

EXPLORING TERRORIST ALLIANCES IN NORTHWESTERN BORDERLANDS OF PAKISTAN: TEHRIK-E-TALIBAN PAKISTAN IN FOCUS

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Abstract

The presence of terrorist networks along the northwestern borderlands of Pakistan threatens the safety of the local people as well as regional security. The recent strengthening of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) presents a significant challenge to Pakistan's security agencies and society. This paper examines why the TTP allies with regional terrorist groups and the benefits it gains from these alliances. Based on data collected from a diverse group of individuals and sources, the study finds that ideologically, Al-Qaeda (AQ) facilitates TTP's access to training and safe houses but also creates obstacles due to differing priorities and communication methods. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), on the other hand, supports TTP's ideological goals, though it faces challenges stemming from differing perspectives and cultural differences. Despite these ideological differences, TTP and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) share intelligence and coordinate for joint attacks, though they

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encounter issues related to information leaks. ISKP's influence in Bajaur and Balochistan exerts severe financial pressures on TTP.

Keywords: Terrorist alliances, TTP, Northwestern borderlands, ISKP, Taliban, Pakistan

Introduction

Terrorism has been adopted by non-state actors throughout world history. Such actors no longer work in isolation; instead, they collaborate, creating opportunities and challenges. Individuals who engage in acts of terrorism are called terrorists. They form groups that carry out impactful, deadly, and high-profile attacks. Terrorist organisations are groups of people that use terrorism to achieve their objectives (Phillips, 2015). They make alliances with other terrorist organisations because they provide far-reaching and enduring engagements and thus present a substantial risk to individuals and the state. Bacon (2013) argues that alliances are formal or informal security cooperation agreements between two or more terrorist organisations that are characterised by sustained engagement and prospective strategic deliberation. In the borderlands between Pakistan and Afghanistan, terrorist alliances have been pivotal in maintaining the operational continuity and resilience of the militant actors.

Studies dealing with terrorist group alliances are among the most prominent streams of terrorism scholarship. Horowitz & Potter (2014) argued that terrorist groups do not operate in isolation.

Instead, they cooperate, forming an intricate network of intergroup cooperation. Byman (2003) says that terrorist groups seek alliances to increase the 'scope and scale of their operations. Asal et al. (2016) describe the alliance of terrorist groups as a collective or mutually reinforcing effort aimed at achieving a specific goal, encompassing ideological, logistical, and operational aspects. Karmon (2005) states that terrorist groups form in response to common threats when they share a sense of the dangers posed by the world system. For instance, Osama Bin Laden's persistent calls for Sunni factions to combine efforts with Al-Qaeda (AQ) were motivated by the idea that the "Crusader-Zionist" threat necessitated unification (Bacon, 2014). Asal et al. (2015) argued that ideologically similar groups tend to cooperate more than ideologically dissimilar groups.

Though there is considerable literature available on the alliance of terrorist groups, especially AQ and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), there is almost no literature on the alliance of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) with regional groups. This study aims to fill this gap by addressing two fundamental questions. First, it examines the driving factors that motivate TTP to form alliances. Second, it examines how alliances with prominent regional terrorist organisations present both opportunities and challenges for the TTP across ideological, tactical, and logistical domains. The study represents a significant step forward in

understanding TTP's strategic relationships within the complex network of regional terrorism.

Opportunities and Challenges in Terrorist Cooperation

Cooperation among terrorist groups creates opportunities for those groups. For instance, in 2006, the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) allied with AQ to form Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). GSPC took on AQ's suicide bombing strategy to increase the effectiveness of the group's attacks and shatter the Algerian government's claims to defeat terrorism (Bacon, 2014). Moreover, Phillips (2014) notes that the terrorist alliances enable various groups to gather resources, which is key to their longevity and efficiency. Furthermore, by forming alliances, these terrorist organisations manage to perform more frequent and successful attacks.

Opportunities exist, but cooperation between terrorist networks also poses challenges. The formation of an alliance can vary due to the potential for counterterrorism operations (Jadoon et al., 2023). The robust identification with the in-group, combined with a strong tendency toward insularity, aggravates the already covert and illegal nature of terrorist groups, making the formation of alliances even more problematic (Bacon, 2014). Allied terrorist groups with varying ideologies also pose a threat (Phillips, 2019). Doubting the credibility of commitments or the prospects of cooperation also poses challenges. For example, the Algerian

Islamic Group (GIA) not only questioned future cooperation and whether AQ would be successful but also the credibility of commitments, leaving no option for Bin Laden but to withdraw support (Bacon, 2017).

According to Jadoon et al. (2023), terrorist groups cooperate through alliances in ideological (supportive statements), tactical (joint actions), and logistical (material or non-material assistance) domains. As Jadoon et al. explain, when cooperation is confined to one domain, terrorist groups are said to be in tactical alliances. If cooperation extends to more than one domain, then they are in strategic alliances. ISKP, for instance, had formed a strategic alliance with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). From a logistical perspective, there is a close cooperative relationship, as even ISKP's deceased emir, Al-Baghdadi, maintained direct links with LeJ while LeJ was actively recruiting terrorists for ISKP in Balochistan. Tactically, ISKP and LeJ cooperated in several joint operations. Depending on ideology, costs, and benefits, TTP cooperates with AQ, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), and ISKP.

TTP Cooperation with AQ, IEA, and ISKP

AQ and other terrorist groups have labelled TTP as "Ansar," which means "protectors." As such, TTP's role has primarily been to engage the local populace on behalf of other terrorist groups (Shane, 2009). AQ's radical expansionism also financed

local insurgents. This funding enabled the construction of training camp facilities and the recruitment of local tribespeople (Hussain, 2023). TTP receives support from AQ through several means of communication, as well as promoting the war against the Pakistani government (Smith, 2009). The suicide attack on the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad in September 2008 was executed by operatives from AQ and TTP (Gall, 2008). Similarly, TTP considers the IEA its own because of the longstanding relationship it has had with the IEA. TTP claimed that it feels protected so long as the IEA is in charge. The TTP threat to Pakistan has been increasing ever since the IEA assumed power (Mir, 2022). TTP has publicly celebrated the IEA victory over Afghanistan as its own (Basit, 2023). Under the IEA, Afghanistan provides strategic depth for the TTP.

Apart from TTP's relationships with AQ and IEA, TTP logically cooperates with ISKP. In January 2015, Hafiz Saeed Khan (TTP chief of Orakzai) established another organization, ISKP, along with Hafiz Quran Daulat (TTP head of Kurram), Gulzaman (TTP head of Khyber), Mufti Hassan (TTP head of Peshawar), and Khalid Mansoor (TTP head of Hangu) (Karim, 2022). ISKP did not engage in any direct armed conflict with TTP, likely because TTP perceives some strategic advantage in ISKP activities that target the Pakistani government.

Theoretical Underpinnings

This paper employs rational choice theory and ideological similarity theory to understand the TTP's alliances with other terrorist organisations. These theories help us understand the reasons, prospects, and challenges that TTP faces in forming alliances with regional terrorist groups. Rational choice theory emphasizes the decision-making processes agents use to achieve strategic objectives, thereby optimizing utility through calculated choices. This theory offers a pragmatic framework for analyzing the strategic behavior of terrorist organisations in the context of their alliances. Asal et al. (2016) assert that the fundamental characteristics of alliances among terrorist organisations arise from cooperative engagements in rhetoric, material resources, and operational activities. These coalitions serve a purpose, arising from a rational assessment of costs, benefits, and risks. For TTP, establishing alliances is a carefully determined move that weighs prospective benefits and drawbacks. Rational choice theory also encompasses TTP's symbolic propaganda and communication tactics, including the release of alleged collaborative declarations and the distribution of collective propaganda. Based on this logic, the following expectation (E1) is established for the study: If the TTP is resource-constrained or has a common enemy, it forms tactical or logistical alliances - for example, by sharing safe routes, ammunition, or training spaces for specific campaigns.

Although rational choice theory explains the strategic considerations behind alliance formation, ideological similarity theory illuminates the ideological glue that keeps alliances intact. Oots (1986) and Asal et al. (2015) suggest that terrorist groups with common ideological orientations are more prone to collaboration, and that betrayal and conflict are less likely within allied groups that share a common ideology. For TTP, alliances are not merely strategic conveniences; they are profoundly rooted in ideological attachments. Bacon's (2014) account of Abdelmalek Droukdel, the leader of GSPC, regarding alliances with AQ highlights the importance of ideological compatibility. AQ: We rely on legitimacy from religion before anything else as a basis for our decisions. Similarly, TTP unites with other factions and employs ideological rationales to validate the coherence and strategic bolstering of its ideological goals.

Drawing on this reasoning, a second expectation (E2) is suggested in the study: if the TTP has doctrinal or ideological commitment, for example, a similar understanding of jihad or a similar religious authority, this leads to ideological alliances. Accordingly, this study seeks to consider the extent to which TTP's alliances with AQ, IEA, and ISKP conform or deviate from these theoretical expectations. It evaluates whether these expectations are met or contradicted in the ideological, tactical, and logistical realms.

Research Methods

This research employs qualitative approaches, utilizing individual interviews as the primary data collection tool, complemented by observations. Researchers use qualitative methods, which involve collecting and analyzing non-numerical data thematically to understand ideas, opinions, and experiences, learn more about a problem, or develop new research ideas (Bhandari, 2020). The interviews took place in North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Bannu, Peshawar, and Islamabad, in Pashto, Urdu, and English, depending on the respondent's preference. Using non-probability sampling methods (snowballing and purposive sampling methods), the researcher conducted a total of 29 semi-structured interviews with five academic experts, five media personnel (journalists), five members of law enforcement agencies, six local elders (North Waziristan and South Waziristan), and eight relevant think tank members. Verbal and written informed consent was obtained from participants who were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. To reduce the risk, sensitive responses were anonymised and personal identifiers were removed. After collecting the data, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis, identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns and themes within it. The researcher reflected on his positionality and acknowledged that his background in the tribal districts gave him valuable insider access and enabled him to build strong trust with respondents. By examining responses from

interviews and secondary sources, the researcher identified themes highlighting the opportunities and challenges TTP faces in forming alliances with AQ, IEA, and ISKP.

Data Analysis

The key themes drawn from the collected data are analyzed in the following section.

Ideological Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with AQ

AQ assists TTP in widening the scope of their narrative about fighting a just jihad, enabling TTP to strengthen ideological appeal to gain further support while challenging adversaries (Interview data)

The respondents from a think tank argued that TTP and AQ share similar beliefs and have the potential to be powerful. Both groups seek to establish Islamic governance according to their radical interpretations of Islam. These groups are anti-Western, which allows them to form alliances and garner new supporters. As Hennessey (2010) says, they work together, train together, and devise plans together. Both TTP and AQ harbor a profound animosity against the Western powers, which they consider foes of Islam, and dispense violence against Muslim populations. TTP thus exploits this approach to recruiting new members and their supporters. Additionally, the underlying principle of both TTP

and AQ is jihad. The cooperation enables them to showcase themselves as the defenders of the Muslim land and interests while waging a rightful war against the perceived enemies of Islam. This pattern is consistent with E2, in which ideological similarity facilitates durable forms of cooperation and narration between TTP and AQ.

TTP is more focused on the local Pashtun nationalist agenda that contradicts AQ's global jihadist focus, generating conflict regarding goals and aims (Interview data)

One journalist states that TTP struggles to maintain an alliance with AQ due to significant ideological differences. TTP emphasizes its agenda of local Pashtun nationalism in combination with its resistance to the Pakistani state. This agenda competes with AQ's overarching aims of global jihad and the creation of an Islamic caliphate. As the Congressional Research Service (2024) emphasizes, their goals differ significantly. This divergence creates friction over strategic objectives, as TTP places greater emphasis on local issues rather than AQ's transnational goals. This split in ideology poses challenges to coordination efficiency, as AQ uses TTP's clout in the region to further its agenda. However, TTP resists any order that takes its focus away from its goal. This contradicts the E2.

Ideological Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with IEA

IEA, not a terrorist organization, but holds a critical position in facilitating these groups and alliances due to its former strategic ties and ideological leanings. It is crucial to explore and understand the role that the IEA plays in strengthening TTP's operations and capabilities. For a long time, the government of Pakistan has blamed the IEA for harboring and supporting TTP, which is creating bigger challenges for the security apparatuses in the borderlands of Pakistan. One of the academic respondents stated that,

IEA justifies the objectives of the TTP in the eyes of sympathetic audiences while simultaneously adding credibility to the TTP's attempts to enforce strict Islamic sharia law in Pakistan (Interview data)

TTP enhances the legitimization of its objectives in collaboration with IEA. They establish cooperative alliances to legitimize and enhance the credibility of their objectives. Similarly, Maizland (2023) argued that TTP aims to leverage the IEA governance model while sharing ideological similarities. By leveraging cooperative efforts and garnering the support of sympathetic stakeholders, TTP aims to enhance the legitimacy of its cause. In collaborating with IEA, TTP strategically secures the support and empathy of diverse individuals.

TTP exploits tribal and ethnic grievances by garnering support from marginalized communities and portraying

themselves as protectors of these groups and their identities through affiliation with the IEA (Interview data)

Another respondent from LEAs argued that the tribal and ethnic groups on the borderlands have deep apprehensions regarding issues such as discrimination, marginalization, and underrepresentation. TTP exploits such grievances by portraying itself as resolving such issues. By exploiting divisions and injustices in society, it aims to garner support and justify its activities in line with the narrative of correcting systemic imbalances, while claiming that these issues will be resolved and rights will be protected. TTP, along with IEA, pose as champions of marginalized people, portraying themselves as guardians of ethnic and tribal identities. E2 is a meeting that shows that TTP-IEA cooperation reinforces the ideological goals of TTP, enhances legitimacy with sympathetic audiences, and positions the TTP and the IEA as defenders of marginalized communities.

Clashes occur due to ideological differences involving the theological views and interpretations of Islam of Deobandi-influenced IEA and Salafist TTP (Interview data)

The argument from a local elder is that the contrast between the Deobandi-influenced IEA and the Salafist-influenced TTP is profound because their ideologies diverge, leading to conflicts between the two groups. Moreover, the IEA differs fundamentally in its ideology, being entirely Deobandi, whereas

the TTP incorporates both Deobandi and Salafist elements. The clashes arise from disagreements related to theological issues, Islamic law, and politics, as well as the struggle for religious authority. The emphasis placed by the IEA on traditional Islamic practices in Hanafi jurisprudence clashes with some elements of TTP's Salafism, which follows radical Islam.

The IEA's predominantly Afghan Pashtun identity is incompatible with the TTP's Pakistani Pashtun identity, resulting in cultural and ideological conflicts (Interview data)

The journalist states that, despite sharing a common ethnic heritage as Pashtuns, the TTP and IEA have a strained alliance due to their differing national identities. The IEA, which comprises mainly Afghan Pashtuns, focuses on internal politics and governance in Afghanistan, directing its activities toward consolidating and stabilizing the country. In contrast, TTP, representing Pakistani Pashtuns embedded in Pakistan's socio-political environment, centered its mission on engaging the Pakistani state while enforcing its sharia law in Pakistan. These differences give rise to ideological and cultural conflicts.

This reveals contradictions in the E2 - theological differences between Deobandi IEA and Salafist TTP, as well as national identity differences (Afghan vs. Pakistani Pashtuns) - generated conflict, limiting the durability and cohesion of their ideological alliance.

Ideological Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with ISKP

TTP commanders referred to the field fighters as brothers, emphasizing that there are no significant differences among them. They focused more on enforcing Sharia law, which is more important for them than the means of achieving it (Interview data)

Local elder respondent argued that the enforcement of Sharia law reveals an underlying ideological objective that both TTP and ISKP have in common. This goal is evident in their application of Sharia law, not only as a guiding principle but also as a comprehensive component of their governance vision. For both TTP and ISKP, the establishment of Sharia law is of utmost importance, irrespective of their disagreements or differences regarding the methodology for achieving it. TTP commanders consider ISKP members as comrades due to shared beliefs and goals. Furthermore, the field operatives have no divisions among them; instead, they focus on imposing sharia law at all costs. In this case, E2 is met, as both groups share the goal of enforcing Sharia law and consider one another comrades.

Diverse ideological priorities of TTP and ISKP pose difficulties in garnering sympathizers (Interview data)

It further argued that ISKP's broader transnational goals do not resonate with someone concerned about local issues. TTP's

nationalistic strategy of implementing Sharia law and toppling the Pakistani government, in turn, curtails TTP's capability of attracting recruits who are reluctant to affiliate with a faction that advocates a more extreme and transnational jihadist agenda. The potential recruits who sympathize with the radical Islamist agenda are somewhat skeptical about joining TTP due to its links with ISKP.

Disparities in beliefs between Deobandi TTP and Salafist ISKP deepen conflicts, incite violence, and make cooperation more difficult (Interview data)

Another source states that the Deobandi TTP and Salafist ISKP have significant ideological differences, which lead to conflicts between the two groups. TTP emphasizes regional and cultural aspects that conflict with the globalized and authoritative version of Salafist ISKP. This split in beliefs leads to constant conflict, since every group perceives the other's approach as wrong. As a result, these conflicts hinder cooperation and collaborative efforts in every possible way. Here, E2 is contradicted.

Tactical Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with AQ

AQ assists TTP in operational collaboration and strategic planning that culminate in joint efforts directed towards high-value Pakistani (Interview data)

A respondent from LEAs indicates that, with AQ's support, TTP can enhance work speed and more efficiently

organize operations. Due to improvements in operational coordination and the execution of assaults on Pakistan, the TTP now conducts intricate and extensive operations with enhanced precision and efficiency. The TTP capitalizes on strategic vulnerabilities where its goals align with AQ to conduct attacks within Pakistani territory, hence exacerbating the instability of the Pakistani state. The coordinated actions present significant peril not only to the civilian populace but also to security personnel, thereby exacerbating violence and instability in the region, which is the objective of TTP.

AQ facilitates TTP in altering its organisational strategy to a model with centralised control and decentralised execution (Interview data)

He further argued that TTP's operational model has undergone significant changes, transitioning from a conventional approach to one characterised by centralised control and decentralised execution, aided by AQ's shift, which has enhanced TTP's ability to protect its commanders and leaders from detection and capture. This organisational structuring also enables TTP to gain political capital within the complex environment of terrorist groups. The ability of TTP to sustain its operations despite attempts by the security forces to disrupt its activities boosts its reputation and credibility among sympathetic circles in an environment where survival depends on maintaining momentum through continuous attacks. Here E1 is met.

The varying tactical methods employed by TTP and AQ pose difficulty for TTP in terms of coordination and adaptation to attack the Pakistani security forces and civilians (Interview data)

Another respondent from media personnel argued that AQ commits its efforts toward global, coordinated assaults on its enemies, seeking to inflict mass casualties and strike high-profile targets to maximize media attention and psychological impact. As part of a complex plan, AQ often works with many people or groups, uses destructive bombings and armed attacks, and employs other methods like fast hijackings, while TTP focuses on local tactics. These different approaches make things difficult for TTP. As a result, TTP faces challenges in achieving its tactical objectives.

It is increasingly complex to protect sensitive operational information while coordinating with AQ, where information sharing results in exposing TTP local networks (Interview data)

Respondents from LEAs state that working with AQ creates complex tactical challenges for TTPs in maintaining security and secrecy. AQ's global reach and extensive network require sharing information across borders, which jeopardises the security of TTP's networks in Pakistan. Similarly, Bacon (2017) argued that alliances can increase the risk of deception or information leaks. The TTP insurgency against the Pakistani government causes the group to rely heavily on secrecy to protect its operatives, bases,

and supply lines from government countermeasures. Sharing information with AQ compromises TTP's local operations, as AQ's worldwide activities attract unwanted attention from international and regional security agencies. E1 is contradicted.

Tactical Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with IEA

One of the reasons that TTP makes alliances with the regional terrorist organisations is to seek tactical leverage and maximize its capabilities to have an advantage over its opponents, the state. A study participant from LEAs noted that,

Access to diverse weaponry and ammunition from the IEA enhances TTP's capabilities while enabling them to execute more complex and deadly attacks against Pakistan (Interview data)

The IEA enhances the operational efficiency and effectiveness of TTP. The IEA not only governs Afghanistan but also controls a wide range of armaments and weapons left behind by coalition forces. This allows the TTP to obtain these materials to conduct more sophisticated and lethal attacks against Pakistan. Similarly, Siddique (2023) highlighted that the TTP obtains U.S. weapons left behind in Afghanistan. This resource greatly enhances TTP operational capabilities, enabling it to intensify further assaults on Pakistani security forces, government buildings, and civilian populations. E1 is met here.

The condemnation of TTP operations by IEA serves to denounce TTP tactics and goals while impeding the ability of TTP to function and gain support (Interview data)

IEA condemns a series of attacks attributed to the TTP, which resulted in both military and civilian casualties. In condemning TTP activities, the IEA aims to show the Afghan people that it does not support violence against military and civilian populations. This stance weakens TTP efforts to gain recruits or sympathy from the IEA-controlled Afghanistan. However, whenever TTP conducts operations that cause collateral damage to civilians, it risks alienating the very population it seeks to engage in. Here, E1 is contradicted.

Tactical Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with ISKP

By sharing intelligence and coordinating attacks with ISKP, TTP targets critical infrastructure, government installations, and security checkpoints while wreaking havoc and mayhem (Interview data)

The respondent from a think tank states that the TTP systematically cooperates with ISKP in attacking Pakistani government facilities, security checkpoints, posts, and other strategic assets. Through acts of terror, it seeks to undermine the credibility and effectiveness of established governance structures, creating a power vacuum that they exploit for their own ends.

Moreover, through intelligence sharing, TTP enhances its operational effectiveness, enabling it to capitalize on security flaws. Hence, E1 is met.

Exposure, compromise, and information leaks constitute significant risks associated with cooperation, as sharing information always comes at a cost (Interview data)

Another media personnel argued that cooperation between TTP and ISKP faces significant operational challenges due to increased coordination and information sharing. Both function within contexts where the confidentiality of their activities is essential. TTP emphasizes insurgency against the Pakistani government and employs safe operational networks, secure communication channels, and discreet operations to avoid government surveillance and countermeasures. Likewise, ISKP exhibits extremism to enhance operational security, thereby protecting its fighters, bases, and other assets from both local and international adversaries. However, cooperation between them comes at a cost of information leaks and vulnerabilities.

ISKP's intense sectarian focus causes friction with TTP, since such violence erodes the group's local support (Interview data)

It further asserts that the divergent tactical goals of TTP and ISKP hampered their cooperation, prioritizing sectarian violence against selected religions as part of their broader strategy. This

hinders the TTP's goal of localized insurgency within Pakistan. To operate, TTP depends on local support networks; however, ISKP's sectarian violence threatens to alienate these supporters. TTP utilizes local networks to operate, while ISKP sectarian violence endangers the local support that is so crucial. Here, E1 is contradicted.

Logistical Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with AQ

AQ aids TTP by safe houses, training camps, and logistical support, which function as hiding places for its personnel and operations (Interview data)

The respondents from LEAs argued that AQ helps TTP operate illicitly by providing logistical support. Such places serve not only as bases for the TTP to strategize their attacks but also as safe havens from the prying eyes of security forces. AQ is facilitating the planning and execution of cross-border attacks into Pakistan. The assistance enables them to meet their resource needs better and survive counterterrorism operations. In this way, the logistical support enhances the TTP's ability to conduct protracted campaigns and execute incursions into Pakistan more easily.

TTP accesses AQ propaganda materials and social media platforms, reaching a wider audience and attracting more recruits (Interview data)

One media respondent says that TTP has access to an extensive range of platforms, networks, and propaganda materials. Because of this cooperation, TTP strengthens its intellectual power and messaging while possessing a powerful tool to disseminate its radical agenda. TTP utilizes AQ's sophisticated propaganda machine to disseminate its narratives through multiple digital platforms, including social media and websites. TTP spreads its radical ideology inside and outside of Pakistan, targeting new demographic audiences. Additionally, TTP's use of AQ-established social media channels gives it unprecedented exposure and influence over other global terrorist organisations. TTP uses these platforms to communicate with like-minded individuals, develop plans, and recruit new members. Therefore, E1 is met.

The management and sharing of locations become tricky because increased activity and movement render these spots vulnerable to counterterrorism measures (Interview data)

Most respondents from LEAs argued that, in alliance with AQ, TTP encounters hurdles in protecting safe houses and hideouts. Such places are critical for the storage of weapons, for planning assaults, and for serving as safe havens for leadership. Such areas are vital for TTP activities in the region. Their cooperation increases the visibility of these hideouts and attracts the attention of intelligence agencies. Movements of personnel, weapons, and

equipment reveal these locations, thus compromising security. Here, E1 is contradicted.

Logistical Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with IEA

Cooperation with the IEA facilitates the movement of TTP fighters and leaders across the borders, bypassing Pakistani security personnel and receiving medical assistance and asylum (Interview data)

The local elder respondent argued that the IEA helps TTP maintain a more manageable movement for its commanders and fighters across borders. TTP has greater access to the porous Pak-Afghan border, which, due to the rough landscape, aids them in escaping the relentless attempts of the Pakistani security forces to capture them. TTP has access to Afghanistan, which provides them with refuge, medical care, and logistical support. Moreover, TTP has benefited from the IEA in terms of operational bases and safe havens. TTP exploits breaches in border control to conduct ambushes, raids, and offensives against Pakistani security forces and civilians with impunity.

GDI and its cells' finances and arms TTP, increasing TTP terrorist attacks (Interview data)

Respondent from LEAs argued that GDI (General Directorate of Intelligence) and its cells provide TTP with significant material assistance, including weaponry and funds. GDI is the national

intelligence and security agency and works under the IEA, whose overall task is clandestine and covert. This has led to a dramatic increase in TTP terrorist activities. The leading player in planning and facilitating TTP's receipt of aid has been the GDI. With its units, the GDI manages the provision and transport of weapons to strengthen TTP capability. The GDI and its cells supply a wide variety of arms, including light weapons, explosives, ammunition, and IEDs, which significantly enhance TTP's capability to conduct extensive assaults on Pakistan. Pakistan. Here E1 is met.

Increased border security poses challenges to TTP concerning the receiving and transferring of arms and other supplies (Interview data)

The respondent states that, with the addition of checkpoints, border patrolling, and monitoring equipment, security presence has been strengthened, making it increasingly difficult for the TTP to smuggle weapons and supplies through the borders. Pakistani forces have also tried to intercept smuggling routes and dismantle terrorist networks, which has further complicated the logistical assistance of the TTP. Due to the increase in intelligence and surveillance, the forces are now able to capture smugglers and weapon caches and arrest terrorists, which leads to the disruption of TTP activities. Therefore, E1 is contradicted.

Logistical Opportunities and Challenges in Alliances with ISKP

With the support of ISKP, TTP enjoys access to training facilities, logistical infrastructure, and professional expertise, thereby increasing the scope of their attacks against Pakistan (Interview data)

The respondent from media personnel says that, cooperating with ISKP, TTP achieves a crucial foothold near the Pakistani border. TTP considers the inaccessible region of Afghanistan an ideal location to establish secure bases and operational centers beyond the reach of Pakistani law enforcement agencies. These safe bases operate as vital logistical centers where TTP operatives seek shelter and liaise with other terrorist organisations for the advancement of shared radical objectives. The purported purpose of TTP's cooperation with ISKP is to enhance their abilities by assimilating terrorist activities, insurgent methodologies, and guerrilla warfare techniques. TTP employs ISKP's renowned skill of covert ops and warfare to refine their attack logistics against Pakistan. Here E1 is met.

The activities of ISKP in Bajaur and Balochistan pose significant challenges for TTP, particularly in terms of financial and material support (Interview data)

Another respondent from a think tank argued that ISKP's stronghold in Bajaur and Balochistan has compounded TTP's

resource dependencies and raised significant challenges regarding financing and material support. These two regions are critical operational zones for ISKP. Its presence dominates smuggling routes, engages in the local economy, and extorts resources. Additionally, ISKP's presence in these areas obstructs TTP's access to vital supply lines such as arms, ammunition, and hubs. The struggle for scarce resources intensifies the economic burden on TTP, hindering its ability to maintain efficiency. Here, E1 is contradicted because ISKP's control over crucial areas in Bajaur and Balochistan limits TTP's access to finances, arms, and supply routes, thereby creating logistical problems and reducing the effectiveness of their cooperation.

Conclusion

The cooperation with regional terrorist organisations since 2020 poses a significant threat to the region because of the reemergence of the TTP. This paper examined opportunities and challenges for TTP in alliances with AQ, IEA, and ISKP. Through its alliance with AQ, TTP bolsters its ideological appeal, thereby mobilizing further support. IEA justifies TTP aims while exploiting tribal and ethnic grievances. In the case of ISKP, TTP commanders refer to them as brothers, and field fighters are more concerned about Sharia enforcement than anything else. Ideological cooperation creates problems, too. The global agenda of AQ collides with the local Pashtun nationalist agenda of the TTP, leading to friction over ideological goals and priorities. Religious and cultural differences also constitute a barrier to ideologically motivated cooperation between TTP and ISKP. The ideological priorities of TTP and ISKP differ, making it challenging to attract supporters and sympathizers.

AQ assists operational coordination and joint planning for combined operations with TTP against high-value Pakistani targets. Moreover, AQ assisted TTP in changing their organisational strategy to a centralised command but decentralised operational strategy. IEA adds to TTP's ability to execute complex attacks in Pakistan. In contrast, ISKP's cooperation and intelligence sharing with TTP destroys critical

infrastructure. Different tactics further complicate an alliance. The simultaneous use of varying strategies by AQ and TTP makes it difficult for TTP to adapt and coordinate to meet tactical goals, while also endangering TTP's local network security. IEA's denunciation of TTP tactics prevents the Afghan population from sympathizing with them to support their cause. At the same time, ISKP sectarian violence diminishes TTP local support.

Logistically, AQ provides safe houses, training camps, and access to its extensive propaganda system for TTP's use. The IEA enables the cross-border movement of TTP commanders and fighters in Afghanistan. GDI and its various cells fund and arm TTP, which increases assaults on Pakistan. ISKP training and logistical experience also strengthen TTP's capacity to execute more attacks in Pakistan. Logistical cooperation poses challenges due to increased surveillance and monitoring. TTP faces substantial logistical challenges with communications, access to secure sites, and the receipt of supplies. At the same time, ISKP's presence in Bajaur and Balochistan creates logistical challenges for TTP in terms of finances and material aid.

This paper shows that TTP's alliances are opportunistic and strategically calculated to maximise survival, operational reach, and ideological legitimacy. At the same time, ideological divergence and organisational rivalries limit such alliances and reaffirm that rational cooperation between terrorist groups is conditional. This paper develops the theory of alliances in unstable borderlands, where

shared fears of threats and local grievances influence patterns of cooperation and confrontation.

This paper highlights the phenomenon of terrorist group alliances shifting with radical cooperation among terrorist groups, whether ideologically, tactically, or logistically, creating an environment of continued conflicts. To mitigate the threat posed by TTP and its allies, exploit internal fractures and differences, and disrupt cooperation. Understanding work is vital for counterterrorism strategies. Combating terrorism extends beyond military action; it also requires addressing the underlying political, ethnic, and ideological issues. This paper is also important for decision-makers, security experts, and other actors involved in stabilizing the region.

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