Policy Brief
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Cross-Border Terrorism in Pakistan: Evidence of Afghan Infiltration within TTP Tashkeels (Groups)

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Executive Summary

Since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, Pakistan has witnessed a significant surge in cross-border terrorism. Drawing on data from field reports, local newspapers, law enforcement briefings, and interviews, this policy brief argues that Afghan nationals now constitute the majority of infiltrating terrorists, and that Afghanistan under the Taliban regime has become a principal facilitator of terrorism against Pakistan. Between June and September 2025, Pakistan recorded a 36% increase in organized terrorist infiltration groups (tashkeels) and a 48% rise in the total number of militants crossing from Afghan provinces into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan. Approximately 70–80% of these infiltrators were Afghan nationals—a stark increase from 5–10% in previous years. The data further indicates a growing presence of Afghan nationals within Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) formations. The Taliban regime's active complicity is evident in its continued harboring and protection of TTP leadership, including Noor Wali Mehsud in Kabul, as well as in the provision of financial stipends, weapons, travel permits, and logistical support to militants. Afghan territory is also reportedly hosting more than 60 TTP camps and propaganda networks. This evolving trend underscores the urgent need for a coordinated international strategy to compel the Taliban regime to cease its support for terrorist groups operating from within Afghanistan.

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Background

Following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021, Pakistan initially expected improved border stability and cooperation against the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Contrary to expectations, the opposite transpired: the Taliban's ideological and operational affinity with TTP created a safe haven network inside Afghanistan. The Taliban's de facto government has consistently failed to act against the TTP, despite Pakistan's repeated diplomatic protests and international appeals. Instead, Taliban authorities and intelligence organs have extended material and operational facilitation, emboldening the TTP and allied networks to regroup, recruit, and launch cross-border attacks. By 2025, the Afghan border has transformed into the most active terrorism corridor in South Asia, threatening regional peace, trade, and counterterrorism gains achieved over the last decade.

Key Findings and Evidence

1. Sharp Rise in Infiltration from Afghan Territory

- From June–September 2025, security data confirms 172 Tashkeels (infiltration formations) comprising nearly 4,000 militants crossing from Afghan provinces into KP—representing a 36% and 48% increase, respectively.
- Similar infiltration from Zabul, Paktika, Kandahar, and Nimroz provinces into Balochistan totalled 83 tashkeels and around 1,200 militants.

- Approximately 70–80% of each tashkeel consisted of Afghan nationals, compared to only 5–10% before 2021.

2. Afghan Involvement in Terror Attacks

- On 7 August 2025, Pakistani forces eliminated 70 terrorists in Sambaza, Zhob (Balochistan)—all confirmed Afghan nationals. The Afghan government formally requested retrieval of bodies.
- On 25–26 April 2025, 45 Afghan terrorists were neutralized in North Waziristan District.
- Up to 30 September 2025, 267 Afghan nationals killed in encounters were identified by name and address.
- Between April–September 2025, 135 Afghan nationals were killed in counter-terrorism operations across KP and Balochistan.

Afghan nationals were confirmed perpetrators in multiple high-profile suicide bombings and attacks, including:

- Frontier Constabulary HQ attack, Bannu (3 Sep 2025) – 3 out of 6 attackers were Afghan, including the suicide bomber.
- Chaman attack (15 Oct 2025) – Afghan suicide bomber was intercepted by the security forces.
- Other suicide bombings in North Waziristan, Bannu, and Quetta (2024–2025) involved Afghan nationals belonging to Hafiz Gul Bahadur and Sadar Hayat groups.

3. Taliban's Direct Support and Facilitation of TTP

- Financial Patronage: The Taliban pays 50,000 Afghanis to families of Afghan terrorists killed in Pakistan.
- Safe Haven for Leadership: TTP chief Noor Wali Mehsud resides in Kabul under Taliban protection, receiving a USD 43,000 monthly stipend.
- Operational Infrastructure: Over 60 TTP camps operate in Nuristan, Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktiya, Khost, and Paktika provinces.
- UNSC's 36th Monitoring Report confirms joint TTP–Al Qaeda training facilities in Afghanistan.
- Arms and Equipment: Taliban supplies US-origin M16 rifles, M4 carbines, night vision devices, and NATO weapons valued at over USD 7 billion to TTP.
- Intelligence Cover: The General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI) of the Taliban issues travel passes to TTP operatives to bypass security checkpoints with weapons and ammunition.

5. Propaganda and Recruitment Operations

- TTP's Umar Media operates freely from Afghan territory, disseminating jihadi propaganda through encrypted platforms.
- Videos of Noor Wali Mehsud addressing large gatherings in Afghanistan demonstrate active incitement of Afghan youth for "jihad against Pakistan."
- Taliban units and Afghan army commanders are actively recruiting fighters for TTP and providing security for terrorist camps.

Implications

1. **National Security Threat Escalation:**
   The Taliban's state-level facilitation of terrorism represents a structural threat to Pakistan's internal security. The cross-border infiltration trend confirms that Afghanistan is not merely a source but an operational hub for anti-Pakistan militancy.
2. **Collapse of Counter-Terrorism Cooperation:**
   Afghanistan's failure to fulfill commitments under international counterterrorism norms undermines Pakistan's efforts and erodes regional stability.
3. **Diplomatic Dilemma:**
   The Taliban regime's duplicity—publicly denying involvement while privately supporting the TTP—creates a policy paradox for Pakistan in terms of recognition, engagement, and aid.
4. **Border Management Challenges:**
   The volume of infiltration across a 2,600 km porous border underscores the need for accelerated fencing, surveillance, and bilateral coordination mechanisms, which currently remain ineffective.
5. **International Responsibility:**
   The use of US-origin weapons by TTP and Afghan militants points to the unintended consequences of NATO's withdrawal—a global concern demanding international attention. The increasing use of US weapons by TTP and other militants have been detailed in IRS's special report on the subject published in April 2025.

Policy Recommendations

1. Diplomatic and Political Measures

- **Internationalize the Evidence:** Share verified intelligence and UNSC reports with key global partners (UN, OIC, EU, US, and China) highlighting Afghanistan's non-compliance with counterterrorism commitments.
- **Leverage Regional Platforms:** Utilize SCO, ECO, and SAARC mechanisms to press for accountability.
- **Reconsider Bilateral Engagement:** Pakistan should condition future cooperation with the Taliban regime on verifiable dismantling of TTP camps.

2. Security and Border Control

- **Enhance Integrated Border Surveillance:** Expand deployment of drones, night-vision systems, and ground radars across infiltration-prone districts.
- **Revise Rules of Engagement:** Empower border forces to neutralize cross-border threats preemptively under a clear legal mandate.
- **Accelerate Border Fencing:** Complete fencing of remaining segments along Chaman, Zhob, and North Waziristan sectors.

3. Intelligence and Counterterrorism

- **Joint Intelligence Fusion Cells:** Create specialized inter-agency units for real-time intelligence sharing between civil and military agencies.
- **Track Funding Streams:** Collaborate with FATF partners to intercept Taliban-linked financial transfers supporting TTP operations.

4. Narrative and Information Domain

- **Expose Taliban's Duplicity:** Use strategic communications to counter the Taliban's denial narrative by publicizing concrete evidence.
- **Support De-Radicalization Campaigns:** Implement cross-border information programs to discourage recruitment of Afghan youth into militant networks.

Conclusion

The empirical data from 2024–2025 clearly establishes that Afghanistan, under the Taliban regime, is the principal enabler of cross-border terrorism against Pakistan. Afghan nationals are not peripheral participants but the core composition of TTP's operational force. The Taliban's policy of sheltering militants, providing them resources, and allowing them to use Afghan soil with impunity threatens not only Pakistan's national security but also regional peace and global counterterrorism efforts. A coordinated international strategy is therefore imperative to compel the Taliban regime to cease support for terrorist groups operating from within Afghanistan.

About the Institute

Established in 1982, the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad is one of Pakistan's leading think tanks, dedicated to independent research on South Asian and broader regional affairs. Over the past four decades, IRS has produced in-depth analyses on a wide range of subjects, including geopolitics, defense, economy, culture, health, education, environment, science, technology, and social development. Recognizing the interlinked nature of regional dynamics, the Institute's research also extends to China, West Asia, and the Central Asian Republics, offering a comprehensive understanding of regional trends and challenges. Through its specialized programs and expert teams, IRS provides policymakers and scholars with strategic insights to inform decision-making and foster regional cooperation. IRS actively promotes intellectual exchange through its publications, conferences, seminars, and roundtable discussions, most notably its annual international conference, the "Regional Dialogue." This flagship event brings together global policymakers, diplomats, and scholars to deliberate on key regional issues. Committed to academic rigor and policy relevance, the Institute of Regional Studies continues to play a vital role in shaping informed discourse and advancing stability and prosperity across the region.