




# THE AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN BORDERLANDS AND THEIR IMPACT ON PAKISTAN'S SECURITY

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**ABSTRACT.** *The Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands have a significant impact on the relationship between the two neighboring states, Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as on Pakistan's security. This border zone, known as the Durand Line, is not just a line on a map. It is the zone of interaction, conflict, negotiation, and hybridity that has become a haven for "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan", one of the extremist and terrorist organizations operating here over the past two decades. Today, Pakistan finds itself in a challenging position due to the periodic infiltration of "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan" militants from Afghan territory and a renewed wave of violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, as well as in some other regions of Pakistan. The danger lies in the fact that the "Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan" utilizes Afghan territory to plan and execute operations within Pakistan.*

*The purpose of this article is to analyze how borders with cross-border ethnic, social, and economic networks are continually constructed, maintained, and contested through policies, violence, and social practices.*

*The theoretical framework is primarily grounded in the concept of borderlands theory and, to a lesser extent, in insurgency and counterinsurgency theories. It draws on a wide range of recent sources, highlighting the background and realities of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands. The findings and insights, derived from a comparative and empirical content analysis of the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands, challenge traditional state-centric views and reveal how borderlands function as dynamic spaces of interaction, conflict, and identity negotiation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Afghanistan, Pakistan, Afghan-Pakistan borderlands, violent extremism, terrorism, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.*

## INTRODUCTION

The border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan not only embodies many characteristics of a borderland but is also complicated by the historical relationship between the two countries, the unique geographical landscape, and regional geopolitics. In today's context, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderland has become a significant source of security challenges for Pakistan. This is largely due to the active

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presence of the Pakistani Taliban, “Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan” (hereinafter referred to as TTP), a radical religious organization primarily composed of ethnic Pashtuns. The TTP is concentrated in the northwest of Pakistan along the Afghanistan border and adjacent Afghan territory. There is substantial evidence suggesting that TTP militants have extensive ties with the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. Additionally, the TTP functions as an umbrella organization, comprising around three dozen armed groups involved in attacks against Pakistan.

TTP’s methods include attacks and terrorist strikes against Pakistan’s security services, military units, and law enforcement agencies, as well as acts of intimidation against the civilian population.

The TTP’s publicly stated reasons for attacking Pakistani authorities include the implementation of Sharia law in Pakistan, the release of its members from Pakistani prisons, and the reduction of Pakistan’s military presence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which has long served as a base for the group. Additionally, the TTP seeks to restore the right to free movement and other privileges. The Pashtun tribes residing on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border have lost several rights and benefits following the merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the North-West Frontier Province into the newly formed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018.

TTP primarily operates in regions such as Waziristan and Swat and other districts and areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. Whereas across the border in Afghanistan, TTP activities are concentrated in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Khost, Paktia, and Paktika, which share a border with Pakistan. These areas provide strategic locations for the TTP due to their proximity to the Afghan-Pakistani border and the presence of supportive networks. The leaders of the TTP, as noted by former Pakistani envoy to Afghanistan Asif Durrani, reside in Kabul (Afghanistan International, 2024).

The Afghan government in Kabul has repeatedly assured that Afghan territory will not serve as a sanctuary for extremist and terrorist groups and will not permit them to use Afghan soil to launch attacks on neighboring countries. Nonetheless, Islamabad remains skeptical about these assurances, noting that there is a substantial discrepancy between the words and actions of the Afghan Taliban. This skepticism is fueled by ongoing security concerns and the historical context of cross-border terrorism.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Boundaries are an attribute of statehood that defines a state’s territory and distinguishes it from the rest of the world. They serve as imaginary lines separating one state’s territory from another’s and delineate the limits of the state’s sovereignty and jurisdiction over its designated areas, thereby establishing the legal framework within which the state exercises its authority. According to Baud and Schendel (1997), boundaries appear on the political map and reproduce the state’s description and representation of itself, thereby shaping the country’s politics, economy, strategy, and security paradigm.

However, the term “borderlands” refers to the territory on both sides of the border between two states. As a space of unique political, economic, and cultural interaction,

borderlands often exhibit distinct characteristics. These may include the formation of competing identities, special economic zones, or a political status quo. Tariq et al. (2020) note that typically these circumstances do not always align with geographical and political realities. Therefore, the study of borderlands should be approached from multiple perspectives, including legality, geography, geopolitics, and other aspects of historical development.

According to scholars specializing in border security, such as Wermuth and Riley (2007), in the context of security paradigms border regions are particularly significant because they often serve as the origin of many security risks and challenges for a state. This is especially true when dealing with unstable, fragmented, or formal borders. Such borders frequently become a hub for illegal imports and exports, smuggling of goods and services, and cross-border crimes – such as drug trafficking and power abuse, illegal arms trade, and the movement of ammunition. These conditions collectively create an environment conducive to the development of transnational violent extremism and terrorism.

Thus, the borderlands theory places a special socio-political context at the center of research on instability and conflict in border regions. This approach highlights how the proximity to borders can create distinct social, economic, and political dynamics that contribute to tensions and conflicts. According to Baud & Schendel (1997), by examining these dynamics, one can better understand the complex interactions between bordering states, local communities, and external factors that influence the stability of these regions

In this regard, the Durand Line, established during the colonial period in 1893 to demarcate the state border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, serves as a critical example of how a border not recognized by the Afghan government encourages local tribes to engage in controversy with Pakistani authorities over crossing the border. This, in turn, leads to border conflicts between Kabul and Islamabad. Additionally, the Pashtun tribes on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border share a strong sense of common customs and traditions. In this regard, Tariq, in his previous work (2018), notes that “they maintain a way of life and social norms to which they adhere and enforce within their territory, despite coercive measures by the authorities of Afghanistan and Pakistan”.

Pakistan considers the Durand Line as a border with Afghanistan and considers it an internationally recognized border. Afghanistan does not recognize the international legal status of the border with Pakistan. At the same time, nomadic Pashtun tribes used to move between the two countries every year, along with members of armed groups, including TTP militants, who also crossed the Afghan-Pakistani border, which ran mainly through Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The historical background of the emergence of this line has led to the rise of an irredentist movement among Pashtun tribes on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border, which transcends national boundaries. This circumstance allows the TTP to operate across the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands with relative ease. At the same time, the observed Pashtun irredentism in the Afghan-Pakistani border region, as Deleixhe et al. (2019)

state, is not a legitimate movement from the perspective of established international law norms regarding the inviolability of modern state borders. Since the end of the Cold War, a general consensus has formed globally on this issue. Exceptions include the situations in Kosovo and South Sudan, where the question lies on a different plane (Deleixhe et al., 2019).

In the discourse of insurgency and counterinsurgency theory, some researchers argue that the primary focus is on the strategies employed by extremist groups and the countermeasures taken by states (Jermalavičius, 2007). In the context of Afghanistan and Pakistan, this theory highlights the logic of conflict development, fueling not only ethnic irredentism but also violent extremism and terrorism. Due to the prolonged civil war in Afghanistan and the intervention of third countries, various militant groups, primarily the TTP, have established extensive networks spanning both countries. In this regard, Bakrania (2017) claims that these networks utilize ethnic connections and tribal affiliations to recruit fighters and plan operations, complicating efforts by state forces to effectively combat extremists and militants.

The approach of Pakistan's military to addressing these threats often involved treating certain groups as strategic assets in their geopolitical maneuvers within the framework of the West's military-political strategy in Afghanistan. This has significantly complicated efforts to combat cross-border violent extremism and terrorism (Gohel, 2023). The absence of a unified bilateral strategy between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the context of the changed military-political situation in Afghanistan after 2021 only exacerbates the situation, as both countries struggle with internal divisions and external pressure. Moreover, effective combat against cross-border violent extremism and terrorism requires not only improved bilateral cooperation but also a nuanced understanding of the socio-political landscapes of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a combination of theoretical frameworks and research methods to analyze the emergence of the TTP and its impact on Pakistan's security, particularly in the context of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands.

The study draws on several theoretical frameworks. One of these is the borderland theory, which offers a foundational understanding of local communities situated in unstable and securitized border zones. According to borderland theory, such communities develop within a constrained set of possibilities: they may submit to, adapt to, or resist the prevailing socio-political conditions.

The study also employs insurgent and counterinsurgent theories as supplementary tools. These theories partially address the complexities of transnational terrorism, providing additional insight into the dynamics at play.

As it was mentioned above, the theory of borderlands is well-suited to describe the Afghan-Pakistani border region, as it takes into account the nature of this socio-political space. Rather than focusing on questions of loyalty or disloyalty to Pakistani authorities, it views the area as a long-term process in which a new supra-ethnic identity

is being formed. In other words, local tribes find themselves in an intermediate state. Over time, this may lead to the emergence of competing identities.

This perspective challenges the commonly held thesis regarding the legacy of the British colonial administration, which supporters of Pashtun irredentism often cite. Consequently, the events of 1893, frequently referenced to argue that the border does not align with the sense of belonging of many local Pashtun tribes, are losing their relevance. While tribal ties, languages, and kinship networks remain strong and continue to operate freely on both sides of the border, this process also has its temporal limits.

Although the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands allow for ongoing interaction and movement, the consolidation of sovereignty will inevitably assert itself over time.

As for the applicability of insurgency theory to the study of the Afghan-Pakistani border problem, one must say the following. In the classical sense, this theory is appropriate for analyzing the Republican period of Afghanistan's history, when the Taliban on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani border shared common goals and objectives and operated as a single organized force. It is in the period before the events of 2021 that insurgency theory helps explain the persistent instability in the region.

However, today, further development of insurgency theory is necessary, as the characteristics of the Afghan-Pakistan border have changed. Although this strip of territory still exhibits some insurgent features, its political situation and nature have evolved. Whereas in the past it served as a refuge for insurgent groups, today it has become a sanctuary for terrorist organizations such as the TTP, Islamic State of Khorasan (hereafter – ISIS-K), etc. It should also be noted that, instead of enjoying popular support, the TTP exerts unilateral coercion over local tribes.

Nevertheless, insurgency theory can be applied to a certain extent, as it emphasizes socio-economic motivations and political marginalization based on economic inequality, poverty, and feelings of exclusion from political processes, as drivers of conflict. In this regard, it is not simply a tale of resentment toward colonial legacies; rather, it concerns the factors that fuel the narratives exploited by the TTP. At the same time, the transnational nature of the terrorist underground has expanded to include groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and others, providing a broader framework for recruitment and legitimacy.

It is also worth highlighting the applicability of counterinsurgency theory, which pertains to state approaches, in this case, Pakistani, to securing the border with security forces, and to building fencing at the border, governance, and infrastructure. However, these state-led measures often fail due to the deterioration of relations between the Pakistan and Afghanistan governments. This is exacerbated by poor governance, corruption, and a lack of coordination between the military and civilian leadership.

The methodological approach also integrates comparative analysis and content analysis. These methods are employed to explore the comparative and content dimensions of the TTP's rise and its broader implications for Pakistan's security. Comparative analysis is utilized to contrast the TTP's activities with those of other militant groups in the region, as well as to compare the Pakistani government's response to the TTP with its

handling of other insurgencies. This approach highlights the unique features of the TTP's strategies, its regional influence, and its interactions with other militant organizations. Furthermore, comparative analysis is used to assess the government's counterinsurgency efforts and the varying levels of success in different regions of Pakistan, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Content analysis is also significant to this study as it is employed to systematically analyze official documents, reports, and various sources of secondary data. This method allows for the extraction and organization of relevant information regarding the TTP's formation, its strategies, and its expansion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The emergence of the TTP and its impact on the security situation in Pakistan.*

Around 2003, as part of the fight against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the international coalition forces led by the US and NATO significantly expanded their area of operation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands. As a result of the military actions in the tribal areas, which include extensive regions of the Pashtun belt, significant Taliban groups were localized. Operating under different names and forms, but under the banner of fighting against the West and its allies in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, various militant groups expanded their influence by uniting with other extremist groups based in different parts of Pakistan.

Over time, this led to the emergence of a local movement known as the Pakistani Taliban movement. The trend reached its peak in December 2007, when the formation of the "Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan" (TTP) was officially announced, with Baitullah Mehsud as its leader. The same year, Maulana Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Maulana Faqir Muhammad were appointed as two deputies, with 27 Taliban militant groups pledging allegiance to the TTP leader and agreeing to submit to its centralized command (Siddique et al., 2010).

Initially, the area of operation for the TTP was the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). However, the indiscriminate drone strikes by the US in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands played a significant role in expanding the TTP's sphere of influence. As the number of drone strikes increased, it prompted the number of civilians killed and wounded. This significantly contributed to the growth of support for the TTP among the local population.

In many ways, these events served as a trigger for a broader confrontation between the TTP and the Pakistani government. In response to US actions and the involvement of the Pakistani military, the TTP was able to consolidate its position and expand its influence in areas previously controlled by traditional tribal leaders of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, as well as strengthen its position in the settled districts of the former North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, which, like the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, is now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, it became clear "after the 2009 attack on a police academy in Lahore, Pakistan, that the TTP had a wide-ranging network throughout Pakistan" (Farley, 2021). Despite Pakistan's efforts to combat the TTP, the movement's militants continue to expand and spread across the country, exacerbating internal security challenges, including increased violence and political instability, which can further strain the country's economic recovery efforts.

The situation became particularly acute following the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021. The unexpected rise to power of the Afghan Taliban in Kabul provided significant ideological justification and motivation for the TTP's further activities, contributing to its revival. Additionally, the large arsenal of weapons left behind by the Americans gave new impetus to TTP militants, enabling them to launch active operations in neighboring Pakistan. For instance, it is reported that "US troops left behind military equipment and weapons worth approximately \$75 billion in Afghanistan. This included hundreds of pickups, cargo and transport trucks, mine-resistant vehicles, armored personnel carriers, as well as hundreds of thousands of rifles, pistols, machine guns, grenade launchers, rocket weapons, and night vision device" (Farley, 2021). It is more challenging to discuss the exact number of planes and helicopters left for the Taliban, as many were disabled or abandoned, according to military experts (BBC News, 2021). Additionally, a small number were flown out to neighboring countries.

TTP now periodically conducts attacks against Pakistani military, police, intelligence officials, and civilians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province using Western weapons. Representatives of Pakistani political parties and civil activists have also faced persecution for refusing to cooperate with the TTP. Local business communities and traders have been subjected to extortion. Almost all individuals cooperating with local authorities have found themselves targeted by the militants.

Moreover, the TTP's activities have expanded beyond their traditional stronghold of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Northwest Tribal Areas into several districts and cities in the already volatile neighboring province of Balochistan. The insurgency by Baloch separatist groups, which are nationalist and secular in nature, has fluctuated over the past two decades. Insurgent groups, including the Baloch Liberation Army, the Balochistan Liberation Front, the Balochistan Republican Guard, and others, have been fighting against the Pakistani government. They have periodically made their presence known through attacks on central government officials and Chinese interests in the country, accusing the central government of unfairly appropriating Balochistan's rich gas and mineral resources. Severe economic problems have exacerbated these grievances. Balochistan is Pakistan's largest and least populated province, yet it remains the country's poorest province, with approximately 70% of the population living below the poverty line (Niaz, 2024).

Since 2023, there have been increasing reports of TTP militants infiltrating the city of Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, as well as the cities of Chaman and Qilla Saifullah, which border Afghanistan. Additionally, TTP activities have been noted in Kalat and the Zhob district, located near Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This expansion reflects the TTP's strategic efforts to establish a broader presence in Balochistan, beyond its traditional strongholds (Ur Rehman, 2023).

According to security experts, the TTP is seeking to establish strong connections with Baloch militant groups to form a united front against Pakistani security forces. The TTP has reportedly recruited two groups from the Quetta and Kalat districts in Balochistan. The Baloch groups themselves have remained silent about TTP operations in their territory, which highlights their common interests in countering Pakistani security forces or their reluctance to engage in open confrontation with the TTP (Akhter, 2024).



According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) database, a non-profit organization that specializes in collecting and mapping data on armed conflicts worldwide, 2024 saw a significant increase in armed activities by Baloch separatists, with levels of activity doubling compared to 2023. This surge in violence was partly driven by intensified attacks leading up to national and provincial elections. Separatists enforced a boycott by targeting polling facilities during the voting process. The largest series of attacks occurred on August 25-26, 2024, in which more than 70 people, including 23 civilians, were killed (Shaikh, 2024).

The high level of violence persisted throughout late 2024, reflecting the enhanced armed and organizational capabilities of Baloch groups. This violence was characterized by an ethnocentric dimension, as it primarily targeted Punjabi workers, highlighting the complex nature of the conflict (Pandya & Shah, 2024). There has also been a notable increase in attacks on Chinese nationals working on projects related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative. These attacks have heightened security concerns and strained relations between China and Pakistan, with China pressing Pakistan to enhance security measures for its citizens and projects in the region (Pandya & Shah, 2024).

It is worth noting that the TTP has had a presence in Balochistan before, which can be attributed to the province's strategic location at the crossroads of borders with Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan and their unstable tribal regions. Historically, the TTP's presence was confined to the Pashtun areas of Balochistan. However, there has been a recent increase in interactions between the TTP and Baloch separatist groups, marking a shift in the dynamics of the conflict. Security experts believe that the TTP is expanding its presence in Balochistan to prevent the Islamic State in Pakistan Province (IS-P), a splinter group of IS-K, from filling the jihadist space. The primary motivation for this expansion is strategic: maintaining a foothold in Balochistan provides the TTP with an alternative safe haven within Pakistan. This is particularly important as Islamabad pressures Kabul, and it serves as a useful insurance policy for the TTP during challenging times. Balochistan's vast territory and low population density make it an attractive sanctuary for the TTP, offering ample hideouts and potential resources (Basit, 2023).

At the same time, the situation in Balochistan is exacerbated by the generally weak governance that characterizes peripheral border regions, which affects the country's overall security and economy. This allows insurgents to use porous borders and kinship ties to take refuge in neighboring countries (Ansary, 2020).

Thus, the growing activity of the TTP in Balochistan has potential long-term implications for the overall trajectory and composition of the conflict in Balochistan. At the same time, to strengthen its position in the province, the TTP has been provoking Baloch groups in various ways by issuing statements about the numerous challenges facing Balochistan.

***Current Situation: From Ceasefire Attempts to the Construction of a Fence on the Afghan-Pakistani Border.*** TTP and the Pakistani government have repeatedly declared ceasefires. One of the most recent ceasefires, brokered by Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani in the fall of 2022, was broken after Pakistani Prime



Minister Shahbaz Sharif (who replaced Imran Khan in April 2022) rejected the call of Afghan Deputy Prime Minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. The latter called on the Pakistani authorities to release all Afghan citizens from detention facilities in Pakistan. By November 2022, the militants unilaterally announced the resumption of operations against the Pakistani authorities.

In the spring of 2023, a significant infiltration of TTP militants into Pakistan from Afghanistan was documented. In a message circulated on social media, the extremists threatened the authorities that if the Pakistani army initiated punitive actions against the TTP, the militants would launch targeted attacks on government members and top officials.

Personal threats against Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who leads the Pakistan People's Party, and other officials had a notable impact. Despite the challenging security situation in the country, the Pakistani authorities did not undertake a large-scale military operation to neutralize the TTP and its extremist networks.

Overall, attacks by the TTP against Pakistani law enforcement agencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province have increased significantly in frequency and intensity since the Afghan Taliban regained power. In 2023, a total of 1,215 terrorist attacks were recorded, compared to 858 in 2022 and 903 in 2021 (Janjua et al., 2024).

The TTP attacks have surged by nearly 70 percent over the past two years, primarily targeting law enforcement and military forces in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. This escalation has resulted in the deaths and injuries of hundreds of Pakistani troops (Afghanistan International, 2024). According to the Global Terrorism Index, in 2025, TTP emerged as a terrorist group, with a 90% increase in attributed deaths (Global Terrorism Index, 2025).

The deteriorating security situation along the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, exacerbated by the escalating intensity of TTP attacks against Pakistan in 2023, has prompted the Pakistani government to strongly criticize the Afghan authorities. Throughout 2023, Pakistani officials, through various channels, urged the Afghan government to stop sheltering the TTP, demanding that Kabul either take action against terrorists using Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan or extradite them to Islamabad. "A key message from Pakistan's Acting Prime Minister Anwar ul-Haq Kakar at the time was to press the Afghan authorities to take decisive action against the TTP" (Ariana News, 2023).

Simultaneously, Islamabad periodically conveyed to Kabul that the possibility of Pakistan conducting a targeted operation on Afghan territory to neutralize TTP militants could not be ruled out.

Meanwhile, as noted above, crossing the border in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands has traditionally been a component of the seasonal migration process of Afghan Pashtun nomads. The Pashtun tribes, settled on both sides of the border, continued to live as they had for decades, largely disregarding the border.

At the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, following the invasions of Afghanistan by Soviet and then American and NATO forces, as well as in the years that followed, the unauthorized movement of Afghans across state borders remained relatively unchanged and stable. Under these conditions, the groundwork was laid for illegal activities such as smuggling of goods and services, drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, and other unlawful endeavors.

In the early 2000s, as American drones began to dominate the Afghan-Pakistani border area, the security situation became increasingly complex. This period marked the emergence of open confrontations between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistani authorities for the first time, which served as a primary catalyst for the rise of TTP in the region. The unique status of the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, combined with its rugged terrain, enabled the TTP to establish a strong presence in this challenging environment.

New realities prompted Islamabad to consider constructing border fortifications along the Afghan-Pakistani border, an idea first announced in September 2005. This proposal led to an escalation of tensions on the border at the time. Following objections from Kabul, Pakistani authorities initially shelved the plan. However, Pakistan repeatedly revisited its intention to fence the border, only to postpone it each time due to the resulting escalation of tensions. This cautious approach was understandable given the sensitive nature of the issue.

As it was mentioned above, the Durand Line has not been officially recognized by Kabul, and the dispute over its legitimacy between Afghanistan and Pakistan has persisted for over a century. Consequently, Afghanistan views the construction of border fortifications as an attempt by Pakistan to solidify the disputed border. This issue is particularly contentious along the mountainous and poorly controlled sections of the 2,640-kilometer border between Afghanistan and the Pakistani provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan (Mohanty, 2024).

In the spring of 2017, Pakistan initiated the active construction of a fence along its border with Afghanistan. On April 25, 2023, at a press conference, Major General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry announced that 98% of the work on fencing the 2,611-kilometer Pakistan-Afghan border had been completed. He also noted that 85% of the proposed forts had been installed along the border to restrict the movement of terrorists (Mohanty, 2024).

The fencing project has been a significant part of Pakistan's efforts to enhance border security and reduce cross-border terrorism. Despite Afghan opposition, Pakistan has continued with the project, citing national security concerns (Samaa-News, 2024)

On the other hand, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, religious tensions between Shia and Sunni tribes are not uncommon, often escalating into land disputes and clashes between them. The Kurram district, located about 200 kilometers from Peshawar, the administrative center of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, has long been a site of intertribal conflicts. In September and October 2024, clashes between local tribes resulted in the deaths of 20 and 11 people, respectively. In November 2024, seven incidents of religious violence were recorded, including two terrorist attacks and five clashes, leading to 115 fatalities and 137 injuries (Inayatullah, 2024).

While Pakistan's construction of border fortifications along the Afghan border remains a contentious issue between Islamabad and Kabul, the complex geography of the region is a primary factor contributing to periodic flare-ups in the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province has become a hub for terrorist and insurgent groups. Simultaneously, there is a lack of coordination between the central and provincial governments in sharing information and assigning responsibilities for countering security threats. Furthermore, inadequate oversight from Afghan authorities exacerbates the situation.

Table 1 highlights the most important aspects of the analysis, focusing on the origins, expansion, growth of influence, and challenges posed by TTP.

**Table 1.** A summary table of the content analysis on the emergence of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its impact on Pakistan's Security

Aspect	Findings
<b>Context and Formation</b>	The TTP emerged in 2007 as a unified faction of various militant groups under Baitullah Mehsud's leadership, amid the Afghanistan-Pakistan border conflict.
<b>Initial Area of Operation</b>	Initially based in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and later expanded to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and beyond.
<b>U.S. Drone Strikes Impact</b>	Increased drone strikes led to civilian casualties, fueling local support for the TTP and expanding its influence.
<b>Growth and Consolidation</b>	TTP expanded after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, using the Taliban's resurgence for ideological support and operational bases.
<b>Strategic Expansion</b>	Since 2023, there have been increasing reports of TTP militants infiltrating the Balochistan province
<b>Weapons and Resources</b>	The TTP benefited from military equipment left by the U.S. in Afghanistan, strengthening its operational capabilities.
<b>Impact on Security</b>	TTP intensified attacks across Pakistan, with significant casualties and an increased destabilization of the political and economic situation.
<b>Government Response</b>	Pakistan's government has used mostly military and fewer intelligence efforts to counter the TTP, but regional sanctuaries in Afghanistan hinder effective control.
<b>Recent Threat Level</b>	In 2023, a total of 1,215 terrorist attacks were recorded, compared to 858 in 2022 and 903 in 2021.
<b>Current Threat Level</b>	In 2025, TTP emerged as a terrorist group, with a 90% increase in attributed deaths.

*Source: conducted on the result of the analysis (Siddique, et al., 2010; Farley, 2021; Janjua, et al., 2024; Global Terrorism Index, 2025; Ur Rehman, 2023).*

Thus, in the short and medium term, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands can be characterized by a complex ethnic and cultural structure, which further complicates control and security enforcement in the region. Tribal ties that cross the border create favorable conditions for illegal migration, arms and drug smuggling, as well as the covert movement of militants. These factors exacerbate instability and hinder the coordination of joint actions between the two countries, which in turn contributes to the persistence of a zone of lawlessness and extremism.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political factors in the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands has facilitated the long-standing presence of the TTP in this region. However, the current resurgence of TTP activities in Pakistan is linked to the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan in 2021. This development provided the TTP with legitimacy and ideological momentum to intensify terrorist attacks against Pakistani authorities. Simultaneously, the absence of strong and trusting relations between Islamabad and Kabul, coupled with a significant trust deficit between the two governments, creates favorable conditions for the TTP to actively target the neighboring state.

Simultaneously, Pakistan has become increasingly critical of its own government's policy towards Afghanistan. Experts in the country acknowledge that the Afghan dimension of Pakistan's foreign policy requires significant revisions. Consequently, calls to reevaluate Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan are growing louder. The Pakistani establishment appears to be reassessing its Afghan policy, which could lead to reduced engagement and a withdrawal from active support and assistance to Afghanistan at the regional and international levels. Currently, bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan remains at an all-time low.

Thus, the ongoing dysfunction in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the short and medium term will remain a pressing issue for both countries. Resolving this issue is a necessary condition for normalizing bilateral Afghan-Pakistani relations.

Future research based mainly on borderlands theory and partly on insurgency and counterinsurgency theories could be valuable in addressing the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands issue. A deeper investigation would contribute to understanding this issue as one rooted in cross-border cooperation, hybrid governance, and flexible approaches that move beyond rigid state borders. The given research encourages reimagining these regions not as peripheries to be controlled, but as central spaces of interaction and shared governance. Exploring the factors that shape cross-border cooperation, hybrid governance, and flexible governance models between Afghanistan and Pakistan could help identify new alternatives for resolving the borderlands issue.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

MA: conceptualization, validation, writing of the methodological section, the discourse analysis of the study, discussion section; MT: access to region-specific data and mass media; MM: participation in the discussion section.

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