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Resurgence of Terrorism in Pakistan

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By

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Introduction:

The massacre of eight school teachers of which seven belonged to the minority Shiite community in Parachinar (KPK) earlier this month along with an attack on the Frontier Corps camp in Balochistan by a group of militants which killed six FC soldiers underscores the rise in political violence in the recent months, perpetrated by the Pakistani Taliban — the outlawed Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Pakistan has been a victim to terrorism, the loss of lives, property and peace & stability for almost three decades now, all emanating from its western border due to geopolitical shifts that included the dynamics of Cold War, the 9/11 Attack in the USA, and America's sporadic departure from Afghanistan signaling an end to the protracted war on terror (WOT) and the resultant Taliban government in Afghanistan. The civilian response to this menace is of frustration and disappointment towards the policy makers and implementers as the surge in violent attacks is disrupting the daily lives and causing the people not enjoy the citizenship in Pakistan as they question the safety of their families. Since August 2021, the fragility of Pakistan's counter terrorism gains have come into a sharp focus and the country is divided on how to tackle this situation of confusion, slip-ups and rhetoric.

Reasons: Resurgence of Terrorism

Some very pertinent reasons why there has been a resurgence of terrorism and militancy in the country are as follows:

I. Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan

Taliban's too return to power in Afghanistan has had an emboldening effect on the TTP, as both of them have a longstanding region-political, ideological and battlefield linkage.

Although, Pakistan expected Taliban's help in sorting out the TTP but due to the connection between the two, the Afghan regime deemed TTP as Pakistan's internal matter and only offered to facilitate negotiations between the Pakistan govt. and the TTP.

II. Border Fencing did not yield results

Although, the border fencing of the 2,640km long border between Pakistan and Afghanistan was expected to minimize rather thwart and weaken the terrorist networks, but the notion proved to be misplaced especially after the withdrawal of the coalition forces from Afghan soil. The fencing could not stop the TTP's cross border attacks and infiltration from Afghanistan.

III. Alliance of the terrorist factions

The TTP has created mergers with other non-state insurgents/actors who are skilled at the asymmetrical warfare. The more they became allied with other terrorist factions, the more lethal and resilient they have become. Under their new leader Nur Wali Mehsud since 2020, the TTP, more than 22 splinter groups have united with TTP enhancing its operational strength and spatial outreach within Pakistan.

IV. Inadequate counterterrorism infrastructure

A report submitted to the National Assembly in Pakistan highlighted serious capacity and law enforcement gaps in KP's Counter Terrorism Department. The police department of KP has borne the brunt of the resurgence of TTP attacks losing more than a 100 personnel in almost a 100 assaults. According to the report, the CTD manpower is ill-trained, under resourced, and ill-equipped with spending less than 4% of the total budget (Rs. 2.18 billion) on operations, and no spending on equipment procurement. Overall, the total budget is also half that of Punjab's CTD budget.

V. Deterioration in Pakistan- Afghanistan relations

Relations between Pakistan and the Taliban have taken a nose-dive resulting in the very frequent border issues and the Taliban have also accused Pakistan of providing its air space to the US for drone attacks on Afghan soil that killed the Taliban chief Ayman al-Zawahiri. Also, the cooperation of US and Pakistan has led to the inclusion of some influential chiefs of the Taliban in the Indian subcontinent in the designated list of the global terrorists. Hence, the any improvement in the US- Pakistan relation is going to be challenging for Pakistan in terms of relations with Taliban.

- I. Unstable political environment
- II. Two- front war: economic crisis plus the security crisis

Pakistan's Appeasement Policy:

Pakistan's engagement of talks with the TTP has seen to be held from the position of weakness. Political analysts have observed that it has given it time to recuperate and re-

establish their strongholds within Pakistan and spread its geographical network. All the attempts to make truce between the two parties have proven to temporary and inconsequential, with Taliban being the ones who call it off unilaterally each time i.e. in 2021, twice in 2022. All the peace talks have hit the dead-end as both sides stood for their demands relating to the reversal of the FATA merger with KPK, among other things.

The geopolitical analysts recognize the loopholes in the policy- call it myopic policy of supporting the Taliban which has enabled the group to lead its way back to power. Pakistan appears to be in a quagmire. This policy has exposed some fragility in Pakistan's counter terrorism gains. Pakistan has communicated with the Taliban using the backchannel diplomacy, expecting the Taliban to persecute the TTP. However, the Taliban adopted a quid-pro-quo policy with the TTP on board and asked for negotiation between the TTP and the Pakistani govt.