

Operation Radd-ul-Fassad and Beyond: A Strategic Assessment of Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Efforts (2017–2020)

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Abstract: This article provides a critical evaluation of Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy from 2017 to 2020, with a primary focus on Operation Radd-ul-Fassad. Initiated in response to persistent militant threats, the operation sought to dismantle terrorist networks, secure the nation's borders, and eliminate extremist elements through coordinated military and civilian efforts. The study examines key operations such as Khyber IV in Rajgal Valley, highlighting their tactical importance, and assesses major political developments, including the 2018 merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the repeal of the FCR. Emphasis is also placed on the Pak-Afghan border fencing initiative, construction of security forts, and measures to curb cross-border smuggling of arms and narcotics. Together, these initiatives contributed to a significant reduction in terrorist activities and an improvement in Pakistan's GTI ranking. The article concludes that the convergence of military operations, policy reforms, and border control measures strengthened Pakistan's internal security and regional stability.

Key Words: Counterterrorism, Radd-ul-Fassad, Pakistan Army, FATA, Khyber IV, Rajgal Valley

Introduction

Pakistan has been facing the brunt of War on Terror (WoT) since 2001 when it decided to side with US in the backdrop of the 9/11/2001 tragedy which changed the political, diplomatic and security landscape of South Asia. With the American military operation in Afghanistan (October 2001) against Taliban government and Al-Qaeda, the element of terrorism expanded to Pakistan's tribal areas, including the erstwhile FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). Resultantly, Pakistan was forced to launch military operations in these areas, but soft-handed policies led the terrorist groups to reorganize and formed the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) umbrella organization in 2007. Large-scale operations in Swat and South Waziristan Agency in 2009 led a resurgence of terrorism and Pakistan ranked 3rd in the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) in 2013. Meanwhile, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) came into power, and it initiated the peace talks with TTP and other terrorist groups, but due to terrorist organizations' non-serious behavior during peace talks and increasing terrorist assaults, the Pakistani government launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan Agency (NWA) in 2014. The Army Public School (APS) attack on December 16, 2014, altered the scope of the effort and led to a transition in the country's political system. The civil government and military establishment, along with Imran Khan, Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), and Tahir-ul-Qadri, Chairman of Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) supported military forces fighting terrorism.

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Political parties designed the National Action Plan (NAP), and the civil administration agreed to establish military tribunals for two years. From 2014 to 2016, military forces conducted large operations and established the writ of government in the NWA and other agencies of the erstwhile FATA (Javed et al., 2025). At the conclusion of Operation *Zarb-e-Azb*, the state's security position had steadily improved, and terrorist incidents were declining by the day. Meanwhile, due to security upgrades, insurgent attacks decreased by 56%. However, the death rate fell by approximately 48%, and injuries fell by 57% in 2015 compared to 2014 (Zulfiqar, 2017). As per intelligence reports:

Operation Zarb-e-Azb in its first two years achieved its goals of destroying the hideouts and shattering the networks of Al-Qaeda and its associated groups, both foreign and local, particularly the IMU, the IJU (Islamic Jihad Union), the ETIM (East Turkistan Islamic Movement) various factions of the TTP and Haqqani Network.

However, with the help of the nation, the civil administration, and other civil organizations, the military was successful in the decisive campaign against militancy. Meanwhile, the operation marked a crucial step towards restoring calm in the state by totally destroying terrorist hideouts in the NWA (Rehman, 2020). In addition, for the sake of peace and stability, Pakistani military forces launched a countrywide operation in 2017, namely Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad* (Dar, 2019).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing an extensive review of primary and secondary sources such as government reports, military briefings, policy documents, academic publications, and credible media coverage from 2017 to 2020. The research is structured to examine the multidimensional aspects of Pakistan's counter-terrorism strategy, with a central focus on Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad*. Case study analysis, particularly of Operation *Khyber IV* and the FATA-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa merger, is used to explore the interaction between military actions and political reforms. This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of strategic developments and their impact on national security.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its integrated analysis of military, political, and administrative responses to terrorism in Pakistan, since the terrorism has brought devastating financial and human casualties. By connecting key operations with policy shifts and border management efforts, the research highlights the multifaceted nature of counter-terrorism success. It offers valuable lessons for other states facing internal security threats and contributes to the broader discourse on combating militancy in post-conflict societies.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study spans the period from 2017 to 2020, a critical phase in Pakistan's internal security trajectory. It focuses on major initiatives like Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad*, the Rajgal Valley military campaign, the Pak-Afghan border fencing project, and the FATA merger. The research assesses their collective role in reducing terrorist incidents, enhancing border security, and stabilizing previously volatile regions. It also addresses the implications of these measures for national and regional counter-terrorism policies, making it relevant for scholars, policymakers, and security practitioners alike.

Factors behind the Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad*

Terrorist attacks began progressively during the first quarter of 2017. Following the successful outcome of Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* in NWA, a series of suicide attacks reignited the bloodshed. These attacks included a suicide attack in Lahore on February 13, the placement of an explosive device beneath the Sariab road bridge in Quetta on the same day, a suicide bombing in Mohmand Agency and Peshawar on February 15, and a suicide attack on the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar on February 16. An explosive device attack took place on a security force convoy in Awaran on the same day. On February 21, security troops and terrorists from the JuA battled in the KPK.

Table 1

Militant attacks in One Week of 2017

Chronology	Attacks	Deaths	Injuries
13 th Feb	2	15	85
15 th Feb	2	9	4
16 th Feb	2	91	300
21 st Feb	1	8	0
Total	7	123	389

Source: ("Pakistan Army launches", [2017](#)).

Meanwhile, seven attacks in a week caused 389 injuries and 123 deaths. These attacks were carried out by TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) militants, as well as Islamic State. However, the horror dimensions have been altered. The terrorist initiation began in tribal areas and extended throughout Pakistan, mainly in Punjab and Sindh. However, following the wave of bloodshed, the state took a determined posture to eliminate terror threats ("Pakistan Army launches", [2017](#)).

The activation of sleeper cells by terrorist organizations, following the success of Operation Zarb-e-Azb, was another factor. Meanwhile, the lack of NAP implementation had exacerbated the security situation, making it difficult to trace the funding sources of terrorist organizations across the country. The security agencies notified the Punjab's government about the activation of terrorists' sleeper cells, which included banned organizations operating under a different name in Punjab. However, there were no effective mechanisms in place to trace and control the situation of elevated terrorism. As a result, the state's security landscape favored Operation Rad-ul-Fasad (Express News, [2017](#)).

Framework of Operation Radd-ul-Fassad

In the beginning of 2017 with the rise of terrorism once again, the country needed to take decisive steps to control the worsening situation caused by the penetration and influence of terrorism, as well as the deteriorating peace atmosphere. Consequently, COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa (2016–2022) convened an emergency meeting with the Corps Commanders (CC) of Punjab and the Director General (DG) Rangers of Pakistan's Punjab. The meeting also included the heads of the Intelligence Agency, with the aim of restoring peace in the country and eliminating the impact of terrorism. Meanwhile, the situation turned in favor of a decisive strike against the new wave of terrorism ("Pakistan Army launches", [2017](#)).

However, the civil government strongly condemned the wave of terrorism. Consequently, Ishaq Dar, the former Finance Minister of Pakistan, discussed the country's security situation and strongly condemned the security threats posed by Afghanistan across the border, as well as the terrorist attacks from Afghanistan against Pakistan. However, the use of Afghan territory for violations was a challenge to the integrity of Pakistan and its law enforcement agencies. He further discussed the position and role of security forces against terrorist groups. As a result, the Pakistani government gave the Pakistan Army authority to establish the state's writ ("Pakistan Army launches", [2017](#)). Meanwhile, Pakistan Army took decisive stance and initiated Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad on February 22, 2017 (Salik, [2019](#)). The name of this operation is very meaningful, in Surah Al-Baqarah, verses eleven and twelve, Allah says, "When they are told not to cause mischief, they say, we are reformers. Beware! In reality, these people are corrupt, but they have no consciousness". In Arabic, mischief-makers are called *al-Mafsdun*. In Surat al-Maidah, it is ordered to kill those who riot. Moreover, tagging any military operation with the name of Quran or any other religious connotation, the manor objective is to justify their actions before the general public. Such religious terminologies differentiate between the 'good and evil' at once before the eyes of the citizens of the country. That's why the Pakistan Army started Operation Radd-ul-Fassad (Sideeq, [2021](#)). As per Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) report:

Pakistan Army launches Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad across the country. The effort entails conduct of Broad Spectrum Security/ Counter Terrorism (CT) by Rangers in Punjab, continuation of ongoing operations across the country and focus on more effective border security management. Country wide de-weaponisation and explosive control are additional cardinals of the effort (ISPR Press, [2017](#)).



Pakistan Army, Pakistan Navy, Pakistan Air Force, Civil Armed Forces (CAF), and other law enforcement agencies participated in this operation. Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad* was significant because all armed forces and other law enforcement agencies were equally contributing and fighting together against terrorism (Khan, 2017).

In 2017, a large-scale wave of terrorism entered Punjab due to suicide attacks, prompting the provincial government to take a firm stance against law violations at the local level. Consequently, the Punjab's government demanded that the federal government deploy Rangers throughout the entire province to maintain law and order and to support other security forces such as the Punjab police and the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) in intelligence-based operations (IBOs) against terrorist organizations. Meanwhile, the federal government approved the Punjab government's request and deployed 2000 Rangers personnel in Punjab (Qarar, 2017).

Objectives of Radd-ul-Fasaad

Every launch of a warfront or defensive has a set of objectives, some of which either succeed or fail. Similarly, Operation Raddul Fasaad had significant objectives.

- ▶ The key objective of this operation was to establish a strong grip on the consolidations of previous operations like Operation Zarb-e-Azb in NWA, Khyber I, Khyber II, and Khyber III in Khyber Agency.
- ▶ Second objective was to enhance societal social and customary values, enforce law and order, and prevent the infiltration of radical elements.
- ▶ The third objective was to uphold law, order, and stability within the country by eliminating the lingering traces of terrorism and its components.
- ▶ The fourth objective was to eliminate anti-state actors' weaponry and disrupt their supply chain.
- ▶ The fifth goal was to enforce law and order against all groups that undermine security forces and civilians through illicit activities such as kidnapping and terrorism (Dar, 2019).
- ▶ The sixth objective was to Implementation of NAP will be the first priority for law enforcement agencies (“Pakistan Army launches”, 2017).
- ▶ Furthermore, the presence of foreign militants in tribal areas was the primary reason for Pakistan's terrorism. However, eliminating the foreign terrorist factions from tribal areas was the priority of the government and law enforcement agencies (Waraich et al., 2021).

Most Significant Terrorist Groups in 2017 and Decline of Terrorism until 2020

In 2017, the TTP established itself as a major terrorist group in Pakistan by carrying out a huge number of militant strikes. However, other terrorist groups, including as JuA, the Local Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Islam (LeI), carried out violent attacks. As a result, the Daesh group thrived in Pakistan, expanded its roots, and carried out six militant strikes in Pakistan, compared to three in 2016. The violent density, and the geographical access of these terrorist groups is significant by mapping their attacks in the below table.

Table 2

Terrorist Attacks Claimed by Terrorist Groups in 2017

Organization	Balochistan	FATA	Islamabad & AJK	KP	Punjab	Sindh	Total
TTP	11	31	-	22	2	4	70
JuA	3	27	-	5	1	1	37
Daesh	4	-	-	1	-	1	6
L-e-I	-	19	-	2	-	-	21
LT	-	1	-	28	-	-	29
L-e-J	6	1	1	1	-	1	10
L-e-J (A)	2	2	1	1	2	-	8
AuS	-	-	-	-	-	6	6
BLA	41	-	-	-	-	1	42
BLF	39	-	-	-	-	-	39
BRA	30	-	-	-	-	-	30

Organization	Balochistan	FATA	Islamabad & AJK	KP	Punjab	Sindh	Total
L-e-B	9	-	-	-	-	-	9
SDLF	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
SDRA	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
AQIS	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
SeMP	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
RSG	-	-	-	2	1	-	3
NI	10	-	-	-	-	2	12
Unknown Militants	10	2	4	9	8	8	41
Total	165	83	6	71	14	31	370

Source: (Rana, 2018).

In 2017, FATA was the most afflicted region, followed by Balochistan, which saw 165 terrorist attacks: 83 in FATA, 6 in Islamabad and AJK, 71 in KPK, 14 in Punjab, and 31 in Sindh. Furthermore, TTP had carried out 70 out of 370 militant strikes in Pakistan (Rana, 2018). Various terrorist groups carried out 262 militant assaults in 2018, with the TTP maintaining a foothold in militancy across the country by carrying out 79 militant attacks, compared to 70 in 2017. Meanwhile, the other terrorist groups were the JuA and HA, who carried out 15 attacks; the Local Taliban 28, and the LeI 10, which most likely belonged to the FATA and KPK. Minor and rebel groups across the country carried out the remaining militant attacks. However, TTP had fared far better than other militant groups (Rana, 2019).

Table 3

Terrorist Attacks and its Consequences in 2018

Region	Attacks	Killed	Injured
KP&FATA	125	196	376
Balochistan	115	354	589
Punjab	4	20	39
Sindh	12	19	21
G. B	5	5	3
AJK	1	1	2
Total	262	595	1030

Source: (Rana & Sial, 2019).

The FATA and KP had a greater number of militant assaults than the other regions of Pakistan (Rana & Sial, 2019). In 2019, Pakistan witnessed 229 militant incidents. The TTP and its allies launched 158 attacks, compared to 171 in 2018. These militant attacks resulted in 357 deaths and 729 injuries. Furthermore, military operations proved efficient in countering terrorism, resulting in a reduction in terrorist activity.

Table 4

Terrorist Attacks and its Consequences in 2019

Region	Attacks	Killed	Injured
KP	125	145	249
Balochistan	84	171	436
Punjab	5	21	41
Sindh	14	18	2
Islamabad	1	2	1
Total	229	357	729

Source: (Rana & Sial, 2020).

On the other hand, KP and FATA had again mostly affected with 125 militants attacks (Rana & Sial, 2020). However, KP experienced a significant number of militant attacks in 2020, with 79 of the 146 incidents resulting in 220 deaths and 547 injuries.

**Table 5**

Terrorist Attacks and its Consequences in 2020

Region	Attacks	Killed	Injured
KP	79	100	206
Balochistan	42	95	216
Punjab	7	5	59
Sindh	18	20	66
Islamabad	0	0	0
Total	146	220	547

Source: (Sial & Ali, 2021).

In 2020, a turning point occurred in the militant environment; small terrorist factions, notably JuA and HuA, were united into TTP (Sial & Ali, 2021). Between 2017 and 2020, the TTP was the most significant terrorist group for conducting their terror activities in the different parts of country (Javaid, 2022). Simultaneously, the security forces executed more than 149,000 IBOs to combat the militancy of the TTP and other small militant factions, resulting in law enforcement authorities averting almost 400 terrorist strikes nationwide. Additionally, almost 900 terrorists were killed, more than 1,300 were apprehended, approximately 2,000 surrendered, and over 7,300 suspects were detained by the security forces (Chaudhry et al., 2020). However, the implementation of Operation *Radd-ul-Fassad* led to a gradual decline in terrorist activities, resulting in Pakistan's ranking improving from 5th in 2019 to 7th in 2020. By February 2020, On the other hand the security forces achieved several successes under the framework of operation *Radd-ul-Fassad* from 2017 to 2020 (Javaid, 2022).

Administration Structure and FATA Merger in KP: A Political Move

FATA is located on the western boundary, near to Afghanistan and within Pakistani territory. The FATA territory consists of seven agencies or districts: Bajour, Mohmand, Khyber, Kuram, Orakzai, South Waziristan, and North Waziristan (Shah, 2018). The FATA region has traditionally served as a critical entry route to the Indo-Pak peninsula for a variety of immigrants and invaders, dating back to the Aryans and Alexander the Great. The Mughals crossed this territory in the early 16th century to seize Delhi and defend their kingdoms (Committee on FATA Reforms, 2016). The region consists of six smaller pockets referred to as Frontier Regions (FRs), namely FR Bannu, FR Dera Ismail Khan, FR Kohat, FR Lakki Marwat, FR Peshawar, and FR Tank (Yousaf et al., 2018). While there are numerous border crossings between Pakistan and Afghanistan in this region, there are confirmed seven specific routes, including Malakand, Khyber, and Gandab, which traverse the Mohmand agency. The Kohat route passes through Parachinar, the Bangash route passes through the Kurram area, and the Gomal and Tochi routes pass through Waziristan territory (Khokhar, 2014).

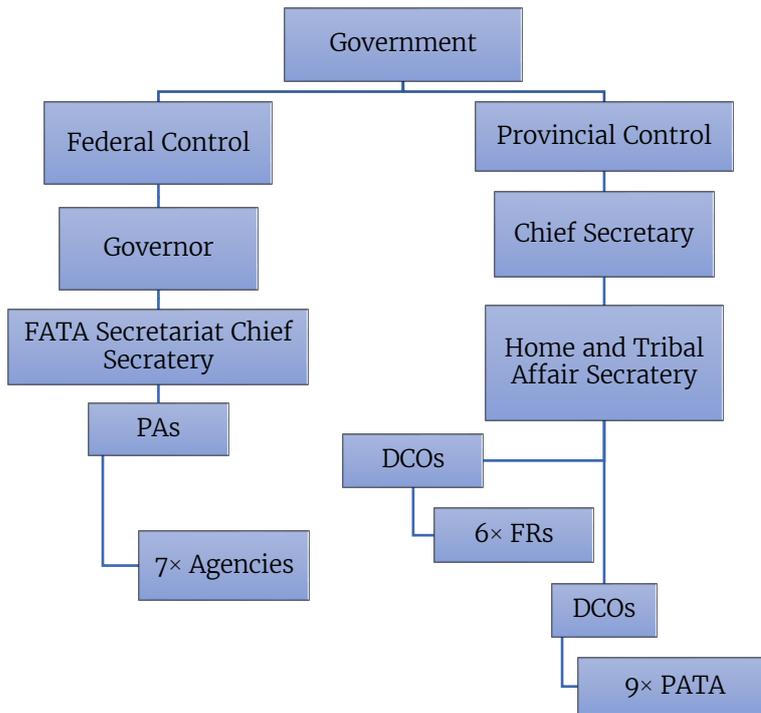
Following the subcontinent split in 1947, FATA was incorporated into Pakistan. During the 1960s, there was a significant surge in the dissemination of Islam in this region (Norell, 2010). The population of this region is roughly five million when it was 3.2 million, according to the 1998 census. Approximately 99.2% of the population in FATA consists of Muslims. However, there are also around 50,000 Sikh, Christian, and Hindu minorities residing in the region. Approximately 20,000 Sikhs and Christians, along with 10,000 Hindus, live in the subdivisions of Bara, Jamrud, and Landi Kotal in the Khyber Agency and several other sections of this region (Khan, 2017). The British Government developed the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) in 1901, which served as the framework for FATA's administration structure and the enforcement of civil and criminal laws until 2018 (Shah, 2018).

As per article 247 of Pakistan constitution, only President of Pakistan was the authority of chief executive and Governor of KP had administrative authority of tribal areas as political agent to President. FATA Development Authority (FDA) which supports and runs under the direction of Pakistan's President. Through the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) act the political agent PA was responsible to establish law and order including punishments in the case of tribe's crime or individual crime and also responsible for human rights of people especially social and judicial rights (Yousaf et al., 2018). According to this act, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) served as the authoritative figure in the district or tribe and held the power to

arrest any individual, including tribesmen, for the investigation of crimes or acts of violence. The DC could exercise this authority only after obtaining permission from the commissioner (Mahsud et al., 2021).

Figure 1

Political and Administrative Structure of erstwhile FATA.



Source: (Mazhar, 2010).

The government had no proper influence in the affairs of FATA (Mazhar, 2010). Therefore, FATA was only constitutional part of Pakistan, but stateless territories government institution could not implement rules and regulations in the way of restless value. Under the article 247's (6) amendment the constitutional status of FATA could not be changed without acceptance of tribal *maliks* (Jadoon, 1997). The 2017 had been landmark for FATA reforms. The Pakistan government formed the policy of FATA merge in KPK for the purpose of peace building and political stability (Ali et al., 2023). In May 2018, the constitutional amendment bill was passed in the National Assembly for FATA merge in KP. After that PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said in the National Assembly:

The issue needed a national consensus, and thank God, we achieved it today the merge will greatly impact development in FATA, which borders restive in Afghanistan. This is the beginning of the process we have to win the trust of the people of FATA, and we can achieve it through infrastructure development in the area. We need to build hospitals, schools and roads in FATA to bring in at par with other parts of the country (Shah, 2018).

Therefore, five year tax exemption and 100 billion development packages were in the agenda of government. It was the landmark and diplomatic political stance of the government for the purpose of development. However, *Jamiat Ulama Islam Fazl-ur-Rehman (JUI-F)* and *Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP)* opposed the government action and proposed the referendum and PkMAP was in the favor of separate province (Shah, 2018). Meanwhile, the FATA merger bill was also passed in the Provincial Assembly of KP by securing 92 votes in the favor and 7 members of assembly opposed the initiative of government. The merger of FATA in KPK was milestone of KP Assembly. The initiative of the government had opened the doors for the representatives of FATA in the Provincial Assembly of KPK and as well as National Assembly of Pakistan (Hayat, 2018).

Hence, in KP Assembly the Provincial government had faced the opposition by the Assembly members who belonged to FATA. Those people strongly condemned the stance of government and walk out from



assembly (Hayat, 2018). While, on 31st May 2018 President Mamnoon Hussain signed on 25th constitutional amendment and abolished former status of FATA. After merge in KPK the seats of the Assembly rise from 124 to 145 with the addition of 21 seats. However, the seats of National Assembly and Senate also extended for representatives of erstwhile FATA. In the years of 2018-2020, there were 2200 Levis force's vacancies had filled in erstwhile FATA and as well as the government started the improvements in education, health and other public sectors (Khalique, 2024).

Rajgal Valley's Threats and Khyber IV Operation

Khyber Agency comprise 2576 sqkm, the tribal area of FATA shares the border with Afghanistan from east and also shares the borders with Orakzai Agency from south and Mohmand agency from north ("Pakistan: Backgrounder on Khyber", 2011). Khyber are mountainous area which consists of rugged and barren terrains. The mostly hilly tracks and valleys with narrow strips with the lack of infrastructure are present in this area. However, the beautiful valleys of Khyber are Maidan, Rajgal and Bazar ("Khyber District", 2024). Rajgal valley was an important strategic and geographical location for terrorists as this valley shares the border with Afghanistan and two major routes connect Pakistan with Afghanistan ("Operation Khyber-IV", 2017). Due to its geographical location the different terrorist groups including TTP and JuA established their hideouts on Pak-Afghan border inside Pakistan. Moreover, these groups also established their relationships with cross border terrorist groups and tried to make an alliance with Daesh and created the threats for Pakistan's security forces ("Army launches Operation Khyber-4", 2017). Keeping in view of security threats Pakistan Military forces launched operation Khyber-IV in the Rajgal valley on July 16, 2017 ("Pakistan Army Captures Strategic", 2017). The aims and objectives of this operation were:

1. The main objective of this operation was to abolish the hideouts of terrorists inside Rajgal valley.
2. To ensure the security of international border.
3. To control the influence of Daesh from Afghan border into Pakistan.
4. To exploit the alliance of Pakistan's terrorist groups and cross border terrorist group Daesh.
5. To rehabilitate of Temporary Displaced Persons (TDPs), as the priority of Operation (Wakeel, 2017).

The initial phase of Operation Khyber-IV was very difficult because that the Rajgal valley comprise 250 sq km rough and narrow belt area. During the operation there were no proper communication networks. Moreover, the lack of infrastructure and roads in this area made critical for Army (Yousaf, 2017). 500 families were living in Rajgal valley. The displacement of those families on safe area was the challenge for state and law enforcement agencies. Therefore, due to the efforts of military forces, the 500 families had safely displaced to another areas. However, due to the geography of Rajgal valley the transfer of logistics from one place to another place was very difficult but to achieve this purpose Army used choppers for carrying the logistics from one place to another. However, this operation was jointly performed by Pakistan Army and Pakistan Air Force ("Pakistan Army launches operation", 2017). The artillery and aviation have also contributed to operation Khyber-IV and destroyed the terrorist's hideouts successfully ("Operation Khyber-IV", 2017). The initial phase of Operation had been fruitful the security forces established their control on Rajgal valley after tough resistance by terrorists. Moreover, Army established their posts on "Brekh Muhammad Kandao" near Pak-Afghan border and established their writ on 12000 feet High Mountain with the efforts of SSG (Syed & Shinwari, 2017).

On the other hand, 52 terrorists were killed 32 were injured 4 were surrender and 1 was arrested. Meanwhile a few terrorists escaped toward Afghanistan. There were 2 soldiers were martyred and 6 were injured (Yousaf, 2017). During the ground clearance Military defused a large number of landmines. Moreover, military discovered Indian based ammunition and Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs) during this operation. The six weeklong counter terrorism operation Military gained the complete control of Rajgal valley and established 91 check posts ("Operation Khyber 4 completed", 2017).

Pak-Afghan Border Fencing

In 1893, King Abdur Rehman of Afghanistan and Sir Mortimer Durand, a British diplomat, entered into an agreement that defined the border on the western side of FATA and designated it as the Durand Line (Shah, 2018). The Durand line, which separates the tribal regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, runs for a distance of 2611 kilometers, passing through FATA and the Baluchistan province of Pakistan. This region has a border that spans 1381 km with Baluchistan and 1230 kilometers with KP (Yousaf et al., 2018). There were

around 100 pathways that were occasionally utilized along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Despite their ease of smuggling, only a few routes were used for general population. Every day between 20,000 and 35,000 individuals crossed the border from Chaman to Torkham. These were legal immigrants, traders, members of non-governmental organizations, and NATO personnel. Furthermore, between 7,000 and 9000 unlawful crossings occurred every day via alternative routes (Raja et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, a large number of militants were carrying out cross-border attacks. However, Afghan authorities did not cooperate against terrorist attacks, so Pakistan's civil and military leadership decided to secure the border (Butt, 2017). Despite this, Pakistan took the initiative to fence its Pak-Afghan porous border in 2017 in an effort to combat militancy (Gul, 2018). At initially, Pakistan's tribal agencies including Mohmand, Khyber, and Bajaur were part of the first stage of border fencing. The second stage encompassed the other portions of the tribal region and Balochistan ("Border management", 2017). The "Big Ben" post, a challenging and crucial point at the Torkham border and a major crossing point from Pakistan to Afghanistan, served as the starting point for the Pak-Afghan border fencing (Raja et al., 2022). Forts, on the other hand, serve a critical role in border protection. For this reason, the government intended to build 843 border forts. This approach resulted in the completion of 343 forts, with 161 still under construction, and 1450 km of the 2611 km border with Afghanistan completed by the beginning of 2020 ("Govt cites anti-terror operation", 2020). Initially, security forces installed surveillance cameras on the border. Therefore, between 2017 and 2020, security forces completed 83% of the border fencing work (Raja et al., 2022). Nevertheless, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the construction of border barrier has persisted with unwavering determination and vigor (Basit, 2021).

The endeavor of constructing border barrier was exceedingly difficult and challenging. The geography and challenging landscape of the mountainous region of Pak-Afghan posed difficulties throughout the process of installing the fence. The border barrier has two parallel chain-link fences, with a 2-meter (6-foot) gap in between, which is filled with concertina wire coils. The double barrier is equipped with surveillance cameras and infrared detectors, with a height of 3.6 meters (11 feet) on the Pakistani side and 4 meters (13 feet) on the Afghan side. There are a total of 16 officially authorized crossing stations that facilitate passage across the border. Thus, the implementation of the border fencing policy has shown to be highly effective in thwarting cross-border terrorist attacks. The reduction of transnational assaults had already commenced on a significant magnitude. In 2019, militants carried out a total of 82 attacks that crossed the border, however in 2020, the number decreased significantly to only 11 (Basit, 2021).

Conclusion

It is concluded that in response to a rise in suicide attacks in Punjab and Sindh, Pakistan's government launched Operation Radd-ul-Fassad in 2017. The purpose of the operation was to disrupt numerous terrorist organizations' networks, including the TTP, as well as to eradicate sleeper cells. During this operation, police and rangers actively managed the security situation across Punjab and Sindh. They also successfully targeted sleeper cells and terrorist groups, resulting in the arrest of many TTP militants, as discussed above. This operation resulted in a major reduction in terrorist assaults until 2020, as mentioned above, and security forces achieved significant progress in Radd-ul-Fassad, successfully destroying terrorist networks including TTP and its allies. The Pakistani government, in-between, took a political stance, merging FATA with KP in 2018, abolishing its constitutional status, and initiating development projects in the province. The government implemented this measure to solidify its authority within the FATA region. Meanwhile, Pakistan's government authorized the Afghan border strategy, forcing the Pakistani army to begin border fencing and fortifications along the Afghan border. They had finished 83 percent of the barrier work by 2020 and built over 400 forts to combat cross-border attacks, illicit border crossings, and smuggling. As a result, the border fencing program was effective, and a slow drop led to cross-border attacks. This study finds that with the efforts of government and military forces, Pakistan improved its position in the GTI rank, which was 4th in 2016 to 7th in 2020. However, it is pertinent to emphasize that military operations or any strategic action, which may come with collateral damage, can be an effective yet short-term strategy for addressing the root cause of terrorism in any region. Besides, a long-term strategy is, thus, required for a long-term peace in Pakistan.



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