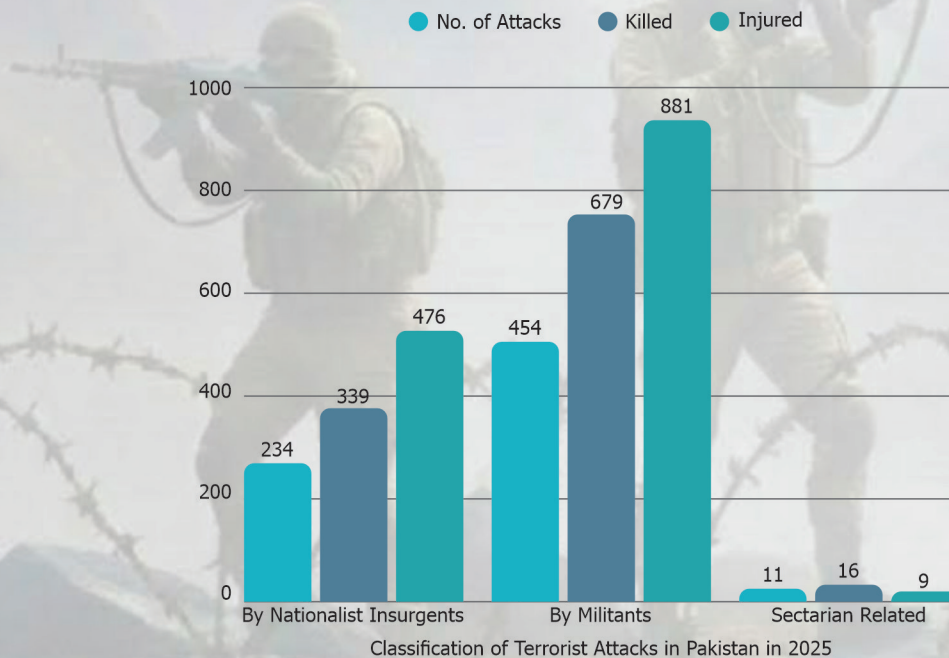


# PAKISTAN SECURITY REPORT 2025

ANNUAL REPORT FROM PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES



# **Conflict and Peace Studies**

---

**VOLUME 18**

**January 2026**

**NUMBER 1**

---

## **PAKISTAN SECURITY REPORT 2025**

**PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES (PIPS)**

PIPS Research Journal

## Conflict and Peace Studies

Copyright © PIPS 2026

**All Rights Reserved**

No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form by photocopying or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage or retrieval systems, without prior permission in writing from the publisher of this journal.

### Editorial Advisory Board

**Prof. Dr. Saeed Shafqat**

Director, Centre for Public Policy and Governance, Forman Christian College, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Dr. Tariq Rahman**

Dean, School of Education, Beaconhouse National University, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Marco Mezzera**

Former Senior Adviser, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre / Norsk Ressurssenter for Fredsbygging, Norway.

**Dr. Catarina Kinnvall**

Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden.

**Prof. Dr. Syed Farooq Hasnat**

Pakistan Study Centre, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

**Dr. Adam Dolnik**

Professor of Counterterrorism, George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, Germany.

**Anatol Lieven**

Professor, Department of War Studies, King's College, London, United Kingdom.

**Tahir Abbas**

Professor of Sociology, Fatih University, Istanbul, Turkey.

**Peter Bergen**

Senior Fellow, New American Foundation, Washington D.C., USA.

**Dr. Rasul Bakhsh Rais**

Professor, Political Science, Lahore University of Management Sciences Lahore, Pakistan.

**Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)**

Post Box No. 2110,  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
+92-51-8359475-6

**www.pakpips.com**  
**editor@pakpips.com**

**Price: Rs 1,000**

**US\$ 30.00**

The views expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect any positions held by the institute.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Foreword	11
1	Overview of Security in 2025: Critical Challenges and Recommendations	15
2	Security Landscape of Pakistan in 2025	49
3	Militant Landscape of Pakistan in 2025	97
4	State Responses	111
5	Pakistan 2025: Extremism Landscape, Projections and Policy Options	131
6	Evolving Media and Propaganda Strategies of Militants	145
7	Emerging Nexus between BLA, TTP and Al Qaeda	153
8	Securing CPEC: Risks and Policy Pathways	161
9	Pakistan's Successes against IS-K in 2025	177
10	Faith-based Violence and Persecution in 2025	183
	Annexes	191



## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ACC:</b>	Afghan Citizen Card	<b>HGBG:</b>	Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group
<b>AJK:</b>	Azad Jammu and Kashmir	<b>HuA:</b>	Hizbul Ahrar
<b>AQIS:</b>	Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent	<b>IED:</b>	Improvised Explosive Device
<b>Arm:</b>	Army	<b>IMP:</b>	Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan
<b>ASWJ:</b>	Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat	<b>IPCM:</b>	Inter-Provincial Coordination Ministry
<b>ATC:</b>	Anti-Terrorism Courts	<b>ISI:</b>	Inter-Services Intelligence
<b>ATF:</b>	Anti-Terrorism Force	<b>ISIS:</b>	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
<b>BH:</b>	Beheading	<b>IS-K:</b>	Islamic State Khorasan
<b>BLA:</b>	Balochistan Liberation Army	<b>ISPR:</b>	Inter-Services Public Relations
<b>BLF:</b>	Balochistan Liberation Front	<b>JI:</b>	Jamaat-e-Islami
<b>BNP:</b>	Balochistan National Party	<b>JID:</b>	Joint Intelligence Directorate
<b>BNP-M:</b>	Balochistan National Party-Mengal Group	<b>JM:</b>	Jaish-e-Muhammad
<b>BRA:</b>	Baloch Republican Army	<b>JuA:</b>	Jamaatul Ahrar
<b>BRG:</b>	Baloch Republican Guards	<b>JUI-F:</b>	Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl
<b>BSF:</b>	[Indian] Border Security Force	<b>Kid:</b>	Kidnapping
<b>BT:</b>	Bomb Blast	<b>KP:</b>	Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa
<b>Civ:</b>	Civilians	<b>LeJ:</b>	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi
<b>CPEC:</b>	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	<b>LeJ-A:</b>	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami
<b>CTDs:</b>	Counter Terrorism Departments [of police]	<b>LI:</b>	Lashkar-e-Islam
<b>CVE:</b>	Counter Violent Extremism	<b>LM:</b>	Landmine Blast
<b>DGMOs:</b>	Director Generals of Military Operations	<b>LoC:</b>	Line of Control
<b>DSP:</b>	Deputy Superintendent Police	<b>Lvs:</b>	Levies Force
<b>FATF:</b>	Financial Action Task Force	<b>Mil:</b>	Militant
<b>FC:</b>	Frontier Corps, Federal Constabulary	<b>MQM:</b>	Muttahida Qaumi Movement
<b>FIA:</b>	Federal Investigative Agency	<b>MWM:</b>	Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen
<b>Fr:</b>	Firing	<b>NACTA:</b>	National Counter-Terrorism Authority
<b>HG:</b>	Hand Grenade	<b>NADRA:</b>	National Database and Registration Authority
<b>HRCP:</b>	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan	<b>NAP:</b>	National Action Plan
		<b>NEC:</b>	National Executive Committee
		<b>NIPTAC:</b>	National Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre

<b>NRTC:</b>	National Radio Telecommunication Corporation	<b>Sab:</b>	Sabotage
<b>PCNS:</b>	Parliamentary Committee on National Security	<b>SRA:</b>	Sindhudesh Revolution Army
<b>PIFTACs:</b>	Provincial Intelligence Fusion & Threat Assessment Centres	<b>SECP:</b>	Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan
<b>P-ml:</b>	Paramilitary Forces	<b>Sect:</b>	Sectarian
<b>PML-N:</b>	Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz	<b>SM:</b>	Sipah-e-Muhammad
<b>PoR:</b>	Proof of Registration [Card]	<b>SP:</b>	Superintendent of Police
<b>Pol:</b>	Police	<b>SSP:</b>	Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan
<b>PPP:</b>	Pakistan People's Party	<b>ST:</b>	Sunni Tehreek
<b>PTI:</b>	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf	<b>TA:</b>	Terrorist Attack
<b>QWP:</b>	Qaumi Watan Party	<b>TDPs:</b>	Temporarily Displaced Persons
<b>RA:</b>	Rocket Attack	<b>TLP:</b>	Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan
<b>RAW:</b>	Research & Analysis Wing	<b>TTP:</b>	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
<b>RCB:</b>	Remote-controlled Bomb	<b>UBA:</b>	United Baloch Army
<b>Rng:</b>	Rangers	<b>UN:</b>	United Nations
<b>SA:</b>	Suicide Attack	<b>WB:</b>	Working Boundary

## METHODOLOGY AND VARIABLES

The PIPS conflict/security database and archives are the basic sources relied upon for this report. The archives and the database are the outcome of a meticulous monitoring process on every relevant incident in the country on a daily basis. A regular follow up is conducted in liaison with PIPS correspondents in the regions in order to keep track of daily developments on such incidents. PIPS compiles data from sources including newspapers, magazines, journals, field sources and screening of official record. More than 30 English and Urdu dailies, magazines, and journals, and various television news channels are monitored to update the database and archives. Regional daily newspapers and weeklies from Peshawar, Quetta, Gilgit and Karachi are also monitored for details of incidents reported in the local media. Correspondents in provincial capitals are the primary source for PIPS to verify the media reports. In case of a major incident, PIPS teams consult the local administration and journalists for further details. In cases where PIPS finds it difficult to verify facts of a particular incident, it gives preference to the official statements in that regard.

PIPS security reports utilize eight major variables with their respective set of sub-variables for analysis of the security situation in Pakistan. The security landscape is mapped through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative methods are used, based on PIPS Conflict and Security Database, to measure the scale and level of violence. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach dilates upon changes and developments on the militants' front, state responses to these developments and projections of future scenarios. The following eight major variables with their sub-sets of variables are used in the PIPS Security Reports:

**Attacks:** This major variable has a sub-set of five sub-variables i.e. (i) terrorist attacks including militant attacks, nationalist insurgent attacks and sectarian-related attacks; (ii) incidents of ethno-political violence; (iii) cross-border attacks; (iv) drone attacks; and (v) operational attacks by security forces against militants. Since Pakistan's security landscape is very complicated with a diverse array of insecurity indicators in different parts of the country, the type of violence in one geographical unit is often different in its nature and dynamics from security landscape in other parts of the country. For this purpose, the mentioned sub-set of variables is carefully monitored and analyzed in the security report with a view to suggest specific counter-strategy for each type of attack in these areas.

**Clash:** Another variable used is of clashes which include four sub-variables, i.e., (i) inter-tribal; (ii) sectarian; (iii) clashes between security forces and militants; and (iv) militants' infightings. The number of such clashes and their geographic location is taken as an



indicator of parallel trends unfolding simultaneously with major trends and patterns of security in different areas of the country.

**State Responses:** It has two sub-variables: (i) security measures, and (ii) political and administrative responses. The first takes into account the security forces' operational attacks and clashes with militants, search and hunt operations and terrorists' arrests, etc. The second variable entails the government's political and administrative measures to maintain law and order and reduce insecurity and violence.

**Casualties:** Casualties include both the number of people killed and injured. Casualties among civilians, militants and security forces are treated as another indicator to measure the levels and trends of security in the country.

**Attack Tactics:** This head takes a comprehensive account of various tactics used by different actors including suicide attacks, missile attacks, hand grenade attacks, kidnappings, rocket attacks, beheadings, landmine blasts, firing, sabotage, target killings, and bomb and improvised explosive devices blasts.

**Development on Militants' Front:** This variable analyzes statements, activities, internal divisions and other activities of militants to determine their strength and the dynamics of their strategies.

**Opportunities and Challenges** include political measures and military responses to different security issues along with highlighting constraints and challenges encountered by the state.

**Claim of Responsibility:** It provides insight into militants' targets, tactics, areas of operation, and agendas.

## GLOSSARY

**Military Operation:** Large-scale operations launched by military and paramilitary forces against Islamist militants and separatist insurgents in KP, FATA and Balochistan to preserve law and order and the writ of the state.

**Operational Attack:** Pre-emptive attacks launched by military and paramilitary troops to purge an area of militants.

**Clashes between Security Forces and Militants:** Armed clashes between security forces and militants, triggered by militants' attack on security check posts/ convoys and confrontation during search operations.

**Terrorist Attacks:** Include militant, nationalist, insurgent and sectarian attacks. Indiscriminate use of violence by militant outfits such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), and Baloch and Sindhi insurgent groups, etc., as well as violent sectarian groups, manifested through suicide attacks, beheadings and destruction of educational institutions, CD/video shops, etc.

**Nationalist Insurgent Attacks:** Attacks by separatists/nationalist insurgents mainly in Balochistan and interior parts of Sindh.

**Sectarian Attacks:** Indiscriminate use of violence rooted in differences among various Islamic schools of thought over interpretation of religious commands. Incidents involving indiscriminate use of violence perpetrated by banned sectarian outfits such as LeJ, Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat, Sipah-e-Muhammad, and Zainabiyoun Brigade etc., against rival schools of religious thought.

**Ethno-political Violence:** The threat or use of violence, often against the civilian population, to achieve political or social ends, to intimidate opponents, or to publicize grievances.

**Inter-tribal Clash:** Clashes or feuds reported between tribes, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, rural areas of Punjab and parts of interior Sindh.

**Search and Hunt Operation:** Launched by law enforcement agencies on intelligence to capture militants or to purge a particular locality of suspected militants and their hideouts.

**Sectarian Clashes:** Violent clashes between armed factions of banned sectarian outfits or between followers of rival sects such as Sunni-Shia, Deobandi-Barelvi strife. Sectarian clashes also include tribal feuds between followers of Sunni and Shia schools of thought as in Kurram, where once the Sunni Turi tribesmen frequently clashed with members of the Shia Bangash tribe.

**Overall Violent Incidents:** The sum of militant and counter-militant attacks by the security forces, besides drone attacks, incidents of ethno-political violence, and attacks with sectarian motives or by nationalist insurgents.

**Plot/Failed Terror Attempts:** These include attempts at terrorist attacks that were either foiled by security forces and bomb disposal squads, or explosives went off by accident before militants or suicide bombers reached their intended target.

## FOREWORD

Pakistan's internal security environment entered another critical phase in 2025, as the country experienced a sharp resurgence in militant violence. A total of 699 terrorist attacks were recorded nationwide, representing a 34 percent increase over the previous year. These incidents claimed at least 1,034 lives, a 21 percent rise in terrorism-related fatalities, underscoring the scale and persistence of the challenge confronting the state.

The epicentres of insecurity remained Balochistan and the southern and tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where militant activity intersected with longstanding political, socio-economic, and cross-border dynamics. In response, security forces carried out 259 counterterrorism operations and engaged in 21 major armed clashes and encounters with militant groups, which inflicted unprecedented losses on militant networks, with 1,313 militants killed during the year – the highest annual figure since the onset of Pakistan's internal war on terrorism. A further 602 militants were killed in retaliatory fire by law enforcement agencies following attacks, during attempted infiltrations from Afghanistan, or in foiled and failed terror plots. These gains, however, came at a considerable cost: 82 security personnel were martyred during anti-militant operations, while another 437 lost their lives in terrorist attacks.

The intensification of militancy also had regional ramifications. Pakistan's coercive actions against terrorist hideouts across the border heightened tensions with Afghanistan, which Islamabad holds responsible for hosting and facilitating militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). These tensions increasingly drew international attention and engaged several friendly countries – including China, Qatar, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia – helping elevate Pakistan's security concerns to the global diplomatic arena.

Religiously motivated militant groups – most prominently the TTP, Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP), and Islamic State–Khorasan (IS-K) – accounted for 454 of the 699 attacks recorded in 2025. Baloch insurgent groups, while responsible for fewer incidents (229 attacks), emerged as a particularly lethal and strategically disruptive threat. Their operations targeted provincial stability and Pakistan's geo-economic interests, especially projects linked to China's multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and development initiatives. High-profile incidents, including the Jaffar Express hijacking and the insurgents' evolving tactic of blocking major highways and briefly seizing control of towns such as Zehri, demonstrated an expansion in both ambition and operational capacity. These threats were subsequently blunted through intelligence-based

operations by security forces, though the underlying drivers of the insurgency remain unresolved.

Across both conventional and unconventional security domains, 2025 was an intense yet consequential year for Pakistan. The country's response to Indian attacks on civilian facilities inside Pakistan in May reshaped regional and international perceptions of Pakistan's security posture. This recalibrated image was further reinforced by Pakistan's campaign against Daesh, which received public acknowledgment from U.S. President Donald Trump and former CENTCOM Chief General Michael Kurilla. Particular reference was made to the arrest of an IS-K militant involved in the 2021 Abbey Gate bombing at Kabul airport, an attack that killed 13 U.S. service members and 170 others. A dedicated section of this report examines Pakistan's counter-IS-K operations in detail, highlighting their contribution to restoring global confidence in the country's counterterrorism credentials.

Notwithstanding these operational and diplomatic gains, Pakistan's internal security environment continues to demand more comprehensive and integrated responses that balance kinetic action with political, social, and economic measures. Balochistan, in particular, requires urgent attention through a credible, transparent, and inclusive political process – one that marginalizes insurgent narratives not only on the battlefield but also within political discourse and public imagination.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, efforts to address militancy have been complicated by political divergences between the federal and provincial governments. Disagreements over the scope of military operations, the use of drones, and the repatriation of Afghan nationals have generated visible friction, creating operational uncertainty for security forces and eroding public confidence and intelligence cooperation.

Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan likewise warrants reassessment. The year 2025 marked a turbulent chapter in bilateral relations, defined by persistent security threats but also shaped by diplomatic engagement facilitated by friendly Muslim countries. While distrust and violence strained ties, both sides engaged in a cautious balancing act – managing immediate crises while tentatively exploring avenues for cooperation.

The 20th edition of the Pak Institute for Peace Studies' Annual Security Report moves beyond a quantitative accounting of violent incidents. It offers extensive qualitative analysis of Pakistan's militant landscape, emerging nexuses among militant actors, state responses, border security dynamics, and evolving militant strategies across operational and propaganda domains. The report also provides in-depth examination of security policy formulation, alongside practical recommendations for security sector reform and for

addressing terrorism and extremism. Additional sections focus on CPEC security, Pakistan's counter-IS-K successes in 2025, and the dynamics of faith-based violence and persecution.

As in previous years, this report seeks to contribute fresh perspectives for policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and watchdogs concerned with Pakistan's security trajectory and the pursuit of sustainable solutions. PIPS remains grateful to all chapter contributors, and extends special appreciation to Safdar Sial, who not only compiled and organized the data but also authored key chapters of this report.

**Muhammad Amir Rana**

January 10, 2026



## Overview of Security in 2025: Critical Challenges and Recommendations

**Muhammad Amir Rana and Safdar Sial\***

- 1.1 Overview of Security Situation in 2025
- 1.2 Critical Challenges and Recommendations

- 
- Muhammad Amir Rana is President of Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). He has authored several books, most recently of "The Militant: Development of a Jihadi character in Pakistan", which won the German Peace Prize in 2014. Safdar Hussain, nom de plume Safdar Sial, is Research Analyst at PIPS and Associate Editor of *Conflict and Peace Studies* journal. He has also co-authored "Dynamics of Taliban Insurgency in FATA" and "Radicalization in Pakistan".





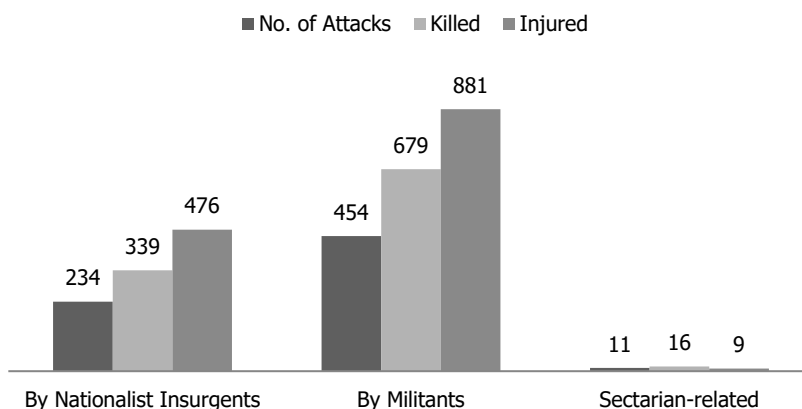
## 1.1 Overview of Security Situation in 2025

Pakistan witnessed a sharp surge in militant violence in 2025, with 699 terrorist attacks recorded countrywide – an increase of 34% compared to the previous year. This renewed wave of violence claimed at least 1,034 lives, marking a 21% rise in terrorism-related fatalities. In addition, 1,366 people were injured over the course of the year, underscoring the growing human cost of terrorism.

Security and law enforcement personnel bore the brunt of the terrorist violence. Of the total terrorism-related fatalities, as many as 437, or more than 42%, were personnel of security and law enforcement agencies, including 174 policemen, 122 army soldiers, 107 FC members (both Frontier Corps and Federal Constabulary), 21 Levies personnel, 12 paramilitary troops, and one Rangers official. Civilians were also heavily affected, with 354 non-combatants losing their lives. Meanwhile, 243 militants were killed, either in suicide attacks they carried out or during retaliatory fire by security forces following some of the terrorist attacks.

Of the 699 militant attacks recorded in 2025, a clear majority – 454 incidents – were carried out by religiously motivated groups, reflecting a sharp increase from 335 such attacks in 2024. This terrorist violence was largely driven by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its allied local Taliban factions, alongside the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, Lashkar-e-Islam, and Islamic State–Khorasan (IS-K). Together, these groups were responsible for 679 fatalities, up from 520 the previous year, and left another 881 people injured.

**Chart 1: Classification of Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in 2025**



Ethnic, or sub-nationalist, militant violence – driven largely by Baloch armed groups – intensified over the year. Apart from five attacks attributed to the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army in Sindh, Baloch insurgent groups were responsible for 229 attacks,

including 225 in Balochistan and four in interior Sindh and Karachi. The violence was primarily carried out by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), and Baloch Republican Guards (BRG). Taken together, attacks by Baloch and Sindh insurgent groups totaled 234 in 2025, up from 175 in 2024. These attacks claimed 339 lives and injured 476 others.

Sectarian violence, while far less frequent, remained a grim constant. As in 2024, 11 sectarian-related attacks were reported in 2025, claiming 16 lives and injuring nine more.

As many as 455 attacks in 2025, or over 65% of the total recorded attacks in the year, targeted personnel, vehicles, convoys, and posts or facilities of security and law enforcement agencies. Civilians were apparently hit in 44 attacks, while a combined total of 28 attacks targeted government officials, offices, state symbols, and public property. As many as 21 attacks were directed against non-Baloch workers, travelers and settlers in Balochistan, and another 12 attacks struck alleged spies or collaborators. Terrorists carried out 22 attacks on political leaders and workers. Targets related to commerce and industry were hit in 24 instances, while railways tracks and trains were targeted in 16 attacks. Tribal elders and members of local peace committees were hit in 20 attacks. Ten attacks specifically targeted polio vaccination teams and their security escorts, primarily police. Other sporadic targets attacked by terrorists in 2024 are given at Table 1.

**Table 1: Targets Hit in Terrorist Attacks in 2025**

<b>Targets</b>	<b>No. of Attacks</b>	<b>Killed</b>	<b>Injured</b>
Security/law enforcement agencies	455	655	873
Education/institutions/teachers	12	2	0
Non-Baloch individuals, workers	21	64	49
Gas pipelines	6	0	0
Government officials/ state symbols	16	15	32
Power pylons/cell phone towers	2	0	0
Tribal elders/ peace committee members	20	42	39
Civilians	44	78	137
Private property/banks, shops, etc.	3	2	3
Shia religious scholars/community	3	3	4
Worship places/shrines/madrassas	2	11	33
Public sector, property	12	0	7
Sunni religious leaders/community	8	8	8

<b>Targets</b>	<b>No. of Attacks</b>	<b>Killed</b>	<b>Injured</b>
Political leaders/workers	22	32	63
Unknown	2	3	1
Alleged spy or collaborator	12	25	8
Media/journalists	1	1	0
Health/polio workers, security escorts	10	10	1
Judges/lawyers/courts	2	12	36
Former militants	2	3	1
Railway tracks / trains	16	65	57
Commerce and industry	24	3	14
National infrastructure	4	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>1,366</b>

Militants employed a range of weapons and tactics in executing 699 reported attacks in 2025. Besides perpetrating 23 suicide or coordinated *fedayee* attacks, they mainly used direct infantry fire in 368 attacks, improvised explosive devices or IEDs of multiple types in 160 attacks, and hand grenades in 58 attacks. The terrorists also used sabotage and incendiary devices in 39 attacks, and the tactic of siege, hostage and hijack in another nine attacks. Other attack tactics or weapons, employed over the year, included 18 drone strikes, eight rocket attacks, seven coordinated gun-and-bomb attacks, and a same number of mortar explosions. One incident of beheading was also recorded.

Although terrorist attacks were recorded in all four provinces and the federal capital in 2025, over 95% of them were concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

As in year before, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa experienced the highest number of terrorist incidents in the country in 2025, with 413 attacks that also included five sectarian-related attacks. These attacks claimed a total of 581 lives and left 698 others injured. Compared to the previous year, the number of terrorist incidents in the province increased by 40%, while fatalities rose by 14%. The militants not only escalated the frequency of their attacks but also carried out more intense and high-impact attacks during the year under review. Most of the terrorist activity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was concentrated in six southern districts – North and South Waziristan, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, and Dera Ismail Khan – which collectively accounted for 248 attacks, or over 60% of the total incidents in the province. Other significant hotspots included Bajaur, with 36 attacks (with at least nine attributed to Islamic State-Khorasan), and the provincial capital Peshawar along with the

neighboring Khyber district, which together witnessed 50 attacks. A significant number of attacks (17) took place in Kurram, while nine attacks happened in lower and upper Dir. Meanwhile, 12 attacks were recorded in Karak, and eight in the neighboring Hangu district. Overall, terrorist activity was reported in 27 districts across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2025. Security and law enforcement personnel, particularly from the army and police, were the primary targets, accounting for about 73% of the total reported attacks in the province.

Marking a 26% increase from the previous year, Balochistan experienced 254 militant attacks in 2025, resulting in 419 deaths and injuries to 607 others. By comparison, 322 people were killed in such attacks in the province in 2024. Attacks by various Baloch insurgent groups in the province rose by over 30% year-on-year, accounting for 225 incidents in 2025. These attacks alone caused 338 fatalities and 462 injuries. Baloch insurgent groups carried out a range of high-impact and coordinated attacks, including highway roadblocks, sieges, hostage-taking, and hijackings, targeting security forces, civilians, non-Baloch individuals, railway tracks/trains, and alleged spies, among others. Such major incidents were reported across multiple districts, including Kalat, Harnai, Bolan, Nushki, Khuzdar, Zhob, and Kech. Overall, violence linked to Baloch insurgent groups was recorded in 27 districts, predominantly in the central, southern, and southwestern regions of the province, with security forces being the primary target. The highest number of attacks by Baloch groups in any single district was recorded in Kech (30 attacks), followed by Quetta (26), Kalat and Mastung (18 attacks each), Nasirabad (17), Nushki and Khuzdar (13 attacks each), Panjgur (12), Gwadar (11), and Kachhi (10). Religiously motivated militant groups, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic State (IS-K), were responsible for 28 attacks in the province, nearly half of which occurred in Qilla Abdullah and Quetta. These attacks caused 80 deaths and injured 141 people. With the exception of a single attack on Levies personnel in Panjgur, all attacks by the TTP and its affiliates were concentrated in the northern, predominantly Pashtun-populated districts bordering Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. IS-K, which carried out seven attacks in Balochistan, was more active in Kalat, Mastung, and Quetta districts. In addition, a single sectarian-related attack was reported in Balochistan in 2025, resulting in a single death.

Compared to 12 attacks in the previous year, Sindh province recorded 21 terrorist attacks, including 16 in Karachi, two in Shikarpur, and one each in Hyderabad, Jacobabad, and Jamshoro. These incidents resulted in 14 fatalities and left 17 others injured. The Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) was believed to be involved in five attacks across Karachi, Hyderabad, and Jamshoro. The Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) claimed responsibility for one attack in Karachi, while another Baloch insurgent group, the Baloch Republican Guards (BRG), was linked to three attacks on railway tracks in Jacobabad and Shikarpur. Meanwhile, the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group were involved in eight attacks in Karachi, killing eight people and injuring

three others. In addition, four sectarian-related attacks in Karachi in 2025 claimed five lives, including three local leaders and activists of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, journalist and television anchor Imtiaz Mir, and a man identified as Adil Hasan.

Punjab witnessed seven terrorist attacks in 2025, a decline from 11 incidents in the previous year. These attacks killed five people including four militants and one policeman, and injured two policemen. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan was responsible for six of these incidents, all of which occurred in Dera Ghazi Khan district, bordering on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with policemen as the primary targets. Hafi Gul Bahadur group claimed responsibility for a single attack in Lahore, which targeted and killed Head Constable Qurban Ali.

Meanwhile, a suicide blast outside the judicial complex housing the Islamabad district and sessions courts killed 12 people. Jamaatul Ahrar, a faction of the banned TTP, claimed the attack.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, three attacks were reported, including two in Diamir district and one in Gilgit. These incidents killed three security personnel, including two Scouts and one Frontier Corps official, and injured six others. One of the attacks was sectarian in nature, while the remaining two were attributed to the TTP and its affiliates.

**Table 2: Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in 2025**

Region	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	413	581	698
Balochistan	254	419	607
Punjab	7	5	2
Islamabad	1	12	36
Karachi	16	14	10
Sindh (excluding Karachi)	5	0	7
Gilgit-Baltistan	3	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>1,366</b>

### 1.1.1 Comparison

In 2025, a total of 1,124 incidents of conflict-related violence were recorded across Pakistan, as listed at Table 3. This figure includes 699 terrorist attacks previously mentioned, along with 259 anti-militant operations or kinetic strikes conducted by security forces, and 21 armed clashes and encounters between security forces and militants.

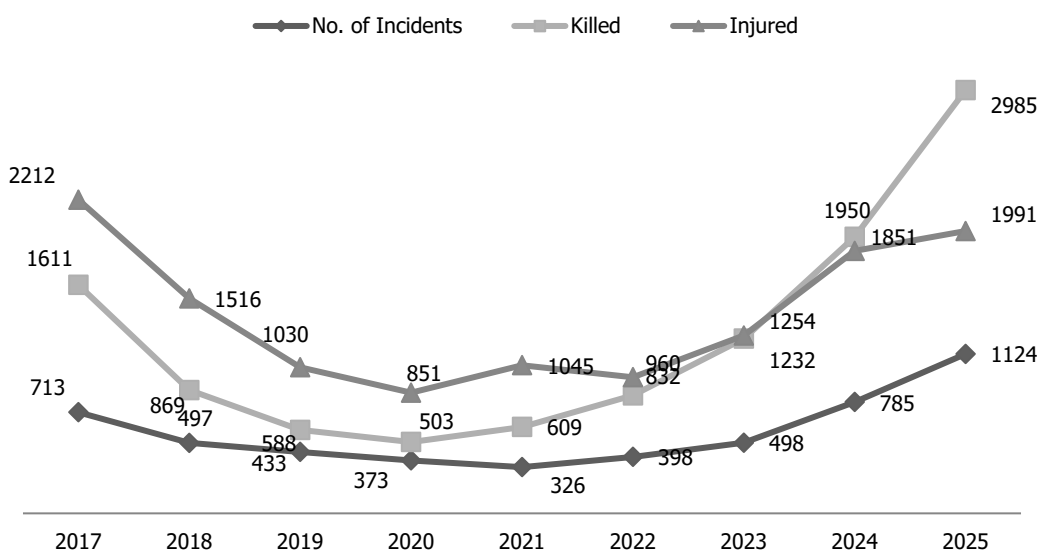
A combined total of 49 violent incidents occurred along Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan and India. The overall violent incidents also included 47 instances of abduction by militants and nationalist insurgents. (For details on other sporadic incidents, refer to Table 3.)

Overall, these violent incidents resulted in the deaths of 2,985 individuals and left 1,991 others injured.

**Table 3: Nature of Overall Incidents of Violence**

<b>Nature of Incidents</b>	<b>No. of Incidents</b>	<b>Killed</b>	<b>Injured</b>
Terrorist attacks	699	1,034	1,366
Political/ethnic violence	1	0	3
Clashes & encounters between security forces and militants	21	40	27
Pak-Afghan border	31	327	64
Pak-India border	18	76	218
Operational attacks by security forces	259	1,384	172
Drone attacks	12	11	65
Inter-militant clashes/attacks	1	2	0
Faith-based/mob violence	3	2	6
Abduction by nationalist insurgents	7	1	0
Abduction by militants	40	8	1
Militants-tribesmen clashes	8	10	6
Plot/foiled terror attempt	18	76	1
Recovery of dead bodies	2	5	0
Targeted Attack	3	4	6
Protests/clashes with security forces	1	5	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,124</b>	<b>2,985</b>	<b>1,991</b>

The total number of conflict-related violent incidents increased by over 43%, rising from 785 in 2024 to 1,124 in 2025. Similar to the previous year, this year's surge was primarily driven by a rise in both terrorist attacks and counterterrorism operations. Escalated abductions and border incidents were additional contributing factors. The number of fatalities associated with overall violent incidents also saw a significant increase of more than 53%, climbing from 1,950 in 2024 to 2,985 in 2025. (*See Chart 2*)

**Chart 2: Comparison of Overall Incidents of Violence & Casualties (2017-25)**

For the fifth consecutive year, the number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan increased in 2025. This surge in terrorist violence coincided with the Taliban's rise to power in neighboring Afghanistan in 2021. Markedly, 2020 was the last year to witness a relative decline in terrorist violence in Pakistan, a trend that had been ongoing since 2014, following military operations in former FATA and Karachi, as well as an extensive counter-militancy campaign implemented nationwide under the National Action Plan. However, since 2021, this downward trend has not sustained, and the incidence of terrorist attacks has risen. (See *Chart 3 and Table 4*)

**Table 4: Comparison of Terrorist Attacks and Fatalities in Pakistan (2009-25)<sup>1</sup>**

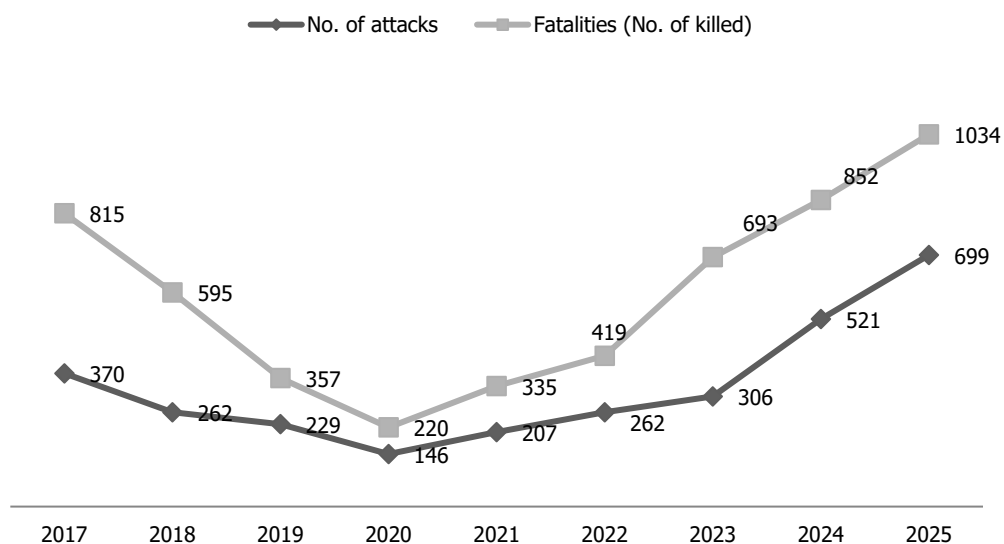
Year	No. of Terrorist Attacks (%Change)	No. of Killed (% Change)
2009	Baseline year (2,586 attacks)	Baseline year (3,021 Fatalities)
2010	18%↓	4% ↓
2011	7%↓	18%↓
2012	20%↓	14%↓
<b>2013</b>	<b>9%↑</b>	<b>19%↑</b>

<sup>1</sup> ↑and↓ represent increase and decrease, respectively, from previous year.



Year	No. of Terrorist Attacks (%Change)	No. of Killed (% Change)
2014	30%↓	30%↓
2015	48%↓	38%↓
2016	28%↓	12%↓
2017	16%↓	10%↓
2018	29%↓	27%↓
2019	13%↓	40%↓
2020	36%↓	38%↓
<b>2021</b>	<b>42%↑</b>	<b>52%↑</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>27%↑</b>	<b>25%↑</b>
<b>2023</b>	<b>17%↑</b>	<b>65%↑</b>
<b>2024</b>	<b>70%↑</b>	<b>23%↑</b>
<b>2025</b>	<b>34%↑</b>	<b>21%↑</b>

**Chart 3: Comparison of Terrorist Attacks and Fatalities in Pakistan (2017-2025)**



- As shown in Table 4, the number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan increased by 34% in 2025 compared to the previous year. This surge in terrorist violence was primarily driven by a rise in attacks reported from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the two provinces most affected by terrorist violence. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the frequency of terrorist incidents rose by 40%, as compared to 2024, while Balochistan saw a 26% increase in such attacks. Similarly, Sindh experienced a 75% upsurge in terrorist violence. In contrast, Punjab recorded a 36% decline in such incidents compared to the previous year.

**Table 5: Comparison of Terrorist Attacks & Casualties (2025 vs. 2024)<sup>2</sup>**

Province / Region	Number of Attacks (%Change)	Killed (% Change)	Injured (% Change)
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	40%↑	14%↑	35%↑
Balochistan	26%↑	30%↑	14%↑
Punjab	36%↓	17%↓	83%↓
Sindh	75%↑	14 (unchanged)	39%↓
Islamabad	1 (unchanged)	12 compared to 1 in 2024	36 compared to 1 in 2024
Gilgit-Baltistan	3 compared to 0 in 2024	3 compared to 0 in 2024	6 compared to 0 in 2024
<b>Total</b>	<b>34%↑</b>	<b>21%↑</b>	<b>25%↑</b>

Compared to 13 attacks in the previous year, 23 suicide and *fedayeen* attacks were recorded in 2025, including 14 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, eight in Balochistan, and one in the federal capital, Islamabad. These attacks claimed 181 lives – substantially higher than the 111 fatalities recorded in such attacks in 2024 – and injured 356 others. Religiously motivated militant groups accounted for 18 of these suicide attacks, which killed 149 people and injured 236 others. Of these 18 major incidents, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) carried out 10 attacks, including eight in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and one each in Quetta and Islamabad. The Hafiz Gul Bahadur (HGB) group, along with the militant alliance it leads, Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP), conducted a total of four suicide bombings in North Waziristan, Bannu and Khyber districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa targeting security forces. Another religiously inspired group, Islamic State–Khorasan (IS-K), perpetrated four major suicide bombings, with two hitting political gatherings in Mastung and Quetta

<sup>2</sup> ↑and↓ represent increase and decrease, respectively, compared with previous year, i.e., 2024.

districts of Balochistan, and two attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, targeting Jamia Haqqani in Nowshera, and police personnel in Peshawar. Meanwhile, Baloch insurgent groups – the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) – were responsible for five suicide attacks in Balochistan. The banned BLA carried out four suicide bombings, including two in Kech and one each in Nushki and Khuzdar, targeting security forces and a school bus, while the BLF was involved in a single suicide attack in Chagai district against Frontier Corps headquarters.

Pakistan's borders with India and Afghanistan remained under sustained strain throughout the year, punctuated by serious flare-ups that underscored the fragility of regional security. In total, 49 violent incidents – including armed attacks and cross-border clashes – were recorded along Pakistan's frontiers with Afghanistan (31 incidents) and India (18 incidents). Together, these episodes claimed 403 lives – among them 293 militants, 47 members of Pakistani security forces, and 63 civilians on Pakistani side – and left another 282 people injured.

Tensions along the Pakistan–India border escalated sharply in May, when 11 of the 18 recorded incidents occurred within a single month. Overall, these clashes resulted in 76 fatalities and injuries to 218 others. The escalation was triggered on May 7, when the Indian Air Force conducted overnight incursions into parts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and multiple cities in Punjab, launching missiles from Indian airspace. The strikes pushed both countries into a major confrontation, intensifying hostilities along the Line of Control (LoC). In the days that followed, border forces exchanged repeated bursts of gunfire and mortar fire, while India also deployed waves of drones – some of which hit their targets, while others were intercepted and downed in several Pakistani cities. Pakistan, for its part, claimed to have shot down five Indian fighter jets and responded with barrages of missiles and airstrikes on targets inside India.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan–Afghanistan border remained volatile throughout the year. A total of 31 violent incidents were reported along the frontier, resulting in 327 deaths –including 293 militants attempting to cross into Pakistan, 33 Pakistani security personnel, and one civilian – and injuries to 64 others. Most of these incidents took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (21), with the remainder occurring in the Chaman and Zhob regions of Balochistan. Relations between Islamabad and Kabul deteriorated sharply after October 11, when Afghan forces allegedly opened unprovoked fire along the border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, reportedly to facilitate the movement of the TTP militants into Pakistani territory. Pakistan responded with a sustained seven-hour counteroffensive, striking positions across the border from Arandu in Chitral to Angoor Adda in South Waziristan. By nightfall, heavy fighting had erupted, with Pakistani artillery and air assets targeting Taliban positions and forcing their retreat. The clashes continued intermittently until October 15, resulting in the martyrdom of 23 Pakistani soldiers and the deaths of

more than 200 Taliban fighters. Eventually, the two sides agreed to a temporary 48-hour ceasefire, which was extended the following day, October 18, following high-level negotiations held in Doha. However, by the end of the year, the border crossings remained closed to civilian movement and commercial traffic, opening only for the repatriation of Afghan refugees and the facilitation of UN humanitarian assistance.

In 2025, a combined total of 1,313 militants were killed, as compared to 639 during the year before, and 86 injured, during 259 anti-militant operations, and 21 armed clashes and encounters between security forces and militants recorded across the country. As many as 82 security personnel and 29 civilians were martyred in these actions.

Overall, the 259 recorded anti-militant operations in 2025 marked a 64% increase from the previous year. These operations resulted in 1,384 fatalities, including 1,293 militants, 70 security and law enforcement personnel, and 21 civilians. Another 172 individuals were injured, including 85 militants. Of the 259 recorded operations, 206 (about 80%) took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 47 in Balochistan, three in Punjab, two in Karachi (Sindh's provincial capital), and one in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. While these operations were spread across 47 districts and regions nationwide, but only six districts recorded 10 or more operations over the year. In KP, North Waziristan saw the highest number of operations, with 30, followed by DI Khan (28), Lakki Marwat (27), Bannu (25), Khyber (15), Karak (14), and South Waziristan (12 incidents). In Balochistan, highest number of anti-militant operations was recorded in Kech (9 incidents), followed by Kalat, with eight operations.

Security and law enforcement agencies also entered into in a total of 21 armed clashes and encounters with militants – compared to eight such incidents in previous year – in 16 districts or regions of the country. These armed clashes and encounters claimed 40 lives (20 militants, 12 security personnel, and 8 civilians) and injured 27 others. As many as 19 of these clashes took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and one each in Balochistan and Punjab. In 2025, a total of 12 incidents involving unspecified drone strikes were recorded, resulting in 11 fatalities and 56 injuries. These strikes were separate from the 18 militant attacks in which drones were used as a delivery or attack platform, as well as four counter-militancy operations that also employed drones.

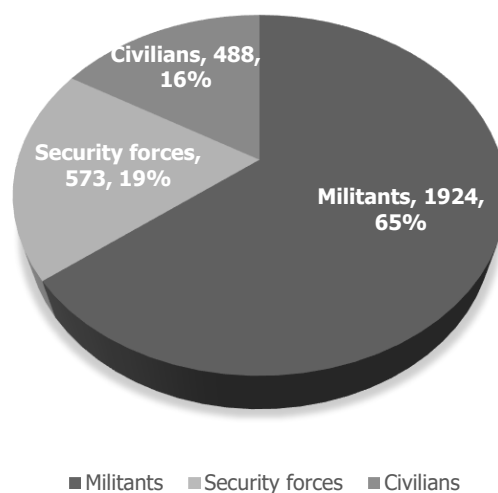
The proscribed TTP and its affiliates significantly intensified the abduction of security personnel, government officials, tribal elders, as well as traders and businesspeople during the year. A total of 40 such incidents were recorded – 39 across eight districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and one in Diamer district of Gilgit-Baltistan. These abductions resulted in the deaths of eight individuals. Similarly, Baloch insurgent groups, including the BLA and BLF, carried out seven abduction incidents in Balochistan. Their victims included laborers, miners, and personnel from the security forces and government institutions.

The number of people killed in overall conflict-related violent incidents in 2025 (2,985) represented an increase of about 53% from those killed in such incidents in the year before (1,950). Civilian fatalities saw a decline, with 488 reported deaths in 2025 – a 15% decrease from 577 in 2024. However, security forces and law enforcement personnel experienced a rise in casualties, with 573 martyred in 2025 compared to 441 the year before. The number of militants killed in violent incidents also grew significantly, reaching 1,924 in 2025, up from 932 in 2024. (See Table 6)

**Table 6: Casualties in Overall Violent Incidents in 2025**

Category	Killed	Injured
FC	126	171
Militants	1924	118
Civilian	488	1,067
Police	188	333
Paramilitaries [unspecified]	12	3
Army	225	274
Levies	21	25
Rangers	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,985</b>	<b>1,991</b>

**Chart 4: Distribution of Deaths in Overall Incidents of Violence**



Of the 1,924 militant fatalities recorded in overall violent incidents, the majority occurred during anti-militant operations and direct clashes with security forces, accounting for 1,313 deaths. A further 243 militants were killed in terrorist attacks, either as suicide bombers or in retaliatory fire by law enforcement personnel following certain attacks. In addition, 293 militants were eliminated while attempting to infiltrate Pakistan from Afghanistan, while another 66 were killed in other failed or foiled terror plots.

In contrast, most fatalities among security forces resulted from terrorist attacks, which claimed 437 lives. Anti-militant operations accounted for 82 additional deaths, while another 47 personnel from security and law enforcement agencies were martyred in border-related incidents and clashes.

## **1.2 Critical Challenges and Recommendations**

### **1.2.1 Pakistan's Mounting Terrorism Challenge**

In 2025, terrorist incidents increased further by over 34%, indicating a sustained escalation in militant violence. Pakistan has experienced a marked increase in terrorist violence since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. Militant groups operating from Afghan territory have intensified attacks, particularly along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border regions. The provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa continue to be the most affected, with these western border regions accounting for more than 95 percent of terrorist attacks in Pakistan in 2024 and 2025.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and its affiliates, Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, local Taliban factions, and Lashkar-e-Islam continue to dominate the militant landscape. Meanwhile, Baloch insurgent groups have escalated attacks in Balochistan. The Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) has also launched multiple high-impact attacks in parts of KP and Balochistan. These groups have maintained operational momentum, with periodic high-impact incidents underscoring their lethality. In 2025, militant outfits simultaneously sought to consolidate territorial control while expanding operational reach across multiple regions. Reports indicate that the HGB group is emerging as a rival force to the TTP in certain areas of KP, particularly North Waziristan and Bannu. The group is reportedly behind the formation of Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan, which operates in these same districts.

Pakistani Taliban militants, primarily those associated with the banned TTP and the HGB group, have regrouped and re-established networks in many KP districts. Initially concentrated in the southern districts, their presence has now expanded to nearly all districts of the province. Government sources confirm that TTP militants are embedded in

local communities across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The KP government also reiterates that militants are entering from Afghanistan and insists it is confronting the threat.<sup>3</sup>

Baloch insurgents have intensified attacks on security forces, development projects, and individuals accused of collaborating with the state, particularly Punjabi workers and officials. Their evolving tactics include coordinated highway raids, attacks on mineral transport vehicles, and assaults on development sites, law enforcement check-posts, and police stations. While the southern and southwestern districts have long been epicenters of the Baloch insurgency, militants have increasingly expanded operations into central districts such as Kalat, Bolan, Kachhi, and Harnai. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) have played a leading role in this escalation, employing sabotage, arson, kidnappings, and coordinated attacks using sophisticated weapons and suicide bombers. This shift is accompanied by a marked rise in high-impact operations, including incendiary attacks and small-arms fire against development infrastructure, as well as siege, hijack and hostage operations, contributing to rising terrorism-related casualties across the province.

The enhanced operational capacity of Baloch insurgent groups, combined with growing local sympathy in certain areas, poses a serious and multidimensional challenge for the government and security agencies. While current counterterrorism efforts remain largely concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, both the federal government and the Balochistan provincial administration are reportedly considering a large-scale security campaign in the province.

### • **Recommendations**

To address the challenges posed by the deteriorating internal security situation, PIPS offers the following recommendations:

- Stick to the ongoing zero-tolerance policy towards terrorist groups with no negotiations unless they renounce violence.
- Develop and implement mechanisms for the National Extremism and Security Policies and the revised National Action Plan (NAP), with annual reviews and parliamentary oversight for transparency and adaptability.
- Increase the capacity and role of civilian law enforcement agencies, especially the police Counter-Terrorism Departments (CTDs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, to better address terrorist threats through community-rooted structures.

---

<sup>3</sup> Daily *Mashriq* (Urdu), September 9, 2025, <https://mashriqtv.pk/latest/443672/>

- Counter the unpredictable and high-impact attacks by Baloch insurgent groups (e.g., BLA, BLF, BRAS) with heightened vigilance and coordinated efforts among security and law enforcement agencies.
- Initiate comprehensive dialogue with local communities and representatives of political and social groups, particularly in Balochistan and KP, to isolate militants and gain community trust and support for counterterrorism efforts.
- Ensure that legal frameworks and fundamental rights are upheld when addressing insurgency or terrorism so that the state and its institutions retain their legitimacy and public trust.

### **1.2.2 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Evolving Patterns of Militancy**

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's (KP) security challenges in 2025 reflect a convergence of factors: cross-border militancy, evolving terrorist tactics, stretched law enforcement capacity, sectarian fault lines, and political discord. Yet the response is also evolving. The gradual modernization of policing, selective use of force, renewed engagement with local communities, and clearer acknowledgment of the problem at the national level suggest that the state is learning and adapting. The durability of these remedial measures, however, will depend on sustained political consensus, continued investment in police capacity, and meaningful cooperation - both domestically and across the border - to prevent militancy from further entrenching itself in the province.

Militant intent was evident from the start of the year. The first two months saw about 93 terrorism-related deaths, followed by a sharp spike in March alone, which recorded 98 fatalities. Although April and May witnessed a relative decline, attack frequency rose again in June before easing later in the year, coinciding with engagement between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban through dialogue in Doha, Turkey and subsequently Saudi Arabia.

Militants have remained concentrated in southern districts near the Afghan border, benefiting from intact cross-border networks and safe havens. During a provincial assembly session in January, KP police chief Akhtar Hayat Khan stated that around 4,000 militants—about 35 percent of them Afghan nationals—were active in the region.<sup>4</sup> He acknowledged weak police control in areas such as D.I. Khan, where militants dominated at night, and admitted that militants benefit from supply lines linked to the Afghan Taliban, alongside limited police capacity to counter attacks. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, while chairing a meeting of the Apex Committee of the National Action Plan in January 2025, also acknowledged a surge in terrorism, noting that militant groups have established footholds

---

<sup>4</sup> For details, visit: <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1882723/terrorists-have-safe-havens-in-southern-districts-meeting-told-in-kp>>



in KP and Balochistan, allegedly with foreign support. He vowed their complete eradication.<sup>5</sup>

On 14 August 2025, Pakistan's Independence Day, TTP-affiliated militants carried out a coordinated wave of attacks across KP, primarily targeting security and law enforcement agencies. The attacks spanned 11 districts—including Peshawar, Upper and Lower Dir, Khyber, Swabi, South Waziristan, Shangla, Bannu, Charsadda, Tank and Lakki Marwat—indicating a deliberate effort to stretch security forces by striking multiple locations simultaneously. Traditionally, such attacks on Independence Day are associated with Baloch insurgent groups in Balochistan; this appeared to be the first instance of the banned TTP deliberately exploiting the occasion to stage widespread violence in KP, underscoring the symbolic intent to challenge state authority.

Most of the August 14 attacks involved frontal assaults or direct firing at police check-posts, stations and mobile units, alongside the use of IEDs and grenades. Security installations, particularly those of the police and Frontier Corps, were the primary targets. Civilian casualties were largely incidental, occurring during clashes near security posts or in areas such as Azam Warsak. The repeated attacks in Upper and Lower Dir were especially notable, as these districts had remained relatively peaceful in recent years.

- ***Local Resistance to Militancy and Drones***

Local resistance to militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is becoming more visible, alongside growing concerns over drone strikes. In several areas, communities have shifted from quiet cooperation with security forces to open pushback against militants. In April 2025, residents in South Waziristan confronted militants during an attempted attack on a police officer's home, while villagers in parts of D.I. Khan forced militants out and publicly vowed not to let them return. Later, in June, the armed volunteers of a peace committee joined Lakki Marwat police to launch an operation against militants. According to the police, the terrorists had taken shelter in a house and held women hostage. The police targeted the militants inside the house along with the member of a local peace committee. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Inspector General Zulfiqar Hameed praised the bravery of the police and the public, stating that the police and the people of Lakki Marwat will jointly eliminate the terrorists.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the Dotani tribes' collective stand against militants after the killing of two of their own constables reflects deep anger and a renewed willingness to defend their areas. By

---

<sup>5</sup> Syed Irfan Raza, "Terrorists have intruded into Balochistan, KP, says PM," *Dawn*, January 4, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1882905/terrorists-have-intruded-into-balochistan-kp-says-pm>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

using jirgas to declare unity against terrorism, tribes have been reviving traditional mechanisms to deny militants local space and legitimacy.<sup>7</sup>

Security forces are increasingly recognizing the importance of this community backing. For instance, Corps Commander Peshawar, Lieutenant General Umar Ahmad Bukhari, in April met with local elders in Miranshah, North Waziristan. He stated that local cooperation is extremely important in the ongoing efforts against terrorists. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the maintenance of peace in the area, development projects, and public concerns. The locals also shared suggestions regarding security issues in the area, economic development, and the rehabilitation of Temporarily Displaced Persons (TDPs).

At the same time, local resistance against major military operations, which could displace the local population, is also visible in former FATA regions. For one, a deadlock continued between tribal elders of Tirah and government officials over a proposed military operation in Tirah Valley and the forced displacement of local families. In multiple jirgas, elders opposed any forced eviction, instead demanding compensation for damaged or destroyed homes and suggesting temporary, voluntary relocation with advance payments. Despite government insistence, officials failed to convince the elders.<sup>8</sup> It was after another six months that a 24-member jirga of tribal elders from Tirah valley reached a written agreement with the district administration, on December 20, to vacate the area for a planned military operation. Residents will leave between January 10 and January 25, 2026. The agreement includes compensation of Rs3 million for destroyed houses and Rs1 million for damaged ones, Rs250,000 per family at registration, and a monthly stipend of Rs50,000 until the planned return in early April 2026.<sup>9</sup>

These sensitivities were sharply exposed by the suspected drone strikes causing casualties among civilians. Adding to these challenges are reports that militants have themselves began to use drones for surveillance, and possibly for attacks. For one, a sit-in protest was observed in Hurmuz village, Mirali tehsil, after a suspected quadcopter strike killed four children and injured five others in May 2025. Thousands of locals, including women and children, demanded transparency, justice, and accountability for the attack. The protest has shut down highways and disrupted daily life across North Waziristan. Tribal elders condemned the strike as a human rights violation and criticized the government's lack of response compared to other provinces.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan's military denied responsibility for the deaths of four children in North Waziristan, attributing the incident to a proscribed militant network allegedly operating at the behest of Indian intelligence. In a statement, the Inter-

---

<sup>7</sup> Daily *Mashriq* (Urdu), April 17, 2025, <https://mashriqtv.pk/latest/409028/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibrahim Shinwari, "Deadlock persists over launch of military operation in Tirah," *Dawn*, June 13, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Ibrahim Shinwari, "Tirah people agree to vacate houses for military operation," *Dawn*, December 21, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1962291/tirah-people-agree-to-vacate-houses-for-military-operation>

<sup>10</sup> "Sit-in continues against Mirali quadcopter strike," *Dawn*, May 21, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1912229/sit-in-continues-against-mirali-quadcopter-strike>

Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, rejected allegations implicating Pakistani security forces in the strike, calling them "entirely baseless" and part of a "coordinated disinformation campaign" aimed at undermining the military's counterterrorism efforts. "Initial findings have established that this heinous act was orchestrated and executed by Indian-sponsored Fitna Al Khwarij," the statement said alluding the banned TTP.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, the picture is mixed but telling. Community resistance is emerging as a critical asset against militancy, but it remains fragile. Sustaining it will require not only security operations, but also trust, transparency and sensitivity to local concerns. Without that balance, gains on the ground risk being undermined by renewed anger and alienation.

### • ***Political Challenges in Countering Terrorism***

Efforts to respond effectively to militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have been complicated by political differences between the federal and provincial governments. Disagreements over the scope of military operations, the use of drones, and the repatriation of Afghan nationals have created visible friction. Debates over the future of the former FATA regions—including rumors of reversing the merger with KP—have added uncertainty to an already volatile environment. Such discussions risk reviving old grievances and, as past negotiations show, echo demands previously raised by militant groups.

In July, when Islamabad and the security establishment strongly advocated a major anti-militant operation, former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur categorically ruled out such action in the province. Speaking after an All Parties Conference on law and order, he emphasized that federal agencies should focus on border security, asserting that the provincial government was fully capable of protecting its territory. Gandapur also rejected the notion of "good Taliban," accusing elements within the state of supporting such groups in the past. He raised concerns over drone use, noting that militants were now employing tactics once used by state institutions, and declared that his government would not permit drone-based operations in KP.<sup>12</sup>

On the same day, a delegation of tribal elders met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman, and KP Governor Faisal Karim Kundi to explore counter-militancy measures through closer engagement with tribal leadership. The prime minister praised the sacrifices of tribal communities and security forces, assuring that consultations

---

<sup>11</sup> Arab News, May 21, 2025, [https://www.arabnews.com/node/2601602/amp?utm\\_source=www.duranddispatch.com&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=infographic-may-2025-north-waziristan-drone-strike-protests-strategic-messaging-implications&\\_bhlid=03628559f15fb0b95f999fd90e02301e662edf30](https://www.arabnews.com/node/2601602/amp?utm_source=www.duranddispatch.com&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=infographic-may-2025-north-waziristan-drone-strike-protests-strategic-messaging-implications&_bhlid=03628559f15fb0b95f999fd90e02301e662edf30)

<sup>12</sup> Daily *Mashriq* (Urdu), July 24, 2025, <https://mashriqtv.pk/latest/432048/>

would continue to address tribal concerns. The parallel meetings by federal and provincial leaders underscored the lack of coordination.

Federal–provincial divergence became more pronounced after Sohail Afridi assumed office as KP Chief Minister in October 2025. Afridi convened a peace jirga on November 12, bringing together former governors, tribal elders, religious scholars, political leaders, journalists, and civil society activists. The jirga issued a 15-point declaration urging the federal government to prioritize talks with Afghanistan, include KP in policy decisions, reopen Afghan trade routes, and release the province's Rs400 billion National Finance Commission share. This jirga, called to address law and order and strategies for re-establishing peace, followed a previous meeting in Khyber district on October 25, where CM Afridi had warned against launching any new military operations in the tribal districts.<sup>13</sup>

Such political divisions have created operational uncertainty for security forces and weakened public confidence and intelligence cooperation. In contrast, initiatives like the Orakzai grand jirga ahead of Muharram, where Sunni and Shia elders jointly promoted peace, demonstrated how traditional forums can manage local and sectarian tensions. Without clear federal–provincial alignment on whether dialogue or force should lead counterterrorism efforts, Pakistan continues to lack a coherent and unified strategy to counter militancy in KP.

- ***Militants' High-Tech Shift Forces Security Upgrade***

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, American forces destroyed some military equipment but left behind a significant stock, which was taken over by the Afghan Taliban and subsequently fell into the hands of terrorist groups. While the Biden administration claimed no usable equipment was abandoned, President Donald Trump has criticized the withdrawal, asserting that military assets were handed over to the enemy. He has also suggested conditioning aid to Afghanistan on the return of U.S. military equipment.<sup>14</sup>

An investigative report published in ***Dawn*** in November 2025 highlighted a worrying shift in militant tactics following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. In areas such as Bannu and nearby districts, militants began deploying far more advanced and lethal weaponry. Commercial quadcopter drones, modified to drop improvised explosives—mostly GP-25 grenade launcher rounds and small mortar shells—became a preferred tool. Some of these drones were fitted with thermal cameras, enabling militants to carry out surveillance and

---

<sup>13</sup> Arif Hayat & Umer Farooq, "KP peace jirga demands Centre prioritise talks with Kabul, consult province on Afghan policy," *Dawn*, November 12, 2025, [https://www.dawn.com/news/1954653?utm\\_source=www.duranddispatch.com&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=pakistan-s-militancy-crisis-5-key-realities&\\_bhlid=665f3d0e4f43dbf5469eb2045efbd46ca25a0980](https://www.dawn.com/news/1954653?utm_source=www.duranddispatch.com&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=pakistan-s-militancy-crisis-5-key-realities&_bhlid=665f3d0e4f43dbf5469eb2045efbd46ca25a0980)

<sup>14</sup> Abdullah Mohmand, "FO notes 'profound concern' ...," *Dawn*, January 29, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1888478/fo-notes-profound-concern-on-weapons-in-afghanistan-as-us-demands-military-equipments-return>

attacks under cover of darkness. To stay ahead of security forces, they frequently changed drone frequencies to evade jamming systems.<sup>15</sup>

On the ground, militants also benefited from a surge in sophisticated weaponry left behind in Afghanistan. Their arsenal now included M-4 and M-16 assault rifles, M-24 sniper rifles, night-vision devices, thermal scopes, and steel-core 5.56mm ammunition. This equipment allowed them to strike security personnel from distances of up to 1,500 metres and, in some cases, penetrate standard body armour. Snipers using thermal optics proved particularly deadly, often targeting officers at night when visibility was lowest.

Faced with these evolving threats, police and military forces were forced to rethink both their tactics and equipment. Early countermeasures included protecting key installations with nets and canopies and deploying rooftop snipers to shoot down hostile drones. As attacks intensified, the state began investing in modern weapons and technology on a much larger scale. Security forces acquired M-16 and M-24 rifles, light sniper weapons, M-249 machine guns, thermal sights, anti-drone guns, surveillance drones, and high-frequency jammers for armoured vehicles. Older weapons, such as Dragunov rifles, were upgraded with thermal scopes, while new special operations units were trained with a strong focus on marksmanship and night-fighting skills. These measures helped curb drone and night-time attacks, with several quadcopters successfully shot down or disabled.

Concerns had surfaced earlier as well, after reports suggested that Taliban-linked militants had gained access to US-made FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missiles. A video released by the banned TTP showed fighters training with the system, which uses infrared guidance to autonomously strike targets and allows operators to withdraw quickly. Although there is no confirmed evidence that such missiles have been brought into Pakistan, officials remain alarmed by the possibility that they could be used against military positions or to breach the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Security experts warn that the introduction of these weapons would significantly raise the stakes and could sharply escalate violence in the region.<sup>16</sup>

### • **Recommendations**

The year 2025 underscored the need for a coherent, depoliticized counterterrorism strategy for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—one that bridges federal and provincial divides, secures the border through cooperation with Afghanistan, and prioritizes protecting civilians over political point-scoring. The people of KP have shown resilience. What they need now is a

---

<sup>15</sup> Ismail Khan, *Dawn*, November 26, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1957290/one-eye-on-the-barrel-the-other-on-the-sky-how-police-in-bannu-are-dealing-with-evolving-militant-tactics>

<sup>16</sup> Arshad Aziz Malik, *The News*, April 10, 2025, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1299761-new-threats-to-pakistan-s-security-ttp-acquires-us-javelin-missiles>

united leadership that matches their courage with clarity and commitment. The way forward requires clearer alignment, sharper focus, and simpler choices.

- Federal and provincial governments need to stop working in parallel and agree on a shared counterterrorism approach, with regular joint planning and a single public message. Mixed signals on negotiations, and the use of force only deepen confusion on the ground and undermine trust among both security personnel and civilians.
- Border management must be treated as a sustained priority rather than an episodic response. Better intelligence-sharing, coordinated patrols, and targeted interdiction along known militant routes are essential, alongside continued diplomatic engagement to limit cross-border sanctuaries. Without this, gains inside KP will remain fragile.
- Policing needs to be strengthened faster than anything else. Well-trained, better-equipped police units capable of night operations, counter-sniper work, and post-operation holding roles are critical if the military is to step back without leaving vacuums.
- Technology should be used smartly and sparingly. Anti-drone systems, thermal sights, and surveillance tools are necessary, but they must be matched with training, maintenance, and clear rules of engagement to avoid civilian harm and political backlash.
- Community trust remains the decisive factor. Local peace initiatives, jirgas, and civilian cooperation have shown results, at least in winning the trust of the people, and should be supported consistently. Any displacement, search operations, or use of force must be accompanied by transparency, compensation, and visible service delivery to prevent resentment from turning into resistance.
- Sectarian tensions, particularly in areas like Kurram and Hangu, require patience rather than force alone. Mediation, protection of movement and supplies, and enforcement of agreements should go hand in hand with humanitarian relief and economic normalcy.
- Finally, PIPS emphasizes that accelerating the reform and governance process, as well as rehabilitating the citizens of the former FATA, requires the following actions:
  - Enhance the economic and infrastructure development of this strategically critical area.
  - Schools, colleges, and universities should be built on modern footings to educate the youth of tribal areas in modern arts and sciences. Along with education, employment opportunities should be introduced to prevent the youth of tribal districts from turning to illicit means of earning their livelihoods.
  - Bring back the internally displaced persons and rehabilitate them.

- Speed up the process of political, administrative, and judicial reforms in tribal districts.
- Police in the tribal districts which is at the frontline of fighting the resurgent TTP and other militant groups, should be incentivized and equipped with the latest weapons to better counter terrorism and the loss of precious police life is reduced.

### **1.2.3 Pak–Afghan Relations: Challenges and Opportunities**

The year 2025 proved to be a turbulent chapter for Pakistan and Afghanistan, defined by persistent security threats but also punctuated by diplomatic outreach and regional attempts at stability. While distrust and violence strained ties, both nations engaged in a delicate dance –managing immediate crises while cautiously exploring pathways to cooperation.

Pak–Afghan relations in 2025 remained deeply strained but not entirely static. Despite repeated assurances from Kabul, Islamabad entered the year with growing frustration and dwindling trust. A February 2025 UN report reinforced Pakistan’s core concern: the Afghan Taliban’s continued tolerance—and, at times, facilitation—of the banned TTP. According to the report, the group benefitted from financial assistance, logistical cover, and operational space inside Afghanistan, enabling it to intensify attacks in Pakistan.<sup>17</sup> Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif publicly reiterated Pakistan’s long-standing position, stressing that “a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is indispensable for regional connectivity and shared security.” Speaking alongside Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Tashkent in February, he underlined that Afghan soil must not be used for militancy against any neighbor, including Pakistan.<sup>18</sup>

While terrorist violence inside Pakistan continued to rise, concerns over cross-border militancy hardened further. In March, ISPR Director General Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry linked the Jaafar Express attack in Balochistan to handlers based across the Afghan border.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Army Chief Gen Asim Munir, during a visit to Bannu following a foiled attack on the cantonment, asserted that the operational depth enjoyed by militant groups inside Afghanistan remained the single most serious threat to Pakistan’s internal security.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "TTP still gets financial, logistic support from Afghan Taliban," *Dawn*, February 15, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1892006/ttp-still-gets-financial-logistic-support-from-afghan-taliban>

<sup>18</sup> Syed Irfan Raza, "Peaceful Afghanistan vital for regional connectivity: PM Shehbaz," *Dawn*, February 27, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1894562>

<sup>19</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Military vows to crush Balochistan terrorists, abettors," *Dawn*, March 15, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1897969/military-vows-to-crush-balochistan-terrorists-abettors>

<sup>20</sup> Umer Farooq, *Dawn*, March 7, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1896274/militants-still-operating-from-afghan-soil-coas>

These claims were not isolated. Pakistan's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Muhammad Sadiq Khan, used his March engagement with Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to underline that peace in Afghanistan and stability in Pakistan were now inseparable.<sup>21</sup> Discussions covered trade, border management, and the sensitive issue of Afghan refugees, reflecting Islamabad's attempt to keep dialogue alive even as trust eroded.

Despite the security impasse, 2025 also produced modest diplomatic signals that suggested space for engagement still existed. In April, Pakistan allowed 150 Afghan trucks to transit to India via Wagah—a narrowly calibrated but symbolically important gesture—after Afghan authorities sought relief for stranded consignments.<sup>22</sup> Afghan interim Prime Minister Mullah Hasan Akhund responded by again assuring that Afghan soil would not be used for hostile activities.<sup>23</sup>

In May, momentum appeared to build. Pakistan appointed an ambassador to Kabul for the first time since 2021, elevating relations beyond the chargé d'affaires level. This move, alongside Kabul's reported intention to reciprocate, signalled a cautious upgrade in diplomatic engagement rather than a breakthrough.<sup>24</sup> China's quiet facilitation reinforced the perception that regional actors were invested in preventing a complete breakdown in Pak-Afghan ties. After visiting China, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar proposed forming a regional alliance with Afghanistan, China, and Bangladesh to move toward a more cooperative future.<sup>25</sup>

By mid-year, however, security concerns again dominated the agenda. In July, Pakistan formally briefed the United Nations on what it described as credible evidence linking both the TTP and Baloch insurgent groups to bases inside Afghanistan. The UN Security Council Monitoring Team's July report lent weight to Islamabad's position, noting that the TTP retained around 6,000 fighters and continued to receive support from de facto Afghan authorities.<sup>26</sup>

The August Pakistan-Afghanistan-China trilateral dialogue in Kabul highlighted the limits of regional persuasion.<sup>27</sup> While Pakistan and China urged decisive action against militant

---

<sup>21</sup> *Dawn*, March 24, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1899911/cross-border-infiltration-bid-foiled-in-north-waziristan>

<sup>22</sup> Business Recorder, May 2, 2025, <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40360614/pakistan-allows-150-afghan-trucks-to-enter-india-via-wagah-border>

<sup>23</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Afghan soil will not be used for hostile acts: Kabul," *Dawn*, April 20, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1905407/afghan-soil-will-not-be-used-for-hostile-acts-kabul>

<sup>24</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Islamabad appoints ambassador to Kabul first time since 2021," *Dawn*, May 31, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1914440/islamabad-appoints-ambassador-to-kabul-first-time-since-2021>

<sup>25</sup> Bibi Amina Hakimi, Tolo News, May 23, 2025, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-194410>

<sup>26</sup> The report was accessed here: <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/482> (on August 5, 2025)

<sup>27</sup> For details, please visit: < <https://www.dawn.com/news/1932200/pakistan-china-urge-kabul-to-rein-in-terror-outfits> >



groups, the Taliban declined to publicly label them as terrorists. This reluctance underscored the ideological and historical constraints shaping Kabul's choices—and the narrowing room for ambiguity.

- ***Escalation, Ceasefires, and Failed Talks***

In September, following clashes with militants in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that killed 19 soldiers, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif issued a sharp ultimatum to Kabul during a visit to Bannu: choose between supporting Pakistan or the outlawed TTP, which he accused of launching attacks from Afghan soil.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, during a quadrilateral meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, the foreign ministers of China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia jointly called on Afghanistan to take "effective, concrete, and verifiable" action against terrorist groups, including the TTP, thereby amplifying Pakistan's demand for an end to cross-border militancy.<sup>29</sup>

Relations between the two countries sharply deteriorated in October after border clashes erupted across multiple sectors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Pakistan accused Afghan forces of facilitating militant incursions, responding with a large-scale counteroffensive. The fighting, which left dozens dead on both sides, pushed the relationship to its most dangerous point in years.

Later, in the Doha talks—facilitated by Qatar and supported by Türkiye—both sides pledged to respect each other's sovereignty, avoid hostile actions, and establish a bilateral mechanism to address security concerns. The Taliban spokesperson, Zabiullah Mujahid, confirmed the signing of a bilateral agreement reaffirming peace, non-aggression, and dialogue as the basis for future engagement.<sup>30</sup> On October 30, Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed to extend their ceasefire and set up a joint mechanism to monitor and penalize border violations, concluding five tense days of Turkey- and Qatar-mediated talks in Istanbul.<sup>31</sup>

Pakistan-Afghanistan talks in Istanbul collapsed after both sides failed to agree on measures against cross-border terrorism. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif declared the negotiations "over," accusing the Afghan team of arriving "without any programme" and refusing a written accord. The fragile ceasefire remained in place, though Asif warned of

---

<sup>28</sup> Umer Farooq, "Choose between Pakistan and TTP, PM tells Kabul," *Dawn*, September 14, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1941848/choose-between-pakistan-and-ttp-pm-tells-kabul>

<sup>29</sup> Anwar Iqbal, "Quadripartite moot urges Kabul to counter terrorism," *Dawn*, September 27, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> For further details, visit: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1949845>

<sup>31</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Truce extended after last-ditch efforts bear fruit," *Dawn*, October 31, 2025.

a “befitting” response to any violation. Islamabad insists the responsibility lies with Kabul to curb terrorism, vowing to protect its sovereignty if the process fails.<sup>32</sup>

According to Arab News, a new round of Saudi-mediated talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan, held in November, also failed to produce a breakthrough, though both sides agreed to maintain their fragile ceasefire. The discussions, following a Saudi initiative, included Pakistan’s military, intelligence, and foreign office representatives.<sup>33</sup> Pakistan’s leading English-language daily newspaper *Dawn* reported that the closed-door session in Riyadh ended with both sides holding firm to their longstanding positions and showing little willingness to compromise. The report added that another Saudi-hosted round remains possible in the near future.<sup>34</sup>

- ***Refugees: A Humanitarian and Political Fault Line***

Alongside security and border tensions, the issue of Afghan refugees emerged as one of the most consequential - and emotionally charged - dimensions of Pak-Afghan relations in 2025. Pakistan moved ahead with a phased repatriation policy targeting undocumented Afghans, ACC holders, and later PoR cardholders. Authorities framed the process as lawful and orderly, emphasizing Pakistan’s decades-long hosting of Afghan refugees despite not being a signatory to international refugee conventions.

Yet the scale and pace of returns told a more complex story. By late 2025, over 1.7 million Afghans had returned starting from 2023, many citing fear of arrest as the primary driver.<sup>35</sup> UNHCR and IOM data pointed to sharp spikes in detentions, particularly in Balochistan and Punjab. What Islamabad described as enforcement of the law, many Afghans experienced as abrupt displacement after decades of residence.

The closure of all 42 Afghan refugee camps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa<sup>36</sup> by December 2025 symbolized the end of an era in Pakistan’s refugee policy and added another layer of strain to an already fragile bilateral relationship.

- ***Opportunities & Recommendations***

By the end of 2025, Pak-Afghan ties stood at a precarious crossroads. Opportunities remain narrowly defined: trade, transit cooperation, and regional connectivity could still offer incentives for pragmatic engagement. However, without credible steps to address

---

<sup>32</sup> More details available here: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1953839/istanbul-talks-break-down-but-truce-holds>

<sup>33</sup> For details, visit: < <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2624899/pakistan> >

<sup>34</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Riyadh quietly mediates talks between Pakistan, Afghanistan: sources," *Dawn*, December 1, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1958546>

<sup>35</sup> Details can be seen here: <<https://www.dawn.com/news/1955358/tenfold-rise-in-arrest-of-afghans-across-pakistan-this-year>>

<sup>36</sup> Daily *Mashriq* (Urdu), December 17, 2025, <https://mashriqtv.pk/latest/514098/>

cross-border militancy, these openings are likely to remain fragile, transactional, and reversible.

Practical recommendations therefore have to move beyond calls for “engagement” and focus on rebuilding minimum trust while managing risks.

- First, Pakistan needs to recalibrate its Afghanistan policy away from episodic crisis diplomacy toward sustained, structured engagement that survives security shocks. A structured, ongoing dialogue covering all contentious issues is essential. Pakistan must aim to create a framework for regular communication to reduce mistrust and foster long-term collaboration.
- Second, while Pakistan cannot compromise on core security interests, it could press for incremental, verifiable steps—such as intelligence-sharing on specific individuals, restrictions on movement near the border, or joint mechanisms to investigate incidents, rather than all-or-nothing demands. Small, enforceable measures are more likely to test Taliban intent than maximalist positions that Kabul is structurally unwilling to meet.
- Third, the refugee issue requires a more calibrated and humane approach, not only for moral reasons but for strategic ones. Mass repatriations carried out under pressure deepen Afghan public resentment and hand the Taliban a narrative of victimhood. Pakistan could make its border management policies more people-friendly to build goodwill among the Afghan population. Facilitating cross-border movement, trade, and humanitarian engagement will help improve public perceptions and strengthen ties at the grassroots level.
- Fourth, Pakistan should lean more systematically on regional frameworks rather than bilateral pressure alone. China, and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Türkiye, have been able to bring both sides to the table when direct engagement faltered. Islamabad should work with these partners to develop shared benchmarks on counterterrorism and border stability, so that pressure on Kabul is collective and consistent.
- Fifth, Pakistan’s own border management strategy needs continued investment and restraint. Pakistan should prioritize defensive dominance - surveillance, intelligence-led interdictions, and rapid response - over punitive actions that deepen Afghan sensitivities and international scrutiny. Demonstrating restraint, while remaining firm, strengthens Pakistan’s diplomatic position when it seeks regional or global support.
- Finally, Pakistan should recognize that stability in Afghanistan will remain limited for the foreseeable future, regardless of diplomacy. Policy should therefore be anchored in realism rather than expectation. The goal should not be immediate transformation of Taliban behavior, but risk management: containing spillover violence, keeping

communication channels open, and preserving economic and transit links that give all sides a stake in calm.

#### 1.2.4 An Intensifying Baloch Insurgency

The year 2025 marked a period of significant evolution and intensification for the Baloch insurgency, characterized by strategic adaptation, geographical expansion, and a growing complexity in the conflict's dynamics. Over the years, the insurgency has transitioned from a peripheral security challenge to a sustained, multi-faceted campaign that tests the state's military and political responses.

Incidents over the year – ranging from raids on security posts and stations and the torching of mineral convoys to the high-profile hijacking of the Jaffar Express – illustrate a deliberate move away from isolated hit-and-run strikes toward **coordinated operations** that can seize terrain briefly, disrupt key economic lines, and generate dramatic media images. These are not the actions of a fractured fringe but of groups that have learned to choreograph violence to both weaken the state's authority and maximize publicity for their cause.

A second trend is the **widening geographic footprint** of insurgent activity. While southern districts such as Kech and Gwadar remain important bastions, attacks have spread into central and northwestern Balochistan – Washuk, Kharan, Kalat, Kachhi and others – and are even bleeding into adjacent provinces. The BRG's operations near the Sindh border and claims of attacks in Shikarpur, and the noted insurgent recruitment outreach into Karachi and Sindh, signal a deliberate attempt to project the conflict beyond historical fault lines. This widening geographic footprint complicates counterinsurgency efforts because it blends rural guerrilla settings with peri-urban and transport corridors, threatening pipelines of commerce and forcing security resources to disperse. The repeated strikes on mineral transportation routes and the suspension of the Jaffar Express underscore the insurgents' strategic intent to target the province's economic arteries and to raise the fiscal and political cost of governance.

Organizationally, the insurgency shows both fragmentation and adaptation. Old brands (such as the BLA and BLF) coexist with newer formations (BRG, BRAS) and episodic reappearances of groups like the BRA, suggesting a fluid ecosystem of militant identities. At the same time, there is evidence of strategic learning: groups are forming alliances, experimenting with dedicated special units (the **BLF's Sado Operational Battalion** and BLA's Majeed Brigade), and coordinating multi-unit assaults. These developments suggest that groups imitate successful operational models and adopt elite units and suicide tactics to enhance lethality and prestige. The alliance dynamics – BRAS's inclusion of multiple separatist groups and even the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army – also imply an effort to

pool resources, diversify targets, and amplify political narratives across ethnic and provincial lines.

The insurgents' ***operational toolkit has been broadened***. Beyond small-unit ambushes, we see seizing and burning of government facilities, hostage-taking, roadblocks, sieges, use of incendiary devices, and a willingness to conduct complex, multi-day operations. Suicide and high-casualty tactics have been used selectively to generate shock and to overwhelm security responses. This expansion of methods is matched by enhanced information operations: professionally produced videos, magazines in multiple languages, battle-damage assessments, and memorial content aim to sustain recruitment, legitimize violence, and project a narrative of continuing struggle. The targeting of administrative nodes such as NADRA offices and district headquarters is as much symbolic as it is practical: destroying civil registration infrastructure undermines the state's capacity to govern and creates a sense of impunity in the affected localities.

A notable sociopolitical dynamic is ***the changing recruitment base***. The Baloch insurgency increasingly draws from an educated, middle-class milieu that transcends traditional tribal mobilization. This shift erodes earlier assumptions that Baloch militancy was principally a product of tribal patronage patterns; instead, grievances about economic marginalization, perceived governance deficits, and elite capture now resonate with urbanized cohorts and diaspora networks. At the same time, narratives of foreign manipulation and hardship among rank-and-file militants –captured in high-profile defections and surrenders – point to internal tensions within insurgent movements and potential leverage points for reintegration strategies.

The ***interaction with other violent actors*** complicates the conflict environment further. The rise of IS-K's antagonism toward Baloch groups, and continued TTP presence in parts of the province, introduces a multi-vector conflict in which nationalist insurgents may be pressured on two fronts: from the state and from Islamist rivals. This rivalry can radicalize tactics, provoke cycles of revenge, and divert resources from nationalist political messaging to survival-oriented militancy. In operational terms, the presence of jihadist affiliates increases the risk of particularly brutal attacks (suicide bombings, indiscriminate mass casualties) in mixed-ethnic districts, undermining local support for any single actor and elevating civilian vulnerability.

On the state side, ***responses have been tactically effective*** in certain instances – disrupting networks, killing fighters, and seizing materiel – but are hampered by an absence of a coherent political and developmental strategy. The political vacuum, fragmentation among provincial parties, and the marginalization of traditional Baloch political leaders have left a governance deficit that insurgents exploit. Arrests and kinetic pressure can produce short-term security gains, yet without parallel efforts to restore

legitimacy, service delivery, and grievance redress, military gains are likely to be temporary. The US designation of the BLA and its combat wing as foreign terrorist organizations in August 2025 is an important external development; it may constrain transnational support and financial channels but could also harden group identities and provide propaganda capital about persecution, depending on how designation is leveraged by local actors.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest several likely trajectories. If the insurgents continue to professionalize media outreach, expand geographically, and cultivate cross-group linkages, the conflict will become more expensive for the state and more disruptive to national economic projects. Conversely, fissures within militant ranks – evident in surrenders and competing group identities – offer potential openings for negotiated reintegration, targeted amnesty, or defections if paired with credible political concessions and socioeconomic pathways.

- ***Recommendations***

In conclusion, the Baloch insurgency in 2025 demonstrated a concerning maturation. It is no longer a localized rebellion but a geographically expanding, media-savvy, and tactically innovative conflict. It exploits a political vacuum and is increasingly set against a backdrop of overlapping militant landscapes. A sustainable resolution will require moving beyond a purely security-centric approach to a comprehensive strategy that combines targeted law enforcement with genuine political outreach, economic inclusion, and a concerted effort to win the narrative battle for the allegiance of the Baloch people. The trends of 2025 suggest that without such a paradigm shift, the cycle of violence is poised to continue its destructive path.

- Pakistan needs to develop a comprehensive and distinct counter-insurgency strategy tailored specifically for Balochistan. This strategy should include well-defined implementation mechanisms and be seamlessly aligned with national extremism and security policies, as well as the revised National Action Plan. Furthermore, sustained efforts are essential to execute these measures effectively. This requires the active engagement and collaboration of all relevant stakeholders.
- Given that the province shares borders with Afghanistan and Iran, it is imperative to establish a constructive counterterrorism framework with the Afghan and Iranian governments or, at the very least, foster functional relations to address border insecurity and cross-border incursions effectively.
- Resolving the conflict in Balochistan requires comprehensive political dialogue, socio-economic reforms, and efforts to address grievances and rebuild trust. Winning public trust is crucial to reducing the appeal of insurgent ideologies among the Baloch people. The issue of enforced disappearances, often exploited by insurgents to gain support

and recruits, must be addressed through a lawful and amicable policy to counter militant narratives effectively.

- Pakistan must introduce employment opportunities for youth to improve their living conditions and prevent them from being drawn toward militancy and insurgency. As the socioeconomic trickledown impact of mega development projects for masses in the Balochistan has been minimum so far, Pakistan needs to make sure that people in the province start reaping the benefits of big projects as soon as possible.

### **1.2.5 National Security and Counterterrorism & Counter Violent Extremism Approaches**

PIPS recommends the following measures to enhance the frameworks and implementation of the revised NAP, as well as national security and CT/CVE policies, making them more effective and actionable.

- Despite numerous challenges, democracy in Pakistan has endured, reflecting the people's aspirations and steadfast belief in a democratic political system. Therefore, the cornerstone of national security and counter-terrorism strategies in Pakistan must be a robust democratic framework, upheld through free and fair elections, the supremacy of parliament, and adherence to the constitution.
- The National Action Plan (NAP) and counterterrorism framework shall be "civilianized," with the parliament playing a leading role in its implementation and oversight. The elected representatives of the people, as well as political parties, must articulate their vision for addressing the challenges facing Pakistan and should present their ideas for countering extremism and terrorism at the parliament.
- Modernize and reform police, strengthen its investigation branches, reform the Evidence Act and enhance police's operational autonomy.
- Devise well-defined, realistic, and achievable plans/objectives with effective monitoring and evaluation systems against individual NAP goals/clauses. Monitoring and evaluation be done using clearly defined and concrete performance indicators, otherwise NAP would continue to be judged subjectively on the basis of varying perceptions.
- Strengthen NACTA; the prime minister may take ownership of NAP and use the NACTA platform to regularly review the status of and progress on NAP provisions.
- Inter-Provincial Coordination Ministry (IPCM) be activated to work along with NACTA for better coordination and results.
- Reform the criminal justice system with much greater urgency and focus as this particular NAP action has practically remained a nonstarter so far.

- The government shall review and refine key definitions in the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 in consultation with relevant stakeholders, which will also contribute to avoiding delays in prosecution.
- Afford rigorous training and sensitization to the ATC judges in handling terrorism cases.
- Strengthen ATCs through infrastructural uplift and capacity building.
- Develop and run an effective de-radicalization and rehabilitation program, led by civilians that also engages or partner with civil society organizations.
- Build and promote counter-narratives, including on social media platforms.
  - The Paigham-e-Pakistan can be a significant ideological response to the extremist ideologies; the message be disseminated widely and transformed into national narrative.
  - Categorization of militants into pro-state and anti-state must end.
  - Curb the access of militant/jihadist and sectarian groups to cyberspace and other means of communications without misuse of related laws, with a view to evade loss of public trust and confidence in state institutions.
- Comprehensive educational reforms are needed, aiming at removal of hateful, discriminatory, and insensitive contents from the textbooks and inclusion of more scientific inquiry, debate, and critical thinking and reasoning. There is also a need to increase in education budget to improve the quality of education.
- It is utmost essential to include women in all walks of life and protect their social, political, and economic rights; the Parliament needs to rectify laws that discriminate against women in any shape or form. Women should also be included in efforts meant to CVE as the UN resolution 1325 acknowledges the role of women in the promotion of peace and security.
- While acknowledging the bulging youth population, all political parties also need to empower the youth by providing them space and platform for free expression and creativity as well as leadership.





Established in 2006, Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an Islamabad-based research and advocacy organisation. The Institute offers a range of consultancy services through a combination of independent research and analysis, innovative academic programmes, and hands-on training and support that serve the following basic themes: Conflict analysis and peace-building; dialogue; prevent/counter violent extremism (P/CVE); internal and regional security; and media for peace and democracy. It also conducts frequent structured dialogues, focus group discussions, and national and international seminars to understand the issues listed earlier and also strengthen partnerships. The outcomes of PIPS research and planned events have frequently and extensively been reported on media that adds to its credibility as an active, effective and well networked civil society organizations. Also, many of PIPS policy reports and recommendations have been credited and also included in the state policy documents and discourses mainly those on security and CVE.



**PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES (PIPS)**  
P.O Box. No: 2110, Islamabad, Pakistan  
Tel: +92-51-8359475-6 Fax: +92-51-8359474  
Email: [pips@pakpips.com](mailto:pips@pakpips.com)  
[www.pakpips.com](http://www.pakpips.com)