

11 November 2023

TTP's Tactics and Pakistan's Policy Options

Author: Natasha Khan*

Key Points:

- The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is one of the largest and most organised militant groups operating inside and across the borders of Pakistan.
- Pakistan has pursued a two-pronged strategy to deal with the TTP, consisting of both hard measures and negotiations with the organisation's leadership.
- Unfortunately, the TTP has repeatedly used the cover of dialogue to rebuild its strength whenever it has been pushed into a corner through military measures.
- The TTP is not only intricately linked to several cross-border terrorist outfits but has also recently revamped its organisational structure, making it deadlier.
- Reports about the organisation's possession of modern weapons left behind in Afghanistan are another alarming trend.
- Pakistan must gain the cooperation of its neighbours like China and Iran, who suffer from the spillover of terrorism.
- The country should clearly define the baseline beyond which no group's activities will be tolerated nor any negotiations entertained.

Why Does the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan Matter?

The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is one of the largest and most organised militant organisations operating inside and across the borders of Pakistan. The group came into existence as war-weary militants from Afghanistan sought refuge in Pakistan after North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) action. It has close links to some of the region's most violent militant and jihadist organisations, including the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKP) and Afghan Taliban.¹ Organised along ethnic, sectarian, and religious lines,

¹ Abdul Sayed, "The Evolution and Future of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 21, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/21/evolution-and-future-of-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-pub-86051>.

Natasha Khan is a graduate of Peace and Conflict Studies, NUST, Islamabad. Her research focuses include discourse analysis, defence and security, and international relations. She serves as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research.

the goal of the TTP is the establishment of an Islamic state in Pakistan. It thus targets the state of Pakistan itself.² Last year alone saw over 150 attacks, mainly on Pakistani law enforcement agencies. The TTP is also significant for its fast-evolving tactics and adapting to the changing security landscape within the country. It also astutely leverages both negotiations with the Pakistani authorities and terrorist attacks to achieve its goals.³

A Checkered History of Negotiations

Pakistan has pursued a two-pronged strategy to deal with the TTP. On the one hand, the military has focused on hard measures, including but not limited

² "Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan," *Center for International Security and Cooperation*, January 2, 2023, <https://cisac.fsi.stanford.edu/mappingmilitants/profiles/tehrik-i-taliban-pakistan>.

³ Abid Hussain, "What Is behind a Resurgence of Violent Attacks in Pakistan?" *Aljazeera*, December 26, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/12/26/what-is-behind-a-resurgence-of-violent-attacks-in-pakistan>.

to such hardcore operations as Operation *Zarb-e-Azb*. As a result, the TTP fighters were heavily beaten and displaced from the tribal areas of Pakistan.⁴ These military measures were taken in tandem with other measures, including the streamlining of physical security in tribal areas.⁵

One fundamental measure was the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) merger, which integrated the poorly governed Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) areas. This was a milestone in weakening the TTP since it eradicated the existing physical spaces and hampered the logistics and ground support for TTP's operations. Quite understandably then, the reversal of the merger has been one of the chief demands of the TTP. In addition, the fencing of the border between the troubled tribal belt of Pakistan and Afghanistan has also limited the movement of the TTP inside Pakistan.⁶

Despite the recent rising frequency of terror attacks around the country, TTP was expected to be rendered less effective due to tighter border controls.⁷ However, the TTP finding shelter in Afghanistan and the recent breakdown of negotiations between the TTP and the Pakistani authorities have been vital developments.⁸ The loosening of border security, coupled with the reversal of the merger, therefore, has been a part of the TTP's ultimatum. Historically, Pakistan has continued negotiations and dialogue with the TTP leadership in addition to taking hard measures. Multiple talks – in addition to those widely known to the public – have been held between the Pakistani authorities and the TTP leadership. The dialogues have been facilitated by a host of relevant actors, including religious scholars and tribal leaders on the Pakistani side and the Afghan Taliban. Despite the frequency of such dialogues, the TTP has never reached a long-term consensus with the Pakistani authorities.⁹ On its part, the Pakistani side has been offering several concessions. The authorities have been open to the idea of permitting political representation to members in exchange for the non-

⁴ Saleem Qamar Butt, "Terrorism in Pakistan," *The Nation*, January 15, 2023, <https://www.nation.com.pk/15-Jan-2023/terrorism-in-pakistan>.

⁵ Asfandiyar Mir, "Pakistan's Twin Taliban Problem," *United States Institute of Peace [USIP]*, May 4, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/05/pakistans-twin-taliban-problem>.

⁶ Vinay Kaura, "Pakistan-Afghan Taliban Relations Face Mounting Challenges," *Middle East Institute*, Accessed December 2, 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/pakistan-afghan-taliban-relations-face-mounting-challenges>.

⁷ Ayaz Gul, "Key Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Crossing Reopens after High-Level Talks," *VoA News*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/key-afghanistan-pakistan-border-crossing-reopens-after-high-level-talks/6975558.html>.

⁸ Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan Turns Up Heat Over Cross-Border Attacks," *VoA*, October 5, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-turns-up-heat-over-cross-border-attacks-/7298839.html>.

⁹ ARY News, "What Was the Purpose of Creating a Banned TTP?" YouTube video, December 20, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeiK10-va2M>.

use of violence.¹⁰ The state has also invested heavily in rehabilitating returning fighters through short-term and long-term re-education and vocational programs.¹¹

However, this soft side of the official policy has failed to eradicate extremism and terrorism from the country. With the takeover of the Taliban government in the neighbouring country, the TTP has returned even better equipped than before.¹² The results expected from years of dialogue have not been visible; instead, this soft side of policy has been heavily criticised. Critics have pointed out that negotiating with terrorists has been futile. This argument is not without its merit.¹³ The TTP has repeatedly used the cover of dialogue to rebuild its strength whenever it has been pushed into a corner through military measures. After the required recuperation time, the TTP resumes an aggressive posture. This trend has withstood the test of time. The TTP once again renounced all negotiations last year, as soon as the situation became favourable.¹⁴

The Evolution of TTP and Cross-border Terrorism

The TTP has evolved to adapt to the changing environment. This is apparent in both its organisational and ideological structure. It has been observant of the success of the Afghan Taliban and has restructured itself along similar organisational lines. While it was previously also modelled along the lines of a centralised *shura* and local commanders, its recent restructuring has improved its operability.¹⁵ Since 2020, the TTP management has been styled along bureaucratic lines similar to the Afghan Taliban, with shadow governors in charge of different regions inside the country. In addition to this, it also established a centralised military training system.¹⁶

¹⁰ Asfandiyar Mir, "Five Things to Watch in the Islamabad-Pakistani Taliban Talks," *USIP*, June 21, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/five-things-watch-islamabad-pakistani-taliban-talks>.

¹¹ Abdul Basit, "Pakistan's Militant Rehabilitation Programme: An Overview," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 9 (2015): 10–17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26351388>.

¹² Munir Ahmed, "Pakistani premier claims US military equipment left behind in Afghanistan is now in militant hands," *AP News*, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-us-military-equipment-afghanistan-taliban-147275573d2dc48e4f7343626094a51b>.

¹³ Dawn, "On again, off again: A timeline of govt-TTP talks," December 10, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1660188>.

¹⁴ Munir Ahmed, "Pakistan Taliban Ends Ceasefire with Govt, Vows New Attacks," *The Diplomat*, November 29, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/11/pakistan-taliban-ends-ceasefire-with-govt-vows-new-attacks/>.

¹⁵ Anadolu Agency, "Maulvi Fazlullah elected new Pakistan Taliban leader," November 11, 2013, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/maulvi-fazlullah-elected-new-pakistan-taliban-leader/205946>; Michael Semple, "The Pakistan Taliban Movement: An Appraisal," *CIDOB*, 2016, https://www.cidob.org/content/download/65003/1999170/file/65-82_THE+PAKISTAN+TALIBAN+MOVEMENT+AN+APPRAISAL.pdf.

¹⁶ Abdul Sayed, "The Evolution and Future of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan," *Carnegie*, December 21, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/21/evolution-and-future-of-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-pub-86051>.

This new structure has bolstered the organisation since it allows flexibility for the leaders in charge of particular areas so that they remain under the umbrella of the TTP and add strength to it, while also retaining a level of independence. The TTP has been divided into over a dozen *wilaya* (singular *wilayat*). These smaller administrative units are spread over the KP province, Gilgit-Baltistan, Punjab and Balochistan – virtually all over Pakistan. In addition to ordering the existing sub-areas under the organisation's control, this system helps to spread and add territory to the group's control, with one being added as recently as last year.¹⁷ It has also become more adept at appealing to the general public beyond the tribal belt, to spread its messages and ideology as far as possible. The organisation is not only improving its narrative by drawing on historical and symbolic Islamic motifs but also ensuring more effective dissemination through the incorporation of digital technology.¹⁸ An additional alarming trend is the TTP's possession of modern weaponry (estimated at around USD 7.12 billion) left behind by the retreating American forces from Afghanistan. This has increased the organisation's deadliness and accuracy, making it increasingly difficult for Pakistani authorities, including law enforcement agencies, to effectively resist the organisation.¹⁹

With regard to cross-organisational linkages, the TTP is intricately linked to several cross-border terrorist outfits. These ethnic, political and ideological affiliates, including al-Qaeda and its several factions in Afghanistan, pose another security challenge. A convergence of existing factions across the national borders, including the Hafiz Gul Bahadur (HGB) group, the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), et cetera, feeds into the complex landscape of insecurity. Such affiliates have carried out several attacks claimed by or attributed to the TTP. Dozens of such factions exist at present, both inside the affected states and around the Pak-Afghan borders. However, from the perspective of Pakistan in particular, the presence of groups like the *Jaish-ul-Adl*

close to the Iranian border touching Balochistan adds to the fragile situation inside Pakistan's restive province. TTP's policy of extending support to Baloch outfits will be a factor in emboldening all such elements inside and outside Pakistan's borders.²⁰

The effects of such coalitions are already apparent with the recent rise in terrorist attacks in the country. These attacks have been projecting an outward trend with an increasing domain beyond the KP province to faraway areas like the country's economic hub, Karachi, and have included diversified targets.²¹ Such attacks are likely to continue expanding outward and manifest the various objectives pursued by the different terrorist factions as the disparate groups draw support and strength from each other. Some of the major groups, including the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) and TIP, also pose a threat to Pakistan's immediate neighbours, including Iran and China.

The Threat to China with the Rise of the TTP

China possesses several security and economic interests in Afghanistan. In this vein, its interests are at risk due to the country's proximity to Pakistan and Afghanistan and also with reference to its engagement in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. Realising this, the Chinese government has adopted a pragmatic stance. Through the years, the government has maintained relations with both the NATO-backed Afghan governments and the Afghan Taliban. The Taliban's coming to power has brought the risk of increased instability in the region due to its close contacts with the other militant factions, including the TTP. The TTP and those it has pledged to support – like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) – target Chinese nationals and installations in and around Pakistan.²²

The recent attacks on foreigners in Afghanistan and the Taliban government's struggle to establish reliable control in the country cast doubt on the dependability of China's relationship with the latter. Indeed, a convergence with Pakistan offers more stability in terms of achieving Chinese objectives in Afghanistan and beyond. China and Pakistan realise the need to work together on the mutual terrorism threat. In this regard, China has also offered to play the role of mediator between Pakistan and the active militant factions to encourage dialogue

²⁰ Imtiaz Gul, "Re-Emergence of Proxy Terrorism," *The Express Tribune*, October 8, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2380672/re-emergence-of-proxy-terrorism>.

²¹ The Khorasan Diary, "Episode 13 (Round-Up)," YouTube video, December 29, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_Ktdr51fy.

²² P. K. Balachandran, "Pakistan Army Resolves to Fight Back as Baloch Separatists and Islamic Zealots Link Up," *Eurasia Review*, December 29, 2022, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/29122022-pakistan-army-resolves-to-fight-back-as-baloch-separatists-and-islamic-zealots-link-up-analysis/>.

¹⁷ Daud Khattak, "Whither the Pakistani Taliban: An Assessment of Recent Trends," *New America*, Aug. 31, 2020, <https://www.newamerica.org/future-security/blog/whither-pakistani-taliban-assessment-recent-trends/>; Harsh Behere, "TTP Unfazed by Pakistan's New Multidimensional Counterterrorism Strategy," *The Diplomat*, July 01, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/06/ttp-unfazed-by-pakistans-new-multidimensional-counterterrorism-strategy/>.

¹⁸ Sarah Zaman, "Pakistani Taliban Release New Magazine Geared Toward Women," *VoA*, July 19, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistani-taliban-release-new-magazine-geared-toward-women/7187254.html>

¹⁹ Abubakar Siddique, "Pakistani Armed Groups Obtain U.S. Weapons Left Behind in Afghanistan," *Radio Free Europe*, March 29, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-armed-groups-obtain-us-weapons-left-in-afghanistan/32340664.html>; Lynne O'Donnell, "The Taliban Are Now Arms Dealers," *Foreign Policy*, July 5, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/05/taliban-afghanistan-arms-dealers-weapons-sales-terrorism/>; Zia Ur Rehman, "U.S. arms left in Afghanistan surface in Pakistan Taliban insurgency," *Nikkei Asia*, March 12, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Terrorism/U.S.-arms-left-in-Afghanistan-surface-in-Pakistan-Taliban-insurgency>.

and negotiation and eradicate terrorism in the region.²³ Another avenue exists to achieve this goal. In the long run, Pakistan and China plan to incorporate Afghanistan into the CPEC partnership. With its rich natural resources of coal, oil, natural gas, cobalt, and lithium, Afghanistan has much to add to the partnership. Progress on the economic front can also help curb terrorism.²⁴ With the Chinese pressure, the Taliban can be pushed to revoke their backing for elements like the TTP and TIP. The latter is among the major antagonists in China's restive Xinjiang region, which is an integral part of the CPEC and the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI).²⁵

The Threat to Iran with the Rise of the TTP

Iran has its own security concerns in the context of the Taliban takeover.²⁶ This has not only highlighted insecurity for Iran in a bilateral context with Afghanistan but also complicates the delicate balance between Iran and Pakistan. In the latter case, the TTP and other groups like *Jaish-ul-Adl* and *Jundullah* affect the balancing of the sectarian equation between Iran and Pakistan alongside further destabilising border security. The targeting of Pakistan's Shia minority with close links to Iran has the potential to re-inflate sectarian discord not only in the country itself but also create tensions with Iran.²⁷ In addition to creating direct insecurity, this has also affected economic security in bilateral relations.²⁸

The economic and security equation in the region remains incomplete without taking the Afghan authorities on board. Realising the need to engage with the de-facto Taliban Government, the Iranian authorities have taken an active approach towards their neighbour. The Iranian authorities have shown a positive attitude towards the Afghan Taliban despite their erstwhile

violence against the Shia Afghan population.²⁹ Although this policy has been criticised at home, the Iranian government has continuously backed this relationship, given its emphasis on regional stability and Iran's internal security. The Taliban government, apart from being an important strategic ally, also has a vital role to play in mitigating the IS threat. A weak government and political instability in Afghanistan are the surest ways for the IS elements present in the country to gather strength and strengthen their cross-border activities.³⁰

This IS threat also marks a point of convergence between Iran and Pakistan. Apart from the shared Shia Muslim community, the two countries share the mutual IS-K threat. Cross-border terrorism has also profoundly affected Balochistan and other parts of Pakistan, neighbouring Iran and Southern Afghanistan.³¹ The TTP is again important here due to the strong links it shares with most of the terrorist outfits active in the area.³² Moreover, the refuge and support the TTP finds across borders are among the factors crucial to its evolution and survival.³³ Terrorism in the South Asian region weaves a complex network of different factions and ideologies of which TTP is an integral part. It has succeeded in expanding beyond the country, sharing intricate ideological, political and ethnic affinities with groups in and across Afghanistan and Iran. If Pakistan is to neutralise this threat meaningfully, important regional partners – in addition to Afghanistan – like China and Iran must be taken on board. A long-term approach towards exterminating terrorism requires stable relations and goal alignment between the three neighbours, augmented by the support of important non-regional actors.

²³ Bonnie S. Glaser and Andrew Small, "China's Goals after the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *German Marshall Fund*, August 27, 2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/chinas-goals-after-us-withdrawal-afghanistan>.

²⁴ Lynne O'Donnell, "The Taliban Didn't Get Chinese Recognition, but They're Getting Chinese Help," *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/31/taliban-china-afghanistan-relations-investment-recognition/>.

²⁵ Zafar Iqbal Yousafzai, "China's Interests in Afghanistan One Year After the U.S. Withdrawal," *The Jamestown Foundation*, October 4, 2022, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-interests-in-afghanistan-one-year-after-the-u-s-withdrawal/>.

²⁶ Atlantic Council, "How the Taliban Takeover Impacts Iran," YouTube video, May 18, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFUwQXoGbho>.

²⁷ The Associated Press, "The military chiefs of Pakistan and Iran agree to work together to stop border attacks by militants," July 17, 2023. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/military-chiefs-pakistan-iran-agree-work-stop-border-101332574>.

²⁸ Umer Karim, "The Pakistan-Iran relationship and the changing nature of regional and domestic security and strategic interests," *Global Discourse* 13, no. 1 (2023): 20-38.

²⁹ Fatemeh Aman, "Iran-Taliban Growing Ties: What's Different This Time?" *Atlantic Council*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iran-taliban-growing-ties-whats-different-this-time/>; "UN Expert Decries 'Systematic' Attacks on Afghan Shia Groups," *Aljazeera*, September 12, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/12/un-expert-decries-systematic-attacks-on-afghan-shia-groups>.

³⁰ Borzou Daragahi, "Iran Spent Years Preparing for a Taliban Victory. It May Still Get Stung," *Atlantic Council*, August 20, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iran-spent-years-preparing-for-a-taliban-victory-it-may-still-get-stung/>.

³¹ Reza Hasan, "Pakistan and Iran: The Potential for a Great Alliance," *The Express Tribune*, June 22, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/article/97602/pakistan-and-iran-the-potential-for-a-great-alliance>.

³² US Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2019," accessed March 2, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2019/>.

³³ Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan Turns Up Heat Over Cross-Border Attacks."

The Continuing Role of the United States

The United States is Pakistan's major non-regional partner in its fight against terrorism. It has clearly defined its stance on the issue of TTP and other cross-border terrorist outfits, including groups like al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS).³⁴ It has also committed to using all its counterterrorism tools against any terrorist threats emanating from Afghan soil. However, despite its current unequivocal stance, the record of US engagement in the region is mired with controversy. Insiders have elaborated that the whole operation was "devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan".³⁵ This speaks volumes about the efficacy of US policy in the region. Even now the direction of its efforts is equivocal, where it tries to court both India and Pakistan depending on geopolitical conditions and convergence of national interests.³⁶

Significantly, the American leadership has also stated that it is willing to employ its over-the-horizon capabilities to keep watch over Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover. This policy has previously been employed in Africa.³⁷ However, these capabilities present their own challenges because they will require significant cooperation from Pakistan. The reliance on special operations and drone strikes under this approach has previously not only created a rift between Afghanistan and Pakistan but also alienated Pakistan's population from the authorities. In addition, it also eroded the trust of the general public in the policies and activities of the US. It had further destabilising effects on the security of Pakistan, including but not limited to mass internal displacement and the establishment of the Taliban's shadow government in several tribal areas in the country.³⁸

Furthermore, whether the over-the-horizon approach is something completely novel or just a rebranding of

old interventionist policies is also debatable.³⁹ What is crucial for this capability to function meaningfully in the case of Afghanistan though, is whether Pakistan cooperates with the US. And while there have been no official-level confirmations, there is in fact indication that a renewed (perhaps limited) cooperation might be in the works.⁴⁰ The presence of hostile governments in both Afghanistan and Iran increases the importance of Pakistan, especially with regard to the US's proposed over-the-horizon anti-terrorism policy. Thus the extent and success of US policies in the region will depend on the cooperation it can elicit from Pakistan.⁴¹ However, the Pakistan-US relationship is also being calibrated against the US's increased leaning towards the other consequential ally in the region, India, as has been indicated in the Defence Industrial Roadmap.⁴²

Policy Options for Pakistan

Pakistan's main failure regarding the TTP has been its ambivalence when dealing with the group. The recent militant incursion into Chitral is one clear sign of the failure of the state policy to effectively deal with the problem.⁴³ It failed to acknowledge the pattern of TTP's dubious negotiation tactics. On the other front, it also miscalculated the effects of the Taliban's victory in its neighbouring country. This was coupled with the falsely optimistic picture of the dialogue option to deal with the TTP.⁴⁴ The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) coalition government sharply criticised these policy loopholes. It disparaged its predecessors' policies of appeasement and stated that there would be no dialogue with the TTP in the future.⁴⁵

³⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Terrorist Designation of AQIS and TTP Leaders: Press Release," December 1, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-aqis-and-ttp-leaders/>.

³⁵ Craig Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers: A Secret History of the War*, *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/>.

³⁶ TP Srivastava, "US Air Force Returns to Pakistan? Rumors Rife Over US Military Presence 'Near' Afghanistan," *Eurasian Times*, July 14, 2023, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/us-air-force-returns-to-pakistan-rumors-rife-over-us/>.

³⁷ Tore Hamming, "Over-the-Horizon Is Far Below Standard," *Foreign Policy*, January 5, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/01/05/over-the-horizon-biden-afghanistan-counter-terrorism/#cookie_message_anchor.

³⁸ Wali Aslam, "The US drone strikes and on-the-ground consequences in Pakistan," *Peace in Progress*, February 2014, <https://www.icip.cat/perlapp/en/article/the-us-drone-strikes-and-on-the-ground-consequences-in-pakistan/>

³⁹ Daniel Brunstetter, "Over-The-Horizon Counterterrorism: New Name, Same Old Challenges," *Modern War Institute*, November 24, 2021, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/over-the-horizon-counterterrorism-new-name-same-old-challenges/>; Asfandiyar Mir, "Two Years Under the Taliban: Is Afghanistan a Terrorist Safe Haven Once Again?" *USIP*, August 15, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/08/two-years-under-taliban-afghanistan-terrorist-safe-haven-once-again>.

⁴⁰ TP Srivastava, "US Air Force Returns To Pakistan?"

⁴¹ Reuters, "Pakistan summons US deputy mission chief over US-India statement," June 26, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/pakistan-summons-us-deputy-mission-chief-over-us-india-statement-2023-06-26/>; Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, "Don't Expect Pakistan to Host US Military Bases," *The Diplomat*, June 10, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/dont-expect-pakistan-to-host-us-military-bases/>; Umair Jamal, "Pakistan and the US Join Hands Against the Pakistani Taliban," *The Diplomat*, December 29, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/pakistan-and-the-us-join-hands-against-the-pakistani-taliban/>.

⁴² The White House, "Joint Statement from the United States and India" *The White House Press Release*, June 22, 2023; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/22/joint-statement-from-the-united-states-and-india/>.

⁴³ Zahid Hussain, "The TTP's new battleground," *Dawn*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1775603>.

⁴⁴ Roohan Ahmed and Uzair Younus, "With No Help from Kabul, Pakistan Faces the TTP Threat," *New Lines Institute*, January 19, 2023, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/pakistan/with-no-help-from-kabul-pakistan-faces-the-ttp-threat/>.

⁴⁵ Tribune, "TTP issues threat to PPP, PML-N in major policy shift," January 04, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2394165/ttp-issues-threat-to-ppp-pml-n-in-major-policy-shift>.

In addition, the civil and military leadership agree on using hard measures against the terrorist group.⁴⁶ Streamlining national policy is paramount. Needless to say, the measures taken now will translate into the coming decades and can either continue the vicious cycle of insecurity or help the state move towards peace.

The 2022 revocation of negotiations by the TTP has been taken as a turning point in Pakistan's policy towards the outfit. The government is also reported to be in talks with the Afghan Taliban government, which is being persuaded to play its role in the process.⁴⁷ Important national bodies like the National Security Committee have debated how to best deal with the TTP threat. As a result, it has reached a consensus over clearly defining the role of the Afghan Taliban. However, it is important to acknowledge that ethnic and ideological affinities across the borders make it difficult for the Afghan Taliban to completely dissociate themselves from the various Taliban factions inside the borders of Pakistan. This will pose a considerable security threat for decades to come and the state will have to carefully calibrate its policies. Holding the Taliban government accountable for its commitments made in the Doha Agreement is only one part of the picture. Pakistan also needs to make it clear that none of its red lines are flexible, while clearly articulating its expectations from and areas of cooperation with its neighbours. This also means explicitly defining the baseline beyond which no group's activities will be tolerated nor any negotiations entertained. This will mark the defining point in achieving national security goals tied to the broader regional security landscape.⁴⁸

Recommendations

1. The country must devise a unified civil and military policy on the TTP.
2. Pakistan must have clear expectations from the Taliban government and communicate them unequivocally.
3. The country must collaborate closely with regional partners, including Iran and China, to address cross-border terrorist movement and cooperation.
4. Pakistan must also make use of international support to the best of its advantage in

⁴⁶ "Pakistani FM Zardari Slams Previous Government's TTP Policy," *Aljazeera*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/17/pakistani-fm-zardari-slams-previous-governments-ttp-policy>.

⁴⁷ Ayaz Gul, "China Asks Afghanistan's Taliban to Address Terrorism Worries," *VoA*, May 06, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-asks-afghanistan-s-taliban-to-address-neighbors-terrorism-worries/7081901.html>.

⁴⁸ Kamran Yousaf, "Islamabad in Quiet Diplomacy with Kabul to Neutralise TTP," *The Express Tribune*, January 16, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2396165/islamabad-in-quiet-diplomacy-with-kabul-to-neutralise-ttp>.

- meeting the TTP threat.
5. It must realise and implement lessons from past policy failures, including the understanding that dialogue has proven futile.