

Critical Review of Pakistan's Role in the War on Terrorism

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Keywords	Abstract
Counterterrorism, Pakistan, Political Instability, State Sovereignty, Terrorism, War on Terrorism.	<i>Terrorism is one of the primary catalysts destabilizing the foundations of any nation, both internally and externally. Pakistan has taken a leadership role in addressing this critical issue. Often referred to as the "fashion of the day," terrorism is an epidemic that impacts both the public and the government. Its roots run deep, spreading far beyond Pakistan's borders. The perilous situation stems from a number of causes, including poor federal governance, nationalization, religious conflicts, inequality, and weak political leadership. Consequently, Pakistan's sovereignty has suffered severe damage from the various repercussions of terrorism since the 9/11 attacks. As is widely recognized, diverse terrorist actions have been committed for numerous reasons around the world for decades. In fact, terrorism is one of the most brutal crimes. As the world changes, terrorism will also adapt, exploring new opportunities for growth and impact made possible by technological advancements.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism endangers the country's sovereignty and damaged its economy. Terrorist activity has caused Pakistan to lose both money and foreign investors. In addition, Pakistan's tourism sector is declining, and the government is compelled to reallocate funds to security budgets because of the ongoing threat posed by terrorism, which undermines prospects for good governance. Pakistan's current counter-terrorism operation shows signs of failure on all fronts. Industry closures, decreased agricultural production, restricted access to the United States and other European markets, depreciation of the rupee, an increase in state debt, the absence of any hope for settling the longstanding Kashmir dispute, and fatalities from drones and other terrorist attacks are the effects of it. In addition, social order is deteriorating, law enforcement organisations are facing decline, and the average individual's standard of living is declining. Pakistan has historically enjoyed a very strong position in the UN, contributed a significant number of troops, and been praised widely for its creative approaches to solving issues. The three major pre-planned regions are Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Afghanistan, its neighbour, has made the Middle East an important ally of the US. During the Cold War and the subsequent US-led "War on Terror" against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, Pakistan played a major role as a non-NATO ally. Although the United States, the United Kingdom, NATO, and non-NATO members like Pakistan and China provided support for America's counter-terrorism campaign, Pakistan's support was more effective because the US utilised all of its air, sea, and intelligence facilities (Khan & Khan, 2024; Liaqat & Hussain, (2025).

Objective

- To assess the role of Pakistan in the war on terrorism.

Research Question

- What was the role of Pakistan in the war on terrorism?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is qualitative in nature. The data was collected from a variety of sources, such as websites, government documents, and scholarly publications. Descriptive analysis was used to examine the data.

LITERATURE ANALYSIS

This research study presents a literature review, organised under different headings for clearer presentation.

Terrorism in Pakistan: All of these major events have intensified Pakistan's terrorist scenario across the board. Most people believe that US involvement in Pakistan during the 1980s was a main factor in the rise in terrorism there. In order to counter the Soviet Union, Pakistan and Afghanistan established a base camp. In order to fight alongside Mujahedeen in Pakistan's tribal areas, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) trained militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Arab world and provided operational support. The Afghan Mujahedeen received financial backing from Saudi Arabia and the US, but forces were also sent into these camps to oversee and carry out the terror campaign. They were also trained in various techniques, including how to carry out bomb attacks by car, bicycle, and camel, and killings of people (Rashid et al., (2023; Mustaqeem. 2023). Afghans were eager to participate because they believed that the Soviet Union was attempting to impose foreign ideologies in order to overthrow the country and destroy its social order, religion, and culture. Many foreign powers were accused of converting the nation into a focal point for proxy war. Terrorists tried to incite divisions between communities and religions in order to gain control because it suited their own interests to serve those opposing forces (Milyukov, 2024).

Soviet Union Breakup in 1989: Pakistan supported setting up a warlord-dominated Afghan state in Kabul following the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989, but its situation rapidly changed as a result of a civil war, and the Taliban assumed control (Basit et al., 2021). But the tragic events of 9/11 changed everything, making the Mujahedeen terrorists. When the US and its allies invaded Afghanistan, they succeeded in overthrowing the Taliban. To protect themselves from a terrorist attack such as 9/11, the United States and its allies initiated Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) (Rabbi, 2012; Samuels, 2025).

Terrorism: Any behaviour that intimidates and harasses the citizens of a country is considered terrorism, and individuals who engage in this kind of activity are known as terrorists. Terrorism is defined as a form of war, a threat of aggression, or a strategy to achieve particular objectives that seeks to violate humanitarian standards and instill a merciless state of terror in the victim (Malik et al., 2019; Muhebes, 2024). Terrorism is considered "the use of violent or unlawful force against people or property with the intent to threaten or compel a country, its civilian population, or any portion of it in order to achieve political or social objectives" (Khalid, 2020; Ibrahim, 2024).

Attack of September 11th, 2001: US President George W. Bush described the worldwide tragedy that took place on September 11, 2001, as a "war" or "crusade." It had a profound effect on the world. The "Authorisation for Use of Military Force (AUMF)" On September 14, 2001, a bill was passed by the US Senate and Congress via a joint resolution (Shirazi, 2016; Shaffer & Kaplan, 2023). According to Hassan et al. (2021), this resolution launched the "Global War on Terror (GWOT)" and gave the President of the United States the authority to use any relevant and necessary means of restraining organisations and persons engaged in the 9/11 insurrection. In this context, the anti-terrorist initiative launched in Afghanistan and has since expanded to several other nations. There have been more drone strikes in seven different nations worldwide as a result of the global war on terror (Mirza, 2021).

War with Al-Qaeda and its Supporters: and How it will End: "J.C. Johnson lectured on the subject of "The War with Al-Qaeda and Its Supporters: and How It will End?" at the "Department of Defence of the United States General Counsel." He said that "the war against terrorism is not an ongoing war, and the United States is approaching a turning point where a law enforcement operation will replace the military war against Al Qaeda" (Ahmed, 2007). Terrorist strongholds in the northern regions were destroyed by the joint US-Pakistani ground operation and drone campaign during the war on terror, but these actions and strikes did not stop terrorism; rather, they made it worse. Drone strikes have a lot of drawbacks and implications, but they were very successful in locating the target and killing him. The drone strikes in Pakistan have sparked a firestorm of anti-American sentiment and outraged the Pakistani people. Both public outrage and terrorist violence have increased during this supposedly covert war (Khan & Rehman, 2018; Mahmood & Jetter, 2023).

Attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre: After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in New York City, the United States initiated a global counterterrorism operation (Robinson, 2024). The state's sovereignty has been compromised on numerous occasions, and this warfare has severely harmed Pakistan's national sovereignty (Qadir et al., 2026). Examples of this include drone strikes, NATO's attack on Salala Checkpoint, and Osama Bin Laden's death, all of which took place without its prior approval (Khan et al., 2023). These terrorist activities have undermined Pakistan's sovereignty. The two most well-known American target towers are the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre. In this regard, the Pentagon is well-known for its financial power, while the other is recognised for its military force (Dhobi, 2024). The US administration has blamed the attacks on the terrorist group Al-Qaida.

American Alliance: The American government established alliances and made preparations in every field, which included economics, essential weapons and ammunition, diplomacy, and law enforcement (Ahmed, 2024; Löffmann, 2024). The US administration reported on September 28, 2001, that it was forming an alliance in accordance with a UN Security Council resolution 1373. Although the American government disregarded norms and standards that are helpful for mutual relations and have various consequences appropriate for a civilised world, it has been noted that the government became more violent, and their actions became known as the popular doctrine "might is right" (Sanaullah, 2021).

State Sovereignty: During the Cold War, state sovereignty was held in high respect (El Taki, 2025). However, social security is valued in terms of sovereignty in the post-Cold War age. Unfortunately, there have been more instances where state sovereignty has been called into question in the interest of ensuring social security. The counterterrorism organisations have been accused of openly violating international law and the principle of state sovereignty by

encroaching upon the regional boundaries of sovereign states to some extent (Hu & Liu, 2025).

NATO Armed Forces Attacked Pakistani Border Posts: On Saturday, Nov. 26, 2011, Pakistani border posts came under bombardment by NATO forces commanded by the US (Haq et al., 2023). A military aircraft entered Pakistan's Salala border area, which is part of the Baize Division of the Mohmand Agency, after flying 2.5 kilometres. At 2:00 p.m. local time, military forces entered Pakistan and began firing from Afghanistan at the "Boulder" and "Volcano" border crossing points with Pakistan using a NATO-affiliated Apache helicopter. The forces not only entered Pakistan in this dangerous environment, but they also killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, including two officers. Additionally, 13 soldiers got significant injuries. Pakistani soldiers lost their lives as a result of the attack, which was a blatant violation of Pakistani sovereignty. Regarding this, the Pakistani armed forces protested and demanded an end to the attacks and violations of Pakistani sovereignty during an assault by NATO forces headed by US-led war helicopters. Despite this, NATO forces kept coming in. Air opponents in Pakistan recorded a depth of 1.6 kilometres. The two-hour continuance of the strikes showed there was no miscalculation and that contact among the parties had broken down. Regarding this, there existed a border communications centre. In the same way, not all Pakistani soldiers were aware of the operation (Haq et al., 2023; Sumbul & Parveen, 2024).

Operation against Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan: Osama Bin Laden, a Saudi national, commanded Al-Qaeda in launching terrorist acts to defend and uphold both the US and the Muslim community. Osama bin Laden and his network, Al-Qaida, are allegedly accountable for the terrorist bombing attacks on the World Trade Centre in 1993, in addition to other terrorist actions such as the terrorist bombings on USS Cole in 1998 and two bombing terrorist attacks on US embassies, whereas Al-Qaida has a long history of terrorist action that goes all the way back to the 9/11 attacks on the United States of America. Without conducting a thorough investigation, the US attributes these terrorist assaults to Osama bin Laden and his affiliates. But since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the US military has been unable to eliminate or apprehend Osama bin Laden. As a result, US forces entered Abbotabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011, disregarding the government of Pakistan (McMahon, 2024). "To either kill or apprehend Osama Bin Laden, the supreme leader of Al-Qaeda, special US Navy Seals launched an attack on Pakistani territory" (Akhter & Malik, 2016). The United States' behaviour was a blatant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty. After learning that Osama bin Laden was in Pakistan, the US military launched a mission on the night of May 1-2, 2011, using helicopters equipped with stealth technology to take off from the border of Jalalabad, Afghanistan, and head into Pakistan (McMahon, 2024).

The mission involved 20 to 25 Navy SEALs. The Navy SEALs were part of the Joint Special Operations Command's Naval Special Warfare Development Group (JSOC) when they arrived in Pakistan, clearly crossing Pakistan's international border and violating its sovereignty, and "came close to the Pakistan military academy in Abbottabad." According to Nazar (2016), "it is one unit of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) dedicated to counterterrorism operations." After entering Pakistan and moving inside the compound sector, they assassinated Osama bin Laden with ease and without any resistance from the opposite side. Following this successful operation, the US soldiers took Mr. Osama Bin Laden's corpse. To verify it, they had Osama bin Laden's DNA examined. "The US gave Saudi Arabia the opportunity to collect Osama's corpse because he was a citizen of Saudi Arabia, but they declined to accept it." As a result, they tossed it into the sea. This is how the US government announced the operation after it was finished (Campbell, 2013; Johnston,

2024). On May 2, 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama declared through international media that Osama bin Laden had been killed. He referred to this as a "significant achievement" and said that Osama and his network, Al-Qaida, had been defeated; thus, justice had been served (Fisher & Becker, 2021).

Pakistan Paid Cost in War on Terror: Pakistan's northern areas are the main source of terrorism in the country as a whole. That is to say, the Pakistani army's most significant and active operations against insurgency and terrorism in Malakand and Swat started in 2009. Three million residents were forced to leave these places as a result of these operations, and the armed forces shifted them towards safer areas (Hanif et al., 2019; Irfan et al., 2022). The Pakistani army conducted several large-scale complete operations, like Sher Dil operations in 2008-09, in Bajur, South Waziristan Zalzala in 2008, and Rah-e-Rast in Swat and Malakand in 2009 (Wahab, 2024). These military operations had overall costs of 28% in 2009–2010. In the last ten years, Pakistan's war on terror has cost the country Rs. 5037 billion, or \$67.93 billion, in direct and indirect expenses (Imran et al., 2024). Pakistan has suffered because of its widely criticised but successful participation in the war on terror (Mahsud, 2024). One of the most important aspects missed in the initial assessments was the compensation planned for those affected by the war; a considerable amount of the total cost is allocated to these individuals (Hussain, 2024).

Pakistan's Exports Suffered in the War on Terror: Pakistan's exports have been negatively impacted as a result of the war on terror for a number of reasons, such as disruptions in foreign markets, changes in domestic markets, and production failure. Pakistani tourism has been impacted by the war on terrorism (Bönte et al., 2024; Afridi et al., 2024). Pakistan's northern regions, like Gilgit Baltistan and KPK, are often visited by tourists due to their amazing natural beauty. The reality is that the locals' main source of income is tourism. Although some of these sites have also been influenced by terrorism, the charm of these places has been seized by anti-terrorism efforts. However, Pakistan's low ranking as a tourism location—121st out of 140—is due to efforts to combat terrorism and militant activity in certain areas. At number two among the ten most affected countries, Pakistan is one of the most affected by terrorist acts (Khan et al., 2024; Afridi et al., 2024).

Pakistani Civilians Expired in War on Terror: Thousands of civilians have been slain by these horrible terrorists, and Pakistan has lamented their losses. According to a report by Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, over 940,000 people were killed directly by war aggression; above 432,000 of whom were civilians. An estimated 3.6 million people died indirectly; thus, Brown estimates the overall death toll at roughly 4.5-4.7 million and counting. Brown highlighted that the exact death figure remains unknown (Savell, 2023). Moreover, the direct and indirect economic costs of terrorism from 2000 to 2010 are estimated at approximately \$68 billion (Javed et al., 2023). In 2018, the Pakistani economy had suffered a total loss of \$126.79 billion since 2001, rising to approximately \$150 billion by 2021 due to the War on Terror. The Taliban-infected and militancy-affected Baluchistan was the state with the highest number, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) looked to be the country's second and third worst-affected regions (Iqbal, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because terrorism is considered the main root of both financial challenges and insecurity in Pakistan, the country's support for the war on terror is seen as a key contributor to the rise of domestic terrorism and a major threat to its sovereignty. As a result of this

alliance, Pakistan's suffered massive human and economic losses, questions regarding its national identity, a pervasive climate of fear, increased security budgets, and severe damage to its tourist industry. The country became viewed as unsafe for foreigners, experienced large-scale citizen displacement, faced setbacks to international sports events, suffered a blockade of its exports, and lacked sufficient funds for reconstruction.

International relations are fundamentally driven by national interest, and United States policies were entirely shaped by its own goals. Therefore, Pakistan urgently needs to revise its foreign policy to safeguard its core national interests. The Pakistani government must work tirelessly to improve conditions in terrorism-affected areas, collaborating with local residents to counteract extremist activities. Additionally, the government should accelerate infrastructure development and focus on the industrialization of impoverished regions by utilizing their local natural resources. It will stimulate economic growth and provide individuals with greater employment opportunities. Building a national consensus on this issue among political, military, bureaucratic, ethnic, and religious leadership is therefore essential to reduce terrorist attacks and restore the confidence of foreign tourists, investors, and civilians traveling or investing in Pakistan. To combat terrorism effectively, Pakistan should engage in dialogue with the US, seek assistance from the UN Security Council and International Court of Justice, formulate an independent foreign policy, and pursue trade agreements with China and other Islamic nations rather than countries tried to terror attacks. Furthermore, establishing agreements with the current Taliban government is crucial for achieving durable peace in the region.

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