

Pakistan: The Sectarian Expanse

D. Suba Chandran¹

Sectarian violence in Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. Though such violence has been in existence since the country's independence, however, sectarian expansions today creates an entirely new geography, from Gilgit to Quetta, targeting new segments of the population in ever widening locations. What started as a campaign against the Ahmadiyyas and enlarged to include the Shias, has now turned against Sufi and Barelvi Sunnis as well. In terms of perpetrators, new groups have emerged, more lethal than the earlier sectarian organizations. The Islamic State (also Daesh, formerly the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham) is one of the latest entrants into Pakistan's landscape of sectarian violence. In terms of intensity, moreover, such violence has escalated dramatically, with growing access to modern weaponry and, particularly, the use of suicide bombers.

1 Prof. D. Suba Chandran is currently the Dean of School of Conflict and Security Studies at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), IISc Campus in Bangalore. He has been editing an annual on Armed Conflicts and Peace Processes in South Asia since 2006. He also manages a portal on Pakistan: www.pakistanreader.org.

Deep Roots

Sectarian conflict in Pakistan is not a monolith; nor is the course of sectarian violence continuous during the over seven decades since Pakistan's independence. Trends have waxed and waned, and there have been periods of sectarian peace.

During the initial decades of Pakistan's independence, the Ahmadiyya community remained the primary target of sectarian conflict. And they continue to be persecuted within Pakistan even today. Since the 1980s, the Shia community has also become the focus of Sunni sectarian extremism. During recent years, the Barelvi Sunni community is being targeted.

The major causes of sectarian conflict in Pakistan include, first, the fault line that underlies the larger Sunni-Shia conflict within Islam, which is reflected elsewhere, currently and most prominently in West Asia. Pakistan is not the only Muslim country to experience sectarian conflict, and this is not a post-1947 phenomenon – there is adequate literature to explain the conflict between these two communities in a historical perspective.

The second cause is, however, specific to Pakistan. The sectarian conflict within Pakistan can be explained as a national phenomenon, often linked to the unique dynamics of local environments. For example, the sectarian violence in the Jhang region in Pakistan – where an anti-feudal campaign coalesced with anti-Shia sectarianism – was specific, not only to the country, but to this part of it.

The third cause can be attributed to the role of state, especially the Deep State in Pakistan. While Islamist politics, with Sunni majoritarian overtones, underpinned both policy and politics from the very outset, but starting with then President General (Retd.) Zia ul Haq, the Deep State began to play a covert and overt role in exacerbating sectarian conflict.

Zia's efforts to legitimise his military rule, made him lean towards religion.² In the process, he identified with the Sunni Islam, causing alarm amongst the Shia community of Pakistan. Militant groups within the Sunni and Shia communities soon crystallized, with the Deep State siding with the former.

During this period, the Deep State's direct control of militant groups to achieve its own objectives vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan provided expanding spaces for these Sunni sectarian groups to further their own agenda domestically. Worse, the subversion of democratic processes and the deliberate undermining of incipient secular and liberal forces provided adequate political space for the sectarian groups. As the International Crisis Group (ICG) notes,

Sectarian conflict in Pakistan is the direct consequence of state policies of Islamisation and marginalisation of secular democratic forces. Co-option and patronage of religious parties by successive military governments have brought Pakistan to a point where religious extremism threatens to erode the foundations of the state and society.³

Fourth, these factors coincided with a regional development—the revolution in Iran and a new radical regime led by Ayatollah Khomeini. This, in turn, sparked a struggle for supremacy within the Islamic World—with Iran and Saudi Arabia contesting for the soul of the Ummah (the Muslim community). This struggle

2 See the following for the impact of Zia's rule on sectarian divide in Pakistan: Charles H. Kennedy, "Islamization and Legal Reform in Pakistan, 1979-1989," *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 63, Number 1, 1990, pp. 62-77; Vali Nasr, "Military Rule, Islamism and Democracy in Pakistan," *The Middle East Journal*, Volume 58, Number 2, April 2004, pp. 195-209; SVR Nasr, "Islam, the State and the Rise of Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan," in Christophe Jaffrelot (ed), *Pakistan: Nationalism Without A Nation*, Zed Books Ltd, London, 2002.

3 International Crisis Group, "The State of Sectarianism in Pakistan," *Asia Report* No 95, April 18, 2006.

reverberated not only in Pakistan, but across countries in North Africa, West Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia, though West Asia and Pakistan became the primary battleground.⁴ Hussain Haqqani offers a simple explanation,

Soon after the Iranian revolution Pakistan became the staging ground for the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. Pakistan's intelligence service channeled around two billion dollars in covert American aid to anti-Communist guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states also provided billions of dollars for the Afghan war, which was fought under the banner of Islamist ideology. Radical Islamists from all over the world poured into Pakistan to join the Afghan jihad. Some of these radicals morphed into al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups currently confronting the West.”

This should not be confused with the first cause – the historical struggle between Shia and Sunni. The Tehran-Riyadh struggle is primarily political, aimed at regional supremacy.

Fifth, the use of domestic and international non-State actors by Pakistan to achieve its own goals in the immediate neighbourhood – Afghanistan and India, gave a fillip to new militant groups – predominantly Sunni. From Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) to Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) – there were numerous groups within Pakistan, which fought in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), as well as in Afghanistan, alongside the Taliban and its affiliates. Subsequently, these militant groups were also introduced to al Qaeda and its associates in the Af-Pak theatre; post 9/11, this link between the local militant groups and al Qaeda affiliates strengthened.⁵ With their Wahhabi/Salafi

4 Husain Haqqani, “Weeding Out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan,” November 1, 2006, <https://www.hudson.org/research/9769-weeding-out-the-heretics-sectarianism-in-pakistan>,

5 See the following: Zahid Hussain, *The Scorpion's Tail: The Relentless Rise of Islamic Militants in Pakistan-And How It Threatens America*, Free Press,

ideological orientation, al Qaeda and its affiliates exacerbated the Shia-Sunni fault lines within Pakistan. The escalation of sectarian violence within Pakistan post 9/11 is no coincidence.

Pakistan's deep engagement in Afghanistan since 1979, and the use of jihadi groups with support from the United States during the initial phase, and on its own since the 1990s, further made the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, then known as the North Western Frontier Province – NWFP) and Balochistan (in that order) as new bases for Sunni militant groups, safe havens and covert operations. If the involvement of Pakistan in J&K made the country's Punjab province a primary recruitment ground, its engagement in Afghanistan since 1979 made its western provinces volatile.

The sixth cause is the less explored, but an important – the impact of remittances from West Asia and what comes ideologically along with it.⁶ Thousands from rural Punjab, KP and Sindh work in the Gulf; the remittances from these countries have created a new class, sparking a disruptive upward movement. With new-found money, this population segment has been looking for a higher social and possibly political status as well. Religion and local mosques have become a part of their strategy to gain social acceptance for their new-found wealth. This phenomenon can be traced across South Asia, and not only in Pakistan, though the consequences vary. In Pakistan, this has given space for a new version of Islam with a Wahhabi/Salafi ideological root, and increasingly violent manifestations. This has caused a strain on the traditionally

2010; Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, New York, 2005; Paul Kapur, *Jihad as Grand Strategy: Islamist Militancy, National Security, and the Pakistani State*, Oxford University Press, New York 2017.

6 Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Saudization of Pakistan", Eqbal Ahmad Centre for Public Education, May, 2017, <http://eacpe.org/content/uploads/2017/05/Saudization-of-Pakistan-updated.pdf>.

Sufi fabric of rural society, galvanizing radical support against minority communities – both within and outside the Islamic fold.

Seventh, is the entry of new groups into Pakistan, accentuating sectarian fault lines. This happened/is happening at two levels – along the Af-Pak border and in mainland Pakistan – Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. At the first level, in the Af-Pak border region, there is a heavy presence of al Qaeda and its affiliates. Sectarian violence in the FATA, especially in Kurram Agency has intensified, because of this factor. At the second level, in the mainland, new groups – owing allegiance to the Islamic State (Daesh), have come to overlay established Sunni militant and sectarian formations operating in Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan.⁷ Some recent sectarian attacks have been attributed to Daesh franchises in Pakistan.

Sectarian violence in Pakistan has clearly been evolving and expanding. Neither the targets nor the perpetrators remain the same, nor is the geographic expanse of Sunni extremism static. It is, consequently, necessary to map the trajectory of sectarian violence in Pakistan – in terms of geography, targets, perpetrators, as well as aims and the endgame the sectarian militants seek.

Mapping the Expanse of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

During the initial decades, the Ahmadiyyas remained the primary targets of sectarian politics and violence. There was violence at the street level, especially during the 1953 and 1974 riots, and there was constant political pressure to declare the

7 “IS footprints growing in Pakistan: report,” Dawn, November 9, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1143272>; Zahid Hussain, “ISIS is no Taliban,” Dawn, July 9, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1117938>; Editorial, “Daesh in Pakistan,” The News, January 2, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/85855-Daesh-in-Pakistan>

Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims. In 1974, an amendment was passed by Parliament, declaring the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims.

During the subsequent decades, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, the Jhang region in Punjab became the primary battleground of sectarian violence, principally because the region was dominated by a small clutch of Shia landlords, and the sectarian movement became a vehicle for anti-feudal protests.⁸ Since the 1990s, however, there has been a steady expansion of sectarian violence outside Punjab.

The following four streams could be identified of this sectarian expansion.

The Geographic Expanse: New Regions of Violence

Unlike the 1980s, sectarian violence is no more limited to a few districts in Punjab. It is widespread across the provinces, and also includes the Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir regions of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). Thus from Karachi and Quetta to the south and west, to Gilgit in the north and Punjab in the East, sectarian violence now covers a huge geography.

While political developments in Gilgit Baltistan have always remained in the shadows, due to lack of access and

8 See the following studies for sectarian violence in Jhang: Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, *Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang*, 2000, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo; Tahir Kamran, "Contextualizing Sectarian Militancy in Pakistan: A Case Study of Jhang," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 20, Number 1, 2009, pp. 55-85; MA Zahab, "The Sunni-Shia Conflict in Jhang", in Imtiaz Ahmad and Helmut Riefeld (eds.) *Lived Islam in South Asia*, Social Science Press, New Delhi, pp. 135-148; Sarfraz Khan and Hafeez-ur-Rehman Chaudhry, "Determinants of Sectarianism in Pakistan: A Case Study of District Jhang," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, Volume 8, Number 1, 2011, pp. 237-243; MA Zahab, "Sectarianism as a Substitute Identity: Sunni and Shias in Central and South Punjab," in Soofia Mumtaz, Racine Jean-Luc, and Imran Anwar Ali (eds.) *Pakistan: The Contours of State and Society*, 2002, Oxford University Press, Karachi, pp. 115-128.

interest in the rest of Pakistan, sectarian violence remained more deeply shrouded, and there are few studies on the issue. However, sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan during recent years has attracted attention in the mainstream media and also a few organizations.⁹ The region is demographically unique in Pakistan, with a Shia majority, unlike the rest of the country. Though divided further, between Noorbakshi and Ismaili Shia, Gilgit-Baltistan is the only part of the country, where Sunnis remain a minority. Since the 1970s, Pakistan has been encouraging Sunnis to settle in the region.¹⁰

This experiment in demographic re-engineering has created a new fault line in Gilgit-Baltistan. Government support for this process has encouraged militant groups targeting the Shia community, especially along the Karakoram Highway, the only physical link between the region and the rest of Pakistan. A series of attacks have been recorded, with escalations in 2005, 2010 and 2012.¹¹

9 See the following: Aziz Ali Dad, "The sectarian spectre in Gilgit-Baltistan," *The News*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/216901-The-sectarian-spectre-in-Gilgit-Baltistan-Part-IV>; Editorial, "Sectarian violence in Gilgit-Baltistan," *Daily Times*, April 5, 2012, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/110579/sectarian-violence-in-gilgit-baltistan/>; Izhar Hunzai, "Conflict Dynamics in Gilgit-Baltistan," USIP Special Report 321, January 2013, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR321.pdf>; "Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan," PILDAT, May, 2011, <http://www.aboardthedemocracytrain.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/GB-SectarianConflit-BackgroundPaperEng-May2011.pdf>;

10 "Sectarian Conflict in Gilgit-Baltistan", PILDAT, May, 2011, <http://www.aboardthedemocracytrain.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/GB-SectarianConflit-BackgroundPaperEng-May2011.pdf>, p. 13.

11 See "14 killed in sectarian violence in Gilgit, Chilas," *The News*, April 4, 2012, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/621417-14-killed-in-sectarian-violence-in-gilgit-chilas>; "Violence in Gilgit," *Dawn*, 28 August 2010, <https://www.dawn.com/news/557342/violence-in-gilgit-2>; "At least 20 Shias pulled off bus, shot dead in northern Pakistan," *Dawn*, 16 August 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/742618>

In Balochistan, the sectarian violence against the Hazara community has intensified. Though Balochistan has been a theatre of cyclical violence, this was overwhelmingly secular sub-nationalist in nature. During recent years, however, the Hazara community in and around Quetta, and Shia pilgrims passing through the region to Iran and back, have been increasingly targeted.

Around half a million Hazaras live in Balochistan, mostly in Quetta, and they have come under a succession of attacks since 2001.¹² These attacks are marked by two distinct trends. First is the targeted killing of individual Hazara men and second, targeting Hazara mosques through bombings and suicide attacks. The first of these occurs at regular intervals but, owing to the small numbers in each of the killings, goes largely unnoticed at the national level. The latter, however, command far greater attention, as the suicide killings and bomb attacks on Hazara mosques leave a devastating trail of blood.

In FATA, the trend is most visible in the Kurram Agency. Historically, the Kurram Agency had its own sectarian fault line owing to the dominance of the Shia community around Upper Kurram, especially around Parachinar – the administrative capital of the Agency. However, sectarian violence in the Agency before 9/11 was intermittent and also low grade. In recent years, especially since 2006-07, however, a series of violent attacks have been recorded on a regular basis.¹³

12 See the Human Rights Watch report on the killing of Hazaras in Balochistan. “We are the Walking Dead: Killings of Shia Hazara in Balochistan,” Human Rights Watch, 29 June 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/29/we-are-walking-dead/killings-shia-hazara-balochistan-pakistan>

13 For details, see D. Suba Chandran, “Pakistan’s Parachinar Problem”, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, July 20, 2017, <https://www.nias.res.in/sites/default/files/Pakistan%E2%80%99s%20Parachinar%20Problem.pdf>.

New Sectarian Groups: The Expansion in Perpetrators

In terms of perpetrators –two phases of sectarian violence can be identified in Pakistan. The first, during the 1980s and 1990s, led primarily by the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and its later offshoot, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). SSP was the most dreaded Sunni militant group, founded by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi in Jhang during the mid-1980s.¹⁴ Later, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) founded by Riaz Basra in 1996 became more violent.¹⁵ Riaz Basra and some of his associates from SSP formed LeJ after Nawaz Jhangvi was killed in 1990. SSP and LeJ were primarily responsible for the sectarian violence during 1980s-90s.

This changed over the succeeding decade, and especially after 9/11. New groups emerged. Punjab’s sectarian militants came to be linked with the Taliban-al Qaeda combine, especially the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, also, Pakistan Taliban). These linkages became deadlier on the sectarian landscape in Pakistan, as terrorists from Punjab linked up with the other provinces – especially Balochistan, KP and FATA.¹⁶ The formation of TTP and its presence in the western provinces of Pakistan, as well as its linkages to Punjabi sectarian militants, dominated the second and current phase of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

Daesh is the latest group to arrive on the landscape of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Though the government repeatedly

14 For a historical account of the SSP read the following: Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror*, 2005, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., New York; Amir Mir, *The True Face of Jihadis*, 2004, Mashal Books, Lahore.

15 See Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror*, 2005, Ne M.E. Sharpe, Inc., New York; Amir Mir, *The True Face of Jihadis*, 2004, Mashal Books, Lahore.

16 Stephen Tankel, “Beyond FATA: Exploring the Punjabi Militant Threat to Pakistan,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 28, Issue 1, 2016.

denied its presence initially¹⁷ increasingly documentation in the media and commentary suggests a consolidation of activities even in 2015-16.¹⁸ Subsequently, military operations have been initiated against Daesh in Pakistan, and Daesh existence in the country is now official, confirmed by statements from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).¹⁹

The entry of Daesh has added another dimension to sectarian violence. Rather than Daesh establishing a local chapter in Pakistan, it appears that a section within the numerous militant groups in Pakistan sought to act as Daesh franchisees, inspired by the early successes in Syria and Iraq. The idea of establishing the Ummah under of an ‘Islamic Caliphate’ has also proven attractive to some. Crucially, Daesh’s takfiri ideology, rejecting all purported ‘deviations’ from its own peculiar interpretation of Islam, are a natural magnet for the sectarian groups in Pakistan. In any event, the injection of this stream into the sectarian setting has resulted in a significant escalation of violence.

17 Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Govt in a state of denial about Daesh?,” *Dawn*, February 1, 2015 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1160813>; “No Daesh in Pakistan, says interior minister,” *Dawn*, February 13, 2016 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1239280>.

18 Ali Akbar, “From TTP to IS: Pakistan’s terror landscape evolves,” *Dawn*, February 12, 2016 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1169542>; “Daesh gradually gaining ground in Pakistan,” Zahid Gishkori, *The News*, March 3, 2017 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/189914-Daesh-gradually-gaining-ground-in-Pakistan>; “Pakistan launches ‘major’ military operation against Daesh in tribal areas,” *The News*, July 16, 2016 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/216876-Pakistan-launches-major-operation-against-Daesh-in-tribal-areas>; “Some foreign militants recruiting for Daesh in Pakistan,” *The News*, June 5, 2016 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/125491-Some-foreign-militants-recruiting-for-Daesh-in-Pakistan>.

19 “Pakistan military gives further details of op against Daesh in Mastung,” *The News*, June 8, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/209395-Pakistan-military-gives-further-details-of-op-against-Daesh-in-Mastung>.

New Targets: The Expansion of Victims

The Ahmadiyya community was the first target of sectarian conflict and consequent violence during the 1950s and 1970s. There were riots against the community – the most devastating in 1953 and 1974.²⁰ The 1953 riots were limited primarily to Lahore. Following the violence, the military was called out for the first time in independent Pakistan. A committee was subsequently formed to look into the violence, and its detailed report, excoriating “the confluence of religion and state in Pakistan”, is now available to the public.²¹

The 1974 riots against the Ahmadiyyas were widespread. Following the riots and the opposition, the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto declared the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims. Ten years later, Zia passed the infamous Ordinance XX, legally confirming their non-Muslim status.

In the 1980s, a new torrent of sectarian violence engulfed Pakistan. Centred in Jhang in Central/South Punjab and led by Sunni and Shia militant groups, saw the systematic targeting of the Shia community. Over the succeeding two decades, the Shia community in Punjab and Sindh, and increasingly in Karachi, became the primary target of sectarian violence.

Post 9/11, there was a further expansion in the sectarian targets. The violence moved to the peripheries of Pakistan. During the last decade, the Turi Shias of the Upper Kurram

20 Fatima Z. Rahman, “Pakistan: A Conducive Setting for Islamist Violence Against Ahmadis,” in Jawad Syed, Edwina Pio, Tahir Kamran and Abbas Zaidi (eds), *Faith Based Violence and Deobandi Militancy in Pakistan*, Palgrave, 2016, pp 209-230.

21 “The 1954 Justice Munir Commission Report On The Anti Ahmadi Riots Of Punjab In 1953,” https://archive.org/stream/The_1954_justice_munir_commission_report_on_the_anti_ahmadi_riots_of_punjab_1953/The-1954-Justice-Munir-Commission-Report-on-the--anti-Ahmadi-Riots-of-Punjab-in-1953_djvu.txt.

Agency have become the prime targets of Sunni militant groups belonging principally to TTP and its local affiliates. Though Kurram Agency did witness some sectarian violence in earlier decades, the intensity of violence and its recurrence since 2007 has been alarming.²² Asad Munir sketches the broad trajectory:

Sectarian hostility in Kurram Agency dates back to the British era. Muharram in Parachinar has not been a peaceful event for many years now. Before the advent of sectarian organisations, like the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Muhammad, sectarian conflict was common in Kurram Agency. Inter-tribal issues such as distribution of water, cutting of wood and denial of road access, ultimately morphed into sectarian conflict. Minor conflicts were witnessed almost every year, while major sectarian clashes erupted in 1982, 1996 and 2007. The Iranian revolution, the entry of Sunni Afghan refugees and the influx of lethal weapons during the Afghan jihad are some of the factors contributing to the intensity and frequency of sectarian violence.

Locals confirm that the escalation in violence is an offshoot of Pakistan's jihad in Afghanistan.²³ Abbas Turi thus notes,

Like other parts of Pakistan, sectarianism was introduced to Parachinar during the days of Afghan Jihad, when the policymakers of the country decided to fight a super power through the religious ideology of Jihad. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the holy warriors fighting against the Soviets had the blessing of Washington and Islamabad. These religious zealots wielded immense influence in Afghanistan and the tribal areas

22 Asad Munir, "Peace in Kurram Agency," *The Express Tribune*, February 12, 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/117541/peace-in-kurram-agency/>. Also see, Mariam Abou Zahab, "Sectarianism in Pakistan's Kurram Tribal Agency," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Volume: 7 Issue: 6, <https://jamestown.org/program/sectarianism-in-pakistans-kurram-tribal-agency/>

23 Abbas Turi, "Marginalizing Parachinar," *The Friday Times*, November 29, 2013, <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tft/marginalizing-parachinar/>.

of Pakistan. Their fight against the Soviets may have been in the national interest, but regrettably, they did disturb the sectarian harmony among the peaceful residents of Kurram.

For example, during the first six months of 2017 alone, there were four suicide attacks in Kurram, highlighting the intensity of the violence in a remote tribal agency.²⁴ Sectarian violence continues, though it remains sporadic. Unfortunately, intermittent incidents get submerged in the larger cycle of violence in the FATA region.

While there was an inherent sectarian fault line in Kurram (the upper regions being dominated by the Shias and the lower regions by the Sunnis), in the past, difference used to be settled through local jirgas. The presence of Sunni militants from outside the Agency, and even from across the border, has made the local jirgas ineffectual.

Sectarian violence in Kurram is not limited to the Agency, and overflows into neighbouring Orakzai Agency as well.²⁵

Balochistan has been a new and expanding theatre of sectarian violence, especially directed against the Hazara community.²⁶ The Hazaras do not belong to Pakistan, and came to Balochistan from Central Afghanistan during the 1880s. They settled around Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, and lived peacefully with the local Baloch communities. Over the past fifteen years, sectarian peace in Quetta has been shattered, mainly due to the presence of the Afghan Taliban, TTP and

24 Asad Munir, "Ghoul and Ghosts," *Dawn*, July 23, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1346711>.

25 Editorial, "Sectarian mayhem in Orakzai," *The Express Tribune*, July 20, 2012 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/410565/sectarian-mayhem-in-orakzai/>; Mariam Abou Zahab, "Sectarianism in Pakistan's Kurram Tribal Agency," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor*, Volume: 7 Issue: 6, <https://jamestown.org/program/sectarianism-in-pakistans-kurram-tribal-agency/>

26 "We are the Walking Dead: Killings of Shia Hazara in Balochistan," Human Rights Watch, 29 June 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/29/we-are-walking-dead/killings-shia-hazara-balochistan-pakistan>

their affiliates. Though LeJ is blamed for the violence in Quetta, it is no coincidence that the Afghan Taliban has established a ‘Quetta Shura’ in Balochistan.²⁷ During the 1990s, Taliban was responsible for a sectarian bloodbath against the Hazaras in Afghanistan; and a section of the Afghan Hazara population migrated to Quetta during this period as well.

Besides this expansion in the target, the most dangerous has been the recent targeting of Sufi Islam. A series of attacks in Sindh, Punjab and KP on Sufi shrines highlights this new danger within Sunni Islam. The Sufis are within the Sunni fold, but their religious practices are rejected by the Wahhabis/Salafis.

Since independence and even before, Pakistan’s sectarian fault lines never ran within the Sunni divisions of society. Though there were differences within the Bareilvi and Deobandi Schools, these never became violent. More importantly, cutting across ethnic divides, Sufism remained the primary glue. Sufi saints and their shrines all across the provinces were revered by all communities. The violence within the Sunni fold is a new phenomenon in Pakistan and, not surprisingly, post 9/11. Since 2010, the most prominent attacks on Sufi Shrines have included:

- October 2017: A suicide attack on a Sufi Shrine in Jhal Magsi in Balochistan kills more than ten.²⁸
- February 2017: A suicide attack in Sehwan on Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sindh kills around 100.²⁹

27 Hussain Nadim, “The quiet rise of the Quetta Shura,” *Foreign Policy*, 14 August 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/14/the-quiet-rise-of-the-quetta-shura/>.

28 “Suicide blast at Jhal Magsi shrine kills 18,” *Daily Times*, October 6, 2017 <https://dailytimes.com.pk/113787/suicide-blast-at-jhal-magsi-shrine-kills-18/>

29 Mohammad Hussain Khan, Qurban Ali Khushik, Imtiaz Ali, “At least 70 dead as bomb tips through Lal Shabaz Shrine in Sehwan Sindh,” *Dawn*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1315136>

- November 2016: More than 50 get killed on an attack on Shah Noorani shrine in Khuzdar in Balochistan.³⁰
- June 2014: A bomb attack on Baba Nangyay Shah Shrine in Islamabad fortunately did not have casualties.³¹
- October 2012: A suicide attack on Kaka Sahib Shrine in Nowshera, Punjab kills three.³²
- April 2011: Two suicide bombers kill more than 50 in Sakhi Sarwar shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab.³³
- March 2011: A bomb attack in Akhund Baba shrine in Nowshera, Punjab kills more than ten.³⁴
- October 2010: Two suicide bombers kill ten in Abdulla Shah Ghazi shrine in Karachi, Sindh.³⁵
- July 2010: Two suicide bombers kill more than 30 in Data Darbar shrine in Lahore, Punjab.³⁶

The New Intensity: Suicide Attacks and Lethality

During the early decades, sectarian conflict in Pakistan, while violent, did not result in huge casualties in single incidents. This has changed in recent years, with instances in which a single attack had more than 100 casualties. The

30 "Tragedy unfold as tragedy strikes Shah Noorani shrine," *Dawn*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1295998>

31 Irfan Haider, "Blast at Islamabad shrine wounds at least 61," *Dawn*, June 20, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1114065> .

32 Zahir Shah Sherazi, "Three killed, 25 injured in Nowshera blast," *Dawn*, October 28, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/759909>

33 Ashraf Buzdar, "Suicide hits at Sakhi Sarwar shrine kills 41," *The Nation*, April 4, 2011, <https://nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2011/suicide-hits-at-sakhi-sarwar-shrine-kill-41>

34 "Another mosque damaged in blast," *The News*, 11 March 2011.

35 "10 killed many injured at Abdulla Ghazi shrine in Karachi," *The Nation*, October 7, 2010, <https://nation.com.pk/07-Oct-2010/10-killed-many-injured-in-twin-blasts-at-abdullah-shah-ghazi-shrine-in-karachi>

36 "Data Darbar attack," *Dawn*, July 3, 2010, <https://www.dawn.com/news/846012>

principal instrument of this dramatic escalation in the lethality of sectarian violence was the use of suicide bombers, though improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and mass shootings continued to inflict significant fatalities. Consider the following numbers:

- October 2017: More than ten killed in a suicide attack on a Sufi Shrine in Jhal Magsi in Balochistan.³⁷
- February 2017: More than 100 killed in a suicide attack in Sehwan at the Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine in Sindh.³⁸
- November 2016: More than 50 killed in an attack on the Shah Noorani shrine in Khuzdar in Balochistan.³⁹
- February 2013: More than 80 killed in an attack in Quetta.⁴⁰
- January 2013: More than 100 killed in twin bomb attacks in Quetta.⁴¹
- August 2012: 25 Shia passengers travelling from Gilgit shot dead.⁴²
- June 2012: 14 pilgrims killed near Quetta in a suicide car attack.⁴³

37 “Suicide blast at Jhal Magsi shrine kills 18,” *Daily Times*, October 6, 2017, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/113787/suicide-blast-at-jhal-magsi-shrine-kills-18/>

38 Mohammad Hussain Khan, Qurban Ali Khushik, Imtiaz Ali, op.cit., <https://www.dawn.com/news/1315136>

39 “Tragedy unfold as tragedy strikes Shah Noorani shrine,” *Dawn*, November 13, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1295998>

40 “Death toll from Quetta blast reaches 80,” *The Express Tribune*, February 17, 2013, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1295998>

41 “Carnage in Quetta: The day after,” *Dawn*, January 11, 2013, <https://www.dawn.com/news/777972>

42 “At least 20 Shias pulled off bus, shot dead in northern Pakistan,” *Dawn*, August 16, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/742618>

43 “Blast targets bus carrying Shia pilgrims in Quetta, 14 killed,” *The Express Tribune*, June 28, 2012, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/400570/blast-targets-bus-carrying-pilgrims-in-quetta/> .

- February 2012: 19 Shia passengers travelling to Gilgit from Rawalpindi shot dead in Kohistan.⁴⁴
- September 2011: More than 25 Shia passengers killed in Mastung, Balochistan.⁴⁵
- April 2011: More than 50 killed by two suicide bombers in Sakhi Sarwar shrine in Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab.⁴⁶
- September 2010: More than 50 killed in a Shia rally in Quetta.⁴⁷
- September 2010: 25 killed in an attack on a Shia rally in Lahore.⁴⁸
- July 2010: More than 30 killed by two suicide bombers in Data Darbar shrine in Lahore, Punjab.⁴⁹
- December 2009: More than 40 killed in a suicide attack on an Ashura (commemoration of the martyrdom at Karbala) procession in Karachi.⁵⁰
- March 2004: More than 40 killed in an attack on an Ashura procession in Quetta.⁵¹

44 "A19 pulled off buses, shot dead in sectarian hit," *The Express Tribune*, 17 August 2012.

45 "Sectarian atrocity: 29 killed in Mastung, Quetta ambushes," *The Express Tribune*, September 20, 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/256419/gunmen-attack-bus-in-balochistan-20-killed/>

46 Ashraf Buzdar, "Suicide hits at Sakhi Sarwar Shrine kill 41," *The Nation*, April 4, 2011, <https://nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2011/suicide-hits-at-sakhi-sarwar-shrine-kill-41>

47 "Quetta rally suicide bomb kills dozens," *BBC News*, September 3, 2010, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11177686>

48 Ali Syed, "Lahore attack: 18 killed, 190 injured," *The Express Tribune*, September 1, 2010, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/45287/blast-in-lahore-procession/>

49 "Data Darbar attack," *Dawn*, July 3, 2010, <https://www.dawn.com/news/846012>

50 "Karachi in mourning over Ashura carnage," *Dawn*, December 30, 2009, <https://www.dawn.com/news/511363>

51 "Carnage in Pakistan Shia attack," *BBC News*, 2 March 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3524851.stm

- July 2003: More than 50 Hazaras killed in the first sectarian suicide bomb attack in Quetta.

Through all this, the strategy of sectarian militant groups was to inflict maximum damage. The targets – often mosques or shrines and religious rallies – were carefully chosen to achieve larger casualties.

During the 1980s and 1990s, and especially until 1996, annual sectarian fatalities remained in the double digits. Since then, and especially after 2001, fatalities have run into three digits, ranging from 200 to 500 each year.⁵² Further, while sectarian violence in the 1980s and the 1990s remained sporadic, after 2001 it became a regular phenomenon.

Large suicide and bomb attacks on shrines and rallies secure greater space in the media. It is, however, the continuous succession of smaller attacks – which occur on a near-daily basis – inflict a steady stream of casualties, often in drive-by assassinations, though they are paid little attention in the media, or by the public. These daily killings reveal a pattern of great sectarian violence across Pakistan on an individual basis at local levels.

Why has Sectarian Violence become Widespread, Recurrent and Lethal?

An analysis of available data reveals a number of trends underlying the dynamic of sectarian violence in Pakistan.

First, the multi-dimensional expansion in sectarian violence in Pakistan is a post 9/11 phenomenon. Certainly, this has nothing to do with the attacks in the US, but the invasion of Afghanistan by the US and the disruption of the Taliban-al Qaeda network, and its shift into Pakistan played a major role in escalating sectarian violence.

52 For a detailed annual data on sectarian violence, refer to the South Asia Terrorism Portal – www.satp.org.

Second, two significant developments occurred, besides the displacement of al Qaeda and Taliban into FATA and Balochistan. One was the creation of TTP and the other was the ex-filtration of sectarian militants from Punjab into Balochistan and FATA. These factors in combination, impacting on the same region, created a perfect sectarian storm.

The third development was outside country – in Syria and Iraq: the birth and rise of Daesh. Daesh’s activities and ‘successes’ widened sectarian faultiness across much of the Muslim world, and Pakistan was no exception. The fact that some of the groups in Pakistan, including those factions within the Taliban pledged allegiance to Daesh and the Caliphate highlights the new alignments within.⁵³ Similar trends were manifested in neighbouring Afghanistan.⁵⁴ Recent sectarian attacks on the Shia communities in Afghanistan demonstrate the sectarian agenda of the groups that proclaim allegiance to Daesh.

The fourth development is also external, but is not recent: linkages between sectarian violence within Pakistan, and the Shia-Sunni rivalry in West Asia. During the 1980s and 90s, the regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia fuelled sectarian mobilisation and violence across the region. Led by Zia-ul-Haq, during this period, Pakistan aligned closely with Saudi Arabia.

This alignment has persisted into the present, even as the struggle for supremacy between Saudi Arabia and Iran

53 Zahir Shah Sherazi, “Six top TTP commanders announce allegiance to Islamic State’s Baghdadi,” *Dawn*, October 14, 2014 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1137908>

54 See the following: “Embassy, mosque attacks fuel fears ISIS bringing Iraq war to Afghanistan,” *The News*, 4 August 2017; “Thousands of Shias protest against IS in Afghanistan,” *Dawn*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1306169> ; “Attack on mosque in Afghan city kills at least 29,” *The News*, 2 August 2017

in the Middle East sharpens. Despite reservations expressed in Pakistan's Parliament, the Deep State continues to work closely with Saudi Arabia. The inclusion of Pakistan in the Riyadh-led Islamic Military Alliance, and the appointment of former Pakistan Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif, as its Commander – suggests Pakistan's deep embroilment in the West Asian sectarian struggle.

This polarizing interface is bound to have an impact on Pakistan-Iran relations, as it did during the 1980s. Iran is already apprehensive about the growing Pakistan-Saudi Arabia security relationship.⁵⁵ More than the bilateral differences at the foreign policy level, such differences seem to be providing a fillip to Sunni extremist formations. Just as sectarian organizations such as SSP and LeJ emerged during the turmoil of the 1980s, these groups, along with TTP as well as Daesh and al Qaeda affiliates, are making use of this space over the past years.

The fifth factor is the flow of remittances from West Asia and the mushrooming of religious institutions in rural Pakistan. Over decades, Pakistani workers in different parts of West Asia have substantially increased as have their remittances back to the home country. Their newfound economic position has them looking for a rise in social position, with a section supporting local religious institutions, as a part of this quest for status. This phenomenon is not restricted to Pakistan, but is visible in neighbouring India and Bangladesh as well, albeit at varying levels. In Pakistan, this has led to a surge in funding for local religious groups and organisations, including extremist sectarian formations.

55 "Iran concerned over Raheel's appointment as head of Saudi-led military alliance: envoy," *Dawn*, April 3, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1324597>; "Iran sounds warning to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia," *The News*, May 9, 2017 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/203374-Iran-sounds-warning-to-Pakistan-Saudi-Arabia>

Combating Sectarian Violence: Is the State Incapable? Or Collusive?

Why has the sectarian violence expanded during the last two decades? What has been the state's strategy in addressing sectarian violence in Pakistan? Crucially, is the state incapable of fighting sectarian violence? Worse, is there state collusion in the expansion of sectarian violence in Pakistan?

In this context, a definition of what constitutes the 'state' is imperative, as is the issue of who is in charge of dealing with the sectarian militants. Though this should be the primary responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior at the national level, and similarly of the Home Ministries at the provincial levels, it is widely accepted that the Deep State – essentially the Army and its intelligence wing – is principally engaged in 'managing' the sectarian militancy and, indeed, supporting and calibrating sectarian violence.

It is widely accepted that the sectarian terrorists of the 1980s and 90s, were a direct product of strategies pursued by the military establishment, and particularly of Zia's efforts to find legitimacy for his rule, and to justify the role of the Army. A section within the political parties, especially the religious political parties, were harnessed to these ends, and contributed to the growth of sectarian militancy during this period. It was, and remains, the Deep State that controls Pakistan's strategy of 'sectarian management'.

The Government, led by the democratic parties – primarily the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N), has rarely exerted significant control over the formulation and implementation of any strategy to control sectarian militancy, though it is possible to find some correlation between the absence of democratic processes and the presence of sectarian violence – especially

in the ‘periphery’ – Balochistan, FATA and Gilgit-Baltistan. It is the Deep State that has been responsible for the creation and proliferation of sectarian extremist organizations.

The sectarian militants serve the external and internal objectives of the Deep State, and without its support, these formations would not have proliferated.

However, the situation, today, is fraught, as the Deep State’s control over these groups is challenged. Thanks to remittances, local funding, and other outside support, the sectarian groups are no longer solely dependent on the Deep State. The external support and ideological exposure to other groups – TTP, al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban and Daesh, the local sectarian groups have evolved their own ideological outlook, more and more in line with the global jihadists, have extended areas of operation as well as their future ambitions. Funding support, ideological affiliations and military expertise are now forthcoming from different sources, outside the Deep State.

The Deep State exhibits some awareness of its emerging limitations in controlling these groups, as well as in effectively containing or calibrating sectarian violence. It would certainly not want to open another front within the heartland. At the same time, elements of collusion appear to persist.

Two explanations could be provided to support the argument for collusion. First, the recent expanse in sectarian violence is taking place in Balochistan, FATA and Gilgit-Baltistan. All these three regions have their own “nationalist” agenda – Baloch, Pashtun and Gilgit. For Islamabad and Lahore, Quetta, Parachinar and Gilgit are a periphery. The approach seems to be: as long as the sectarian militancy remains in the periphery and does not affect the heartland, let them be.

Unfortunately, the sectarian militants, as is evident in the data, are active in Punjab and Sindh as well, and appear to be using the periphery as a launch pad to target the heartland.

The second explanation arises from the expectation that sectarian violence will undermine the existing sub-nationalist divide by undermining Baloch and Pashtun sentiments and imposing a religious identity. Hence, it fits the Deep State's larger plan – to put down sub-nationalist ideologies.

As long as there is any measure of collusion between sectarian groups and the Deep State, sectarian violence is likely to continue and, indeed, further intensify. It is only if the perceived threat of certain group's – such as Daesh and its affiliates – becomes overwhelming, that the Deep State is likely to dismantle structures of support to the sectarian formations. This does not appear to be an immediate prospect.

Sectarian Groups: The Endgame

What do the sectarian militants want? What do they aim to achieve by targeting the Ahmadiyyas, Shias, and now even the Barelvis and Sufi shrines? What is their endgame?

Since the sectarian extremist groups do not form a monolithic bloc, their objectives must be assessed in terms of individual groups. These groups could be broadly categorised into four categories – the old groups – primarily from Punjab led by the SSP and later LeJ; affiliates of the Afghan Taliban, al Qaeda and the TTP; Daesh franchisees in the AfPak region; and the new sectarian groups of Punjab, especially those who came into the limelight following the assassination of Salman Taseer and the hanging of his assassin – Mumtaz Qadri. One could also map a chronological pattern to these different sets of sectarian groups in Pakistan.

Old and New: The Sectarian Militants of Punjab

SSP and LeJ are the two oldest sectarian groups of Punjab, with their original base primarily in Jhang District during the 1980s and 90s. At this stage, their primary objective was

focussed within the Punjab province, especially the Jhang region, and their issues were local. The social-economic hierarchy and demography of Jhang played a primary role in the sectarian interaction between the two groups. The District had a Shia minority, but a section of them were the most influential landlords. The Sunnis were the majority – but the Shia landlords (led by the Syeds and Sials) influenced the power hierarchy of the region. Local traders and businessmen belonging to the Sunni community were expanding their financial footprints and sought political recognition.

Sectarian violence thus had a predominant economic component, and sought a re-balancing of the local social power structure. Hence, one of the primary objectives of SSP and LeJ was to target the Shia landlords. This later expanded to the wider Shia community – engaged in small business and other related service sectors.

The objectives of these groups subsequently expanded and came to be exploited by the Deep State as well. When Pakistan got deeply engaged in the proxy war in Jammu & Kashmir a section of SSP and LeJ militants started allying with Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) and other Kashmir directed militant formations. Their collaboration with HuM and later Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) during the late 1990s led them to look beyond Jhang and Pakistani Punjab.

Post 9/11, cadres, sought alliances with the Taliban, al Qaeda and TTP affiliates. The movement of Punjabi sectarian militants towards west Punjab principally occurred during this phase. The further expansion of LeJ into Quetta and Parachinar was a broadening of this process. As a result, Punjabi sectarian militants have extended their target areas to comprehend Punjab, Balochistan and FATA.

There is no hard evidence yet that the Punjabi sectarian groups have a larger political objective of overthrowing the

state, or of establishing Shariah. They remain focussed on targeting the Shia communities across Punjab, Balochistan and FATA.

Unlike the SSP and LeJ, the new sectarian groups have a larger focus – geographically and politically. They emerged in Punjab during the post-Salman Taseer assassination period. Taseer, the then Governor of Punjab was assassinated by his own security guard – Mumtaz Qadri, who was arrested following the assassination; a trial followed in the courts. During the trial, a new group emerged supporting Qadri and his objectives. Qadri was believed to have assassinated Taseer for his alleged sympathies towards the minority community. Taseer had been fighting for reforms in the Blasphemy law and to prevent its misuse.

The Qadri followers, or those who used his trial as an opportunity to further their own case, have formed a new sectarian group in Punjab and in 2017, this pro-Qadri group evolved into a political party – Tehreek Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (TLY) – led by Khadim Hussain Rizvi.⁵⁶ There has been no widespread violence against the Shias or Ahmadiyyas by this group at this stage, but its political transformation is dangerous. Though the Election Commission of Pakistan has refused to recognise TLY as a political party, it (unsuccessfully) contested bye-elections for two National Assembly seats and a provincial assembly seat in Punjab. Significantly, TLY adheres to the Barelvi school of Sunni Islam, and has demonstrated its capacity for significant countrywide street mobilisation.

In November 2017, TLY organised a huge and protracted political protest, occupying the Faizabad interchange linking

56 Zia Ur Rehman, “Pro-Mumtaz Qadri religious group morphing into militant outfit,” *The News*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/220108-Pro-Mumtaz-Qadri-religious-group-morphing-into-militant-outfit>

Rawalpindi and Islamabad,⁵⁷ around two major demands—to restore a particular clause relating to the finality of the Prophethood in the Election Law and the removal of Punjab’s Law Minister.⁵⁸ A resolution had already been passed in Parliament, referring to the disputed phrase in the clause as a clerical error. TLY, however, continued to exploit the opportunity to demonstrate its strength for over 20 days. Eventually, the Army was called in to disburse the protestors; instead of dispersing the protesters, the Army brokered a deal with the political leadership, surrendering to most of TLY’s demands.

TLY’s larger objective is clearly political, and it is likely to continue its political path, exploiting violent mobilisation as a means.⁵⁹ Though the TLY did not win any of the bye-elections it stood for, its performance, for example in the Lahore bye-election, was better than the PPP and Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI), evidence of the political rise of this sectarian group.⁶⁰

Taliban Affiliates and Daesh Franchisees

Taliban and its affiliates in Pakistan are far from a united entity. Besides the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network

57 Zahid Hussain, “The capital under siege,” *Dawn*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1370547>; Hussain H Zaidi, “The rise of the right wing,” *The News*, November 25, 2017 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/248506-the-rise-of-the-right-wing>; Zahid Hussain, “The flames of bigotry,” *Dawn*, November 20, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1372094>

58 “Right-wing threat,” *Dawn*, November 12, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1370000>

59 “Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah sets sights on 2018 elections,” *The Express Tribune*, January 5, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1600967/1-tehreek-e-labbaik-ya-rasool-allah-sets-sights-2018-elections/>

60 Abdul Basit, “The rise of the far right,” *The News*, October 6, 2017 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/234962-The-rise-of-the-far-right>

from across the Af-Pak border, the TTP within Pakistan also has numerous factions. These TTP factions had an initial focus on FATA, – especially two Agencies – North and South Waziristan. Later it expanded to other Tribal Agencies – Bajaur, Orakzai, Kurram and Khyber, and then gradually expanded into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. Besides targeting the state, especially its security forces, TTP factions have repeatedly attacked minorities.

Before TTP split into multiple factions, the main group was led by the Mehsuds and Wazirs, primarily the former. Under the Mehsuds, TTP was primarily providing safe haven to al Qaeda affiliates hiding in FATA, who wanted to use the region as a base for their operations in Afghanistan against the US led international Forces.

It was during this phase that sectarian militants from Punjab started joining TTP in FATA. As the Punjabi influence grew, TTP was increasingly involved in sectarian violence as well, particularly in certain tribal agencies such as Kurram and Orakzai.

TTP is not, of course, essentially sectarian; at least, not yet. TTP's endgame is aimed at providing space for al Qaeda and Taliban remnants within Pakistan, and also to occupy a political space, especially in FATA. Though TTP engages in violence in Punjab, this is largely punitive in nature – as a warning to the establishment to go slow with its military operations in FATA and KP. It is extremists drawn from LeJ and other sectarian groups from Punjab, rather than TTP, who are principally engaged in targeting the Hazaras and the Turis in Balochistan and FATA, respectively. The presence of the Afghan Taliban in Quetta may also be pushing the violence against the Hazaras in Balochistan. Crucially, these attacks appear to be localized, with no visible larger or national agenda.

Finally, with regard to Daesh franchisees in Pakistan, it is useful to recognize that, rather than Daesh seeking an extension in Pakistan; it appears that a few local groups would have sought to bring themselves under its flag. It is their local endgame, rather than Daesh's agenda, consequently, that will decide their operations and objectives.

The size of these franchisees is small. Except for those few commanders who have declared their allegiance to Daesh, there seems to be no larger organizational network within Pakistan as yet. Despite their size, Daesh franchisees in Pakistan have managed a few spectacular sectarian attacks,⁶¹ though no larger road map is visible in their activities at the present stage. This may, of course, change over time; but no political or military agenda is currently in evidence.

Sectarian militants and groups in Pakistan are divided within. Their objectives, areas of operations and targets seem to be divided as well. While some of the newer groups seek to ape developments in Syria and Iraq; sectarian violence is an end in itself or is part of a local dynamic for others; still others exploit such violence as part of a wider strategy within the ambit of global Islamist militancy.

61 For example, the suicide attack on an army truck in Quetta during August 2017; the suicide attack on the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar in Sehwan, Sindh in February 2017; and the suicide attacks in Mastung in May 2017; were all claimed by the ISIS in Pakistan.

