

THE CONVERGENCE OF ETHNO-IDEOLOGICAL TERRORIST GROUPS IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF THE BALUCH LIBERATION ARMY AND THE TEHRIK-E-TALIBAN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study examines the operational convergence between the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baluch Liberation Army (BLA), two ideologically divergent but strategically aligned terrorist groups. It hypothesises that the emerging convergence between them is driven by pragmatic imperatives and lacks ideological cohesion and sustainability prospects. Employing qualitative methods, the research integrates primary data from interviews with secondary data. A critical deductive analysis, underpinned by data triangulation with theory, offers insights into the alliance's motivations, indicators, and limitations. The study addresses three core questions: (1) What drives the operational collaboration between the TTP and the BLA? (2) What are the observable indicators of this convergence? (3) What limitations hinder the sustainability of this quasi-alliance? Drawing from various theories of terrorism studies, the findings suggest that shared tactics, mutual resource utilisation, and coordinated propaganda efforts underpin this collaboration. However, ideological incompatibilities, divergent operational strategies, and geographic constraints limit its longevity.

Keywords: Ethno-nationalism, Religious Terrorism, Operational Convergence, National Security, Terrorist Collaboration

Introduction

Pakistan faces a multifaceted terrorism landscape, with numerous terrorist organisations¹ operating across its territories, each with distinct agendas, tactics, and ideological foundations. The National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022 identified violent religious extremism and terrorism as the biggest security threats confronted by the nation.² The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) represent two major strains of terrorism in the country: religious extremism and ethno-nationalism. The former pursues the establishment of an Islamic state governed by their ultra-orthodox interpretation of Sharia law, and the latter pursues the agenda of independence for Baluchistan, driven by a mix of perceived and actual grievances over resource distribution and political autonomy, and supported by hostile states. Some other

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organisations with global agendas but little footprints are also operating in the country, like Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Certain ethno-nationalist separatist groups like the Baloch Republican Army and Sindhu Desh Liberation Army also operate with external backing, exploiting the grievances of the people.³ However, the TTP and BLA dominate the terrorism spectrum and pose a major threat to the state and society of Pakistan.

Despite the ideological chasm, several recent developments indicate an emerging collaboration between TTP and BLA to pose a serious challenge to the shared adversary, Pakistan. This study analyses the convergence between two terrorist groups, the ideological TTP and the ethno-nationalist BLA. It argues that these two groups have recently been engaging in what appears to be tactical borrowing – for instance, complex multi-staged attacks, suicide bombings, and strategic use of IEDs (improvised explosive devices) - without any formal collaboration. It identifies seven indicators of the emerging collaboration – mutual recognition, shared tactics, revenue streams, shared weaponry, common foreign patronage, expansion of TTP in Balochistan and coordinated media support. The study further argues that such alliances, though short-lived and unconventional, reflect broader trends observed in global terrorism dynamics, as terrorist groups align for strategic gains, for instance, intelligence exchange, resource sharing, territorial access, etc., despite conflicting long-term goals.⁴

The study is based on research questions probing the drivers of the emerging collaboration between the two groups, indicators of this collaboration and limitations of this quasi-alliance with implications for Pakistan's national security. Primary sources for the study include unstructured interviews with academic experts on terrorism studies, officials of NACTA and senior security officials. It also utilises secondary data from books, journal articles, op-eds, reports by various agencies, and open-source portals. The data has been analysed using a critical reading approach, grounded in deductive analysis and the triangulation of primary and secondary data with theory, to test the hypothesis and derive policy recommendations.

The study draws inferences from multiple theories of terrorism studies to substantiate the argument. These theories help elucidate the emerging alliance between TTP and BLA, the drivers of divergence, and the resurgence of TTP. Convergence theories help explain the emerging collaboration and its likelihood of sustainability amid the alliance's inherent limitations. It highlights that terrorist alliances may not require ideological alignment but pragmatic cooperation against a common adversary. According to the theory, shared tactics, resources, and propaganda efforts of BLA and TTP exemplify this dynamic, where groups with conflicting ideologies unite in opposition to the

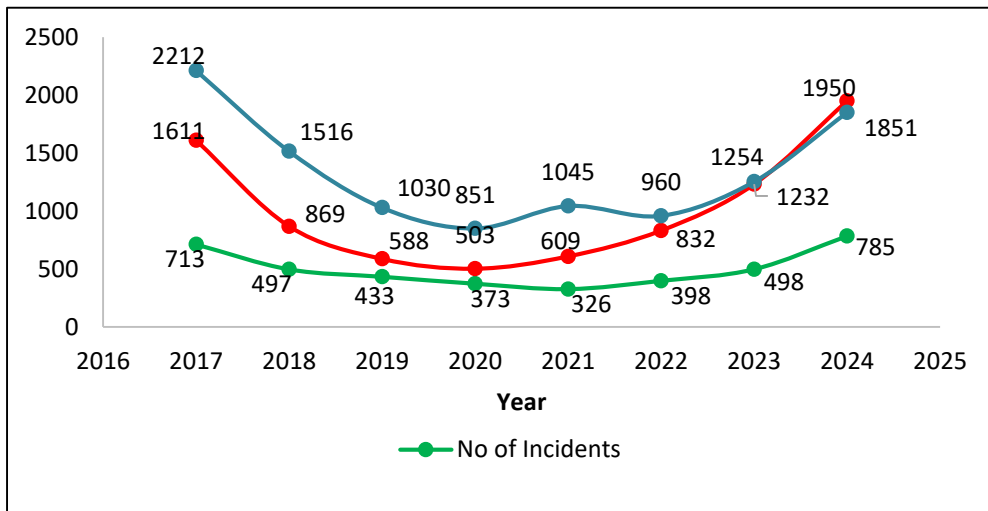
Pakistani state.⁵ (Section 3) The same theory also provides a framework for understanding the current phase of the TTP-BLA collaboration and its future trajectory (Section 4).

The Ideological and Tactical Divergence Theory helps understand the limitations of the TTP-BLA alliance. (Section 5) Furthermore, drawing from the literature on terrorism studies, waves and strain-based explanations have been used to understand the existence of TTP and BLA in the complex terrorist landscape of the country. (Section 2) The study also draws on the Terrorist Groups Resurgence analysis to understand the TTP's resurgence. (Section 2)

Terrorism Landscape of Pakistan

An analysis of terrorism-related data reveals critical trends in Pakistan's security landscape. Since the beginning of the war against terrorism, the country has witnessed over 80,000 casualties and suffered from economic losses exceeding \$150 billion⁶. The most intense period of terrorism occurred between 2007 and 2014, with incidents peaking in 2013, recording nearly 3,923 attacks and over 5,000 fatalities.⁷ Between 2017 and 2024, Pakistan experienced 4,223 terrorism incidents, resulting in over 8194 fatalities and 10,719 injuries, including civilians, security personnel, and militants.⁸ (Figure 1)

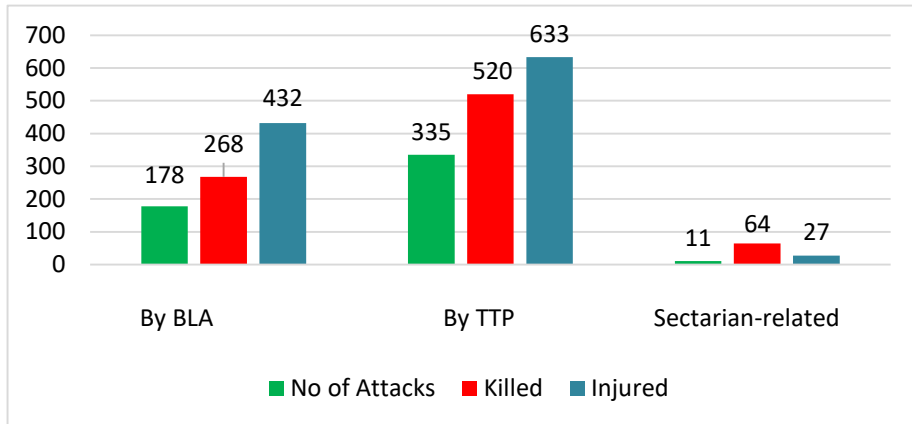
Figure 1: Incidents of Terrorism & Casualties (2017-24)⁹



During this period, the TTP was responsible for a substantial share of attacks, particularly in the northwest regions, while the BLA's insurgency remained limited, primarily targeting state and economic assets in Balochistan. However, since the fall of Kabul into the hands of the Taliban, the country has witnessed a resurgence of terrorists, as indicated by the Global Terrorism Index 2023,¹⁰ which ranked Pakistan 4th among the

most terrorism-affected countries. Terrorist attacks continued during 2024, too, with ethno-nationalist, ideological, and sectarian groups being major perpetrators¹¹ (Figure II).

Figure 2: Classification of Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in 2024



David Rapoport's Waves of Modern Terrorism theory¹² categorises terrorism into four ideological waves: Anarchist, Anti-Colonial, New Left, and Religious¹³. Pakistan started facing this menace during the Religious wave in the late 1970s with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This wave has had the most profound impact on the state's security, shaping groups like the TTP that pursue agendas rooted in religious extremism.¹⁴ The TTP emerged in 2007 as a coalition of various militant groups operating in Pakistan, primarily within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).¹⁵ The TTP's objective is to establish an Islamic state governed by its strict interpretation of Sharia law, and its operations focus primarily on destabilising the Pakistani state and its institutions.¹⁶ This wave embedded religious militancy deeply within Pakistan's militant landscape.¹⁷ Despite effective counterinsurgency operations such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb, which temporarily reduced TTP's operational capacity, the group has shown resilience, exploiting political instability to launch renewed offensives in recent years.¹⁸

The resurgence of TTP can be understood through Structural¹⁹ (Underlying) and Precipitant²⁰ (Immediate) factors. Structural factors, characterised by their static nature, include longstanding grievances about political²¹ and socioeconomic²² marginalisation. These grievances are rooted in underdevelopment, poverty, inequality, and restricted political participation, creating fertile ground for extremist narratives to resonate among communities. Additionally, several precipitant factors²³ including the leadership in the form of Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, the availability of financial resources and support after the establishment of the Afghan regime in Kabul, and continued domestic political instability since April 2022 have acted more like catalysts.²⁴ Attempts by the Pakistani

government to negotiate with the TTP, including temporary ceasefire agreements, and the return of TTP fighters from Afghanistan have also inadvertently contributed to the group's resurgence.²⁵

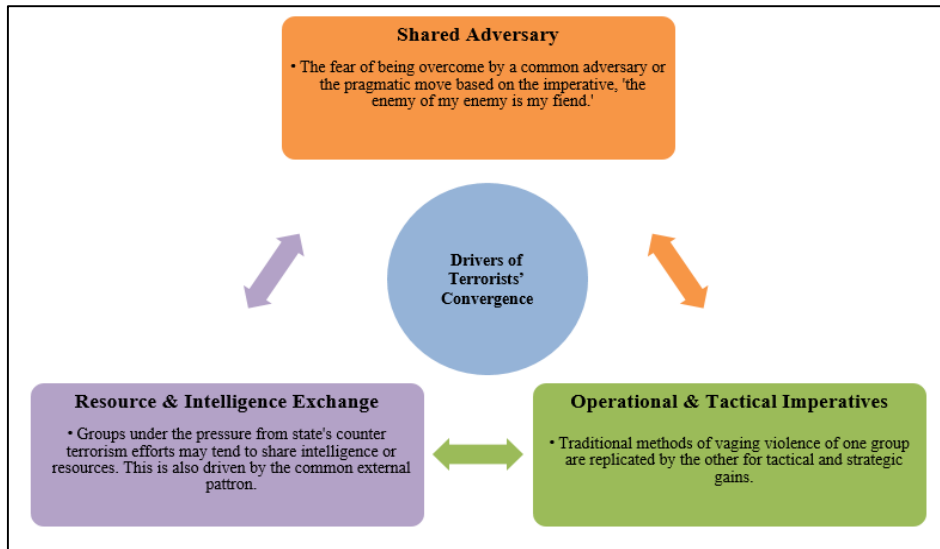
The TTP's renewed momentum has been marked by high-profile attacks on security forces, law enforcement agencies, and public gatherings across the country, particularly in the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the former FATA.²⁶ To understand the emergence of the Baloch insurgent groups, this study aligns with what Tom Parker and Nick Sitter describe as the Social Exclusion Strain of terrorism²⁷. This framework centres on identity-based grievances and demands for autonomy or independence based on ethnic differences. The BLA's secular, ethno-nationalist aims differentiate it from religiously motivated groups like the TTP, yet this form of terrorism has also proven destabilising for Pakistan. It is pertinent to note that literature often refers to unrest in Balochistan as insurgency. However, this approach is flawed in the eyes of various experts²⁸ as the nature and level of unrest inflicted by BLA do not correspond to the agreed definition²⁹ of insurgency embedded in international law. However, for the scope of this study, the term insurgency is used in accordance with the CIA's definition, which defines it as "a protracted political-military activity directed toward completely or partially controlling the resources of a country through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organisations³⁰."

Over the past decade, the BLA has adopted increasingly sophisticated tactics in its insurgency. The group's insurgency has evolved from sporadic attacks on state forces to more organised and high-profile operations, targeting infrastructure³¹ and foreign nationals, especially Chinese workers involved in CPEC projects.³² The BLA has employed complex attacks involving multiple attackers and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). The Majeed Brigade, the BLA's suicide squad, has been instrumental in executing these operations, marking a significant shift in their operational strategy. The group has increasingly engaged in targeted assassinations of security personnel and bombings aimed at critical infrastructure. It has effectively utilised social media platforms like Telegram to disseminate propaganda, showcasing its capabilities and claiming the legitimacy of its actions. The dynamics of the BLA's insurgency are influenced by three key factors: the increasing involvement of women, the rise of the middle class, and the animosity against foreign investment.

Drivers of the Collaboration

The Strategic Alliance Theory explains the convergence of two distinct terrorist groups for tactical and force-readiness purposes. This theory suggests that terrorist groups may merge to enhance their operational capabilities, resources, and strategic reach.³³ By

combining forces, they can pool resources, share expertise, and coordinate attacks more



effectively against a shared adversary.³⁴

Figure 3: Drivers of Terrorists' Convergence driven by Strategic Alliance Theory

Shared Adversary

Both the TTP and BLA view the Pakistani state as an adversary. For the TTP, the Pakistani government represents a secular regime that opposes the group's Islamist vision. For the BLA, the state symbolises centralised control over Baloch resources and autonomy. This shared opposition to the Pakistani state has created common ground, enabling cooperation for mutual benefit.³⁵ Violence against the Pakistan Army, intelligence agencies, and critical security infrastructure indicates functional overlap in threat perception of both parties despite different ideological orientations.

Operational and Tactical Imperatives

Two factors, borrowing of tactics and provision of strategic depth - understood as access to safe havens and cross-regional mobility to evade state pressure characterise this aspect of BLA-TTP collaboration. The BLA has traditionally focused on an insurgency approach rather than high-casualty terrorism. Given the pressure from Pakistan's security forces through successful operations, the need for operational and tactical collaboration increased for both groups. Furthermore, the efficacy of high-casualty terrorism by TTP is another encouraging factor for BLA to learn these tactics, thus driving cooperation. The

high casualty attacks attract attention from local and international media, which serves as a lifeline for any terrorist organisation.³⁶ Furthermore, it serves to spread widespread fear and to challenge the nation.

Additionally, TTP, striving for strategic depth, has been looking for new areas of expansion, and apparently, BLA has shown a willingness to provide them with limited space in the Pashtun-majority areas of Balochistan.³⁷

Resources and Intelligence Exigencies

Resource sharing and intelligence exchange serve as another key exigency for cooperation between the two groups, amid increased military pressures by Pakistan. As Pakistan's security successfully pushed out the TTP from its safe havens on Pakistan's territory after several military operations, particularly Operation Rah-e-Nijat, Operation Zarb-e-Azb, and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, the group came under pressure in terms of resource availability and access to intelligence information required for conducting attacks. This provided an imperative for the group to seek alternative channels for resources as well as intelligence. On the other hand, the BLA, with increased support from external handlers, also came closer to the TTP for the same purpose.

Indicators of the Collaboration

The study identifies seven indicators of emerging TTP-BLA cooperation:

Mutual Recognition

The TTP has strategically sought to unify various anti-state faction under the leadership of Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud. This is being done by focusing on ideological alignment and extending mutual recognition to groups that had previously operated independently or fragmented from TTP during Fazal Ullah's leadership. Extending the strategy to ideologically divergent BLA, Mehsud has publicly expressed support for the Baloch cause, while downplaying the divide between secular nationalism and religious extremism and calling for an alliance.³⁸ A key element of this strategy has involved recognising, publicly acknowledging, and supporting the Baloch armed struggle.

In continuation of this approach, the TTP released a video³⁹ expressing solidarity with the Baloch community after the triple murders case emerged in Barkhan district in February 2023. The murders were allegedly orchestrated by a former provincial minister,⁴⁰ and the BLA used the event to exploit the public sentiments while TTP provided backing. Before this, in 2022, the TTP started issuing messages in the Balochi language, calling for Baloch support in its campaign against the Pakistani state.⁴¹ Reports also suggest meetings

between TTP and BLA leaders in Afghanistan, though the outcomes of the meetings remain unascertained. However, the absence of a definitive proof does not discount the possibility of a future "working arrangement" between the two groups.⁴²

Shared Tactics

The BLA's recent adoption of tactics which were traditionally associated with the TTP suggests a degree of mutual learning in operational strategies. Historically, Baloch insurgents focused on infrastructure and military targets, deliberately avoiding tactics like suicide bombings and large-scale attacks on civilians.⁴³ However, in a marked departure from its previous strategy, the BLA has started employing suicide attacks against softer, non-combatant targets including civilians particularly foreigners, in high-profile incidents in a manner akin to TTP's approach.

A notable example is the recent attack on Quetta Railway Station⁴⁴, which represents the group's first major indiscriminate assault resulting in significant civilian casualties. Such tactics not only reflect the influence of TTP's approach of generating fear through mass-casualty events but also shatter the BLA's narrative of not being a terrorist organisation, as the UN agreed elements of terrorism include the use of violence against non-combatants to instil fear for political objectives.⁴⁵

Leveraging its extensive network in the north-western regions, the TTP can provide logistical support, weapons, or training to Baloch insurgents in exchange for safe passage or in strategically important areas. Additionally, intelligence sharing on terrorist operations and state institutions has reportedly increased, offering both groups significant strategic advantages in planning and executing attacks.⁴⁶ It is pertinent to note that BLA has established a dedicated intelligence wing Zirab, which has significantly boosted its operational capabilities⁴⁷. Moreover, groups being patronised by the same external actors also show tendencies of sharing resources or intelligence.⁴⁸

The BLA's intensified focus on Punjabi and Saraiki settlers also mirrors the TTP's strategy of targeting pro-government figures in the ex-Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Just as the TTP targeted local leaders, or "Maliks," who were viewed as state agents, the BLA appears to regard settlers as symbols of state influence and authority. As no formal collaboration between the two groups is in place, there is also a possibility that this adaptation is taking place at local commanders' levels and transferring upwards in a bottom-up manner.⁴⁹

Revenue Generation

An emerging alignment in revenue-generating methods has also been witnessed recently, marking another indicator of emerging TTP-BLA collaboration. BLA has seen adopting tactics such as extortion, kidnapping for ransom and bank robberies at a fast pace. These techniques have been the hallmark of the TTP's revenue streams in the ex-FATA and KP provinces.⁵⁰ A recent trend in the increase of such crimes in insurgency-affected parts of Balochistan and the alleged involvement of BLA in these crimes indicate the adoption of these tactics by BLA⁵¹, pointing to a pragmatic borrowing of revenue strategies. This is a significant development as the insurgency in Baluchistan was previously supported by angry Sardars and Nawabs⁵² and later primarily by the Indian intelligence agencies⁵³. This localised revenue stream will allow the BLA to sustain its activities independently of external funding sources.

Shared Weapons

An alarming development marking the TTP-BLA collaboration is the transfer of sophisticated US-made weapons from TTP to BLA. On the one hand, this collaboration has significantly enhanced the BLA's operational capabilities, while on the other hand, it has opened an alternative revenue stream for the TTP. The TTP has acquired these weapons from Afghanistan after the abrupt withdrawal of the US and the collapse of the Afghan security forces in 2021, and appears ready to sell them to other militant groups in the region and beyond. These sophisticated weapons particularly include the M4 rifles and night vision thermal scopes, which have given TTP militants a tactical edge in night operations as demonstrated in attacks in Daraban, Dera Ismail Khan, and Tank in December 2023.⁵⁴ Pakistani security officials have seized several caches of such arms, highlighting the exchange of weapons between the two groups. A striking example of the acquisition of these weapons by BLA emerged after the BLA's suicide attack on Quetta Railway Station. The BLA released an image of the suicide bomber posing with an American-made M4 rifle, originally sourced by TTP from Afghan stockpiles.⁵⁵

The Common Patronage

The TTP and the BLA have thrived significantly on the support from external actors. The TTP has largely been able to sustain due to the strategic tolerance of the successive governments in Kabul. Similarly, India has been operationally backing and supporting the activities of the BLA and TTP through Afghanistan. Pakistan has been putting pressure on the current and the previous Afghan regimes to dismantle TTP bases inside Afghan territory, particularly Kunar province, with no positive response. Due to

this support, the TTP has been able to restructure its command, recruit extensively, and intensify attacks inside Pakistan.

Simultaneously, the BLA's operations are largely managed from Afghanistan and parts of Iran. India has been supporting Baloch separatists in the province since the 1970s, as part of its broader efforts to destabilise Pakistan. Following the inception of the CPEC, India's involvement has increased manifold.⁵⁶ Pakistani security and intelligence agencies have uncovered a network of terrorism support being run by India in the province.⁵⁷

India's support to BLA includes financial assistance, intelligence sharing, and training for BLA fighters. Recently, the undeniable evidence of BLA having sanctuaries inside Afghanistan has also surfaced when BLA commanders, including Aslam Baloch and Raziq Mandai, were killed in Kandahar and Kunar provinces, respectively. Furthermore, Pakistan has also made public a dossier providing undeniable evidence of Indian support for terrorist groups like TTP, BLA, Jamat-ul-Ahrar and others in the form of financing and training inside Afghanistan.⁵⁸ In 2022, Pakistan's then Foreign Minister and Pakistan military spokesman held a press conference claiming that India "had so far distributed PKR 22 billion among the terrorist groups."⁵⁹ This common patronage is another indicator of the emerging collaboration between the TTP and BLA, making it easier for international handlers to achieve their objectives and destabilise the adversary state.⁶⁰

TTP in Balochistan

Since its resurgence, the TTP, which was traditionally limited to the KP and ex-FATA regions with small clusters of support in some urban centres, has been seen expanding its operations and organisational structure to parts of Balochistan. Pakistani security forces arrested two senior TTP commanders, Nasrullah and Idris, from Balochistan, testifying to this concerning development. The statements by the arrested TTP commanders not only attest to the TTP-BLA collaboration but also reveal India's backing behind this development. The arrested terrorists made a mention of a meeting of the TTP head with RAW representatives in Kabul, indicating the common patronage of TTP and BLA by India.⁶¹

TTP's expansion in Balochistan is driven by three major objectives, which are: sabotaging the CPEC, exploiting the grievances of the dissatisfied factions of the Baloch population and increasing its operational capabilities to orchestrate attacks on Pakistani state institutions.⁶² If TTP has to enter the territories where BLA is already operating, it will have to reach a working arrangement with them; otherwise, it will open up a new front between the two terrorist groups. Additionally, common patrons will not like to see infighting among their proxies, so the presence of TTP in Balochistan cannot be without

context. However, as the history of terrorist groups shows, such alliances are usually short-lived, and these groups soon fall apart.

Coordinated Media Support

The last, but a key, indicator of TTP-BLA collaboration is the coordinated media support extended by each group to the other. The TTP and BLA have recently been leveraging their social media platforms, such as X, Facebook, and Telegram, to disseminate and amplify each other's narratives. Furthermore, both groups share the details of each other's operations against Pakistani security forces on these platforms.

Several recent TTP press releases favouring the BLA are indicators of this mutual media support. The agenda being propagated through this media coordination is to foster the prospects of a joint resistance against Pakistan's security forces, expand the outreach, and enhance the credibility and legality of their terrorist activities.⁶³ By reposting and endorsing each other's content, these groups multiply the reach of their propaganda, leveraging each other's followers to expand their audience and boost recruitment.⁶⁴ The collaborative online presence strengthens the perception of an insurgent alliance, motivating supporters of one group to extend support to both, and reinforcing a broader anti-state narrative. Furthermore, this coordinated media campaign also creates an echo chamber effect, where the existing adherents and sympathisers of an ideology find their ideals aligned with those of many others. This creates a sense of security and ideological unity while boosting their morale. Additionally, such campaigns catalyse donor support for such groups, increasing their operational sustainability.⁶⁵

Limitations of the Collaboration

Despite emerging convergence, the TTP-BLA alliance faces inherent limitations stemming from ideological, operational, and strategic differences. Inferences from the Ideological and Tactical Divergence Analysis Framework in terrorism studies provide indicators for investigating of terrorism studies⁶⁶ provide indicators to investigate the divergence between terrorist and criminal groups. This section examines how internal structures⁶⁷, ideological incompatibilities⁶⁸, and differences in targeted populations⁶⁹ and geographies⁷⁰ can limit cooperation between the TTP and BLA. ⁷¹

Ideological Incompatibility

The secular, nationalist agenda of the BLA is fundamentally incompatible with the TTP's version of Islamist ideology. While temporary tactical collaboration is feasible, sustaining a long-term alliance is unlikely, as the two groups are driven by goals that

could ultimately put them at odds. The BLA's pursuit of an independent, secular Balochistan conflicts directly with the TTP's vision of an Islamist Pakistan, limiting the depth and durability of their partnership.⁷² Furthermore, BLA is partly inspired by the leftist, liberal and secular agenda, and such groups have historically shown less enthusiasm for long-term collaboration with religiously motivated groups⁷³.

Divergent Target Populations and Methods

The audience of TTP is mainly less educated lower and middle class citizenry in contrast to educated middle-class support –base of BLA who are more inspired by liberal and secular ideas. Similarly, TTP has a base of support among different ethnic groups, mainly Pashtuns and Punjabis. In contrast, BLA's target audience is the Baloch population with lesser zeal for Punjabi ethnicity.⁷⁴ This difference can create friction in collaborative efforts, as the BLA's more localised insurgency contrasts with the TTP's broader ideological struggle.

Organisational Structures

The contrasting organisational structures of the TTP and BLA create substantial barriers to a sustainable merger. Organisational factors in a militant organisation include decision-making processes, leadership style, planning mechanisms, operational tactics, and resource allocation. The TTP operates with a centralised, hierarchical structure led by an authoritative *Amir*, enabling coordinated decision-making and control similar to the Afghan Taliban. Conversely, the BLA's decentralised structure allows for independent factional actions, aligning with its ethno-nationalist goals. When two militant organisations with contrasting ideologies align with each other, the differences in their organisational structures also act as irritants, resulting in conflicting priorities.⁷⁵ Such differences become more paramount at the local commanders levels that are currently collaborating with each other from both groups. In the event of greater coordination between these groups, there is a likelihood of increased resistance from lower levels in both groups, which are keener to address local imperatives for their own sustenance.

Territorial Factors

Another diverging factor, reducing the possibility of a sustainable TTP-BLA collaboration, is the territorial and geographical domain of these groups. Both organisations have traditionally operated in their distinct regions, with the TTP primarily active in Pakistan's north-western regions, particularly the ex-FATA and KP. In contrast, the BLA's activities are concentrated in Balochistan. In this regard, both groups have distinct target populations and expectations. In the event of attempts at any formal

alliance, both groups will have to provide space for each other, which can make their supporters uncomfortable. Additionally, the BLA is likely to cede more territory to TTP, as their stakes are limited to Balochistan. Keeping in view the harsh stance of the left-leaning liberals against religious groups, such a development is likely to annoy many of the BLA supporters.⁷⁶

Future Trajectory

The Strategic Alliance Theory can help explain collaborations driven by pragmatic operational imperatives. According to the theory, alliances between terrorist groups typically go through the following stages: initial contacts, tactical cooperation, potential ideological consolidation and formalised collaboration.⁷⁷ Analysis reveals that the emerging TTP-BLA collaboration currently falls between initial contacts and the tactical cooperation stage. Both groups have established initial contacts and begun informal operational collaboration, including resource exchange, shared tactics, and a unified stance against Pakistan (already qualified). Increased pressure from the Pakistani state is likely to increase the magnitude of this collaboration; however, in the presence of various diverging factors, the alliance is less likely to sustain for a longer term. Furthermore, once short-term goals are met, the likelihood of such alliances falling apart increases, as evidenced by their history.

Nevertheless, the implications of this convergence are far-reaching. The alignment has intensified threats to Pakistan's national security, particularly to critical infrastructure and economic projects. Attacks targeting Chinese nationals and CPEC installations risk undermining Pakistan's strategic partnerships and economic stability. Moreover, the exploitation of socio-political grievances by both groups exacerbates vulnerabilities in marginalised regions, potentially fuelling local support for militant narratives. This underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism that addresses the root causes of extremism and insurgency and also shows the need for specific negotiation strategies where and when needed.

Policy Considerations

In light of the above discussion, Pakistan's counterterrorism policies need to consider the following:

Comprehensive Counterterrorism Strategy:

Counter terrorism strategy must target both the immediate and underlying causes of terrorism. Additionally, the counterterrorism strategy must differentiate among various

terrorist and militant groups and address them according to their varying motivations. For that purpose, a targeted military operation in the affected regions, as well as intelligence-based operations in urban centres, must be meticulously planned and executed while involving stakeholders.

Enhance Intelligence Capabilities

Keeping in view the increasing intensity and frequency of terrorist attacks, the intelligence capabilities of the state become of paramount importance. As the BLA has developed its intelligence wing, the focus of the state should be on enhanced and specialised intelligence backed by human and technological systems.

Negotiation Strategies

The history reveals that negotiations with terrorists have never been beneficial. Therefore, the option of comprehensive negotiations with TTP or BLA must be taken with a pinch of salt. However, a smart negotiation strategy targeting the non-combatant aggrieved groups to address the underlying causes is a viable way forward. For this purpose, the role of moderate tribal leaders in Balochistan becomes important, as they can be engaged to connect with the aggrieved and adopt a moderate approach towards the state.

Focus on Community Engagement

In order to address the new dynamics of insurgency in Balochistan, where *Sardars / Nawabs* have been largely replaced by middle-class, educated youth, there is a need to implement community-based programmes for countering terrorism. Similarly, in Southern KP, community-based solutions can be implemented. An approach that involves the local population, particularly in urban centres, will help foster trust between security forces and communities, encouraging cooperation in identifying and reporting suspicious activities.

Counterterrorism Policy Analysis

To make counterterrorism policy more effective, periodic review mechanisms are needed to align with the policy cycle. Regular assessments of policy involving all stakeholders will help inform required policy adjustments to address ground realities in terrorism-affected regions.

International Collaboration

Pakistan can leverage its relations with international partners, including the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and EU nations, for enhanced intelligence sharing, technology sharing, and joint counter terrorism initiatives at the regional level.

Extremist Financing

As the state has already done a remarkable job in dismantling terrorist financing networks under FATF, there is a need to continue such efforts, particularly with regard to emerging streams of terrorist financing like arms sales and smuggling. Similarly, the capabilities of the police in Balochistan need to be strengthened to curb the crime-terror nexus being developed by the BLA.

Conclusion

The operational TTP-BLA convergence represents a significant evolution in Pakistan's terrorism landscape. Despite their divergent ideological underpinnings, both groups have increasingly engaged in tactical borrowing and operational collaboration against their shared adversary, the Pakistani state. This convergence is primarily operational rather than ideologically driven by shared grievances against the state, mutual resource utilisation, and the necessity to enhance operational capabilities. Both groups benefit from resource sharing, intelligence exchange, and coordinated propaganda efforts, thereby amplifying their operational impact. The TTP has provided logistical and tactical lessons to the BLA, while the BLA has adopted high-casualty tactics and methods long associated with the TTP. Additionally, mutual media amplification has allowed both groups to project an image of unity, thereby attracting greater attention and resources.

However, there are several inherent limitations of this alliance. Ideological incompatibility remains a fundamental barrier, with the TTP's Islamist agenda clashing with the BLA's secular, nationalist goals. Organisational differences further complicate sustainable collaboration; while the TTP operates with a centralised hierarchy, the BLA's decentralised structure allows for greater factional autonomy. Geographic factors also play a role, as the two groups primarily operate in distinct regions, with overlap only in certain areas of Balochistan. These differences suggest that while tactical collaboration is feasible, a long-term alliance is unlikely to endure. Based on indicators from Strategic Alliance Theory, the current collaboration falls between the initial contacts and operational alignment phase and is likely to remain there. The degree of collaboration is expected to increase amid security measures from Pakistan; however, the probability of this converging into a single front remains very low. Yet the short-term collaboration is

expected to amplify risks to Pakistan's socio-economic and security. Furthermore, security institutions of the country are likely to face the brunt of this emerging collaboration.

To counter these threats, the state needs a nuanced counterterrorism strategy that distinguishes among the distinct motivations and tactics of various groups. Enhancing human and technology-based intelligence capabilities is essential to pre-empt and disrupt collaborative activities. Engaging local communities in counterterrorism efforts can foster trust and mitigate the appeal of militant ideologies. Additionally, international cooperation can bolster Pakistan's capacity to address these threats effectively.

While the operational convergence of the TTP and BLA reflects broader trends in global terrorism, it also underscores the adaptive nature of terrorist groups in response to state countermeasures. By understanding the dynamics of this alliance, policymakers can develop targeted strategies to mitigate its impact and enhance Pakistan's resilience against evolving security challenges. Ultimately, addressing the convergence of these groups requires a holistic approach that combines robust counterterrorism measures with socio-political interventions to foster stability and national cohesion.

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