

Overview of Security in 2020: Critical Challenges and Recommendations

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- 1.1 Overview of Security Situation in 2020
- 1.2 Critical Challenges and Recommendations

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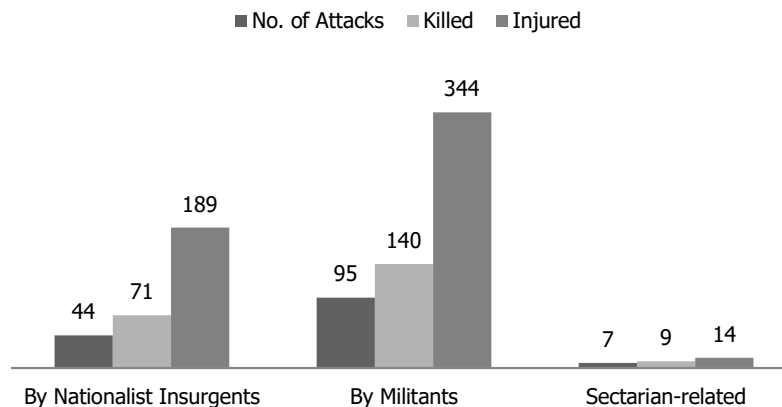
1.1 Overview of Security Situation in 2020

Marking a decline of over 36 percent from the year before, different militant, nationalist/insurgent and violent sectarian groups perpetrated a total of 146 terrorist attacks across Pakistan in 2020 including three suicide blasts. These attacks claimed in all 220 lives – a decline of 38 percent from those killed in such attacks in 2019 – and injured another 547 people.

A distribution of these terrorist attacks by their perpetrators suggests that so-called religiously inspired militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), its splinter groups Hizbul Ahrar and Jamaatul Ahrar (both groups declared a return to their parent group, i.e. TTP in August 2020), as well as other militant groups with similar objectives such as local Taliban groups, Lashkar-e-Islam and ISIS-affiliates perpetrated 95 terrorist attacks – compared to 158 in previous year – which killed 140 people and injured 344 others. Meanwhile Baloch and Sindhi nationalist insurgent groups carried out 44 attacks – as compared to 57 such attacks in 2019 – which claimed 71 lives and wounded another 189 people. As many as seven of the reported terrorist attacks in 2020 were sectarian-related – half from such attacks in the year before – which killed nine people and inflicted injuries on 14 others.

Personnel of security and law enforcement agencies suffered significant casualties in these attacks including 97 dead and 113 injured; those 97 dead included 42 army officials; 25 FC men; 25 policemen; 3 Levies; and 2 Rangers. Similarly, 94 civilians lost their lives and another 372 were wounded in these attacks. Meanwhile 15 militants were killed and another four were injured, either in suicide blasts or security forces' retaliatory fire following some attacks.

Chart 1: Classification of Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in 2020



The militants hit diverse targets of over 17 types in their attacks but they targeted security forces and civilians more frequently. A total of 84 attacks, or about 58 percent of the total terrorist attacks reported in 2020, hit personnel, vehicles/convoys and posts of security forces and law-enforcement agencies across Pakistan. These attacks targeting security and law enforcement personnel also caused significant casualties (133 killed; 215 injured). Civilians were the apparent targets of 29 attacks, which claimed 19 lives and injured 138 others. A combined total of eight attacks targeted Shia and Sunni community members, claiming 18 lives, and another three attacks hit worship places and madrassas killing 24 people. Meanwhile, six attacks targeted tribal elders, and four attacks hit political leaders and workers. Other sporadic targets hit by the terrorist in 2020 are given at Table 1.

Table 1: Targets Hit in Terrorist Attacks in 2020

Targets	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
Security forces/law enforcement agencies	84	133	215
Gas pipelines	1	0	0
Tribal elders	6	9	2
Civilians	29	19	138
CD/other shops/private property	1	0	0
Shia religious scholars/community	4	5	14
Worship places/shrines/madrassas	3	24	112
Govt. offices/public property (hospitals, banks etc.)	1	8	7
Sunni religious leaders/community	4	13	20
Haqqani network [of Afghan Taliban]	1	1	0
Political leaders/workers	4	0	39
Media/journalists	1	1	0
Health/polio workers, security escorts	2	3	0
CPEC/workers/Chinese nationals	1	0	0
Railway tracks / trains	2	0	0
Development, exploration projects, companies, workers	1	4	0
NATO/US supply vehicles	1	0	0
Total	146	220	547

In perpetrating the reported 146 attacks, terrorists mainly employed improvised explosive devices (IEDs) of various types (68 attacks) and direct firing/shootout (56 attacks). They also used other attack tactics, though less frequently, including three (3) suicide blasts, 12 hand grenade attacks, four (4) rocket attacks, one coordinated gun-and-bomb attack and two acts of sabotage.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa witnessed the highest number of terrorist attacks for any one region of Pakistan. A total of 79 terrorist attacks happened in the province, including 31 in the North Waziristan tribal district alone, which in all claimed 100 lives and inflicted injuries on another 206 people. While a majority of these attacks (50) targeted security forces, as many as eight attacks hit civilians, and a combined eight attacks were directed against tribal elders and political leaders/workers. Shia religious community was hit in four attacks, and a single attack targeting a madrassa claimed eight lives. The TTP, Hizbul Ahrar, Jamaatul Ahrar, local Taliban, Lashkar-e-Islam and other groups with similar objectives perpetrated 75 of the total attacks reported from KP, while the other four attacks were sectarian-related.

As in 2019, North Waziristan remained a major flashpoint of insecurity and militant violence in the year 2020 where 31 terrorist attacks took place, or about 39 percent of the total reported attacks from KP, which killed 50 people and injured 55 others. Nine terrorist attacks happened in Bajaur tribal district claiming seven lives. Meanwhile, six (6) terrorist attacks happened in each of Peshawar and South Waziristan districts. Similarly, four attacks took place in DI Khan, and three (3) attacks were recorded in each of Khyber, Kurram and Kohat districts. In all, terrorist attacks were recorded in 19 districts of KP.

After Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan province was most affected by terrorism in 2020 where 95 people were killed and 216 others were injured in 42 reported attacks. Different Baloch insurgents groups, mainly the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), BRAS – a newly established alliance of Baloch insurgent groups mainly including BLA, BLF and Baloch Republican Guard (BRG) – Lashkar-e-Balochistan, Baloch Republican Army (BRA), and United Baloch Army (UBA) etc., perpetrated 32 attacks killing 59 people and wounding 123 others. These attacks included at least four major attacks that targeted security forces in Kech, Bolan, Gwadar (Ormara) and Harnai.

Meanwhile, religiously inspired militant groups such as the TTP, Hizbul Ahrar, ISIS-affiliates and some other similar unknown militants were reportedly involved in as many as 10 attacks in Balochistan that caused death to 36 people and injuries to another 93 people. Attacks by religiously inspired militants also included few major ones including two suicide blasts in Quetta – one of these suicide blasts was perpetrated by the Islamic State group against the mosque attached to a madrassa – and a vehicle-borne blast in Chaman (Qilla Abdullah).

On the whole, terrorist attacks happened in 14 districts of Balochistan including nine attacks each from Kech and Quetta, four from each of Qilla Abdullah and Harnai districts, and three attacks from Mastung. Meanwhile, Bolan, Dera Bugti, Kalat, and Panjgur faced two attacks each, while one attack took place in each of Gwadar, Nasirabad, Nushki, Sibi and Sohbatput districts.

As many as 18 terrorist attacks happened in Sindh province – 15 in Karachi and 3 in interior Sindh – which killed a total of 20 people and injured 66 others. Eleven of these attacks were perpetrated by nationalist insurgents, including 10 attacks by Sindhi nationalist groups Sindhudesh Revolution Army (SDRA) and Sindhudesh Liberation Army (SDLA), and one attack was carried out by a Baloch insurgent group, BLA, against the Karachi Stock Exchange. These attacks by Sindhi and Baloch insurgent groups claimed 12 lives and wounded 66 others. Religiously inspired militants including the TTP perpetrated four attacks, which claimed as many lives. Meanwhile, three attacks reported from Sindh were sectarian-related targeted killings, two of which targeted Sunni leaders and community members, and another targeted a policeman who subscribed to Shia sect of Islam. Half of the attacks reported from Sindh targeted security and law enforcement personnel (including one attack that had sectarian motivation), another four targeted civilians, and two attacks hit Sunni community members. Meanwhile one attack targeted, as cited earlier, Karachi Stock Exchange and another attack hit a rally held by Jamaat-e-Islami. Yet another attack targeted a Chinese national, though without causing any casualty.

In all, seven (7) terrorist attacks took place in Punjab in the year 2020 which claimed five lives and injured 59 people. With the exception of one attack, which was perpetrated by the Baloch insurgent group BLA in Sadiqabad tehsil of south Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan district, all other attacks concentrated in Rawalpindi and were perpetrated by Pakistani Taliban including the TTP and its splinters Jamaatul Ahrar and Hizbul Ahrar, which rejoined the former in August 2020. While five of these attacks in Punjab targeted, apparently, civilians, one attack targeted the police and another targeted a gas pipeline.

No terrorist was recorded in Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir during the year 2020. (*See Table 2*)

Table 2: Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan in 2020

Region	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	79	100	206
Balochistan	42	95	216
Punjab	7	5	59

Region	No. of Attacks	Killed	Injured
Karachi	15	17	65
Sindh (excluding Karachi)	3	3	1
Islamabad/AJK/GB	0	0	0
Total	146	220	547

1.1.1 Comparison

However, when counted together, as many as 373 incidents of violence of different types were recorded across Pakistan including the terrorist attacks cited earlier. Apart from 146 terrorist attacks, these violent incidents also included a combined total of 125 cross-border attacks from India and Afghanistan; 47 anti-militant operational strikes carried out by security forces and their 15 armed clashes/encounters with militants; eight (8) incidents of communal/faith-based violence; 14 thwarted/failed terror plots; three (3) inter-militant clashes; two (2) clashes between security forces and protestors; one sectarian clash; one incident of ethno-political violence; and 11 targeted attacks, whose motivation was not clear (*See Table 3*). These overall incidents of violence killed a total of 503 people and injured 851 others.

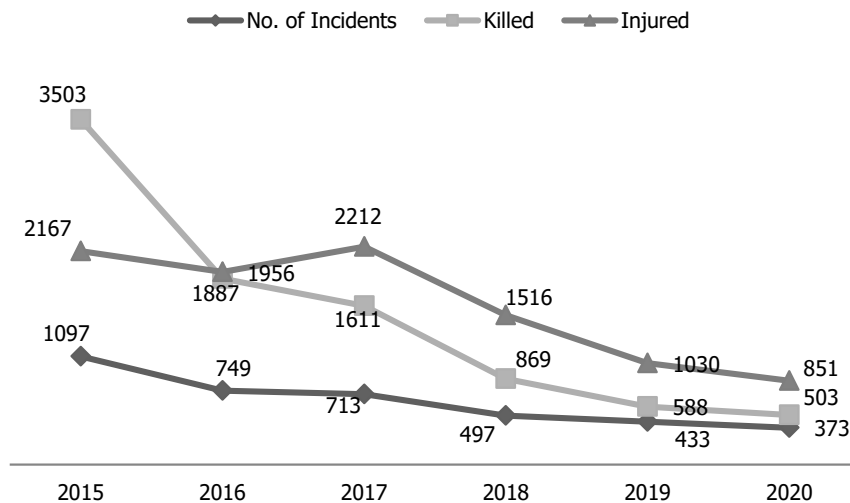
Table 3: Nature of Overall Incidents of Violence

Nature of Incident	No. of Incidents	Killed	Injured
Terrorist attacks	146	220	547
Political/ethnic violence	1	0	5
Clashes & encounters between security forces & militants	15	38	6
Cross-border clashes/attacks	125	62	222
Operational attacks by security forces	47	146	22
Sectarian clashes	1	2	0
Inter-militant clashes/attacks	3	4	10
Communal/faith-based violence	8	6	3
Plot/foiled terror attempts	14	1	0
Targeted attacks [not clear if by terrorists]	11	14	1

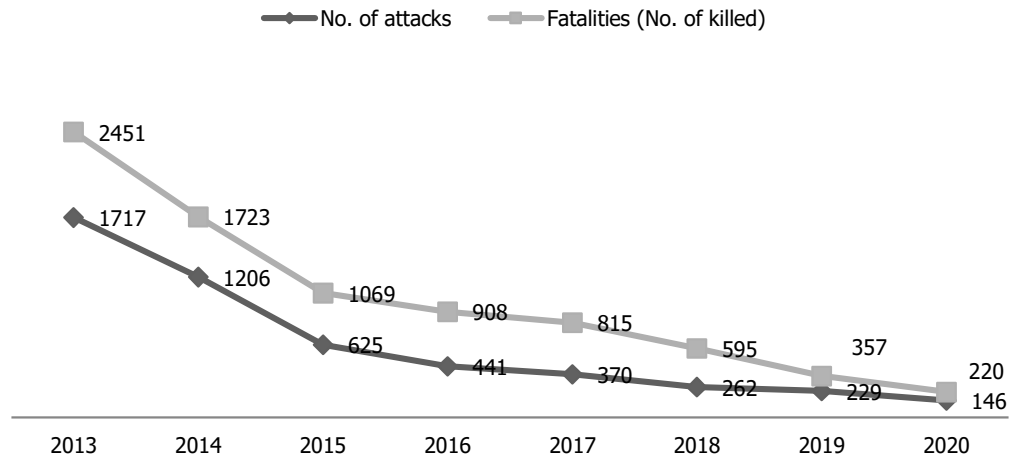
Nature of Incident	No. of Incidents	Killed	Injured
Protests/clashes with security forces	2	10	35
Total	373	503	851

The overall incidents of violence plummeted from 433 in 2019 to 373 in 2020. That decrease in violent incidents was largely contributed by a decrease in terrorist attacks from the year before. Meanwhile, the overall number of people killed in these violent incidents also decreased by over 14 percent; from 588 in 2019 to 503 in 2020. Similarly, the number of people injured in all such incidents of violence also plummeted from 1,030 in 2019 to 851 in 2020. (See Chart 2)

Chart 2: Comparison of Overall Incidents of Violence & Casualties (2015-20)



While in 2020, a considerable decrease was recorded in the number of terrorist attacks compared to previous year, there has been a gradual decrease in such attacks and consequent fatalities in Pakistan since 2014; indeed terrorist had started to take a downturn from 2009 onward with the only exception of 2013. (See Chart 3 and Table 4) The continuous operational and surveillance campaigns by security forces and police's counter terrorism departments (CTDs) – including military operations Zarb-e-Azb, Khyber I-IV, Karachi Operation as well as the operation Raddul Fasaad – and some counter-extremism actions taken under the National Action Plan (NAP) have apparently helped sustain that declining trend in the terrorist violence.

Chart 3: Comparison of Terrorist Attacks and Fatalities in Pakistan (2013-2020)**Table 4: Comparison of Terrorist Attacks and Fatalities in Pakistan (2009-20)³**

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%↓
2013	9%↑	19%↑
2014	30%↓	30%↓
2015	48%↓	38%↓
2016	28%↓	12%↓
2017	16%↓	10%↓
2018	29%↓	27%↓
2019	13%↓	40%↓
2020	36%↓	38%↓

For the past few years, much of the militant violence in Pakistan has visibly concentrated in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while other regions have been facing less frequent

attacks. While that trend sustained in the year 2020 (79 attacks took place in KP and 42 in Balochistan, which combined were about 83 percent of the total attacks reported from across Pakistan), the number of terrorist attacks in Karachi and Punjab posted a relative upsurge.

On the whole, compared to 2019, the number of terrorist attacks in the year 2020 declined in Balochistan by 50 percent and the number of people killed in these attacks in the province also fell by 44 percent. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the frequency of terrorist incidents plummeted by 37 percent and the number of those killed in these attacks fell by 31 percent.

As cited earlier, the number of terrorist attacks showed a relative upsurge from previous year in Punjab (by 40 percent) but the number of people killed in these attacks fell by 76 percent, which indicates that militants failed to perpetrate some major attacks in the province. While the interior Sindh posted a decrease of 25 percent in terrorist attacks, in Karachi such attacks rose by 50 percent, as compared to the previous year. The number of people killed in terrorist attacks in Karachi also increased by 21 percent. (*See Table 5*)

Table 5: Comparison of Terrorist Attacks & Casualties (2019 vs. 2020)⁴

Province / Region	Number of Attacks (%Change)	Killed (% Change)	Injured (% Change)
KP	37%↓	31%↓	17%↓
Balochistan	50%↓	44%↓	50%↓
Punjab	40%↑	76%↓	44%↑
Karachi	50%↑	21%↑	32 times↑
Sindh (excluding Karachi)	25%↓	25%↓	100%↑
Total	36%↓	38%↓	25%↓

Compared to four (4) suicide attacks in 2019, as many as three (3) such attacks happened in 2020 – two in Balochistan and one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These attacks claimed 26 lives – compared to 55 in 2019 – and injured 43 others. The TTP was involved in one of these attacks, which targeted security forces in South Waziristan (KP) inflicting injuries on four people including an army brigadier. The Islamic State (IS) terrorist group claimed one apparently sectarian-related suicide attack that targeted a masjid-madrassa complex in

Quetta killing 16 people, including the bomber, and wounding 19 others. Meanwhile no one had claimed the third reported suicide blast that apparently targeted a rally of a religious organization in Quetta killing nine people including the bomber and injured 20 others.

Posting a decrease of 50 percent from previous year, seven (7) sectarian-related terrorist attacks took place in 2020. These attacks killed nine people, compared to 38 in 2019, and injured another 14 people. Rival Sunni and Shia violent sectarian groups were involved in perpetrating these attacks. Out of total seven such attacks, as many as four targeted Shia religious community killing five and injuring 14 others. A policeman subscribing to Shia sect of Islam was also target killed reportedly on sectarian grounds in Karachi. Meanwhile, two attacks targeted Sunni scholars causing three deaths. While three sectarian-related terrorist attacks happened in Karachi, another two attacks took place in each of Kohat and Kurram districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Apart from these attacks, one violent sectarian clash also took place in Rahim Yar Khan (Punjab) that claimed two lives.

Two less from the year before, a total of 125 cross-border attacks took place in the year 2020 from across Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan (11 attacks) and India (114). As many as 62 people lost their lives in these attacks, a decrease of about 34 percent from the year before; another 222 were also injured. Those 62 Pakistani citizens killed in cross-border attacks included 42 civilians, 18 army officials, and two FC personnel. As in the year before, the situation at Pakistan's borders with India – mainly along the Line of Control (LoC) in Azad Kashmir – remained relatively more volatile, where though the number of cross-border attacks posted a slight decline from previous year yet a significant number of attacks, i.e. 114, took place. Out of these 114 cross-border attacks perpetrated by Indian BSF, 113 concentrated along the LoC in more than nine districts of AJK and one attack happened in Sialkot along the Working Boundary with India. Kotli (37 attacks), Bhimber (21), Poonch (17), Haveli (13), Hattian Bala (9) and Neelum (8) were the AJK districts most affected by Indian cross-border attacks. Meanwhile compared to four (4) cross-border attacks reported from Afghanistan in 2019, as many as 11 such attacks took place in 2020 in Bajaur, Khyber and Upper Dir districts of KP and Zhob district of Balochistan. Similarly compared to six (6) in the year before, cross-border attacks from Afghanistan claimed 17 lives in 2020 including of 12 civilians, two FC men and three army soldiers. With the exception of two attacks that were reportedly launched by Afghan security forces, all other cross-border attacks from Afghanistan were perpetrated by Pakistani Taliban militants sheltered there mainly the TTP.

Security forces apparently stepped up anti-militant operations in 2020. Compared to 28 in the year before, security forces and law enforcement agencies conducted 47 anti-militant operational strikes in 2020 in 22 districts and regions of Pakistan. These actions killed a total of 146 people, as compared to 81 in 2019 and injured 22 others. Those 146 killed

included 129 militants and 17 Pakistan Army soldiers. Out of the total 47 operational strikes reported in 2020, as many as 28 were conducted in KP, 15 in Balochistan, and two each in Punjab and Sindh. There were only seven (7) districts where more than one anti-militant operation happened in the year including North Waziristan (11 operational strikes), DI Khan (5), and Bajaur and Tank (3 strikes each) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, as well as Kech and Awaran (4 strikes each), and Harnai (2) in Balochistan. However, North Waziristan drew prime attention of security forces where they killed 49 militants (14 soldiers were also martyred) in 11 operations they conducted.

Security and law enforcement agencies also entered into in a total of 15 armed clashes and encounters with militants – a decrease of 40 percent from such incidents in previous year – across 11 districts of the country. These armed clashes and encounters claimed 38 lives (29 militants, 7 security personnel and 2 civilians). As many as nine of these clashes and encounters (or 60 percent) took place in various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (including 5 in twin Waziristan districts alone), another three (3) happened in Balochistan, while two (2) such incidents took place in Sindh and one in Punjab.

While no such incident had happened in 2019, as many as eight (8) incidents of communal or faith-based violence were recorded in Pakistan in 2020, which in all claimed six lives and injured three others. Six of these attacks took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including five in Peshawar and one in Karak, and one incident each happened in Nankana Sahib and Khushab districts of Punjab. In five incidents of faith-based violence members of Ahmadi community were targeted, and in another two incidents persons accused of blasphemy were shot dead. Meanwhile in one incident of faith-based mob violence shrine (Samadhi) of a Hindu saint was vandalized and torched in Karak.

The number of people killed in overall violent incidents in 2020 (503) represented a decrease of over 14 percent from those killed in such incidents in the year before (588); the number of those injured in such incidents all decreased by over 17 percent. The reported decrease in fatalities was marked by the death of 171 civilians, compared to 235 in 2019, thus representing a decrease of about 27 percent. Fatalities among security forces personnel in 2020 (151) were about 28 percent less from the previous year's fatalities among them (209). The number of militants killed (181), in these violent incidents, however posted an increase of about 26 percent as compared to 2019. (*See Table 6*)

Table 6: Casualties in Overall Violent Incidents in 2020

Category	Killed	Injured
FC	34	33
Militants	181	30

Category	Killed	Injured
Civilian	171	647
Police	28	26
Army	84	104
Levies	3	6
Rangers	2	5
Total	503	851

1.2 Critical Challenges and Recommendations

1.2.1 The FATF Challenge

Pakistan remains on the Financial Action Task Force' (FATF) grey list as it fell short of implementing the 27-point action plan fully by October 2020 despite extension periods. In its three-day virtual plenary in October 2020, the FATF announced Pakistan had largely complied with 21 points, and needed to address the six outstanding items by February 2021 in order to get off the grey list. Earlier in February 2020, the watchdog had warned that Pakistan's failure to meet the body's requirements could lead to the FATF member states tightening their business relations and transactions with Pakistani clients. Due to Pakistan's gradual progress as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been given extensions to implement the action plan fully. Avoiding the blacklist is easier than exiting the grey list because the former needs only three votes at the FATF, while the later would need at least 12 votes. Following the October plenary of the FATF, the industries minister claimed that blacklisting Pakistan was off the table.

Pakistan took a practical course in efforts to unhook itself from the FATF grey list this year (2020). The government carried out financial crackdowns on UNSC-designated terrorist entities, prosecuted persons for terror financing, and went on an eleventh-hour legislation spree to meet the FATF standards. Discussions and debates on these legislations were mostly blocked on the ground of 'urgency'. In June 2020, the interior minister, Ejaz Shah, submitted a report on FATF compliance to the prime minister, detailing that the government had proscribed two main and eleven affiliated groups, and frozen 976 movable and immovable properties linked to proscribed entities. Without giving exact figures, the report also claimed that the government had seized control of schools, colleges, hospitals, dispensaries, and ambulances belonging to banned groups.

Similarly, another significant development has been the prosecution of Jamaatud Dawa (JuD) leaders for money laundering and terror financing. On 3 July 2019, the CTD Punjab had booked thirteen JuD leaders including Hafiz Saeed in multiple cases of money laundering and terror financing.⁵ Hafiz Saeed and his associate Malik Zafar Iqbal were convicted in two cases of terror financing and handed down five-and-a-half years in prison by a Lahore anti-terrorism court in February 2020.⁶ On 24 December 2020, Hafiz Saeed and five others were again convicted in separate cases of terror financing and terrorism and awarded jail terms of 15 years each.⁷ On the other hand, the government also pushed through over a dozen legislations to improve the legal regime on money laundering and terror financing as per the FATF standards. The plan for these legislations was chalked out by the National Executive Committee headed by PM's finance advisor, Abdul Hafeez Shaikh in February 2020.⁸ The haphazard manner in which the legislations were pushed through the Parliament without adequate debate was criticized by the opposition and independent analysts.

However, despite these efforts, there are still six outstanding items on the FATF action plan which Pakistan needs to implement by February 2021. Once the action plan is fully implemented, the FATF would send a technical team on the ground for verification before the country can be taken off the grey list. Following the October plenary, the FATF president said Pakistan was given extension till February 2021 because it had showed progress and made commitments to do better, but he also warned that the extension of deadlines cannot go on forever.⁹ In Pakistan, political leaders have expressed worry about the alleged politicization of the FATF. In August 2020, Prime Minister Imran Khan warned that blacklisting would ruin Pakistan's economy and make it an international pariah like Iran. He accused India of mounting pressures on Pakistan through the FATF.¹⁰ In Oct 2019, the Indian Defense Minister, Rajnath Singh, had announced that Pakistan would soon be blacklisted by the FATF, raising concerns in Pakistan that the FATF was being politicized.¹¹

However, on the other hand, Pakistan has also been provided with some cushion at the FATF forum because of strong support from China, Turkey, and Malaysia. China currently heads the Asia-Pacific Group of FATF which allows some breathing space to Pakistan. In January 2020, China praised Pakistan's progress in improving its anti-terror financing regime, and encouraged the world to acknowledge Pakistan's progress. Following the FATF plenary in February 2020, PM's finance advisor, Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, met Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, Yao Jing, and thanked the Chinese government for the 'massive support' in the FATF meetings.¹² Likewise, Turkey and Malaysia have also been supportive of Pakistan at the forum.¹³

In addition, Pakistan has also been hinging its hope to the US for support at the FATF. In February 2020, while addressing a news briefing, Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that Pakistan hoped that the US would help Pakistan get off the grey list.¹⁴ Some analysts believe with Pakistan's role in facilitating the US-Taliban deal, the US might not be eager to push Pakistan hard, especially in view of Pakistan's weakening economy. Following the conviction of Hafiz Saeed in February 2020, the US chief diplomat for South Asia, Alice G. Wells, called the sentence an important step forward towards Pakistan's commitment to fighting terror financing.¹⁵ Some experts are of the opinion that the US is unlikely to help Pakistan get off the grey list. The most the US would probably do is to ensure that Pakistan remains on the grey list and does not fall into the black list.

1.2.2 The Need for De-Radicalization Programs

Pakistan realized the limitations of hard approach to countering terrorism in the wake of the liberation of the Swat valley from the Taliban which brought to light a worrying fact that a large number of would-be suicide bombers captured during the operation were teenagers who had been mentally programmed to kill and die. This led to the initiation of the de-radicalization projects in the valley. By October 2015, there were about ten militant rehabilitation centers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former FATA, reportedly run under a public-private partnership framework and supervised by the military.¹⁶ The Institute for Strategic Dialogue defines de-radicalization as programs "directed against individuals who have become radical with the aim of reintegrating them into society or dissuading them from violence." The process seeks complete shift in the prisoner's mindset, sympathies, and attitudes.¹⁷

The first project called the *Mishal* De-radicalization and Emancipation Program (DREP) pursued 'no blood on hand' policy, meaning that only those militants were enlisted who had not done any bodily harm to others. Most de-radicalization programs have been led by the military with little participation from other stakeholders like civil society organizations. Information on these programs is scant, but reports claim Pakistan has borrowed heavily from the Saudi Arabia de-radicalization model.¹⁸ Besides, the initiative has been very limited in scope and reach. And given the increasing manifestations of radicalization in the country (e.g. the enormous gathering at Khadim Rizvi's funeral in Lahore, the anti-Shia demonstrations, the fresh wave of attacks on the Ahmadis, and the alleged re-grouping of militants in some tribal agencies, etc.), it may be assumed that the de-radicalization part of the CE strategy is lacking in meaningful impact on the overall CE efforts.

Radicalization is an enormous challenge in Pakistan, yet there is no formal de-radicalization policy or framework in the country. De-radicalization is inherently a long-term process

which cannot be achieved in a few months or even years. The de-radicalization programs initiated following the Swat operation in 2009 are extremely limited, often confined to individuals in post-conflict scenarios. These undertakings are very costly, and the government may be lacking in financial capacity to expand the scope and reach of the initiative. Experts believe this capacity gap can be bridged through increased partnership between the public and non-government sector. Besides, the de-radicalization programs mostly employ moderate clerics to re-educate detainees in prisons in classroom setups. The effectiveness of this method is difficult to gauge without individualized assessments.¹⁹ Overall, the de-radicalization initiative is headed by the military with only sporadic and limited involvement of civil society organizations despite the latter's potential for addressing the conflict's political, economic, and social drivers by facilitating employments for former militants and providing social services to those interested in disengaging from terrorism.²⁰ Overall, Pakistan's de-radicalization efforts lack the 'whole of society' approach, and no policy framework has been devised in this regard despite the promises made in the five-year National Internal Security Policy (2018-23).

Therefore, the PIPS recommends the following points for improving the de-radicalization programs in Pakistan:

- The efficacy of de-radicalization programs have been proven both locally and in other countries. Therefore, there should be briefings by experts to the Parliament on this subject.
- The political leaders and policymakers should actively own de-radicalization programs because no de-radicalization initiative would achieve its maximum potential in the absence of political will.
- The state should approach de-radicalization in a holistic manner with involvement of multiple stakeholders. The subject must not be an exclusive domain of the security agencies.
- The education system in general and de-radicalization programs in particular should inculcate critical thinking, empathy, and compassion in children so that they learn to see the consequences of their actions.
- The government should actively engage civilian experts including psychologists, clerics, and others in the de-radicalization process because the security agencies alone are not capable of carrying out the de-radicalization effectively. Engaging diverse stakeholders would help them learn from each other and share knowledge and experience.
- Evidence shows monetary benefit has been a significant factor in attracting young people to terrorism. Thus, any de-radicalization program must offer alternatives to the individuals in terms of career or occupation so as to prevent them from falling back into terrorism or extremism.

1.2.3 Countering Violent Extremism

Pakistan has a high concentration of violent extremist groups. As many as 78 entities²¹ have been proscribed by the government, majority of which are linked with terrorism and violent extremism. Terrorism is no longer an epidemic in Pakistan, yet the more severe challenge of religious extremism continues to manifest in the larger society. This is partly because countering violent and non-violent forms of extremism has barely been a priority for a state that has traditionally focused more on the acts of terrorism and less on the drivers of it. Surely, other factors such as lack political will and definitional clarity about extremism and resource constraints etc. also explain why extremism is going largely unchecked.

Quite often, in cases of extremism, the state either adopts an ambiguous stance or resorts to the tried-and-failed strategy of appeasing the radicals in order to de-escalate a standoff or situation. Such an approach, often contradicting the existing laws and policies, only emboldens the extremist lots and incentivize hostile behavior on their part. This year 2020 witnessed one of the most worrying manifestations of religious extremism in Pakistan in years as an alliance of various Sunni extremist groups rallied against the Shias in several cities including Karachi and Islamabad, calling the Shia sect 'heretical' and demanding violent action against its followers. Spearheaded by the proscribed outfit Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), four major anti-Shia rallies were taken out in mid-Sep 2020 after a Shia cleric had made some controversial remarks during a *Moharram* sermon in late August.

Observers termed the phenomenon as 'unprecedented and alarming'. Since 30 August, at least five Shias had been killed in different parts of the country and more than 30 cases of blasphemy had been registered against the Shias including a three-year old child.^{22 23} The sectarian tensions resurged weeks after the Punjab Assembly passed the controversial *Tahafuz-e-Bunyad Islam* (protection of the foundations of Islam) bill in July. The bill's provision for upholding Sunni interpretation as the only acceptable version of Islam sparked uproar among Shia clerics who complained that the bill's clause requiring mandatory reverence for esteemed Sunni figures was contrary to Shia beliefs.²⁴

Similarly, the Ahmadi community came under increased attack this year particularly in Peshawar where five Ahmadis were killed in separate attacks. In one of incidents, an under-trial prisoner, Tahir Ahmed Naseem, 57, was shot dead inside a courtroom in Peshawar. The victim, an American national of Pakistani origin, was undergoing a trial for blasphemy. The teenage murderer told the police that he killed the victim because he was an Ahmadi. Likewise, another elderly Ahmadi businessman, Miraj Ahmad, was murdered at his shop by unknown gunmen in Peshawar. According to the Ahmadi community, the murder was preceded by a social media hate campaign against the victim's family. And yet in another

incident, an Ahmadi professor, Naeemuddin Khattak, was killed allegedly by his colleague following a heated debate in Peshawar. The Peshawar police also rescued an Ahmadi family from a Muslim mob that surrounded the family's house following some debate about a public event. Apart from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, two Ahmadi men were also killed in Khushab and Nankana Sahib districts of Punjab. In December, a religiously inspired mob vandalized and torched a shrine (Samadhi) of a Hindu saint in Karak district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Extremism and intolerance were also in full display over the matter of construction of a Hindu temple in Islamabad. In June, the prime minister approved funds for the construction of Krishna Mandir, a long-standing demand of the capital's estimated 3000-strong Hindu community. The temple complex was to include a crematorium, accommodation for visitors, a community hall, and a parking area. The temple's foundation stones were laid during a ceremony on 23 June which triggered a severe backlash from radical clerics, politicians, as well as some media houses. The government's coalition partner, PMLQ, called for the cancellation of the project, claiming that it was "against the spirit of Islam". The Lahore-based *Jamia Ashrafia* issued a fatwa, declaring that the temple's construction was "not permissible" in Islam. Similarly, JUI-F leader and former minister, Maulana Amir Zaman, said Islam did not allow the construction of new places of worship by minorities in an Islamic state.

Under pressure from the radical quarters, the government reversed its decision to fund the temple on 3 July, and two days later, a mob vandalized the temple's boundary walls.²⁵ The government then referred the matter to the Council of Islamic Ideology for advice which ruled in October that there were no constitutional or religious barriers to the construction of the temple. The Council's decision said the Hindus like all other religious groups in Pakistan had the constitutional right to a place for last rites as per their faith. However, it ruled against providing public funds for the construction work. Following the decision, the Capital Development Authority issued a 'no objection certificate' for the construction of the temple on 23 December.²⁶ But, just a week after this positive development, as cited earlier, another Hindu temple was destroyed and burned by a Muslim mob in Karak, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The same temple had been vandalized back in 1997, but was rebuilt on the order of the Supreme Court. According to reports, a local cleric had incited people against the Hindu temple which led to the mob attack.

The resurrection of extremist lots after years of hibernation does not augur well for Pakistan particularly at a time when the country is already under increased monitoring by the FATF, and lingering on the threshold of sanctions. The government is apparently cognizant of this fact which is probably the reason it took some initiatives to promote interfaith and intersect harmony following the sectarian tensions earlier this year. In

October, the government and the clergy signed a 'Code of Conduct' (CoC) for sectarian harmony in the country. Endorsed by religious scholars of mainstream schools of thought, the CoC prohibits issuing decrees of infidelity against any group or individual, and declares taking up arms against the state in the name of Islam as rebellion. It also acknowledges the rights of non-Muslim citizens to practice their religion and rites as per their belief systems. Likewise, it prohibits the use of religious institutions or platforms like mosques and imambargahs for hate speech.

A month after the pronouncement of the CoC, the cabinet also approved an interior ministry proposal for the establishment of a commission for the implementation of national narrative and development of structures against violent extremism and radicalization. The proposed commission's main objectives include, among other things, providing a legal mechanism to curb violent extremism and enforcing national narratives and policies in line with the National Action Plan.²⁷ It is unclear how this proposed commission would be any different from existing institutions with similar mandates such as NACTA. Besides, the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) has more or less identical objectives.

Pak Institute for Peace Studies has advocated diverse recommendations for Pakistan's Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) framework and reconstruction of national narratives through various publications. The Institute believes these documents would be a useful source a policy initiative on CVE. Few highlights of those recommendations are listed below:

- There is a need for establishing a national dialogue forum (NDF). It can serve as a platform for the scholars, academicians, political and religious leaders and policymakers to bring all the key challenges on the discussion table and to understand each other's viewpoints. The NDF cannot only help to connect diverse ideological, social and political segments of the society, but it can also create an environment to discuss critical issues. Such an important initiative must come from the chief executive of the country, with the support of the parliament.
- The NDF secretariat can have support from a counter-extremism research centre comprising experts from the relevant fields of social sciences and religious studies. This centre can also establish a desk to monitor the extremist narratives and hate speech.
- The provinces will need to establish curriculum review committees comprising educationists, and experts from diverse religious, academic and political backgrounds. Such committees can be established separately within existing mechanisms, with specific tasks to regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of the textbooks.

- The provinces need to prioritize the registration of madrassas and to set up a mechanism to bring them under their administrative control. Interestingly, while provinces consider madrassas a federal issue, federal ministries of religious affairs and interior are confused about who is actually responsible for administering madrassa sector.
- To neutralize violent extremist tendencies, detaching the conventional militant groups from terrorism landscape and curbing hate speech, the government has to initiate a reintegration scheme.

1.2.4 Sub-nationalist Insurgency

In 2020, while Sindhi insurgents stepped up terrorist attacks, Baloch insurgent groups also made some major attacks in Balochistan against security forces and also launched a coordinated *fidayee* attacks against Pakistan Stock Exchange, Karachi. Various Sindhi separatist outfits such as the Sindhudesh Revolutionary Army (SDRA) and the Sindhudesh Liberation Army (SDLA) perpetrated ten terrorist attacks in Sindh during the year. Seven of these attacks were carried out in Karachi, two in Larkana, and one in Ghotki. The main targets were the Rangers and an office of Ehsaas Program. The attacks came a month after the interior ministry proscribed (in May) the JSQM-A, SDRA, and SDLA under the anti-terrorism act of 1997. According to the interior ministry, there were “reasonable grounds” to believe that these outfits were involved in terrorism in Sindh.²⁸ Historically, the Sindhi insurgents have perpetrated sporadic low-intensity and low-impact attacks, but in 2020 they managed to create some impact both in terms of the number of attacks and intensity of the attacks they launched.

The SDLA is an underground militant outfit linked with Shafi Burfat-led Jeay Sindh Muttahida Mahaz (JSMM), the only nationalist group to have announced its planned armed struggle. In 2013, the Interior Ministry banned the JSMM for its involvement in province-wide violence and placed Burfat, who lives in Europe in self-exile, on its list of wanted people. A few years back, Syed Asghar Shah, an SDLA leader hailing from Jamshoro district, abandoned the SDLA after developing differences with Burfat over funds and leadership, and formed his own outfit, the SDRA. In the beginning, both militant outfits were carrying out attacks on law enforcement personnel, railway tracks, gas pipelines, and electricity pylons as well as undertaking targeted killing on the basis of ethnicity. “But since the start of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)-linked development projects, the group has started attacking the Chinese nationals using roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in the province.” Luckily, no Chinese national has died in the attacks in the province so far.²⁹

Another important development in 2020 was the reported alliance between Baloch and Sindhi separatist militant groups. On 25 July 2020, the Baloch Raji Ajohi Sangar (BRAS) announced operational alliance with SDRA.³⁰ The BRAS, a conglomerate of Baloch separatist groups, is reportedly the brainchild of Dr. Allah Nazar – the kingpin of BLF.³¹ Between 2015 and 2019, the Baloch insurgency suffered setbacks mainly due to infighting among separatist groups themselves particularly the BLA and BLF, military operations, and surrender of several militants. During this period, the militants executed only 37 attacks, while in 2020 alone they carried out 38 attacks.

This worrying trend indicates there may have been a possible rapprochement between BLA and BLF, and these groups' alliance with SDRA has complicated the security challenges. Pakistan believes the Baloch militants have sanctuaries on the Iranian side of the Pak-Iran border. Currently, the government is fencing its borders both with Afghanistan and Iran. The fencing works continued throughout the 2020 despite the Covid-19 pandemic. Around 100km of the border with Iran has already been fenced, and the rest would be completed by the end of 2021.³² The insurgency in Balochistan is a political issue, and this fact was acknowledged in the National Action Plan which provides for reconciliation with the indignant Baloch leaders. However, no reconciliation effort has ever taken off due to several reasons. Nevertheless, the state must work out a plan for peaceful resolution of the issue.

1.2.5 Regularizing Madrassas

Madrassa has figured prominently in the discussions of religious extremism, yet there is a continuing lack of credible and comprehensive data on the widespread madrassa system in Pakistan. Figures about the actual number of madrassas are mostly raw estimates and official figures often contradict independent research, making it difficult to analyze the system in the light of hard facts. As a result, concerns about the madrassas often tend to border on generalizations. Lack of authentic data may also be a factor impeding meaningful reforms. The number of madrassas has grown exponentially during the last two decades, but the basic task of their registration continues to remain an elusive goal for the authorities. According to government estimates, about 1.8 million students were enrolled in registered madrassahs alone in 2015.³³ Repeated attempts at reforming the madrassa system have met frustrations due to various reasons including opposition from madrassahs.

This year the FATF also reverberated in the talks of madrassa reforms. Reforming the madrassa sector has probably been a point of discussion in the FATF meetings because in Jan 2020 Pakistan informed the FATF's joint group in Beijing that under new reforms the madrassas were given the status of schools where students would be awarded

matriculation and intermediate education certificates.³⁴ Unfortunately, many madrassahs have had ties with extremist groups, and they helped maintain the militant network in Pakistan in the past.³⁵ On 29 August 2019, the government signed an agreement with the Ittehad-e-Tanzeem-ul-Madaris for the registration of madrassas with the education ministry. The agreement envisaged allowing madrassas to open bank accounts, accept foreign donations, and manage their administrative affairs independently in return of registration. It also promised to allow madrasa students to take their secondary and higher secondary exams through their designated education boards and apply for higher studies through mainstream education institutions or for jobs.³⁶ However, in February 2020, the madrasa leaders complained that the government was not implementing the agreement it had inked with the madrassas. Maulana Hanif Jalandhari, the secretary general of Wifaq-ul-Madaris al-Arabia, accused the government of not being serious in negotiating with the madrassas.³⁷

Madrassas also remained a topic of debate this year due to the government's Single National Curriculum (SNC) which claims to end "educational apartheid" and introduce uniform curriculum across all strata of education system in the country. Critics warn that instead of introducing contemporary subjects in madrasa education, the SNC would bring madrassas to regular education system. The SNC also provides for employing madrasa graduates as teachers at regular public schools. Proponents, however, claim that the SNC would turn madrassas into schools.^{38 39} The SNC is scheduled to be implemented fully by 2023, and it remains to be seen whether it will help improve madrasa education.

Successive governments have toyed with the idea of madrasa reforms, yet no significant progress has been made so far. The great majority of madrassahs operate beyond the radar of the state. The government cannot indefinitely evade the much-needed reforms, and has to eventually come up with some workable plan to address this challenge. The number of madrassahs has constantly been growing, yet there is a continuing lack of comprehensive data on the system. Therefore, the stakeholders particularly the government should conduct independent studies to determine the factors behind the rapid growth of the religious schools, and assess the impact of that growth on the society. As one of first steps, the *Paigham-e-Pakistan* can be incorporated into the syllabus of both madrassahs and schools. Currently, public knowledge about the *Paigham-e-Pakistan* is extremely limited. Besides, madrassas should be encouraged to teach basic critical thinking skills to students because evidence from Pakistan's de-radicalization programs shows that youth lacking critical thinking are extremely vulnerable to radicalization.

1.2.6 Implementation of National Action Plan

The National Action Plan (NAP) was initially viewed by many as a paradigm shift in the state's policy towards terrorism and extremism. Others believed the plan was an attempt by the government to pacify the public sentiment that had reached a boiling point following the APS incident. Even though certain NAP clauses propose non-military solutions to the issues like the Baloch insurgency and hate speech etc., still the broader NAP framework lacks a robust response to the problem of extremism which analysts term as a threat to stability in the country. Actions under NAP put significant pressure on militant and extremist groups, forcing them into hibernation modes, but reports suggest some of these groups made a comeback in 2020. Reports emerged of extremist elements patrolling public places in areas of ex-FATA, and sectarian outfits returning to the streets. The situation brought into focus the NAP's role as the lynchpin of the state's CT and CE policy, and the resurgence of militants in tribal areas and of sectarian extremists in urban centers indicate the NAP has faltered on its promises. Similarly, it has failed to bring about the promised reconciliation in Balochistan because throughout the 2020 separatist insurgency remained a significant security issue for the government.

Some observers believe implementing the NAP is not a priority for the government. At the start of 2020, the NAP came under severe criticism from analysts and public alike in the wake of Ehsanullah Ehsan's escape from state custody in Peshawar. A former spokesman of the TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, Ehsan had reportedly surrendered to the security agencies back in 2017. In Feb 2020, he released an audio message, claiming that he had escaped from detention at a safe house in Peshawar. Initially, the government remained silent on the development but weeks later the Interior Minister, Ejaz Shah, confirmed that the ex-TTP leader had, indeed, escaped from the custody of security agencies.⁴⁰ Likewise, the reported regrouping of the TTP and its factions in the erstwhile FATA is also being attributed to government's failure to implement the NAP. Local accounts suggest the TTP has managed to bring its breakaway factions back into its fold, and that more militants are joining the outfit. As a result, the North Waziristan and Bajaur have emerged as the flashpoints of insecurity in recent months where TTP perpetrated two major attacks against the FWO and tribal elders in 2020, though a number of militants were also killed in retaliation by security forces.

These developments are duly seen as a failure of the NAP to check a return of the militants and extremists. It is extremely heavy on agenda with short-term and long-term goals haphazardly placed with one another. Some goals are very broad and vague with no strategy as to how they would be achieved. Very limited attention has been given to the non-kinetic side of the NAP. The *Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan* (TLP) – an extremist outfit – was born in the post-NAP period which is extremely worrying as it raises question over the

effectiveness of NAP as CE tool. To make matters worse, the government sought to appease the TLP in 2017 which emboldened the latter to assert itself with greater confidence. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, the NAP has failed to initiate reconciliation in Balochistan to end the deadly insurgency. The *Pur Aman Balochistan* (Peaceful Balochistan) project failed to open up the dialogue process with the indignant tribal leaders. The government claims thousands of insurgents have surrendered under the *Peaceful Balochistan* project, but observers doubt if they were genuine militants. Overall, the state has lacked the capacity or will to implement the NAP in letter and spirit.

Therefore, in view of the emerging security challenges, the PIPS recommends the following:

- The NACTA conducted a thorough review of the NAP in 2019, and offered recommendations for updating the goals and objectives and addressing loopholes. These recommendations should be implemented in order to improve NAP framework.
- The law enforcement agencies (LEAs), primarily the police, should be empowered through better training, increased resources, and greater operational autonomy so as to enable them to tackle the challenge of terrorism as well as extremism effectively.
- The NAP mandate is too broad for any single ministry to manage effectively. Therefore, the implementation should be supervised directly by the Prime Minister's Office, and spearheaded by civilian authorities.
- The government should encourage and facilitate open debates on policies relating to national security, terrorism, and extremism in order to democratize the policymaking process and improve the quality of policies. Transparency and openness would help build trust between the public and the state, and lead to greater ownership by the people.
- The government should develop a computerized national database on terrorism and extremism, allowing provincial police and CTDs to access and share information swiftly.
- Counter-extremism units should be formed within the federal and provincial LEAs with the mandate to keep watch on actors advocating extremism.
- The Baloch insurgency is basically a political problem, and military actions over the last one and a half decade have failed to put an end to the insurgency. Therefore, a genuine reconciliation process must be initiated in the province instead of investing more resources in military efforts.
- Despite cybercrime laws, many extremist groups and leaders continue to have online presence. The government needs to strengthen efforts to prevent such entities from using the cyberspace for propaganda and recruitment.

- The government should take lessons from the past, and stop treading the path of appeasement with regard to extremist groups like the TLP, and start enforcing its writ.

1.2.7 Ex-FATA's Merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The reforms process in the merged districts of ex-FATA has been disappointingly slow with no major progress seen in 2020. The slow process has resulted in lackluster administrative, judicial, security, and economic reforms. According to former Senator, Afrasiab Khattak, there has been a lack of ownership and clear roadmap for implementing the reforms. The pace for establishing courts and incorporating the local levies into the police is also sluggish. At present, most criminal and civil courts for the seven new districts are established in their respective bordering districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. And the challenge of merging the 30,000-strong levies with the police also remains unaddressed. The levies personnel lack training and infrastructure to undertake policing, which is still performed by the army and paramilitary troops in most parts of the merged districts. The situation has created confusion among residents as many people want to know whether they are still governed by the old system.⁴¹

There has been a gap between the government's expressed promises with the people of the ex-FATA and the government's actual budgeting priorities towards the region. Back in 2018, Islamabad promised to spend nearly \$10 billion on the region's uplift over a ten-year period. But, reports suggest that less than 10% of the \$540 million of the allocated budget for the merged districts was spent during the fiscal year of 2019-20.⁴² In Apr 2020, the press reported that the government had diverted substantial amounts from funds allocated for the displaced people of the former FATA to security enhancement. Originally, the Parliament had approved Rs.32.5bn for special development programs for the displaced persons in the 2019-20 budget, but later 48% of this budget was diverted to security, bringing the budget to Rs17bn. And in ten months till Apr 2020, only Rs5bn had been disbursed for the original purpose.⁴³

The residents continue to lack access to safe drinking water, basic health and education, electricity, etc. The region is also suffering from a prolonged suspension of mobile phone services. Throughout the 2020, the people of former FATA held intermittent protest rallies and sit-ins to draw the government's attention to their plight. The repeated protests show people's resentment about how things are going at present. In early Dec 2020, the JUIF threatened to launch a movement for the legal and constitutional rights of the tribal districts along with expediting the process of merger.⁴⁴ The military operations had displaced an estimated one million people. Those people still await compensation to rebuild their houses which were destroyed during the operations.

On the other hand, the Supreme Court admitted a petition challenging the 25th Constitutional Amendment and the merger of ex-FATA with KP. The petitioners, tribal elders, have pleaded that the merger has destroyed the distinct character of FATA as a unit of the federation. The counsel for the petitioners argued that FATA has lost its identity as well as 12 seats in the NA and 8 seats in the Senate.⁴⁵ Earlier in Jan 2020, the mainstream political parties in the KP assembly had passed a unanimous resolution, urging the government to expedite reforms process. They also demanded of the government to withdraw the amendments in the mines and minerals laws, claiming that the purpose of the amendments was to occupy mineral reserves in the erstwhile FATA. It is true that successful implementation of the reforms would be a long-term process which cannot be achieved in a hasty manner, but observers like Threlkeld, deputy director at a Washington think-tank, have warned that any governance failures in the former FATA or a new war in Afghanistan in the wake of US withdrawal will likely open up new avenues for hardcore militants.⁴⁶ The federal government, therefore, must prioritize the implementation of reforms programs in the merged districts because the residents have already been in a limbo for a few years now.