**The Unyielding Menace**

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The role played by Pakistan in the Afghan Jihad during the 1980s remains a topic of intense debate and historical analysis. While some argue it was a strategic mistake, others perceive it as a well-calculated decision influenced by regional geopolitics and Cold War dynamics. Assessing whether Pakistan’s involvement was a calculated error depends on one’s perspective and the criteria employed to evaluate it. Nonetheless, the prevention of Soviet expansionism was of paramount importance. The aftermath of this involvement witnessed the emergence of the Taliban and numerous other militant groups, which have since posed significant challenges to the political and economic stability of the region. The influx of foreign fighters, weapons, and radical ideologies into Afghanistan contributed to economic instability within Pakistan itself. Later on, Pakistan’s collaboration with the United States in the Global War on Terror following the September 11, 2001 attacks resulted in a resurgence of militancy, as extremist groups redirected the violence towards Pakistan. This cooperation, though well-intentioned, inadvertently fueled the rise of militancy from within.

Throughout history, the tribal areas on the Pakistan-Afghanistan borders have been known for their inadequate governance and as constant safe havens for outlaws. High level of poverty, unemployment, and limited educational and healthcare opportunities mostly renders parts of the population susceptible to being radicalised and recruited by extremist groups. Deprivation can also lead to grievances against the government and the perception that the state is corrupt and ineffective. In such cases, extremist ideologies that promise change and justice can find fertile grounds for recruitment. Inequality can intersect with ethnic or sectarian tensions, further exacerbating social divisions and creating conditions conducive to extremism. Various terrorist organizations often choose these areas as centres for training, recruiting, and planning.

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The religious schools (madrasas) often serve as breeding grounds for radicalization and recruitment of terrorists through ideological and militant training to youngsters. There are numerous extremist organisations consisting of students of religious madrasas operating within Pakistan for an extensive period. Although these groups have diverse objectives, they all adhere to the same ideology of violent jihad. Regrettably, the administrations in Pakistan have oscillated between backing or deliberately disregarding extremist factions during various historical periods. Relying on strategic miscalculations and intervening only when these groups jeopardise national security. Counterterrorism efforts have perennially faced hindrances due to this inconsistency.

The enabling environment for terrorist activities in Pakistan can be attributed to political instability, weak governance, and corruption. The erosion of the rule of law, caused by weak governance and corruption, poses challenges in maintaining economic stability. This creates a vacuum that extremist groups exploit. Financial corruption often leads to impunity for those involved in criminal or terrorist activities. It becomes increasingly difficult to hold terrorists accountable when corrupt officials shield or cooperate with militants. Dishonesty siphons off resources that should be used for counterterrorism efforts, such as funding for law enforcement agencies, intelligence services, and border security. Additionally, under certain circumstances, the political instability and feeble governance have prompted negotiations and treaties with extremist groups, thus granting them recognition and sanctuaries.

Sectarian tensions, characterized by deep-rooted religious divisions, have indeed been a persistent source of violence and conflict in various parts of the world, including Pakistan. The divisions may be rooted in theological disagreements, interpretations of religious texts, or historical events that led to schisms within a religious community. Extremists, individuals, or groups, exploit sectarian differences to advance their political agendas. They use violence as a means to promote their respective faction’s dominance or to target perceived religious rivals. Acts of religious prejudice frequently become evident through targeted acts of violence at various places of devotion, such as mosques, churches, temples, and shrines affiliated with differing religious denominations.

Terrorism is not just a threat to human lives. The direct economic consequences are nothing short of disastrous. One of the primary concerns is the financial burden caused by physical infrastructure destruction in Pakistan. Whether it is bombs ripping through buildings or roads being blown up, the repair and reconstruction expenses burn a hole in the nation’s pocket. Now, brace yourself for the indirect economic consequences of terrorism; loss of foreign investment, Increased security costs, and reduced business confidence. That is where counterterrorism policies and strategies come into play. It is not just about catching the bad guys; it is also about preventing them from wreaking havoc in the first place. The goal is to not only combat terrorism head-on but also to tackle the socioeconomic factors that contribute to its growth.

In today’s global landscape, terrorism has become an insidious force that knows no borders and rarely reveals its true face. It transcends religious boundaries, affecting people of all faiths and backgrounds. While short-term tactical successes may provide temporary relief, they cannot rectify the strategic mistakes that fuel terrorism. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that brilliance in strategy alone cannot compensate for a lack of political wisdom. While well-crafted strategies are undoubtedly crucial, they must be guided by astute political judgment and wisdom. Only through a combination of strategic acumen and political sagacity can we effectively combat terrorism and its multifaceted challenges.

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