



Applied Knowledge Services

Governance • Social Development • Humanitarian • Conflict

Impact of Pakistan-Afghanistan Borderlands Instability on the Military and Political Elites in Pakistan

Rapid Literature Review
July 2024

Iffat Idris

About this report

This rapid review is based on seven days of desk-based research. It was prepared for the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme. The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not represent the opinions or views of XCEPT, the UK government, the University of Birmingham, the GSDRC or partner organisations.

Suggested citation

Idris, I. (2024). Impact of Pak-Afghan Borderlands Instability on the Military and Political Elites in Pakistan. GSDRC, University of Birmingham & XCEPT.

About XCEPT

The Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research programme is funded by UK International Development from the UK government. XCEPT brings together leading experts to examine conflict-affected borderlands, how conflicts connect across borders, and the drivers of violent and peaceful behaviour, to inform policies and programmes that support peace. For more information, visit www.xcept-research.org or contact us at info@xcept-research.org.

About GSDRC

GSDRC is a partnership of research institutes, think-tanks and consultancy organisations with expertise in governance, social development, humanitarian and conflict issues. We provide applied knowledge services on demand and online. Our specialist research team supports a range of international development agencies, synthesising the latest evidence and expert thinking to inform policy and practice.

GSDRC

International Development Department

College of Social Sciences

University of Birmingham

Birmingham, B15 2TT

United Kingdom

www.gsdr.org

helpdesk@gsdr.org

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

XCEPT

CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT
EVIDENCE / POLICY / TRENDS



**UK International
Development**

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

Contents

1. Summary	1-2
2. Developments in Pakistan-Afghanistan Borderlands	3-7
2.1 Pakistan-Afghan Relations	3
2.2 Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)	4
2.3 Pakistan's Response to TTP	5
3. Current Situation in Pakistan: Military and Political Elites in Flux	8-13
3.1 Dominant Position of Military in Pakistan	8
3.2 Ouster of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) Government	9
3.3 2024 National and Provincial Elections: Altered Landscape	11
4. Impact of Pak-Afghan Borderlands Instability on Military and Political Elites in Pakistan	14-15
4.1 Impact on Pakistan Military	14
4.2 Impact on Political Elites	14
4.3 Exacerbating Ongoing Crises Facing Pakistan	15
References	16-17

1. Summary

This rapid review looks at how recent clashes on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border and related instability (notably attacks by Tehrik-e-Taliban) impact two of the main powerbrokers in Pakistan: the military and political elites. Specifically, how are developments stemming from border instability affecting the balance of power between these two groups (i.e., the underlying structural features of the Pakistani state)? The review draws on a mixture of academic and grey literature, as well as recent media reports. While there is a wide body of literature on the role of the military in Pakistan, and on the position of political actors, little was found directly addressing the above question. As such, after describing Pak-Afghan tensions and the threat posed by the Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP), this review approaches the question by assessing the wider context of military-civilian relations in Pakistan, and then seeing how this is changing as a result of the former developments.¹

Pakistan's established goal in relation to Afghanistan has been to seek a dependable government that can provide strategic depth for Pakistan's security and serve its interests. The restoration of the Taliban government in 2021 was expected to provide this, but relations between the two countries have deteriorated. There are three main sources of difference: the positioning of the border between the two countries; the Taliban's support for the TTP; and the Taliban's relations with India.

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was set up in 2007 to bring together diverse militant Islamist groups operating in the north-west border region of Pakistan. **The TTP's attacks have evolved from indiscriminate, to specifically targeting the security services.** The group has been very effective in the past two years, seen both in numbers of security personnel killed, and in the kinds of high security facilities being hit. Efforts by Pakistan to agree a ceasefire with the TTP collapsed, with the military and political elites blaming each other for making concessions that strengthened the TTP. The Taliban regime has provided sanctuary to the TTP and resisted calls from Pakistan to restrain the group. Over the past year, the Pakistan military and government have taken an increasingly hardline approach to the TTP and the Taliban. They have tried to put pressure on the Taliban by restricting trade and deporting tens of thousands of undocumented Afghans from Pakistan to Afghanistan. This could be followed by military operations against the TTP inside Afghanistan.

The military has long held a dominant position in Pakistan. For some half of the country's history, Pakistan was under direct military rule (albeit with varying forms of constitutional covering). The military has used its dominant position to build up a massive military business empire, worth billions of dollars. Political power and economic power are mutually reinforcing for the military. It therefore has very strong vested interests for holding onto power. General Pervez Musharraf was the last of Pakistan's military leaders to directly hold office; since he stepped down in 2008, civilian elected governments have ostensibly run Pakistan. However, rather than a transition from military to democratic rule, **the past 15 years or so are more accurately characterised by 'hybrid' regimes.** These entail civilian governments being elected and holding office, but often owing their position to some degree of military influence. Moreover, the military continues to wield considerable power, particularly in relation to foreign and security policy.

The latest incarnation of this hybrid arrangement was the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) coalition government of Prime Minister Imran Khan, elected in 2018. The army was widely seen as helping bring it to office. But in power, when Khan tried asserting his authority, the relationship quickly broke down and in 2022 opposition parties (now enjoying military backing) were able to oust him from office. Both the military

¹ This review should be read in conjunction with a second review looking at the effects of Pak-Afghan borderlands insecurity on security and stability in Pakistan (Herbert & Idris, forthcoming).

and the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition government that succeeded Khan, continued to target him and the PTI. Khan was charged with numerous offences; convictions to date have led to him being sentenced to imprisonment for decades. He is currently in jail, while a massive campaign of repression has been carried out against other PTI leaders and its supporters.

Khan's ouster, and in particular his arrest in May 2022, triggered violent protests, which included targeting of the military. The popular backlash to Khan's removal, notably from groups that traditionally supported the armed forces, has been a new development in Pakistan's history. For the first time, the military finds itself under sustained public pressure and its image has suffered. There are even signs of internal divisions within the military. **In sum, the Pakistan military is – for the first time in the country's history – seeing its dominance challenged.**

Elections for national and provincial assemblies were eventually held in February 2024. Despite the sustained efforts to target PTI, including banning its electoral symbol and forcing its candidates to stand as independents, the party secured the largest number of seats in the National Assembly. While a new coalition government was formed by its rival PML-N and PPP parties, with military backing, the election outcome represents significant challenges to both the military and traditional parties. Worryingly, rather than ushering in a period of political stability, this will likely lead to ongoing political crisis.

This is the context against which to assess the likely impact of Pak-Afghan borderlands instability on the military and on political elites in Pakistan, and on the balance of power between these.

With regard to the military, there is some direct impact: attacks on military facilities and growing military casualties. But ultimately, the TTP is not in a position to defeat the Pakistan military. However, the indirect impact on the military's public image and its political influence is greater. The longer TTP attacks on the security services continue, the greater human toll they take, and the more they are seen as exposing security shortcomings in Pakistan, the more the Pakistan military will be weakened. Albeit (for now) the 'damage' is to its image/legitimacy rather than actual operational capacity, and certainly not to its vast assets.

Borderlands instability and the TTP's attacks impact political elites less directly than the military. The former have generally backed the military in its condemnation of the TTP, and determination to combat the group. The TTP have issued statements condemning politicians for siding with the military.

The Pak-Afghan borderlands instability should be viewed in the context of the wider very serious crises facing Pakistan: political, economic, security (ethnic/sectarian/insurgent violence) and climate change. The former exacerbates the latter and makes it harder for the state to respond effectively. Pakistan's acute economic situation makes funding the kind of large-scale operation that would be needed to clear the TTP very difficult, while the ongoing political crisis diverts government attention and resources from combatting the TTP and addressing borderlands instability.

2. Developments in Pakistan-Afghanistan Borderlands

2.1 Pakistan-Afghan Relations

Pakistan's established goal in relation to Afghanistan has been to seek a dependent government in Kabul, which can provide strategic depth for Pakistan's security, and, crucially, serve the interests of Islamabad rather than historic rival New Delhi. Pakistan thus actively supported the Taliban government during the 1990s. By the same logic, Pakistan was widely seen as losing influence in Afghanistan after the US-led invasion of that country in 2001, the ouster of the Taliban and their replacement with an Afghan government that had close relations with India. In the summer of 2021, when the US withdrew its forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban returned to power, there was a widespread expectation that this would benefit Pakistan. Many analysts "regarded the Taliban takeover at least initially as a triumph for Pakistan's regional policy" (CRS, 2023).

However, this has not proven to be the case; **relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have become increasingly strained. There are three main sources of difference: the positioning of the border between the two countries; the Taliban's support for Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan; and the Taliban's relations with India.**

On the first, **the Durand Line marks the 2,640 km border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, it has never been recognised by Kabul,** as "all Afghan governments since 1947 have taken similar positions on this dispute" (Olsen, Mir & Watkins, 2022). Significantly, this includes both the Taliban government in the 1990s and the current Taliban regime. In recent years, Pakistan has tried to force a change in the status quo by building a border fence along the Durand Line. Mir (Olsen, Mir & Watkins, 2022) claims that the fencing "has been a central project of Pakistani Army Chief Gen. Qamar Bajwa's security policy for the country's western border" and has cost an estimated USD 532 million. According to Mir, the two goals were to control cross-border movement of goods and people, and "to offer a demarcation fait accompli on a border which has been rejected by prior Afghan governments".

The Taliban government in Kabul has condemned the fencing, claiming that it divides the Pashtun 'nation' which is spread across both sides of the border (Qazi, 2022). The Afghans have tried to dismantle sections of the fence, and there have been periodic clashes between Pakistani and Afghan forces over the issue (Olsen, Mir & Watkins, 2022). Moreover, there have been some efforts by Afghans to take control of lands they claim is theirs on the Pakistan side of the Durand Line (Olsen, Mir & Watkins, 2022). Mir (Olsen, Mir & Watkins, 2022) warns that these physical actions represent "a tangible challenge to a pillar of Pakistan's recent security policy – more serious than the rhetorical challenges of the former Afghan government under presidents Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai".

On the second, differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the TTP are detailed in section 2.3.

On the third source of difference – relations with India – there are signs that the Taliban government is, like its predecessor, moving closer to New Delhi. In an interview in June 2022, Taliban Defence Minister Mullah Yaqoob (son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar) stated that his government was keen for Afghanistan to have cordial relations with India and expressed a desire for India to train Afghan troops (Qazi, 2022). Qazi (2022) notes that, should India accede to this request, it would mark "a major foothold for Indian influence on Pakistan's western border".

On both the border and relations with India, the Taliban government have shown that nationalism takes precedence over ideology. "Pakistan policy makers appear to be realizing that the Taliban will walk the talk of jihad and chew the gum of border nationalism at the same time" (Olsen, Mir & Watkins, 2022).

2.2 Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

TTP History and Strategy

Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was set up in 2007 to bring together diverse militant Islamist groups operating in the north-west border region of Pakistan, largely in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (since merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). It was actually created in response to the Pakistan military's campaign from 2002 against armed extremists in the tribal belt; many had fled there from Afghanistan after the US invasion of that country and ouster of the Taliban government. Whilst made up of diverse groups, which are not always united, the main objectives of the TTP "have included fighting Pakistan's security forces, resisting Western forces in Afghanistan, and implementing Sharia law in areas it controls" (CFR, 2023).

The TTP's strategy evolved over time – in addition to FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it targeted major cities across Pakistan. In June 2014 the group attacked Karachi's international airport, prompting the government to launch Operation Zarb-e-Azb against militant strongholds in North Waziristan (part of FATA). The TTP's response to this included what (at least at the time) was the deadliest terrorist incident in Pakistan's history: in December 2014 the group attacked the Army Public School in Peshawar, killing nearly 150 people, most of them children (CFR, 2023). The significance of the school lay in the fact that it was largely attended by children from military families. Unsurprisingly, the army's campaign continued and in June 2016 FATA was declared by the military to have been cleared of militants (CFR, 2023). Between 2014 and 2018, aided by US drone attacks, and infighting amongst the TTP, the Pakistan military succeeded in significantly weakening the group (CFR, 2023). However, it was not totally destroyed, and attacks continued.

After 2018, the Pakistan military's hand was weakened by the Trump administration's decision to suspend (or redirect) \$800 million of military assistance to Pakistan: the country was seen as not doing enough to combat Pakistan-based militants carrying out attacks in neighbouring Afghanistan (CFR, 2023). In 2021, the US pulled out of Afghanistan and the Taliban were restored to power. The return of the Taliban government in Kabul meant that Afghanistan became a sanctuary for the TTP.

In the same period, the TTP's focus and strategy narrowed. In its 2018 manifesto the group said it would be deprioritising indiscriminate attacks, including on religious minorities, and specifically targeting the security services in Pakistan (Sayed, 2021). This was followed by a significant decline in attacks on civilians, and a corresponding rise in those on the military (see below). In terms of goals, the TTP removed calls for a 'greater jihad' and for supporting the global jihad agenda of Al-Qaeda from its 2018 manifesto, and in 2020 it declared "that it no longer had any regional or global agenda beyond Pakistan" (Sayed, 2021). After the return of the Afghan Taliban to power, "the TTP's leadership presented the Afghan Taliban as a role model to the group's fighters, arguing that perseverance in the war against the Pakistani state will guarantee a similar victory to what the Taliban achieved in Afghanistan" (Sayed, 2021).

To further these goals, the TTP has become more engaged in mainstream political issues in Pakistan. It has expressed support for a range of movements opposed to the Pakistani state, notably Pashtun and Baloch nationalists (despite deep ideological differences with these), the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (which opposes the Taliban) and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right religio-political party (despite the TTP and TLP following rival Sunni sects) (Sayed, 2021). The TTP has also "called on Pakistan's opposition political parties to reconsider their nonviolent approach if they truly seek to end the powerful military establishment's political meddling" (Sayed, 2021).

Escalation in TTP Attacks on Security Forces

TTP attacks in Pakistan have increased significantly. “Overall, average TTP attacks per month increased from 14.5 in 2020 to 45.8 in 2022 and expanded in geographical scope, reflecting increased operability and improved weaponry acquired when the Afghan government collapsed” (CFR, 2023). According to the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), a think tank based in Islamabad, “losses among Pakistani security forces reached an eight-year high in the first nine months of 2023. At least 386 security personnel, including 137 members of the army, were killed during this period” (Rehman, 2023).

The TTP has also become more effective in hitting security targets. In January 2023 the group hit police headquarters in Peshawar (capital of KP), killing over 80 people of whom all but three were police officers (Ahmed, 2023). The following month they struck a compound in Karachi, which had the office of the Sindh Police Chief (Ahmed, 2023). According to the International Crisis Group (ICG) the two strikes illustrated that “the TTP insurgency [had] assumed threatening proportions” (Ahmed, March 2023). This appeared confirmed in November 2023, when the TTP attempted to attack a Pakistan Air Force (PAF) facility in Punjab province, “typically considered one of the safest regions in Pakistan” (Rehman, 2023). Respected analyst, Dr Ayesha Siddiq, commented: “No one was anticipating that the militants would target a high-security site in Punjab [... the attack] has demonstrated its capability to capture a hard target” (cited in Rehman, 2023).

The Centre for Preventive Action (CFR, 2024) **warns that the increase in attacks by the TTP could have knock-on effects in terms of facilitating other forms of extremist violence:**

As the TTP expands in Pakistan and security deteriorates, separatist movements and other armed groups could regain strength. United or not, these groups present a major challenge to a cash-strapped Pakistani government. A destabilized Pakistan creates the risk for further proliferation of militant groups in the region and a greater risk of them holding territory and developing the capabilities to launch international terrorist attacks.

2.3 Pakistan’s Response to TTP

Attempts to Resolve Differences over TTP

As noted, **the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan provided a huge boost to the TTP.** Hundreds of TTP prisoners were released from Afghan jails, and their release was celebrated with large motor rallies in eastern Afghanistan (Sayed, 2021). “In addition to congratulating the Afghan Taliban on its return to power, the TTP publicly renewed its pledge of allegiance to its ally” (Sayed, 2021).

In response to the growing attacks by the TTP, Pakistan initially tried talks. At the end of 2021, the military under then army chief Qamar Bajwa – with the backing of the then PM Imran Khan – made concessions to the TTP to secure a ceasefire. These included the release of over a hundred TTP prisoners, among them two top leaders, from Pakistani jails, and allowing “hundreds of armed Pakistani Taliban fighters to come home from Afghanistan” (Ahmed, 2023). In return, a ceasefire came into effect in November 2021, but it broke down a month later, when the TTP resumed attacks to put pressure on the Pakistani authorities to meet their remaining demands (Ahmed, 2023). Nonetheless talks continued for a while, pushed by the Afghan Taliban regime, but by the spring of 2022 had been abandoned. In April 2022, Pakistan carried out air strikes against TTP positions in Afghanistan, following which the group (presumably under Taliban pressure) agreed to another ceasefire (Mir, 2023). But that too broke down in July 2022.

Pakistan has repeatedly appealed to the Taliban to rein in the TTP. This has been done both formally through diplomatic channels and high-profile delegations, and through back channels, with the warning “that failure to do so will have adverse consequences for bilateral relations” (Ahmed, 2023). But the Taliban have proved non-responsive; they even denied that the TTP have any presence at all inside Afghanistan and

have stressed that “Pakistan must avoid military action in Afghan territory” (Ahmed, 2023). The Taliban have persistently offered to mediate between Pakistan and the TTP and have urged Pakistan “to accommodate the TTP with concessions” (Mir, 2022). However, Taliban support is a factor in ceasefire agreements with the TTP failing to hold: “the TTP has little incentive to keep commitments unless the Taliban pressures them” (CFR, 2023). The International Crisis Group (ICG, 2024: 15) suggests a number of possible reasons for the Taliban’s failure to curb the TTP:

The Taliban’s reluctance to clamp down on the TTP is partly motivated by reluctance to act against a longstanding ideological ally. They may also feel their clout with the TTP is limited, given that many of the group’s former members played a key role in founding IS-KP, and if pushed, might defect to their enemies.

The Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) is an extremist group. As the name indicates, it is the local branch of the Islamic State, and is violently opposed to both the TTP and the Taliban government in Kabul, as well as the Pakistan government (ICG, 2024: 8).

Change to Hardline Approach

A change of leadership in the Pakistan Army led to a new strategy on the TTP. Asim Munir took over as Pakistan’s Army Chief from Qamar Bajwa at the end of 2022. Unlike under Bajwa, when “Pakistan oscillated between talks and ceasefire with the TTP and selective kinetic activity, including air strikes”, Munir has taken a more hardline approach. Following the high-profile TTP attacks on the police facilities in Peshawar and Karachi, “the government has ramped up military and police operations, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan [...] where militant attacks are surging” (Ahmed, 2023). After TTP attacks in Balochistan that killed 12 soldiers in July 2023, Munir said Pakistan had “serious concerns on the safe havens and liberty of action available to TTP in Afghanistan” and warned that “such attacks are intolerable and would elicit an effective response from the security forces of Pakistan” (RFE/RL, 2023).

Pakistan has adopted two further strategies to pressure the Afghan Taliban into restraining the TTP. One is application of economic pressure, and the other is deporting Afghan refugees in Pakistan to their home country. On the former, Pakistan has used its economic leverage over Afghanistan – based on Pakistan being landlocked Afghanistan’s “main artery of transit trade” as well as its “main export market” – to scale back trade, and “impose economic pain on the Taliban” (Mir, 2023). “Border crossings with Pakistan contribute more than 40 percent of Afghanistan’s customs revenues, which makes up nearly 60 percent of the Taliban’s total revenues” (Mir, 2023). By tightening rules for trade and carrying out other measures to impede this, Pakistan is able to have a significant economic impact on the Taliban; Pakistan’s economy is far less dependent on Afghanistan, so the negative effects on Pakistan will be far less.

In November 2023, Pakistan imposed a requirement for passports and visas for Afghan drivers crossing the border. A two-week extension was negotiated before this came into effect, but on 13 January 2024 Pakistan did enforce the passport and visa condition. This led to the closure for ten days of the Torkham border crossing, the busiest one between the two countries, with large numbers of vehicles and goods stuck on both sides (RFE/RL, 2024). Chaman, the second-largest border crossing in Balochistan, was closed over two months earlier; minor border crossings such as Dand-e-Pathan and Angor Adda have also been periodically closed.

On the second strategy, **in early October 2023, the Pakistan government announced that it would be carrying out mass deportations of illegal immigrants, mostly Afghans, from 1 November** (O’Donnell, 2023). The new law affects an estimated 1.7 million undocumented Afghan refugees in Pakistan; as of mid-November, over 327,000 had been deported (Mir, 2023). By December 2023, nearly half a million undocumented Afghans had left Pakistan for Afghanistan (CFR, 2024). For a Taliban regime already struggling

to meet the basic needs of its population, the influx of hundreds of thousands of deportees makes this even harder.

Finally, the rhetoric being used by Pakistan in relation to the Taliban has intensified. Islamabad has announced that it will no longer “advocate the Afghan Taliban’s case at the international level” (Mir, 2023). On 8 November 2023, caretaker PM Anwar ul-Haq Kakar openly accused the Taliban of supporting the anti-Pakistan TTP insurgency, saying there was “clear evidence of [the Taliban] enabling terrorism” by the TTP (Mir, 2023). A few days later Pakistan’s special envoy for Afghanistan, Asif Durrani, echoed Kakar saying “peace in Afghanistan, in fact, has become a nightmare for Pakistan” (Mir, 2023). Mir (2023) argues that these statements are significant because they reflect “the latest policy turn led by the military that Pakistan has had enough of the Taliban’s support for the TTP”.

Mir (2023) warns that Pakistan could eventually decide to take military action against the TTP inside Afghanistan, striking the group’s leaders and camps in the country. “The outcome of such an action is not clear. There is deep anger in Afghanistan toward Pakistan. Pakistani military action may increase support for the TTP in Afghanistan and also trigger retaliatory violence. Yet it is possible that cross-border action forces the Taliban to revisit its position, at least tactically” (Mir, 2023).

A very recent incident shows the potential for escalation of tensions over the TTP into direct Pakistan-Afghan hostilities. In March 2024, TTP suicide bombers hit a military checkpoint in North Waziristan, killing seven Pakistani soldiers (Hussain, 2024). Pakistan responded by carrying out air raids inside Afghanistan “aimed at hideouts of armed groups including the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan”, according to a statement issued by the country’s foreign ministry (Hussain, 2024). Afghanistan condemned the raids as “reckless”, claiming that women and children had been killed. “Hours after the air raids, the Afghan military fired mortar shells on Pakistani military positions near border districts, which left four civilians and three soldiers injured” (Hussain, 2024).

3. Current Situation in Pakistan: Military and Political Elites in Flux

3.1 Dominant Position of Military in Pakistan

Transition from Direct Military to Hybrid Rule

The Pakistan military has been the dominant entity in the country since independence in 1947. The security threats facing the nascent country – Pakistan was at war with neighbour India over the state of Jammu and Kashmir within a year of its founding – and the early pattern of centralised control established by a bureaucratic government, paved the way for the military to become the most powerful group in the country. As such, it has been a key actor in the political arena. Sajjad (2023) explains:

The Army's interference in politics has taken various forms, including orchestrating coups, removing civilian governments, or exerting indirect control over weak administrations. This interference has often occurred in collaboration with the judiciary, civil bureaucracy, allied politicians, clergy and elements within the corporate sector – collectively referred to as the establishment in Pakistan. Politicians, on their part, have been quick to yield space to the military due to their own shortcomings, leading to the erosion of institutional boundaries.

For almost half of Pakistan's history, the country was directly under military rule. Military coups/interventions took place in 1958, 1969, 1977 and 1999 (Siddiq, 2019: 53). The last military ruler, Pervez Musharraf, stepped down in 2008, and since then Pakistan has had elected civilian governments. At the time "it was believed that Pakistan's transition to democracy could lead to a reduction in the power of the military" (BTI, 2022: 35). However, the military has continued to exert huge influence in the political arena, particularly through elections. "Over the years, the generals have consciously invested in a political system that allows them strategic control of state and society without visible intervention" (Siddiq, 2019: 53). Schwemlein (2023) describes how: "(T)he establishment has a long record of engineering the electoral playing field to achieve its preferred result, either by manipulating the candidate pool, co-opting politicians (typically via coercion or corruption), directly interceding in the process, or through other means". BTI (2022: 35) conclude: "The hope that the ousting of Musharraf would create an opportunity to deepen democracy in Pakistan has faded over time".

While direct military rule has become a thing of the past in Pakistan, it has been replaced by so-called 'hybrid' regimes: "a power-sharing arrangement in which civilian politicians had nearly free rein in the domestic domain while the high command retained almost absolute control of foreign and security policy" (Ahmed, 2022). Shah (2019: 129) explains Pakistan's hybrid regimes as follows:

Elected officials and institutions are de jure accountable to the people, but in fact are hemmed in by the military. The generals' tutelage extends to crucial 'reserve domains' such as the defence budget, nuclear weapons, intelligence gathering, and internal security. The military also runs vast commercial enterprises and has the final say in foreign affairs, especially when relations with arch-rival India are concerned.

Military Business 'Empire'

Over the decades, the Pakistan military has built up very significant and wide-ranging financial interests. Siddiq (2019: 66) describes the scale of the military-industrial complex in Pakistan:

The military not only takes a significant chunk of the Central Government Expenditure (CGE), it also digs into the broader economy as well. The four military foundations set up for welfare purposes are used to run hundreds of businesses. Besides, there are thousands of acres of agricultural land

distributed to the armed forces. The military operates in all three major segments of the economy—agriculture, manufacturing, and service industry. The estimated worth of this business empire runs into billions of dollars.

Political power and economic power are mutually reinforcing for the military. Again, Siddiq (2019: 68) illustrates how the military uses power (including in hybrid regimes) to bolster its financial interests:

As the military grew in power, it found new means to monopolize both political power and economic resources. Military business started to create monopolies after 2013. Consequently, in late December 2018, there were clashes at the Torkhum border (with Afghanistan) between the police and local transporters as the latter protested against monopolization of cargo business by the Army's NLC. Similarly, the FWO used its army connections to obtain the contract for collecting toll on the Islamabad-Lahore and Islamabad-Kashmir highways constructed with official resources and then increased the fee without the prior consent of the National Highway Authority.

Add to this advantageous tax arrangements, and lack of transparency and accountability, including the military's ability to suppress media reporting of its finances, assets and transactions. Successive civilian governments "were unable to tame the military business giant" (Siddiq, 2019: 69).

Finally, over the past almost two decades, the Pakistan military has expanded into international business. For example, in 2008 its Fauji Foundation bin Qasim Ltd. (FFBL) set up a plant in Morocco to produce phosphoric acid, partly to supply its companies in Pakistan and the rest to be sold on the open market, profits going to military entities (Siddiq, 2019: 69-70). Similarly, in 2014 the Frontier Works Organisation (FWO) registered a construction company in Abu Dhabi; making use of the Pakistan military's contacts with Abu Dhabi's ruler, it was able to win multiple construction contracts (Siddiq, 2019: 70).

Vast financial assets both strengthen the military's position vs. a vs. other state actors, and create strong vested interests for it to hold on to its dominant position. Siddiq (2019: 66) draws the blunt conclusion: 'The military does not control dissent for altruistic reasons, but to safeguard its echelons' multiple interests'.

3.2 Ouster of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI) Government

2018 PTI Government: Hybrid Regime

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI) came into power in 2018. In the July 2018 elections, PTI won the largest number of seats but fell short of a majority; it was able to form a government with the support of a number of smaller parties. Along with the charisma of its leader, former cricketer Imran Khan, and his 'populist and Islamist rhetoric', PTI's success in 2018 was widely attributed to the party having the backing of the Pakistan military under then army chief Qamar Bajwa (CFR, 2023). Shah (2019) claims that the army, and particularly its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) arm, interfered in the elections to ensure PTI came out on top, and its rival Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was kept out of power.

The PTI government thus followed the hybrid regime model outlined above, **whereby civilians 'front' the government but the military have strong influence, in particular on foreign and security policy.** This was reflected in the close cooperation between the military and Khan's administration. Former military officers were appointed to key posts (e.g. Brigadier Ijaz Shah became interior minister), and the military took the lead in the COVID-19 response (BTI, 2022: 10). The International Crisis Group (ICG) reported that, "Khan and his ministers often emphasised that the PTI and the generals were 'on the same page' with regard to policy objectives" (Ahmed, 2022) and "themselves referred to being [...] part of a 'hybrid' system of government" (BTI, 2022: 35).

PTI-Military Differences and Removal from Power

The close relationship between the PTI government and the military broke down as Khan tried to assert his authority over the military. Khan removed General Asim Munir from his post as chief of the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) just months after his 2018 appointment, reportedly after Munir told him about corruption in his innermost circle (Ahmed, 2022). In October 2021, Khan delayed signing off the appointment of the military's nominee as ISI head, as he favoured another officer (Ahmed, 2022).

The military also became disillusioned with the government's perceived failure to tackle the country's economic problems, manifested most obviously in spiralling inflation, **and its handling of foreign relations.** Khan was outspoken in his criticism of the United States and to a lesser extent the EU; and even offended Gulf partners and the Chinese with some of his blunt speaking (Haqqani, 2022). "The generals were concerned that Khan's anti-Western foreign policy was undermining the country's – and the army's – interests" (Ahmed, 2022).

By March 2022, opposition parties were actively seeking to remove Imran Khan as prime minister. The military conspicuously failed to back some of Khan's claims (Ahmed, 2022), indicating a distancing from the party. On 10 April 2022, the PTI lost a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly. The leader of the second largest party in the National Assembly, Shehbaz Sharif of the PML-N, was able to form the new government with his Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition. **Khan blamed the military (along with the US and opposition parties) for his removal from power** (CRF, 2023). In public statements, he implied that some senior army officers were unpatriotic (Ahmed, 2022; Sajjad, 2023).

After his ouster, Khan was charged with corruption and arrested on 9 May 2023, but this led to large-scale protests (see below), and two days later the Supreme Court ruled that his arrest was unlawful and ordered his immediate release (Curtis, 2023: 23). In July 2023 further cases were lodged against him; the following month **he was found guilty of illegally selling state gifts and sentenced to three years imprisonment** (Curtis, 2023: 24). The conviction disqualified him from holding elected office for the next five years (CFR, 2023). Subsequently, many more charges have been made against him, including violating the Official Secrets Act and not having a legal marriage (Curtis, 2023: 25). He remains in prison.

The government and military also sought to weaken the PTI by arresting/pressuring its other leaders to force them to leave the party, e.g. PTI Secretary Asad Umar, former Chief Minister of KP Pervez Khattak and former Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari (Curtis, 2023: 27). Academic Avinash Paliwal argues that "this dramatic crackdown is a clear strategy by the military to break down all the support structures that Khan has [...] once those structures are gone, Khan is next in line" (cited in Curtis, 2023: 28). Finally, media coverage of Khan and his party was restricted: news organisations were banned from using Imran Khan's name or reporting on the PTI in a way that could appear sympathetic (Curtis, 2023: 25).

Backlash Against Military

As seen, **Imran Khan directly blamed the military (among others) for his ouster** (Sajjad, 2023; Schwemlein, 2023). Khan's arrest on 9 May 2023 triggered immediate widespread public anger and protests – further fuelled by the fact that it happened during a court hearing, and was carried out by the Punjab Rangers, a paramilitary force, rather than the police. PTI supporters argued this was proof of the army's involvement, and "they say the arrest has little to do with corruption charges and everything to do with Mr Khan's ongoing public battle with the army" (Curtis, 2023: 22).

What was noteworthy about the subsequent violent protests was that they had "a notable focus against army installations and facilities" (Schwemlein, 2023). Sajjad (2023) points to "(t)he breach of the Army's headquarters, the ransacking of the corps commander's residence in Lahore, the vandalism of military

monuments and displays, and the pelting of stones at military convoys". Goldbaum and Masood (2023) describe these as "once unimaginable scenes in a country where few have dared defy the security establishment". Butt (2022) echoes this: "as a consequence of the army's break with Khan, many 'activists' [...] have now turned their rhetorical guns on the military, especially on social media. For an institution unused to anything other than hagiography, it has been humbling". Outgoing army chief General Qamar Bajwa acknowledged in his last address in that role on 23 November 2022 "that much of the animosity towards the military stemmed from its 'unconstitutional' involvement in domestic politics for seven decades" (Sajjad, 2023).

Especially significant is the fact that the public demonstrations in support of Imran Khan and against the military included military veterans. "For the first time, traditionally strong supporters of the army are now attacking it [...] Even recently retired military members, many of whom are big fans of Khan, have taken to criticizing army leadership in strident tones on social media" (Butt, 2022). Moreover, Sajjad (2023) points out that "(m)any of them had sons or relatives serving in the Army. Those young officers play a significant role in shaping sentiments within the ranks".

There have also been reports of internal divisions within the army – again, something largely unheard of in Pakistan's history. There were rumours during the May 2023 protests that some senior commanders had refused to obey orders from newly appointed Army Chief Asim Munir; the Lahore Corps Commander whose house was sacked by protesters was subsequently removed from his post. "Furthermore, General Munir's tour of garrisons to connect with officers and reaffirm his command left little doubt that he was under pressure. Previous army chiefs [...] also undertook similar actions when facing internal challenges during their tenures" (Sajjad, 2023).

Following Khan's removal from office, "the courts have issued ruling after ruling that have thwarted what many consider attempts by the military to sideline Mr Khan from politics" (Goldbaum & Masood, 2023). This has put the judiciary on a direct collision course with the military – a radical departure from the traditional relationship between the two, characterised by the judiciary providing legal cover for military actions. The military announced that it would try those involved in the 9 May attacks against military installations (see below) in military courts – raising serious questions about due process and fairness. Referring to this, Sajjad (2023) warns that "(t)he growing gap between the military and civilians is likely to widen further due to the army's decision".

3.3 2024 National and Provincial Elections: Altered Landscape

Delays and Restrictions on Opposition

While Imran Khan and the PTI called for national elections immediately after being removed from power, the PDM government which succeeded them and the military were reluctant to do so, fearing the PTI would do well. These fears were further fuelled by the outcome of provincial and national assembly by-elections in 2022. In July the PTI won 15 out of 20 seats up for election in the Punjab assembly (taking back control in Punjab), and in by-elections in October it won six out of eight National Assembly seats (Curtis, 2023: 12). The PDM government insisted that they would only hold elections in accordance with the constitutional timetable of five-year terms, i.e. in October 2023. In an effort to force early elections, in January 2023 the PTI dissolved the provincial assemblies in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (where it had been in power): the constitution stipulates that elections for new assemblies must be held within 90 days (Curtis, 2023). This did not happen.

Further delays in holding elections followed. In August 2023, in accordance with constitutional provisions for the run up to national elections, the National Assembly was dissolved and a caretaker government

appointed under interim PM Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar (Curtis, 2023). However, a decision to use the 2023 census results to demarcate electoral boundaries, meant polls could not be held within the stipulated 90 days. Instead, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced in November that elections would be held on 8 February 2024 (Curtis, 2023: 31). Kakar “is believed to be close to the military” and analysts warned that “a prolonged period without an elected government would allow the military [...] to consolidate control” (Curtis, 2023: 30).

As noted, the military and government had carried out a sustained campaign against the PTI leadership and supporters. This targeting of the party continued in the run up to elections. Weeks before the February 2024 polls, Imran Khan was sentenced to decades in prison for the some of the multiple cases against him (Afzal, 2024). In January 2024, the Supreme Court banned the party from using its electoral symbol, a cricket bat; it ordered all the party’s candidates to stand as independents. In a country with high rates of illiteracy, especially in rural areas, many voters rely on symbols when casting their vote. Furthermore, by standing as independents, PTI candidates would be ineligible to claim a share of the 70 seats reserved for women and minorities, which are distributed post-election through proportional representation (Afzal, 2024). To overcome some of the barriers to campaigning they faced, PTI workers made effective use of social media and artificial intelligence, including issuing statements apparently being made by Imran Khan (Afzal, 2024). On election day, internet and cellular services were cut off on the grounds of security – a move designed to make it harder for PTI supporters to mobilise.

Outcome of Elections

The clear expectation, given the repression of PTI and the military’s support for it, was that Pakistan Muslim League (N) would secure victory in the polls. As Afzal (2024) comments: “the day before the election, the victory of the military’s favoured candidate and party was deemed a foregone conclusion”.

The results, when they were finally released by the Election Commission, were therefore a major upset. PTI candidates, standing as independents, won 93 of the 266 contested seats; PML-N secured 75 seats; PPP 54 seats; and MQM 17 seats (Mir & Salikuddin, 2024). The PTI claimed it had won more seats, but had been denied by widespread electoral irregularities.

Party officials cited major discrepancies in polling station versus constituency-level results (the former did not add up to the latter); unexplained delays in vote counting and results being tabulated (results stopped coming in abruptly on election night); and the fact that some candidates ‘lost’ major vote leads reported on election night by the next morning (Afzal, 2024).

In its preliminary report, the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), Pakistan’s election watchdog, stated that the voting process was transparent, but vote counting and tabulation of results was not; in about half of constituencies, its agents weren’t allowed to observe result tabulations (Mir & Salikuddin, 2024; Afzal, 2024).

Since the PTI candidates had stood as independents, they were unable to use their position of holding the largest number of seats in the assembly, to attempt to form a government (they were short of an outright majority). However, another expectation that PTI legislators would then be enticed (would be ‘bought off’) to join either of the other main parties – PML-N or PPP – also proved incorrect. Only one PTI member ‘defected’; the remainder formed a political grouping, the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), and all 92 backed opposition candidate Omar Ayub Khan when the National Assembly voted to choose the next prime minister (Hussain, 2024). PML-N leader Shehbaz Sharif secured 201 out of 336 votes in the National Assembly, and duly became Prime Minister, heading a coalition government comprised of the PML-N and PPP.

Significance and Implications

The 2024 elections represent disruption of the status quo.

Firstly, they provide further proof – seen in public protests since Khan’s ouster in 2022 - that military dominance in Pakistan has been eroded. “Ultimately, Khan has polarised the political establishment and the country, managing to mount a greater resistance to the military than previous ousted politicians could” (CFR, 2023). Sajjad (2023) echoes this, arguing in relation to the 9 May protests that “the Army, which has historically held a tight grip on power in the country, has emerged as the most damaged institution from this episode”. Butt (2022) writes: “across the political spectrum, there is greater assertiveness against the military’s rise in politics – even if much of it is self-interested rather than principled opposition”.

The fact that PTI-backing candidates were able to secure so many seats, even after the massive clampdown against the party, was extremely significant – showing the power of voters over the establishment. As Omar Ayub Khan declared in the National Assembly: “They put our leaders in jail, took our election symbol, rigged the elections, but we kept standing, and we will stand our grounds. The nation has rejected all the charges [against Imran Khan] [in the election]” (Hussain, 2024). Mir and Salikuddin (2024) “read the outcome [as] a rejection of the military establishment’s role in politics, in particular its opposition to the PTI and the clampdown against the party since last year”. Afzal (2024) writes: “The military failed at decimating the PTI after the most heavy-handed crackdown a party has seen in recent decades, and Pakistanis saw that. They have realized the power of their votes. And they will use it again”.

Secondly, the results are seen as challenging the traditional dominance of the two main parties, PML-N and the PPP. “(T)he Pakistani people have rejected the two traditional, dynastic parties — the PML-N and PPP — and embraced Khan’s aspirational, populist political platform” (Mir & Salikuddin, 2024).

Thirdly, the outcome points to ongoing political instability. On the surface, the military did secure their desired result – a cooperative and not very strong government in power. As Afzal (2024) notes: “The incoming coalition government will function as a junior partner to the military - Shehbaz’s government handed over unprecedented power to the army in 2023, and it is likely to continue to do so in this term as well”. However, she also warns: “The military, which projects itself as the guarantor of stability in Pakistan, has since 2022 generated the worst political crisis the country has seen in decades. Far from returning Pakistan to some modicum of stability, the elections’ conduct has accentuated political tensions in the country” (Afzal, 2024). Mir and Salikuddin (2024) echo her warning that the new government will struggle:

The PTI will be positioned to disrupt its functioning, perhaps through street protests, court cases challenging the electoral results and inside the parliament with its sizeable representation [...] The hybrid approach of the coalition and the military establishment working together can nominally work, but it is structurally unstable, as it lacks a popular mandate, doesn’t have clarity on responsibility and risks disagreements between the coalition government and the establishment.

Nonetheless, despite the setbacks it has experienced, the military remains the dominant entity in Pakistan. One reason is that it retains its massive financial interests. According to Butt (2022):

the military’s level of entrenchment in spheres as widely flung as the political economy of land and business, media censorship and internet surveillance, and backroom electoral politics means that even huge crises can, at most, only chip away at its dominance. The military isn’t going anywhere. It has weathered worse crises before.

4. Impact of Pak-Afghan Borderlands Insecurity on Military and Political Elites in Pakistan

4.1 Impact on Pakistan Military

The TTP's attacks in Pakistan, and the deteriorating relationship with the Taliban government in Kabul, is **obviously having a direct impact on the Pakistan military**. Large numbers of military personnel have been killed, and multiple security (military and police) facilities and installations have been hit.

However, even with the growing numbers of military casualties, the TTP's attacks are not of a scale to fundamentally threaten the military. There is no danger (to date) of it suffering catastrophic losses, and its overall capacity being significantly weakened. "The TTP poses significant security threats in Pakistan but the group is not a nationwide insurgency capable of bringing down the Pakistan government" (Gul, 2023).

Far more significant is the indirect impact of TTP attacks on the Pakistan military. The TTP campaign in Pakistan is causing huge damage to the military's public image. This has already suffered because of the military's widely perceived interference in political affairs, and specifically its role in the ouster and continued targeting of Imran Khan and the PTI. Attacks by the TTP – even if confined to the security services and military installations – undermine the military's claim to be the country's protector, playing the lead role in ensuring national security. It will thus reinforce the anger and disillusionment towards the military already felt by large sections of the population. The longer TTP attacks on the security services continue, the greater human toll they take, and the more they are seen as exposing security weaknesses in Pakistan, the more the Pakistan military's image and legitimacy will be weakened.

Turning to the military's political influence, as seen the dominance of the military in the political arena has already been eroded by recent events. **Being seen as under sustained attack by the TTP and unable to combat it, will not strengthen the military's hand in political affairs.**

4.2 Impact on Political Elites

The impact of Pak-Afghan border instability and the TTP's attacks is far less direct on political elites. In the wake of the breakdown in the TTP ceasefire at the end of 2022, **politicians and the military engaged in a 'blame game' as to who was responsible for making the 'shortsighted' concessions to the TTP.** "On 1 February, the defence minister, referring to the military's in camera briefings on the talks under Khan's government, disclosed that lawmakers had only been informed of decisions already taken, without parliament endorsing them" (Ahmed, 2023). PTI leaders blamed then army chief Bajwa, though Imran Khan acknowledged that his government had approved the approach.

The blame game also extended to different political parties. Imran Khan blamed the Sharif government that succeeded him for failing to rehabilitate the returning TTP fighters: "When the militants came, they were not rehabilitated or given any proper attention..., and no money was spent on them. We were afraid that if we did not pay attention to them, then terrorism would start in different places, which is [what has] happened" (Ahmed, 2023). Imran Khan also blamed shortcomings by provincial police, though rival parties highlighted the fact that the PTI had been in power in KP since 2013 (Ahmed, 2023).

Fundamentally, there are no policy differences between the PTI, PML-N, PPP and other political actors on the approach to the TTP. All broadly support the military's increasingly hardline stance towards the TTP and the Taliban regime. Certainly, there is no political constituency within Pakistan calling for a ceasefire. This means that, while political elites and the military might blame each other for the failure to combat the TTP, they do not disagree on what needs to be done.

4.3 Exacerbating Ongoing Crises Facing Pakistan

The most significant impact of Pak-Afghan borderlands instability is that it exacerbates the many crises that Pakistan is already facing. The political crisis has been covered in detail in Section 3. As well as the security crisis created by the TTP, Pakistan is dealing with numerous other forms of sectarian/ethnic violence, including a simmering armed insurgency in Balochistan. The economy is in a dire situation. “Pakistan is grappling with record inflation and ballooning unemployment, for which it no longer reports data” (CFR, 2023). The country’s foreign exchange reserves are dangerously low, and it has been forced to rely on bailouts from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Schwemlein (2023) explains: “Today, inflation is reportedly at a fifty-year high, and food and energy shortages are becoming increasingly frequent. Investment inflows have collapsed, exports are down”. The TTP violence adds to Pakistan’s economic problems. Michael Kugelman, South Asia Institute Director at the Wilson Centre, warned: “If the threat continues to mount and attacks keep increasing, foreign investors could be scared away” (Gul, 2023). Pakistan is already one of the countries across the globe most vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change.

The crises facing Pakistan, in turn undermine the state’s capacity to respond effectively to the TTP. The military is constrained by a number of factors, including lack of resources: a counter-insurgency/terrorism operation of the kind carried out from 2014 would be very costly, but Pakistan’s economic situation is dire. Referring to the nationwide offensive to eradicate militants that Pakistan announced in April 2023, the Centre for Preventive Action note: “Pakistan now finds itself at risk of default, raising questions about how it will fund the effort” (CFR, 2024). Such an operation would also likely lead to huge personnel losses – over 500 Pakistani soldiers were killed in the clearing operations in FATA (CRF, 2023) – which would cause public anger.

On top of this, **the military’s deep involvement in Pakistan’s ongoing political crisis diverts attention and capacity from combatting the TTP.** Sajjad (2023) argues that both diminishing public support for the military and reported differences within the military’s ranks “severely undermine its ability to stabilize the situation” and “hamper its ability to achieve operational objectives and safeguard institutional interests”. He notes that this is especially crucial in relation to the counter-terrorism operations being undertaken by the army. Mir and Salikuddin (2024) also warn that the ongoing political uncertainty in the country lead to “a government that is more focused on navigating internal politics and less so on addressing strategic challenges”.

In sum, Pak-Afghan borderlands instability feeds into and exacerbates the multiple crises already facing Pakistan; those crises in turn undermine the state’s capacity to respond effectively to developments in the borderlands.

References

- Afzal, M. (2024). 'Pakistan's surprising and marred election 2024 and what comes next'. Brookings, 29 February 2024. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/pakistans-surprising-and-marred-2024-election-and-what-comes-next/>
- Ahmed, S. (2022). 'A change of command and political contestation in Pakistan'. International Crisis Group (ICG), 27 December 2022. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/change-command-and-political-contestation-pakistan>
- Ahmed, S. (2023). 'The Pakistani Taliban Test Ties between Islamabad and Kabul'. International Crisis Group (ICG), 29 March 2023. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/pakistani-taliban-test-ties-between-islamabad-and-kabul>
- Bertelsmann Stiftung (BTI) (2022). *BTI 2022 Country Report — Pakistan*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. https://bti-project.org/fileadmin/api/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2022_PAK.pdf
- Butt, A. (2022). 'Why Pakistan always seems on the brink of collapse'. August 2022. *Journal of Democracy*. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/why-pakistan-always-seems-on-the-brink-of-collapse/>
- CFR (2023). 'Instability in Pakistan'. Centre for Preventive Action, 10 August 2023. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/islamist-militancy-pakistan>
- CFR (2024). 'Instability in Pakistan'. Centre for Preventive Action, updated 9 February 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/islamist-militancy-pakistan>
- Congressional Research Service (CRS) (2023). *Afghanistan: Background and US Policy*. Congressional Research Service. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45122>
- Curtis, J. (2023). *Politics in Pakistan 2022-23 and upcoming elections*. House of Commons Library, Research Briefing. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9883/CBP-9883.pdf>
- Goldbaum, C. & Masood, S. (2023). 'Pakistan's Powerful Military Faces New Resistance from Courts'. *New York Times*, 31 May 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/31/world/asia/pakistan-courts-challenge-military.html>
- Gul, A. (2023). 'Deadly bomb hits Pakistan Military Convoy'. *Voice of America (VoA)*, 11 September 2023. <https://www.voanews.com/a/deadly-bomb-hits-pakistan-military-convoy-/7262847.html>
- Haqqani, H. (2022). 'Pakistan's Military is here to Stay'. *Foreign Policy*, 20 October 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/20/imran-khan-pakistan-military-establishment-courts-pti/>
- Hussain, A. (2024a). 'Shehbaz Sharif elected Pakistan PM for second term after controversial vote'. *Al-Jazeera*, 3 March 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/3/shehbaz-sharif-set-to-become-pakistans-new-pm-after-controversial-election>
- Hussain, A. (2024b). "'Cousins-at-war': Pakistan-Afghan ties strained after cross-border attacks". *Al-Jazeera*, 19 March 2024. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/19/cousins-at-war-pakistan-afghan-ties-strained-after-cross-border-attacks>
- ICG (2024). *The Taliban's Neighbourhood: Regional Diplomacy with Afghanistan*. International Crisis Group (ICG), Asia Report No. 337. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/337-talibans-neighbourhood-regional-diplomacy-afghanistan>

- Mir, A. (2022). 'Five key issues facing Pakistan's new army chief'. United States Institute of Peace (USIP). 30 November 2022. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/five-key-issues-facing-pakistans-new-army-chief>
- Mir, A., Olsen, R. & Watkins, A. (2022). 'Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Heats Up'. United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 12 January 2022. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/01/afghanistan-pakistan-border-dispute-heats>
- Mir, A. (2023). 'In a major rift, Pakistan ramps up pressure on the Taliban'. United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 16 November 2023. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/11/major-rift-pakistan-ramps-pressure-taliban>
- Mir, A. & Salikuddin, T. (2024). 'Understanding Pakistan's Election Results'. United States Institute of Peace (USIP). 13 February 2024. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/understanding-pakistans-election-results>
- O'Donnell, L. (2023). 'Why Pakistan is pushing out refugees'. *Foreign Policy*, 13 November 2023. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/13/pakistan-afghanistan-taliban-refugees-deportation/>
- Qazi, R. (2022). 'As Pakistan's Afghanistan policy fails, the Afghan Taliban moves against Islamabad'. Atlantic Council, 6 September 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/as-pakistans-afghanistan-policy-fails-the-afghan-taliban-move-against-islamabad/>
- Rehman, Z. (2023). 'Pakistan military adds enigmatic militant group to list of worries'. *Nikkei Asia*, 12 November 2023. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Pakistani-military-adds-enigmatic-militant-group-to-list-of-worries>
- RFE/RL (2023). 'Pakistani Army Chief Warns Afghan Taliban Against Harboring Militants'. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 15 July 2023. <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-army-chief-warns-afghan-taliban/32504749.html>
- Sajjad, B. (2023). 'Pakistan at a Dangerous Crossroads'. Wilson Centre, 16 May 2023. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/pakistan-dangerous-crossroads>
- Sayed, A. (2021). 'The evolution and future of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 21 December 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/21/evolution-and-future-of-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan-pub-86051#:~:text=Tehrik-e-Taliban%20Pakistan%20>
- Schwemlein, J. (2023). 'The Military disrupts Pakistan's Democracy Once Again'. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 10 May 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/10/military-disrupts-pakistan-s-democracy-once-again-pub-89724>
- Shah, A. (2019). 'Pakistan: Voting under military tutelage?' *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 30: No. 1. <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/713728/pdf>
- Siddiq, A. (2019). 'Pakistan—From Hybrid-Democracy to Hybrid-Martial Law'. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42: No. 2, (Winter 2019). <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/340/article/779688/pdf>