

Counterterrorism in Pakistan: Challenges, Strategies, and the Way Forward

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Abstract

The study deals with the unrelenting threat of terrorism in Pakistan's internal socio-political challenges. It also overviews the evolution and impacts of terrorism within the country, with a focus on the counterterrorism strategies adopted by consecutive governments. The major counterterrorism operations, such as Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad, and Azm-e-Istehkam, are discussed. The research ascertains and determines the effectiveness of these counterterrorism operations in restoring stability. By the collective efforts of all stakeholders, Pakistan can ensure sustainable peace and development. The objectives of this research are to identify, analyse and assess the major challenges Pakistan faces in combating terrorism. Furthermore, this research aims to scrutinise the strategies and policies implemented in various operations. A qualitative research design with elements of descriptive and analytical approaches has been used, which demonstrates an in-depth understanding of counterterrorism efforts, policies, and challenges in Pakistan.

Keywords: Border management, refugees, Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad, Azm-e-Istehkam

Introduction

Since the Cold War era, Pakistan has held a pivotal position in the global geopolitical landscape. As a frontline ally of the United States during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan became a hub of covert operations, intelligence collaboration, and proxy warfare. This role intensified after 9/11, when Pakistan joined the US-led Global War on Terror, shifting from a Cold War buffer state to an active counterterrorism partner. These alignments have come at a heavy cost, including internal militancy, sectarian strife, refugee influx, and global scrutiny. As terrorism evolved from a regional spillover to a complex transnational threat,

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Pakistan's internal security paradigm also transformed, marked by kinetic operations like Zarb-e-Azb and hybrid strategies like Radd-ul-Fasaad.

A new wave of terrorism emerged in Pakistan after the deadly attacks on the US in September 2001, and it was difficult for a developing country to overcome the situation in a befitting manner. Thousands of Pakistanis have lost lives in war against terror, and the threat is still looming because of the different terrorists' activities across the country. Pakistan is spending a huge amount of money on the war against terror and other counterterrorism measures.

Terrorism has been the most serious problem faced by the people of Pakistan. After the USA and NATO forces' attack on Afghanistan, a large number of militant influxes into Pakistan were observed, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the then Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Baluchistan, which were its worst targets. The increasing activities of militants sparked government actions to counter them. Due to the operations against terrorists' outfits, a large number of people were displaced within their own homeland in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To eradicate and counter terrorism, there are two types of measures. One is the preventive type, and the other is the containment type. A country with a strong economic foundation can counter the terrorist motives easily. Unfortunately, Pakistan's economy is not so strong as to cope with such menace. The technological aspect of Pakistan is also not a strong one because it is dependent on the advanced countries.

Objectives

The study aims to analyze Pakistan's evolving role in international counterterrorism efforts, assessing how its strategies and partnerships have adapted over time. Secondly, it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's military-led counterterrorism operations, examining the extent to which these actions have contributed to domestic and regional security. Lastly, the study will explore the socio-political and economic challenges faced by Pakistan in sustaining long-term peace, considering factors such as governance, development, and public sentiment that influence the stability of the country.

Literature Review

Terrorism is one of the most severe threats that our society is currently encountering. It has unquestionably impacted all sectors of society. This investigation provides a comprehensive examination of counterterrorism operations. The study has addressed the topic of active military operations and passive counter-terrorism strategies, such as de-radicalization.

Existing scholarship largely affirms the complexity of Pakistan's counterterrorism dilemma. Khattak and Mushtaq¹ emphasize that counterterrorism during the Musharraf and PPP eras oscillated between militarized interventions and incomplete institutional reforms. However, Ahmed² critiques these efforts as reactive and unsustainable, arguing that Pakistan's failure to dismantle ideological networks has perpetuated cycles of violence. On the economic front, Mubashra and Shafi³ present data correlating counterterrorism stability with short-term economic gains, though they caution against over-militarization without parallel socio-economic development. Collectively, these studies underscore that while kinetic operations have disrupted terrorist networks, they remain insufficient without consistent political will and institutional cohesion.

Tellis⁴ in his book titled 'Pakistan and the War on Terror: Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance' writes about the remarks of the then president of USA George W. Bush who said in 2003 that due to the effective border management and strategies of Pakistan the key al-Qaeda terrorists have been neutralized. President Bush acknowledged that while certain al-Qaeda leaders continue to exist, they no longer pose a significant threat to the United States or Pakistan. However, the 2008 remarks of the US president were questioned by a significant number of individuals due to the Taliban's increasing strength. Additionally, the counterterrorism measures of Pakistan were questioned, as it was unclear whether Pakistan was genuinely assisting the US. Pakistan's operation in the war on terror did not meet the expectations of the United States. A non-NATO US ally, Pakistan's performance in the counterterrorism campaign was viewed with skepticism.

¹ Bilal Zahoor and Raza Rumi, eds., *Rethinking Pakistan: A 21st Century Perspective* (London: Anthem Press, 2020).

² Arun Kundnani and Ben Hayes, 'The Globalisation of Countering Violent Extremism Policies', *Undermining Human Rights, Instrumentalising Civil Society* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2018), 32-34.

³ Charles O. Manasseh, Chine Sp Logan, Ogochukwu C. Okanya, et al., 'Causal Relationship between Financial Deepening, National Security, Ecological Footprint, and Economic Growth in Nigeria', *F1000Research*, Vol. 13 (2024), 753.

⁴ Ashley J. Tellis, *Pakistan and the War on Terror: Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008).

Impact of terrorism on Pakistani society

Terrorism exists in many types and shapes all over the globe. Terrorism manifests itself in various forms around the world.⁵ Due to its many forms' terrorism does not have a specific definition it always avoids the exact or precise definition. Certain groups, states or individuals may perceive it as terrorism, while others may not even recognise it as such. So, it always evades an all accepted and exact definition. Terrorism is the haphazard use of brutality against the general masses to spread fear in them and they achieve their nefarious designs. Terrorists mostly target the peaceful gathering as their target because the primary aim of them is the spreading of fear among the masses and to pressurize the existing governmental authorities. It is worth mentioning here the word terrorism was actualized during the French revolution.⁶ At that time terrorism was not used in the context as it uses presently because at that time it was a tool of the government which used it against the people to bring them in order and proper subjugation of the government. For example, the French Revolutionary Government from the year 1793-1794, during this time it used the reign as tool of terror of the government directing violence as a tool for policy change. Moreover, it is defined by Kruglanski & Fishman as 'Terrorism is suggested to be 'the use of intimidation or fear for advancement of political objectives'.⁷

Since the Cold War, Pakistan has held a critical position in the global security order, serving as a frontline ally to the United States against Soviet influence in Afghanistan. This partnership deepened after 9/11, when Pakistan emerged as a key state in the Global War on Terror. However, these alliances brought profound internal repercussions, including insurgency, radicalization, and socio-economic disruption.

Today, Pakistan continues to struggle against entrenched terrorist threats despite numerous military operations. This research argues that counterterrorism in Pakistan requires not just military operations but an integrated strategy addressing political instability, socioeconomic grievances, and foreign interference.

⁵ Stuart Elden, *Terror and Territory: The Spatial Extent of Sovereignty* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁶ Manfred B. Steger, *The Rise of the Global imaginary: Political Ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁷ Asad Tamizuddin Nizami et al., 'Terrorism in Pakistan: The Psychosocial Context and Why It Matters', *BJPsych International*, 15:1 (2018), 20.

Terrorism has badly affected all aspects of Pakistani society. Pakistan lost more than seventy thousand precious lives and more than 100 billion dollars due to the scourge of terrorism.⁸

Pakistan's strategic location has made it indispensable in global conflicts—especially during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US war on terror post-2001.⁹ While alliances brought economic and military aid, they also turned Pakistan into a battlefield. Refugees from Afghanistan, foreign-funded extremist groups, and covert operations became domestic threats.

The Cold War's proxy battles laid the foundation for Pakistan's internal instability, and post-9/11 counterterrorism partnerships further complicated its domestic security landscape. Today, Pakistan is caught between its strategic obligations and internal sovereignty.

The process of counter terrorism in Pakistan is not limited to the regular armed forces but it has also been carried out the many Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA's) for example the Police, Rangers, Frontier corps and the Frontier constabulary etc. Pakistan army fights on the front line and the other LEAs are assisting them in different ways. Pakistan faced severe terrorist attacks, after the 9/11. The basic reason behind the attack was that of Pakistan alliance with USA and NATO forces. The assaults originated not just from beyond the border but also from within the nation due to indoctrination by foreign entities. Furthermore, non-state actors or foreign terrorists readily exploit individuals whose families have been impacted by these operations for indoctrination.¹⁰

Pakistan played an unprecedented role in the war on terror against the extremist but the USA still did not accept the Pakistani sacrifices whole heartedly and was asking Pakistan for more.¹¹ Although Pakistan was a non-NATO ally but its efforts were not endorsed as it supposed to be. However, Pakistan faces deadly terrorist attacks due to its alliance with the USA. Moreover, Pakistan was blamed for harbouring and giving safe havens to those terrorists at its own soil. Therefore, now the government of Pakistan is very cautious to fight someone else war. It is primarily focusing on the interest of its own country.

⁸ Hassan Abbas, *The Taliban Revival: Violence and Extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014).

⁹ Muhammad Tahir Rashid, 'Post 9/11 US Military Interventions and Human Rights Abuses', *Journal of Law and Social Sciences—University of Turbat*, 2:2 (2024), 59-60.

¹⁰ Asad Tamizuddin Nizami, *op.cit.*, 20-22.

¹¹ Hidayat Khan, 'Pakistan's Contribution to Global War on Terror after 9/11', *IPRI Journal*, 13:1 (2013), 37-56.

Law enforcement in Pakistan

To counter the various forms of terrorist activities, there are more than 35 LEAs operational.¹² Out of these 35 agencies 27 are working under the umbrella of the federal government, 6 under the umbrella of provincial government and two under the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region for the protection. Terrorism has disrupted the socio-economic and security of the whole country. The most affected are the Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.¹³ Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan by means of territory. Its security is manned by the Police, Ranger, Army, FC and levies. Levies staffs are mostly deployed in the peripheries of the province. Counter-terrorism and counter-extremism are multi-pronged drives which range from kinetic anti-terror operations leading to arrest and prosecution of terrorists to countering financing of terrorism and developing soft interventions aimed at reducing the appeal of extremism. Therefore, countering terrorism cannot be covered through a single piece of legislation nor a single agency. It needs proper coordination and cooperation among all the stake holders and concerned agencies through concerted efforts.

Pakistani government has adopted different counter terrorism strategies to effectively prevent terrorist acts across the country. For protecting the country against terrorism all the Law Enforcement Agencies played their due role.

The operation Rah-e-Nijat

The operation Rahe-e-Nijat, a counter-terrorism operation, was conducted against the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in South Waziristan in 2009. This counterterrorism strategy was a joint armed operation aimed against the terrorists and extremists. This was operated in South Waziristan and near the Afghanistan border. In this operation a Pakistan Air Force jet fighter participated to eliminate the terrorist outfit in the area. Operation was successful because of its multipronged strategies. Terrorists were put on the back foot due to the highly offensive strategic move of the armed forces and the intelligence-based operation. The jet fighter stroked the secret places of terrorists on the basis of intelligence coverage. The purpose of it was to hit only the terrorist outfit and avoid destroying the innocent population. This operation was a difficult one in the sense that it

¹² Waqas Z. Raja, *Countering Terrorism in the North West Pakistan: Exploring Local and Global Perspectives* (Ph.D diss., University of Bradford, 2019).

¹³ Mubeen Adnan, and Rabiya Hamid, 'Trend Analysis of a New-Wave of Terrorism in Pakistan', *Journal of Politics and International Studies*, 10:1 (2024), 57-77.

involved locating terrorists inside the innocent population inside one's own country. The forces tried their best to target only the terrorists' spots, but still some innocents came under the fire. To operate against an enemy state is easier than to operate in one's own country and isolate terrorists amongst the normal living people.

The Swat operation

In May 2009 the military started operation in Swat district against Mullah Fazlullah. He was of the opinion to impose the Islamic Sharia in Swat in true letter and spirit. The local residents of Swat shifted to other parts of the country due to the worst security situation. Because of the huge sufferings, the people of Swat welcomed the operation against the militants and supported the army against the insurgents. Moreover, it is pertinent to mention here that, within a span of three months, the Pakistani army quelled those extremists from Swat, Dir, and Buner.¹⁴ During this operation the people of Swat were welcomed in different district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Moreover, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps were established in Mardan, Charsadda and Peshawar etc. and government and non-governmental organization extended support to the IDPs.

The Operation Sherdil

This operation was carried out from August 2008 to February 2009 in the erstwhile FATA Agency, Bajaur. This operation was started basically because of the trickle-down of the political movement of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.¹⁵ The operation was jointly carried out by the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps (FC). Most of Bajaur was under the control of Taliban since 2007. It was deemed to a hub of Al- Qaeda's operating terrorist activities inside and outside the country. Initially, in 2008 when the FC established a check post near Afghan border the terrorists and their supporters tried to push the FC back.¹⁶ Later on, the ground forces were backed by the aerial strikes against the militants and at the end of the year most of the areas were cleared from militant influences. The winning of the war in Bajaur has strategic significance for Pakistan because this place was second most

¹⁴ Huma Bilal, Azkaa Khan, and Muhammad Azhar, 'War on Terrorism and its Impacts on Pakistan's Security', *South Asian Studies*, 36:2 (2022), 296-297.

¹⁵ Sana Jamal, and M. Ahsan, 'Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan—Analyzing the Network of Terror', *IRIA Report*, Vol. 6 (2015).

¹⁶ Qandeel Siddique, *Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan: An Attempt to Deconstruct the Umbrella Organization and the Reasons for Its Growth in Pakistan's North-West*, DIIS Report 2010:12 (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2010), 35.

important outfit of militants after Waziristan and was adjoining to the Kunar area of Afghanistan which further enhance its strategic importance.

The Khyber Operation

This operation was started as an extension of Zarb-e-Azab in 2014 and was carried out in four different phases. Khyber is the most important region of all that connects Pakistan with Afghanistan.¹⁷ Most of the NATO and allies logistic support and movement was happened via this route after the 9/11 event. Khyber has always been situated on the principal highways linking Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan is a landlocked country and it needs road access to sea for different utilities and logistic support. The region has witnessed different set of extremists' i.e the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Ansarul Islam and Mangal Bagh's Lashkar-e-Islam.¹⁸ Air and ground forces, at different locations, against the non-state actors were used to eliminate those elements that were the threat to Pakistan's peace and stability. This counter terrorism operation of Pakistan army came to an end in August 2017 by clearing the area from extremists. In this operation the Pakistan military closed all the entry and exit points of the terrible area to encircle the terrorists who were inside and restrict their assistance from outside circles.

Moreover, in the same way, the counterterrorism operation was carried out in most of the erstwhile FATA to trickle down the effect of different terrorists' elements who want to destabilise the region. The Pakistan army and other law enforcement agencies fought in collaboration against the terrorists and ultimately brought peace to the region with their effective counterterrorism measures.

In addition to the usual counterterrorism measures, search and cordon operations were also carried out in the erstwhile FATA and all other places in the country. This strategy was adopted in the pre- as well as post-operation scenario. This strategy helped the LEAs to restrict the movement of terrorists and search them easily in every nook and corner of the country.

The Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad

At the end of the Khyber operation, the terrorism did not come to an end, and several other operations in different parts of the country were held to counter the growing threats.

¹⁷ Yumna Chaudhry, Zaheer Abbas, and L. Yuan, 'Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Strategy: An Overview and Assessment of Major Military Operations (2002-2020)', *International Journal of Political Science Law and International Relations*, Vol. 10 (2020), 59-60.

¹⁸ Yousaf Ali, interview by Muhammad Israr, Peshawar, 4 March 2021.

This operation was launched countrywide in 2017 to eradicate the threat of terrorists and their sleeper cells. All the Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) were on the same page to counter the terrorist activities across the country. During this operation the border security management was also enhanced.

Operations Swift Retort

This is one of the important operations in the military aviation history of Pakistan and will be remembered for a long time to come. It was launched in response to the Indian aggression and violation of the Pakistani airspace. The Indian Air Force aircraft released payloads in Pakistan's territory of Balakot. The Pakistani government and military leadership reiterated that they will respond to it in their own way. The Pakistan's military will determine the time and venue. The very next day, on the 27th February 2019, the Pakistan Air Force locked the targets in Jammu and Kashmir and hit them accurately without any casualty. It was a message to India that Pakistan can hit, but they are avoiding any conflict with their neighbouring country. In retaliation the Indian aircraft pursued the Pakistani JF-17 Thunder, but it peacefully came back, and the Indian plane crossed the Pakistani border again while pursuing the JF-17. This time the Pakistan Air Force hit their aircraft and captured their pilot Abhinandan, who was later on handed over to India. The Pakistan Air Force conducted six airstrikes at different locations in the Indian held Kashmir.

Operation Azme-e-Istehkam

This operation started in 2024; unlike Operation Zarb-e-Azb, its focus was targeted.¹⁹ It did not displace large number of people but work out with focus to eliminate extremism, improving law and order in the country in general and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan in particular. This operation was also aimed to improve the socio-economic condition of the country. To some extent this operation brought positive news for the country economic condition. In this operation stability of the country is first priority of all the stake holders. This is a joint venture of the armed, civil armed and intelligence agencies.

¹⁹ Rafaqat Ali, 'Terrorist Attacks and Conflict Intensity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since the August 2021 Taliban Takeover: Pakistan's Response and Operation Azm-e-Istehkam', *International Journal of Social Science Archives (IJSSA)*, 7:3 (2024), 652-653.

Table 1: Overview of Major Counterterrorism Operations in Pakistan (Post-Zarb-e-Azb)

Operation Name	Year	Region	Primary Objectives	Key Outcomes
Radd-ul-Fasaad	2017	Nationwide	Eliminate residual terrorist threats and dismantle networks	Significant decline in terrorist incidents; disrupted financing and sleeper cells
Khyber-4	2017	Rajgal Valley, Khyber Agency	Secure Pakistan-Afghanistan border	Cleared terrorist strongholds; reduced cross-border infiltration
Radul-Haq	2018	Balochistan	Target militant groups attacking security forces	Arrests of high-profile militants; improved security for civilians and infrastructure
Swift Retort	2019	Nationwide (Airspace)	Respond to Indian airspace violations	Demonstrated air superiority and national security commitment
Azm-e-Istehkam	2024	Nationwide	Comprehensive terrorism and extremism eradication	Renewed focus on socio-economic measures and counter-extremism alongside military actions

(Source: Authors’ compilation)

These operations highlight a shift towards integrated strategies combining military, legislative, and socio-economic tools to address terrorism's root causes alongside direct action. However, challenges such as porous borders and foreign-funded insurgencies persist.

With these operations, reductions in terrorists were recorded, and the networks of the terrorists were disrupted. As the security situation improved in the affected regions, the internally displaced persons moved back to their areas. However, still terrorism is a challenge for the LEAs because of residual elements, cross-border terrorism and rehabilitation is challenging for Pakistan.

Table 2: Outcomes of Key Counterterrorism Operations

Category	Impact of Operations	Notable Examples
Reduction in Terrorism	Significant decline in organized terrorist activities, with fewer incidents annually.	Radd-ul-Fasaad
Disruption of Networks	Dismantling of sleeper cells and militant financing structures.	Khyber-4, Radul-Haq
Border Security	Enhanced border controls and surveillance reduced cross-border infiltration.	Khyber-4
Rehabilitation	Return of millions of IDPs to their homes and initiation of infrastructure projects in affected areas.	Azm-e-Istehkam
Integrated Measures	Focused on combining military action with socio-economic reforms to address root causes of extremism.	Azm-e-Istehkam

(Source: Authors' compilation)

The government not solely relied on the operation but also established peace committees, headed by the elites of the troubled areas, to convince people to obey the state laws. These local peace committees played an effective role in many localities.²⁰ Indeed, the peace initiative was courageous and fruitful decision of the government to tackle the problem at gross root level with the help of local elders of the society. Moreover, it is pertinent to mention here that operations are not the sole solution of these issues. It is only the last resort if all the available options are wiped out. The dialogue, community engagements, awareness, development and ensuring stability etc. in the region must be kept in notice. Most of the time the direct operations without utilizing the other channels may mismanage the situation and prolong the resolution of the issues.

In few Operations like Rah-e-Nijat and Swat (2009) the government used the military force in reaction and short-term measures

²⁰ Christine Fair, Carol, and Seth G. Jones. 'Pakistan's war within', *Survival* 51:6 (2009), 187-188.

targeting safe havens in tribal areas²¹. However, this approach neglected root causes like sectarianism, economic inequality, and political exclusion.²²

The launch of Zarb-e-Azb marked a turning point, bringing in more coordinated efforts.²³ This matured with Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017), which expanded to include intelligence, police action, deradicalization programs, and community outreach.²⁴ The most recent operation, Azm-e-Istehkam, integrates military force with socioeconomic reforms.²⁵

Challenges to Counterterrorism in Pakistan

Few of the key challenges to counterterrorism in Pakistan are discussed. This is an important aspect in understanding terrorism and its countermeasures. Due to the instability in the government and its policies, the counterterrorism strategies are mostly affected.²⁶ A rigorous and continuous policy is difficult to pursue in such circumstances. After political issue another important aspect is the economic aspect. Due to the weak economic structure, the counterterrorism strategies are suffered. Pakistan borders are not fully controlled by the law enforcement agencies.²⁷ Its western border is mostly porous and infiltration of terrorists has been easy for those who are operating inside Pakistan. There are more than thirty-five LEA's workings in Pakistan; a close coordination is a must

²¹ Iram Khalid, and Muhammad Iqbal Roy, 'Pakistan's Military Operations: The Counter Terrorism Strategy (2001-2013) Prospects and Implications', *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 53:2 (2016).

²² James A. Piazza, 'Rooted in Poverty? Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18:1 (2006), 159-162.

²³ Urwa Elahi, and Umbreen Javaid, 'Operation Zarb-e-Azb: A Decisive Strike', *Pakistan Vision*, 21:1 (2020).

²⁴ Illango Patchamuthu, Shoaib A. Siddiqui, Naresh Prasad Shrestha, et al., 'Proceedings of the Conference', *Pakistan Horizon*, 71:3 (2018), 75-76.

²⁵ Rafaqat Ali, 'Terrorist Attacks and Conflict Intensity in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa since the August 2021 Taliban Takeover: Pakistan's Response and Operation Azm-e-Istehkam', *International Journal of Social Science Archives (IJSSA)*, 7:3 (2024), 652-654.

²⁶ Martha Crenshaw, 'Counterterrorism Policy and the Political Process', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 24:5 (2001), 329-31.

²⁷ Habibur Rahman, Ahmad Sadiq, and Sayed Attaullah Shah, 'Resurgence and Response: Evaluating the Effectiveness of Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategies Amidst Rising Terrorism Threats', *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 5:4 (2023), 30-32.

between and among them.²⁸ But unfortunately, it is not between and among them to eradicate the menace of terrorism.²⁹ Moreover, another important issue that complicates counterterrorism efforts is related to refugees. The movement of refugee across the borders and their unrestricted movement inside the country have impacts on the measures to counter the terrorism.

The discord among various factions within Pakistan presents a significant challenge to counterterrorism measures. The Sunni-Shia conflicts in different parts of the country further deteriorate the existing situation. Moreover, the different intra and inter conflicts between the religious groups are very harmful for the harmony and integrity of the country. The most vulnerable is the Shia's-Sunni conflicts and the intra-Sunni rivalry is very dangerous for the integrity and harmony of Pakistan. Another challenge is of technological advancement. We still lack the latest technology to effectively address cases involving terrorists who employ modern techniques and equipment. The different foreign agencies are operating inside our borders.³⁰ To deal them effectively the nation needs to unite against the issue of terrorism. This hamper in the smooth functioning of LEAs. Pakistan is facing multi-dimensional challenges not only to fight against the internal rivals but also is facing external skirmishes from the neighboring countries. This hugely affects Pakistan counterterrorism polices.

Conclusion and recommendations

Pakistan's journey in combating terrorism demonstrates the difficulties associated with addressing such a multifaceted issue. The country's counterterrorism efforts, exemplified by operations like Radd-ul-Fasaad and Azm-e-Istehkam, have significantly reduced terrorism incidents and dismantled militant networks. However, enduring challenges such as economic instability, weak border controls, and sectarian violence continue to undermine progress.

A comprehensive approach, blending military precision with socio-economic development and political stability, is essential for long-term peace. Regional cooperation and technological advancements will further

²⁸ Maleeha Lodhi, ed., *Pakistan: The Search for Stability* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2024), 397.

²⁹ Jessica Stern, and Jonathan B. Wiener, 'Precaution against Terrorism', *Journal of Risk Research*, 9:4 (2006), 393-396.

³⁰ Lacin Idil Oztig, 'Pakistan's Border Policies and Security Dynamics along the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border', *South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2021), 50-52.

enhance Pakistan's capacity to counter terrorism. By addressing the root causes of extremism and fostering a culture of unity and resilience, Pakistan can move towards a secure and prosperous future.³¹

Terrorism endures despite tactical achievements, owing to entrenched systemic problems. However, the following recommendations are proposed:

Consistent policies and political stability are essential for effectively combating terrorism in Pakistan. In the absence of governmental continuity and stability, the implementation of rigorous counterterrorism policies becomes challenging. Currently, Pakistan is experiencing significant financial issues. Financial stability contributes to an efficient counterterrorism strategy. Economically robust countries can combat it effectively and proactively. Effective border management can facilitate the implementation of a robust counterterrorism strategy. If law enforcement agencies combat radicals while borders remain inadequately handled, external support is facilitated, so undermining the efficacy of their counterterrorism tactics. Effective and robust coordination among the various LEAs is essential. We cannot achieve the desired goal without adequate coordination among many agencies.

International and regional cooperation is an important aspect of dealing with extremism and the refugee issue. The United Nations, its various agencies, and regional countries may play a crucial role in addressing the issue. Local leaders, tribal heads, and community leaders may be responsible for persuading their communities to reject non-state actors or individuals who operate against the interests of the state. We are quite far behind in technology as compared to the developed nations. In this sector, we need to improve technology and use it properly in counterterrorism strategies.

³¹ Muhammad Ansar Naseer and Ghazala Shaheen, 'Significance of Critical Thinking through Education in Countering Violent Extremism in Pakistan', *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Arts*, 2:3 (2023): 146.