Report

Exported Instability: How Afghan Sanctuary Put Pakistan at the Top of the Global Terrorism Index

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Key Findings:

- The Global Terrorism Index assesses the effects of terrorism within a nation, rather than attributing blame for it. Achieving the top rank signifies that Pakistan was the nation most impacted by terrorism in 2025.
- Terrorism in Pakistan diminished between 2014 and 2019. The turnaround occurred after the Taliban's resurgence in Kabul in August 2021, rather than due to any alteration in Pakistani policy.
- The TTP is pledged to the Afghan Taliban through an oath of loyalty, and UN Security Council observers verify that it functions from Afghan safe havens with logistical, operational, and financial backing.
- Hostility is focused on Pakistan's western border and Chinese investments, reflecting a trend of external backing and strategic denial.

1. A Ranking of Impact, Not Culpability

In March 2026, the Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) ranked Pakistan as the top country on the Global Terrorism Index (GTI).[1] Pakistan recorded 1,045 incidents and 1,139 terrorism-related fatalities in 2025, the most since 2013 and the nation's sixth consecutive yearly increase.[2] The GTI ranks nations based on the number of terrorist incidents, deaths, injuries, and hostages. It rates victims rather than criminals. No country has experienced more attacks, deaths, injuries, and hostage-taking than Pakistan, which is why it ranks at the top of the list.

The IEP's own explanation spans the border. It connects Pakistan's decline to militant activity along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, where organisations have exploited instability since the Taliban's return to power, and it identifies cross-border militancy as the primary driver of the two countries' open battle in February 2026.[3] The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) alone was responsible for 637 killings, or 56% of the national total, and all of its attacks occurred inside Pakistan, mostly close to the Afghan border.[4] The most obvious example of terrorism aimed at a state rather than originating from it is when a group attacks solely Pakistan from bases outside of it. The roots of that threat do not lie in Islamabad’s choices but in four decades of the war next door.

2. The Afghan Jihad: A Shared Project, an Unshared Burden

The assertion that Pakistan's security dilemma is self-inflicted is based on a narrow interpretation of the 1980s. During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia matched US funding for

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[1] Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026* (Sydney: IEP, March 2026), via ReliefWeb, https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2026.

[2] "Pakistan now worst victim of terrorism," *Dawn*, March 23, 2026, https://www.dawn.com/news/1984501.

[3] Institute for Economics and Peace, "Pakistan: Country Most Impacted by Terrorism in 2026," *Vision of Humanity*, March 18, 2026, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/countries-most-impacted-by-terrorism-in-2026/; IEP, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*, n. 1.

[4] "Pakistan Ranks 1st in Global Terrorism Index for the First Time," *ProPakistani*, March 22, 2026, https://propakistani.pk/2026/03/22/pakistan-ranks-1st-in-global-terrorism-index-for-the-first-time-in-2026/; *Dawn*, n. 2.

resistance to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.[5] Since there was no other option due to geography, Pakistan acted as the conduit.[6] The sponsors of the jihad withdrew in 1989 along with the Soviet Union. Millions of refugees, a drug economy, weaponry, and militant networks were left for Pakistan to deal with. UNHCR has referred to the Afghan caseload in Pakistan as the world's largest prolonged refugee population.[7]

After Pakistan became a frontline state in the US-led campaign in 2001, the trend was repeated. According to the Foreign Office, the battle against terrorism has claimed more than 90,000 lives and more than $150 billion in economic damages. According to official Pakistani estimates US aid totalled USD 20 billion throughout that time.[8] The outcome of every major power intervention in Afghanistan has been the same: Pakistan bears the consequences while the intervening force departs. It would be an inversion of history to characterise Pakistan as the origin of regional militancy.

3. Geography and the Spillover Problem

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a 2,640-kilometer border, most of which is mountainous making it difficult to monitor.[9] Militants exploit the kinship, trade, and customs that bind Pashtun communities on both sides to recruit, relocate, and find sanctuary. To break this trend, Pakistan started fencing the border in 2017, a move Kabul has continuously opposed.[10] Spillover from four decades of war next door is not a choice made by Pakistan; rather, it is a structural requirement. Geographic proximity is a constant factor however, the occurrence of violence has varied significantly over the last ten years. The variable that most accurately reflects these variations is the nature of the regime in Kabul.

4. The TTP Before and After August 2021

Accountability is demonstrated by the TTP's own course. Operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched in 2014, decimated the group's infrastructure in the tribal districts, and its last members were only able to escape into Afghanistan. When the Taliban seized power of Kabul in August 2021, these gains were reversed. Despite a decline in terrorism between 2014 and 2019, the GTI reports that there were six times as many terrorist incidents in Pakistan in 2025 as there were

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[5] Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

[6] UNHCR Pakistan, "Guterres lauds Pakistan's generosity for hosting the world's largest protracted refugee population," press release, June 23, 2015, https://www.unhcr.org/pk/node/30.

[7] "Pakistan reaffirms unwavering resolve to combat terrorism," *Radio Pakistan*, August 21, 2026, https://radio.gov.pk/21-08-2026/pakistan-reaffirms-unwavering-resolve-to-combat-terrorism.

[8] "Officials say 'war on terror' caused over $150 billion in losses for Pakistan since 9/11," *Arab News Pakistan*, September 11, 2021, https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1926731, citing Prime Minister Imran Khan, op-ed, *Washington Post*, June 2021.

[9] Tahir Ali Khan, "Fencing the Pak-Afghan border," *The News on Sunday*, February 7, 2021, https://www.thenews.pk/tns/detail/785974-fencing-the-pak-afghan-border.

[10] "Pak-Afghan border fencing contributes significantly to counterterrorism efforts," *Business Recorder*, October 16, 2019, https://www.brecorder.com/news/531290; Khan, n. 10.

in 2020.[11] TTP attacks increased more than seven times from 118 in 2022 to 838 in 2025, according to ACLED data.[12]

The UN Security Council's sanctions monitoring team has verified this. It reported that Afghanistan's de facto authorities continued to give the group financial support as well as logistical and operational space. This space allowed the TTP to launch over 600 attacks in a single six-month period, including from Afghan territory with new training facilities also set up in Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, and Paktika.[13] A separate Monitoring Team study dismissed the Taliban's assertion that terrorist organisations are not utilising Afghan land for cross-border aggression, estimating the TTP's presence in Afghanistan at approximately 6,000 combatants.[14] The monitors have also recorded safe houses, mobility passes, and weapons permits granted to the group in addition to shared training sites used by the TTP, ISIL-K, and the Balochistan Liberation Army.[15]

The Taliban-TTP Bond

The TTP's protection by the Taliban is not due to a lack of capability. It is based on a shared ideology and loyalty. Days after Kabul fell, on August 19, 2021, TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud reaffirmed his allegiance to Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada.[16] By December, he was referring to the TTP as "a branch of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."[17] Hundreds of TTP fighters, including former deputy head Maulvi Mohammad, were released from prisons as a result of the coup.[18] In 2020, eight militant factions were absorbed into a reunified TTP, and between 2021 and April 2023, twenty-one more were added.[19] According to the most recent assessment from UN monitors, Al-Qaeda's media wing has publicly supported the TTP for the

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[11] "Terror index," editorial, *The News*, March 25, 2026, https://www.thenews.pk/print/1406038-terror-index.

[12] "48 terrorists killed in IBOs across Balochistan over 72 hours: ISPR," *Express Tribune*, September 4, 2026, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2627418, citing ACLED data.

[13] "UN monitoring report," editorial, *Dawn*, February 17, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1892481; "Afghan Taliban continue providing funds, logistical support to TTP: UN," *ARY News*, February 15, 2025, https://arynews.tv/afghan-taliban-continue-providing-funds-logistical-support-to-ttp-un.

[14] Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Kabul's claim of denying militants safe haven called into question," *Dawn*, December 18, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1961729, reporting the sixteenth report of the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (1988 Sanctions Committee).

[15] "UN warns of TTP growing presence in Afghanistan," *Daily Times*, February 11, 2026, https://dailytimes.com.pk/1449506/un-warns-of-ttp-growing-presence-in-afghanistan/, reporting the 37th report of the Monitoring Team (July to December 2025).

[16] Thomas Joscelyn, "Pakistani Taliban's emir renews allegiance to Afghan Taliban," *FDD's Long War Journal*, August 19, 2021, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/08/pakistani-talibans-emir-renews-allegiance-to-afghan-taliban.php.

[17] Bill Roggio, "Pakistani Taliban emir says his group 'is a branch of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan'," *FDD's Long War Journal*, December 15, 2021, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2021/12/pakistani-taliban-emir-says-his-group-is-a-branch-of-the-islamic-emirate-of-afghanistan.php.

[18] "Pakistani border forces on alert after militants freed by Taliban," dpa/GNA, August 2021, https://gna.org.gh/2021/08/pakistani-border-forces-on-alert-after-militants-freed-by-taliban/; "Afghan Taliban release TTP prisoners after taking over Bagram airbase," *The Friday Times*, August 16, 2021, https://thefridaytimes.com/16-Aug-2021/afghan-taliban-release-ttp-prisoners-after-taking-over-bagram-airbase.

[19] Abdul Sayed and Tore Hamming, "The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan after the Taliban's Afghanistan Takeover," *CTC Sentinel* 16, no. 5 (May 2023), https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-tehrik-i-taliban-pakistan-after-the-talibans-afghanistan-takeover/.

first time, and ongoing Taliban backing has increased the frequency and severity of TTP assaults.[20]

Table 1. The TTP threat before and after the Taliban takeover

Indicator	Pre August 2021	Post August 2021
Attacks by the TTP and its affiliates*	95 (2020)	454 (2025)
Recorded deaths	140 (2020)	679 (2025)
Average TTP attacks per month	14.5 (2020)	45.8 (2022)
Militant groups merging into the TTP	8 (2020)	21 (2021 to April 2023)
TTP-linked fighters in Afghanistan (UN estimate)	6000 – 8000 (2020)	About 6000 (2025)

Source: PIPS, CTC Sentinel and UN Monitoring Team [21]

**excluding Baloch Insurgents*

Table 1 shows how attacks and fatalities by the TTP and other allied militant groups nearly quadrupled, while the number of fighters hardly changed. Additionally, the TTP has more weapons than ever before. Moreover, weapons and equipment valued at $7.12 billion were left in Afghanistan following the 2021 departure, according to the US Department of Defence.[22] Since then, weapons of US origin have been discovered from extremists in Pakistan.[23] Islamabad did not change between 2020 and 2025. Kabul did. The Afghan refuge alone does

[20] "Taliban support fuels deadlier terrorist attacks in Pakistan: UN report," *Dawn*, via Asia News Network, August 14, 2026, https://asianews.network/?p=294449; "UN says Taliban support fueled deadlier attacks in Pakistan in last six months," *Arab News Pakistan*, August 13, 2026, https://www.arabnews.pk/pakistan/un-says-taliban-support-fueled-deadlier-attacks-in-pakistan-in-last-six-months-2654474.

[21] Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2020* (Islamabad: PIPS, 2021), https://www.pakpips.com/?p=16510; PIPS, *Pakistan Security Report 2025*, vol. 18, no. 1 (Islamabad: PIPS, January 2026), summary at https://www.pakpips.com/article/8744; European Union Agency for Asylum, *Pakistan: Country Focus*, section 4.1.1, June 2026, https://www.euaa.europa.eu/pakistan-country-focus/411-surge-militant-violence-november-2024; Sayed and Hamming, n. 20; "UN says thousands of anti-Pakistan militants in Afghanistan," *Arab News Pakistan*, July 2020, https://arabnews.pk/node/1710336; Syed, n. 15. Attack and death figures for the TTP and allied groups follow PIPS's category of "religiously motivated" or "religiously inspired" militant groups, which covers the TTP and its affiliates, ISKP, Lashkar-e-Islam and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, and excludes Baloch nationalist insurgents. PIPS and GTI totals differ because the two use different counting methods.

[22] US Department of Defense report to Congress (March 2022), as reported in "First on CNN: US left behind $7 billion of military equipment in Afghanistan after 2021 withdrawal, Pentagon report says," *CNN*, April 27, 2022, https://abc17news.com/politics/national-politics/cnn-us-politics/2022/04/27/first-on-cnn-us-left-behind-7-billion-of-military-equipment-in-afghanistan-after-2021-withdrawal-pentagon-report-says/.

[23] "Equipment, weapons left behind by US in Afghanistan now form core of Taliban's security apparatus: watchdog," *Dawn*, via Asia News Network, December 8, 2025, https://asianews.network/?p=243999, citing *Washington Post* reporting on US-origin weapons seized in Pakistan.

not sufficiently explain the magnitude and nature of the violence. The threat is compounded by the motivations of outside entities that perceive Pakistan's turmoil as strategically beneficial.

5. Strategic Rivalry and Proxy Violence.

Because of its location, Pakistan is a corridor that other powers want to either use or deny to others. The most obvious example is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which connects western China to Gwadar. Nine Chinese nationals have been killed at Dasu in 2021, three at the University of Karachi in 2022, five at Besham in March 2024, and two near Karachi airport in October 2024.[24] The selection of targets indicates a desire to break Pakistan's most significant economic alliance rather than to advance local grievances.

The targeting signifies the corridor's strategic importance. As the flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the outcome of CPEC has significance beyond Pakistan, and thus, its failure is consequential for its adversaries. India officially contests the initiative: its External Affairs Minister has declared that CPEC "would infringe upon India's territorial integrity" when it traverses Gilgit-Baltistan.[25] Pakistan's Foreign Office has so ascribed assaults on Chinese citizens to "malevolent entities" aiming "to destabilise CPEC and target the emblems of Sino-Pakistani cooperation.[26]

The Pakistani Government asserts that India is the primary supporter of this initiative. In November 2020, the Foreign Minister and the Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) unveiled a report outlining Indian financial support for militant groups and a 700-member militia, orchestrated by Indian intelligence operatives, aimed at undermining CPEC.[27] In May 2025, the Ministry of Interior ordered that all terrorist organisations active in Balochistan be referred to as "Fitna al-Hindustan", citing their activities at the behest of India. The majority of the violence in the province is caused by these groups. Of the 253 attacks that were reported in Balochistan in 2025, 225 were carried out by them, compared to 28 by the TTP and ISKP combined.[28] The Foreign Office claimed that India was involved in terrorism in Pakistan following the hijacking of the Jaffar Express in March 2025, and the ISPR

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[24] Umar Bacha, "5 Chinese engineers killed in suicide bomb attack in Pakistan, probe under way," *South China Morning Post*, March 26, 2024, https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3256811/5-chinese-engineers-killed-suicide-bomb-attack-pakistan-probe-underway; Mohammad Nafees, "Chinese Nationals Facing Violence in Pakistan," *The Friday Times*, November 30, 2024, https://thefridaytimes.com/30-Nov-2024/chinese-nationals-facing-violence-in-pakistan.

[25] "China reiterates commitment to ensure 'timely completion' of CPEC despite India's objections," *Arab News Pakistan*, May 7, 2023, https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2299141.

[26] Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Bisham terror attack won't impact CPEC, says FO," *Dawn*, March 29, 2024, https://www.dawn.com/news/1824377.

[27] Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Specific proof of Indian terrorism in Pakistan unveiled," *Dawn*, November 15, 2020, https://www.dawn.com/news/1590441.

[28] Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, Government of Pakistan, "Reference to Terrorist Organizations in Balochistan as Fitna al Hindustan in Official Correspondence and Documents," circular F.No 13174/2025-NAP, May 31, 2025, as reported in "Govt names all terror outfits operating in Balochistan as 'Fitna al-Hindustan'," *Dunya News*, June 1, 2025, https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/887085-govt-names-all-terror-outfits-operating-in-balochistan-as-fitna-alhi. Balochistan attack figures: PIPS data cited in European Union Agency for Asylum, *Pakistan: Country Focus*, section 4.2.1, June 2026, https://www.euaa.europa.eu/pakistan-country-focus/421-balochistan.

characterises the TTP as an Indian proxy.[29] [30] Pakistan also cites the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian naval commander, who was arrested in Balochistan in 2016.[31] According to Pakistan's assessment, a cross-border militant issue becomes a persistent campaign against the state when Afghan sanctuary and hostile state interests come together. Viewed together, these historical, geographic and strategic dimensions provide the basis for a direct assessment of the claim that Pakistan's security is self-inflicted.

6. Why the "Past Policies" Frame Fails

The assertion that Pakistan is suffering as a result of its own previous decisions is unsupported by the evidence. It disregards the fact that the initiative from the 1980s was written and sponsored internationally. The drop from 2014 to 2019, which followed Pakistani operations against these same groups and the rise in violence following a change of administration in Kabul rather than Islamabad cannot be explained by it. Additionally, the TTP targets mosques, schools, police, and Pakistani army. Rather than being a tool of the state, it is its enemy.

7. Recommendations

1. **Present with autonomous proof.** Global communication ought to be based on the findings of the UN monitoring team, which possess an authority that national declarations lack, and advocate for the comprehensive implementation of UN sanctions on TTP leadership.

2. **Seek responsibility for remaining armaments.** Pakistan ought to pursue a weapons-tracing agreement with the United States for guns of American provenance retrieved from extremists.

3. **Utilise a singular collection of digits.** Government departments ought to establish a unified consensus on the statistics concerning casualties, refugees, and economic damages, ensuring that the case for burden-sharing is articulated coherently.

4. **Establish a regional alliance.** Pakistan ought to collaborate with China, Iran, and Central Asian nations to ensure Kabul adheres to its counter-terrorism obligations.

5. **Facilitate the movement of the evidence.** Information about hostile state participation should, contingent upon security considerations, be disseminated in formats that allow other parties to evaluate independently, as aimed for in the 2020 dossier. Empirical proof convinces audiences that just official claims are insufficient.

Conclusion

Pakistan's ranking at the Global Terrorism Index is a record of the impositions that Pakistan has endured, including the repercussions of an internationally sponsored war in the 1980s, the expenses of a subsequent war after 2001 and since 2021 a militant sanctuary adjacent to the

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[29] "11 Khwarij killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," *The News*, January 11, 2026, https://www.thenews.pk/print/1392236-11-khwarij-killed-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa.

[30] "Jaffar Express terrorists were in contact with ring leaders in Afghanistan: FO," *Geo News*, March 13, 2025, https://www.geo.tv/latest/595175-jaffar-express-terrorists-were-in-contact-with-ring-leaders-in-afghanistan-fo.

[31] On the arrest and subsequent proceedings, see International Court of Justice, *Jadhav (India v. Pakistan)*, Judgment of 17 July 2019, https://www.icj-cij.org/case/168.

country that UN monitors have meticulously documented. The index quantifies individuals who experience bleeding. The current objective is to guarantee that the global community also enquires about the individual responsible.