

POLICY BRIEF

STATE AND SOCIETY

THE PERENNIAL SECURITY CRISIS IN
BALOCHISTAN AND KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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Executive Summary

2024 remained a deadly year for Pakistan, with incidents of violence jumping sharply prior to the year before. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa witnessed the sharpest increase in violence, reflecting both the global and local nature to the conflict. Pakistan's largest province by land mass, Balochistan, witnessed rising incidents of terrorism as well, triggered by a surging ethnic insurgency and religiously inspired violence in the northern districts of the province. This policy brief traces the historical origins of conflict in both provinces, indicting Pakistan's colonial past and practices of the independent state post-1947. In particular, the brief emphasizes a political and economic solution to the problem, which recognizes the genuine grievances that underpin these bouts of violence, particularly the disillusionment that permeates the Baloch-dominated areas of Balochistan. These solutions necessitate genuine democratic reform, giving voice to local communities and developing a new fiscal and development model that uplifts all and leaves none behind in the ceaseless march to progress.

Introduction: The Trauma of Loss

On 10th July, 2025, Ghulam Saeed, a sepoy hailing from Lodhran, Punjab, was martyred while traveling on a bus from Quetta to visit his ailing father in their hometown. The news of Ghulam Saeed’s passing was too much to bear for his father, who also passed into the void after hearing of his son’s cruel death at the hands of the banned Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF). Six days later, another bus enroute from Karachi to Quetta came under attack in Kalat Division, leading to the death of three passengers (Shahid, 2025).

The examples above highlight the weight of loss and trauma that burdens Pakistan’s collective conscience—particularly in its hinterlands. Alongside Balochistan, the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bordering Afghanistan, too bears the scars of violence, loss, and terrorism, making large parts of these provinces inaccessible for the common Pakistani and straining already prevailing ethnic fissures in the country. The nature of violence across both provinces, while varied, traces its origins to a common cause: a broken political and social structure and a deep-rooted obsession with implementing a military solution to the problem.

In the Eye of the Storm: Violence in Balochistan and KP

The provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have been disproportionately affected by violence in recent years (figure 1).

Region	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	295	509	517
Balochistan	202	322	534
Punjab	11	6	12
Islamabad	1	1	1
Karachi	10	14	26
Sindh (excluding Karachi)	2	0	2
Total	521	852	1,092

Figure 1

Source: PIPS Security Report 2024

Out of 521 violent attacks in 2024, 497 occurred in these two provinces, with KP bearing the brunt of the majority with 295 attacks (PIPS, 2024).

Province / Region	Number of Attacks (%Change)	Killed (% Change)	Injured (% Change)
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	69%↑	21%↑	34%↓
Balochistan	84%↑	41%↑	89%↑

Figure 2: Rising violence between 2024 and 2023

Source: PIPS Security Report 2024

Figure 2 above highlights the sharp increase in the number and potency of attacks across both KP and Balochistan. Balochistan, in particular, witnessed an 84% increase in attacks between 2024 and 2023, highlighting how rapidly the security situation declined there. The number of deaths in Balochistan also jumped 41%, revealing increased lethality and impact.

The rise in incidents in KP and Balochistan reflects a general insecurity prevailing across Pakistan, with the overall number of violent incidents increasing by 70% between 2023 and 2024, as the figures below demonstrate. As a result, Pakistan jumped 3 places to rank as the fourth most vulnerable country in the Global Terrorism Index 2025 (figure 5). Pakistan also sadly accounted for 8% of all deaths caused by terrorism globally in 2023 (Figure 6) (IEP, 2025).

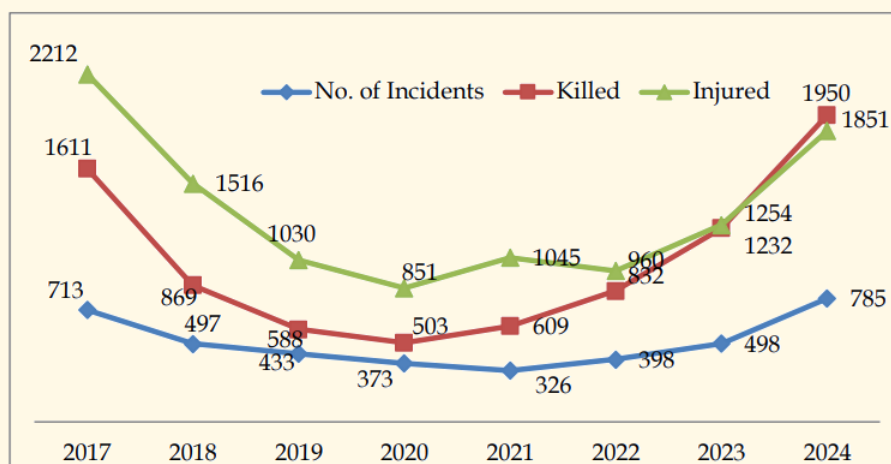


Figure 3: Pakistan in the throes of insecurity
Source: PIPS Security Report 2024

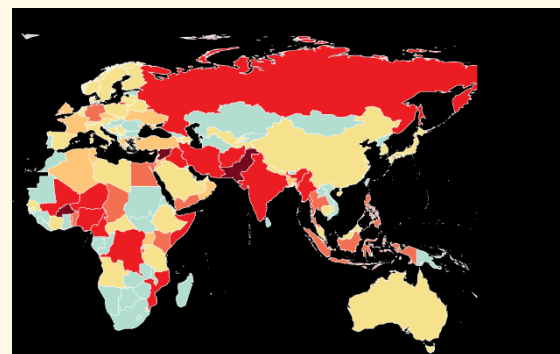
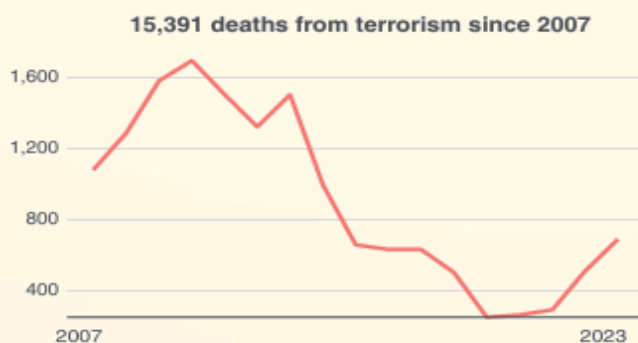


Figure 4: Deadly Years
Source: PIPS Security Report

RANK	COUNTRY	SCORE	RANK CHANGE
1	● Burkina Faso	8.581	↔
2	● Pakistan	8.374	↑ 2
3	● Syria	8.006	↑ 2
4	● Mali	7.907	↓ 1
5	● Niger	7.776	↑ 5
6	● Nigeria	7.658	↑ 2
7	● Somalia	7.614	↔
8	● Israel	7.463	↓ 6
9	● Afghanistan	7.262	↓ 3
10	● Cameroon	6.944	↑ 2

Figure 5: Hotbeds of Terrorism
Source: Global Terrorism Index 2025

Distribution of deaths from terrorism by country, 2024

Ten countries accounted for 86 per cent of deaths from terrorism.

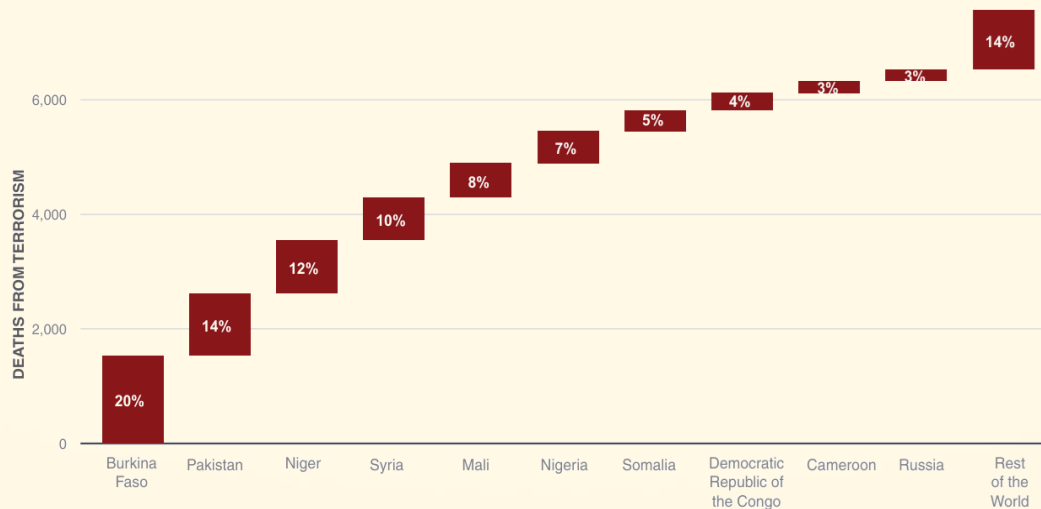


Figure 6: Of Trauma and Loss
Source: Global Terrorism Index 2025

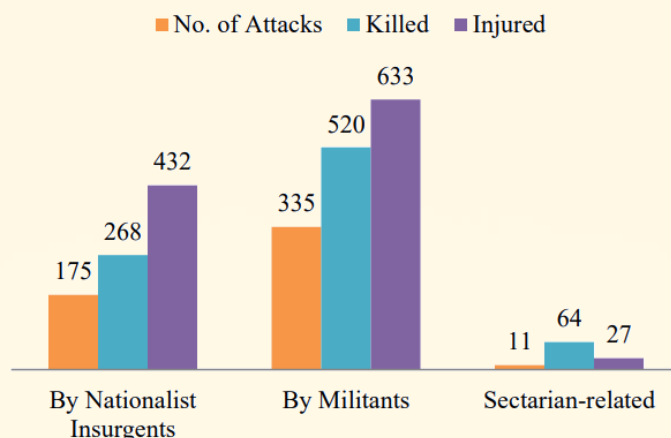


Figure 7: The many faces of violence
Source: PIPS Security Report

Figure 7 above paints another important image. The surge in terrorist attacks can largely be attributed to nationalist insurgents—located predominantly in Balochistan—and militants including the Tehreek-i-Taliban (TTP)—who operate in KP and the northern parts of Balochistan.

Of Promise and Peril: Balochistan under Siege

The Relics of Colonialism

Understanding Balochistan’s ceaseless tryst with violence necessitates a deep glance into history. In colonial India, Balochistan was effectively bifurcated into three components: British Balochistan, the Khanate of Kalat and the princely states of Lasbela, Kharan and Makran. British Balochistan—known also as the Chief Commissioner’s Province of Balochistan was located in the north of the province, extending British control over key areas including Quetta, Pishin, Sibi and Loralai. Despite their overt independent statuses, the Khanate of Kalat and the other princely states conducted their affairs with the consent of the British (Devasher, 2020).

For the British, Balochistan was to be viewed solely through a myopic security lens which established the province as a buffer zone between Britain’s colonial jewel—India—and the avaricious overtures of the Russian Empire. State apparatus evolved accordingly in the province. The Chief Commissioner’s province was dotted with entrenched military cantonments including in Quetta and Zhob, while infrastructural developments including the laying of railways mirrored strategic military interests (Shah, 2014).

The British approach to Balochistan held strong reverberations upon independence. First, the incipient Pakistani government continued with a militaristic approach to the region, by sending the Pakistani military to suppress a revolt by the Khan of Kalat’s brother in 1948. This set a dangerous precedent of turbulent and violent relations between the federal government and Balochistan as violence continued to punctuate federal-provincial relations. Second, extensive reliance on the civil bureaucracy and military under colonial rule had stunted the evolution of an organic political class in Balochistan that could have served as a bridge between the rulers in Karachi and Balochistan. The absence of this intermediary lever would prove critical in state-society relations in the province, shifting state power from a local class of politicians to an expansive civil and military apparatus disassociated from the local populace (Jalal, The

Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics, 2017) (Jalal, Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia: A Comparative and Historical Perspective, 1995).

National Insecurities: Of Centralization and Marginalization

The independent state of Pakistan repeated many mistakes made under colonial rule towards Balochistan. Burdened by a violent partition and an unprecedented exercise of carving out a national identity from this partition, the leaders of post-1947 Pakistan convinced themselves of the need to erase provincial identities and establish a singular identity rooted in religion and language. This approach stemmed from very real fears that the much-larger India would aim to reabsorb Pakistan back into its fold (Jalal, The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics, 2017). The solution, according to the forerunners of the Muslim League, lay in a strong centralized structure that could paper over provincial and ethnic fissures in the province.

The policy backfired strongly, isolating nationalists in East Pakistan (now the independent state of Bangladesh), Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. Violence erupted in East Pakistan as early as 1952 over questions of language, threatening to unravel the Two-Nation Theory within a decade of independence (Ayres, 2009). Instead of confronting these challenges head-on and addressing the grievances of the provinces, the federal government under Iskander Mirza passed the One Unit policy, which merged the four provinces—KP (then known as North-West Frontier Province – NWFP), Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan—into a unified province called West Pakistan. Aiming to serve as a counterweight to the larger population of East Pakistan, the promulgation of the one unit further marginalized populations in West Pakistan’s smaller provinces, entrenching what would become a persistent opposition to the federal government and Punjabi ethnicity in Balochistan.

The resort to violence, meanwhile, became a familiar pattern for the Baloch. Following the operation in 1948, the federal government launched subsequent operations in 1973 (under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) and then in 2006 under General Pervez Musharraf that killed Sardar Akbar Bugti and triggered a massive wave of unrest in the province.

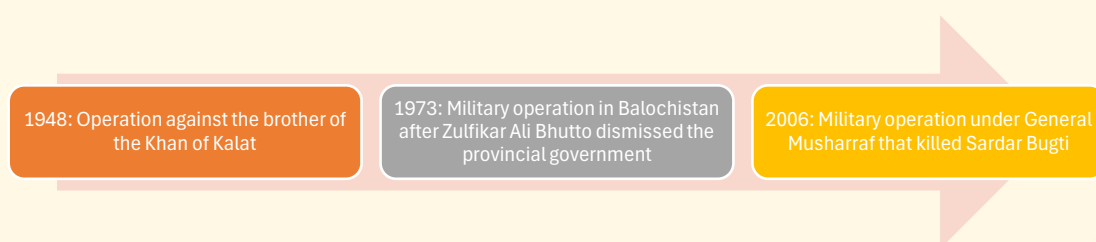


Figure 8: The history of state-led operations in Balochistan

Towards the Contemporary: A Manifestation of a Troubled History

A Question of Political Marginalization

The historical context provided above remains critical because it informs our understanding of the present circumstances in Balochistan. For this brief’s fundamental contention is that the nature of Balochistan’s present challenges is inherently political, and not security-centric. At the heart of this political crisis is a deep marginalization and isolation that the Baloch feel towards the state of Pakistan.

The antecedents of this disillusionment, as stated above, stem from a historically misguided and misplaced approach towards the concerns of the Baloch people.

Recent times have only aggravated this sentiment. The interference in the 2024 elections, in particular, further silenced Baloch voices and thrust upon them what many Baloch feel is an illegitimate government (Shaikh, 2025). Selected governments in Balochistan have been a repeated practice, with leaders representing genuine Baloch sentiments actively sidelined through coercion or military action. Dangerous consequences have emerged from this policy. First, it has legitimized the narrative of radicals who posit the Pakistani state as a colonial exploiter of Baloch resources and power. Second, it has delegitimized the claims of moderate Baloch ethnic parties like the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M), which have aimed to bridge the gap between the Baloch and the state.

Development, Poverty, and Ethno-Centric Conflict

Tied to political marginalization is the sheer economic depravity prevalent across Balochistan. With a population of 14.89 million sparsely scattered across 347,190 sq.km of land, Balochistan has consistently ranked as the most impoverished province of Pakistan. According to the UNDP, the multi-dimensional poverty rate for the province stands at an abysmal 71.2%, with almost 3 out of every 4 households trapped in poverty (UNDP, 2022). The infant mortality rate is 48 per 1,000 births, and the concomitant figure for under-5 children is 53 per 1,000, highlighting the dilapidated state of healthcare in the province. Education fares no better. Per the last Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, the literacy rate for males between 15-24 years of age stood at 49.8% while the female equivalent was a lowly 29.6%.

The state has struggled to provide basic services to the province, of which the water crisis in Quetta remains a stark manifestation. Unregulated extraction of ground water and unpredictable weather patterns have triggered a severe water crisis in the provincial capital, forcing almost 80% of its population to draw water from private water tankers that evade formal regulation or control.

Owing to the political turbulence of its past, Balochistan's economy has failed to develop in a sustainable pattern. Agriculture and livestock remain the predominant sectors of employment, hampered by archaic patterns of ownership that exclude ownership of women and concentrate ownership in tribal leaders. A deep underground economy built on the smuggling of goods from Iran and Afghanistan—including oil from the former—thrives and engages a large segment of the population. Recent attempts to regulate this informal space, including by fencing the border sharply backfired, revealing mistrust between state and society and misjudged decisions that ignored grassroots realities (Notezai, 2024).

The extent of deprivation in Balochistan has further fueled the insurgency in the province and shrouded development projects in mistrust and doubt. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), for instance, has come under sharp criticism by Baloch leaders and societies on the grounds that it is yet another colonial project meant to dispossess the Baloch population of indigenous resources. CPEC's flagship project in Balochistan, the Gwadar seaport, has witnessed intense opposition, culminating in the Gwadar ko Haq Do (Give Gwadar its rights) movement, spearheaded by a local leader and supported by the masses who claimed the port was yet another alien project that impacted local farmers and drastically altered local land ownership patterns. Alongside Chinese interests, local tribal leaders and the military too have faced strident criticism, with many claiming the latter perpetuates the stranglehold of the former to protect its own interests.

This narrative now surrounds mineral extraction in Balochistan, which boasts trillions worth of mineral deposits. For the local Baloch, the state and its foreign patrons cast an avaricious glance at these resources and seek to exploit them without offering adequate benefits and returns to the Baloch. These fears are not unfounded. The extensive extraction of natural gas from the fields in Sui, Balochistan, and their transport to urban centers in Sindh and Punjab without provision of the resource to cities in Balochistan irked many Baloch and strengthened the narrative of Punjabi and federal exploitation.

This deeply prevalent sense of deprivation has crystallized into a strong hatred towards Punjabis, the ethnicity most strongly blamed by the Baloch for their marginalization. Recent attacks by insurgents have thus targeted Punjabi workers, laborers, and travelers, instilling a deep sense of fear in Punjabi settlers and those stationed in the province. This ethno-centric violence mirrors the wave of violence that targeted Punjabis in the wake of the 2006 operation against Akbar Bugti and the mass exodus of Punjabis it triggered then.

The Crisis of Human Rights

The state's relationship with Balochistan has also been fraught with multiple accusations of human rights violations. The narrative of 'missing persons' reflects a particularly egregious form of control that has formed deep fissures between the Baloch and the federal government and the military. Beginning as early as the 1970s, the number of missing persons has increased sharply in recent years, mirroring the rising urgency of the separatist movement (Devasher, 2020). The closure of the University of Balochistan is a manifestation of this crisis, with student protests against the disappearance of fellow students forcing the closure of the university and the presence of a large contingent of Frontier Corps (FC) personnel on campus. There have been other accusations of human rights abuses, including killings in police encounters and the humiliation of Baloch men at FC and police check posts across the province.

These accusations exacerbate the already deeply ingrained mistrust between state and society in Balochistan, fomenting a vicarious hatred amongst the locals against embodiments of the state—the military, the police, and now increasingly officers of the civil administration. Over the last few months, insurgents martyred the Deputy Commissioner in Panjgur and assassinated the Additional Deputy Commissioner in the district Surab. The Assistant Commissioner of tehsil Tump in district Kech, meanwhile, was abducted in June and remains missing. This shift in violence from uniformed personnel towards civilian administrators reflects changing tactics in the insurgency and a pervading frustration towards any arm of the state.

A Society in Upheaval: The Middle Class Nature of Violence in Balochistan

The ethnic insurgency in Balochistan reveals a curious development: a lot of violence has been unleashed by women from a middle-class socio-economic categorization. In March 2025, for instance, a female suicide bomber detonated herself near a moving military convoy in the central district of Kalat. Back in 2022, Shari Baloch a 31-year-old and mother of two, blew herself up outside the Confucius Institute at the University of Karachi, killing three Chinese citizens (Baloch & Notezai, 2022). The 2022 incident in fact, serves as a microcosm of the challenge and pervasiveness of the Baloch insurgency. It reflects the apathy and anger local Baloch hold towards the Chinese, whom they view as co-conspirators along with the Pakistani state in extracting Baloch resources.

The truth is, of course, more nuanced. Baloch society has, over the decades, witnessed state-led violence and marginalization, and as men have gone missing or lost, Baloch women have shattered local norms to speak up against these atrocities. The Baloch Yakjehti Movement (BYM), led by the female, Dr. Mahrang Baloch, reflects this sentiment, while the crackdown unleashed on the BYM and its leaders points towards a repeat of past mistakes on behalf of the state.

Beyond Ethnicity: Religious Extremism in Pashtun-Dominated Areas

Balochistan, sadly, faces a multitude of violent movements. While an ethnic, separatist movement rages in the Baloch-dominated areas, its Pashtun-dominated areas in the north have witnessed sharp bouts of religiously inspired violence led primarily by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and exacerbated by the presence of the Islamic State. The TTP has been able to thrive in Balochistan because of the province's porous border with Afghanistan and the larger political and economic instability that exists. Pashtun communities on the border hold deep roots with their counterparts in Balochistan, which has added a social and communal angle to the problem and threatened deeply rooted social practices in the region.

The Taliban have carried out extensive violence in the north of Balochistan, carrying out large-scale destruction in the provincial capital and targeting key sites and government officials. The Shiite-dominated Hazara community has borne extensive damage on account of the Taliban, which have targeted the community's businesses and residences, forcing them into deeply fortified and monitored spaces in Quetta. The Taliban have also embedded themselves in the local economy of the region, owning and controlling large parts of land around the provincial capital and holding a near monopoly on drug cultivation and supply in the bordering districts (Nguyen, 2012).

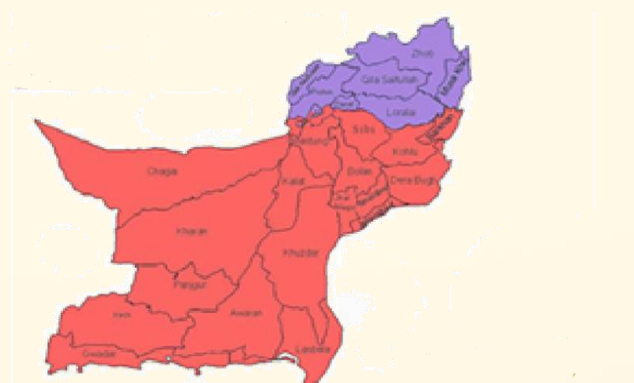


Figure 9: Ethnic Divide in Balochistan

In purple are the Pashtun-dominated areas while in red are the Baloch-dominated areas

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the Throes of Violence

Strategic Depth and Misplaced Loyalties

Much like Balochistan, the violence in KP too finds origins in the machinations of history. Since the 1970s, the Pakistani state developed a strong patron-client relationship with the Afghan Taliban who opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Stemming from fears of Soviet expansion into Pakistan, the bonhomie with the ‘mujahideen’ had another more ominous bent to it: acquiring strategic depth against India in case of violence on the eastern front. For decision-makers in Pakistan, Afghan was the fallback option, a secure western front that would ensure Pakistan was not entrapped in a two-front war in case hostilities with India ever escalated (Devasher, 2020) (Shah, 2014) (Parkes, 2019). This required a pliant government in power in Afghanistan that bent to Pakistan’s will. The solution was the rise of the Afghan Taliban.

This policy carried dire consequences for society and peace in Pakistan. Permitted to run rampant, Deobandi clerics who led the war against the Soviets were extended extensive patronage and permitted space to extend their networks across Pakistan—establishing a strong web of radicalized fighters who would eventually turn their guns against Islamabad. By 2007, radical groups controlled the picturesque Swat valley in KP with impunity while the Lal Masjid operation the same year in Islamabad emphasized how deeply entrenched the tentacles of radical thought were even in Pakistan’s urban centers.

This brief historical analysis remains essential to understand the recent surge in violence in KP. Following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in 2021, expectations in Pakistan centered on a compliant regime that would not provide safe sanctuary to the Pakistani Taliban. Events, unfortunately, ran counter to this, with the TTP gaining increased space and the chance to regroup under patronage from the Afghan Taliban. Safe havens in Eastern Afghanistan, plus direct support from the Afghan Taliban government—evidence exists of the Afghan government providing movement permits and military resources to their Pakistani counterparts—has strengthened the TTP, leading to a direct surge in violent attacks in KP. Al-Qaeda too has regrouped, establishing 9 new camps in 2024 in Afghanistan (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023).

Appeasing Typhon

The legacy of Pakistan’s initial tryst with the Taliban hung over initial interactions between the TTP and the government following the takeover in Afghanistan. In June 2022, for instance, the government announced a ceasefire with the TTP, releasing 80 prisoners in response to the agreement. This faith, however, was yet again misguided, with the TTP canceling the ceasefire a mere five months later in November and authorizing its fighters to ‘carry out attacks in the entire country’ (Hussain, 2022). This policy of appeasement once again reflected a misguided approach on behalf of the Pakistani state, predicated on the ability of the TTP to integrate back into society peacefully. At a deeper, more sinister level, it perhaps also raised questions of continued patronage by the state towards the Taliban as part of the historically toxic and symbiotic relationship that has defined Pakistan-Taliban relations.

The Taliban Rising

An equivocating and dithering Pakistan, coupled with the Afghan Taliban’s cooperation permitted the TTP to regroup and re-organize, which has contributed to the surge in violence in KP. Under the new TTP Amir

(leader), Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, splintered factions of the TTP have reunited and established a common front. The disillusioned Taliban faction formerly led by Hakeemullah Mehsud now led by Mukhlis Yar, for instance, has rejoined the TTP's fold. Other breakaway factions, including the notorious Jamaat ul Ahrar (JuA) and the Hizb-ul-Ahrar (HuA) also pledged allegiance to the TTP, further reinforcing its ranks. The landscape of violence in KP now reflects a motley crew at work: the TTP and Islamic State operate across the province, while the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group has concentrated its operations in Bannu and the Laskhar-i-Islam has emphasized Khyber district (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023).

Mufti Noor Wali's leadership has been instrumental to the Taliban's resurgence as well. A cleric with deep footprints on the radical ideology the Taliban ascribes to, Noor Wali boasts a strong leadership amongst radicals across the country, permitting an air of legitimacy to the Taliban under his command. This was particularly critical after the Taliban lost popular support in KP's tribal areas and hinterlands following its modus operandi of indiscriminate violence against civilians. Noor Wali's leadership marks a shift in this approach as well, with the TTP now concentrating its operations against security forces and installations (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023).

The Absentee State: Failures of Governance

Our analysis, at this point, necessitates a shift towards the insular and to hold accountable what is perhaps the greatest reason for the lack of peace in Pakistan: inadequate governance, political instability and economic depravity. Alongside Balochistan, this holds most true for the erstwhile districts of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which have consistently ranked at the bottom in development indicators across Pakistan (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). Comprising seven tribal agencies and six frontier regions, FATA was rugged terrain bordering Afghanistan possessing poverty rates crossing 60%. Another relic of Pakistan's colonial past, FATA was governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), a penal and retributive system of administration that extended immense powers to civil servants and which promoted a system of collective punitive responsibility.

Until 2018, FATA remained autonomous and governed by the FCR—reflecting its physical isolation, but also marginalization in Pakistan's collective conscience. Under the then PML-N government, FATA was finally merged into KP, extending the administrative structure of the province's other districts into FATA and at last doing away with the FCR. Hope and anticipation, however, soon turned into disaffection as the mechanics of the merger continued to stall. While the structure of administration altered to reflect that prevalent across KP, the development package allotted to FATA has not been disbursed, leaving the region in economic limbo. Although possessed with natural resources including deep fields of pine nuts, FATA's economy continues to rely on traditional modes of subsistence and growth. This has generated criticism against the merger, with many locals claiming the merger was executed in haste and done without appreciation of the local context. Interestingly, this criticism has extended to the cancellation of the FCR, which along with traditional methods of alternate dispute resolution was seen as an effective tool to curb inter-tribal disputes.

The recent and intense sectarian violence in Parachinar, Kurram district's capital attests to this claim. Parachinar has historically been marred by deep sectarian divide between Sunni and Shiite communities, with the recent bout of enmity spilling over into conflict on trade routes and land ownership.

Violence in Parachinar in KP's case serves as a microcosm of the governance failure in the region. Built on economic reasons, the violence has taken on an increasingly sectarian form which insurgents like the Taliban exploit. Critical to the inability to curb this violence is the eroded and absent writ of the state which is completely unable to assert itself. This, coupled with the lack of economic opportunities and dismal social indicators in the region, the civilian government has lost all legitimacy in the eyes of locals, permitting groups like the TTP to regain a foothold in the region and mirroring the extensive presence the military possesses in Balochistan. This has, in turn, further fueled disillusionment amongst the locals, most of whom remember the dispossession and loss caused by previous military campaigns, with large demonstrations taking place in Mohmand and Waziristan in opposition to any future military operation (Dawn, 2025).

Combining the state's lost legitimacy in the region, the overall political turbulence gripping the KP government, the lack of economic opportunities and the locals' distrust of the military, it becomes evident why radical forces have re-emerged in the region. Increasing violence in Khyber, Bajaur and the bordering district of Bannu support this argument, emphasizing the extent and depth of the problem.

Recommendations: Towards a New Social Contract

The thrust of this brief has sought to emphasize the political and economic basis of violence in Pakistan over its militaristic dimensions. The solutions proposed thus suggest a political and economic re-think towards Pakistan's margins, one which empowers local communities and embraces sustainable development.

- **More, not Less Democratization:** The Pakistani state must recognize its crisis of legitimacy and push towards genuine democratic reform that gives voice to local populations, particularly in Balochistan and KP.
- **Reconciliation and Healing:** The government must embrace a reconciliatory approach towards civil and political rights defenders in Balochistan, addressing their concerns and engaging with them to further limit disenchantment.
- **Respecting Human Rights and Local Sentiments:** The government must directly address accusations of human rights violations—particularly the painful question of missing persons in Balochistan. An open and candid conversation would permit disgruntled segments of the society to return to the fold.
- **Re-thinking Development in Balochistan:** Pakistan must actively engage with the Baloch community and address their concerns around patterns of development in the province. The locals must be assured that any development, particularly under CPEC and in Gwadar will not be a mode of extraction but will bring genuine benefit and growth to local, impoverished communities.
- **Recognizing the Flaws of Centralization:** The state must engage with history and appreciate how moves towards centralization have marginalized communities across Pakistan. Any conversation on undoing the 18th Amendment must be quashed and provincial and local autonomy respected.

- **A New NFC Award—Towards a Stronger Fiscal Paradigm:** The government must recognize that addressing economic shortfalls in KP and Balochistan can only be addressed through a fairer distribution of national resources, which requires a new NFC award that prioritizes the development of under-served regions.
- **Wielding the Stick:** Beyond political and the economic, terrorists like the Taliban which fail to relent in violence must be dealt with accordingly and through asserting the state's monopoly of violence. This must not, however, come at the expense of local communities or their displacement.

Post-Script: Global Conflagration—The Middle East Conflict and Reverberations for Pakistan

2025 has been remarkably violent beyond Pakistan's borders as well. The Ukraine-Russia war continues to rage while Israel remains relentless in its genocide of the Palestinians. Buoyed by Donald Trump's hawkish regime in America, Israel extended its attacks beyond Palestine, attacking the Hezbollah in Lebanon, bombing Syria and decimating Iran's top military leadership. Iran responded by a volley of drones on Tel Aviv, successfully bypassing Israel's redoubtable Iron Dome air defense system and causing damage in the Jewish state's capital. Tehran, however, suffered overnight air strikes on its nuclear installations from the United States as well, highlighting the sheer imbalance in military capabilities on both sides but also raising questions of a wider war across the Middle East.

Questions on Pakistan's territorial integrity and instability on its western borders become imminent under this turbulent scenario. A likely full-scale war between Israel and Iran holds powerful social ramifications for Pakistan, where a sizeable Shiite minority holds deep connections with Tehran. Threats to the Ayatollah regime could trigger sectarian tensions within Pakistan which the Taliban can further exploit. Instability in Iran, particularly in its Sistan-Baluchestan province could trigger instability on Pakistan's border with Iran where an ethnic Baloch insurgency also rages.

At the same time, Pakistan must tread carefully on the foreign policy front as well. Together with ensuring social cohesion and peace within its borders, Pakistan must also navigate its burgeoning relationship with the United States. Despite his claims to the contrary, Donald Trump seems to have turned away from convincing Israeli Prime Minister from a ceasefire in Gaza which coupled with his attacks on Iran put Pakistan in an awkward position of courting the US while condemning its violent posturing and support for Israel.

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