

Non-traditional security threats in Pakistan and the role of non-state actors make the Pakistan's role in the region more crucial. Explain.

## 1. Introduction:

Non-traditional security threats in Pakistan, such as terrorism, cyber threats, environmental challenges, and socio-economic issues, have significantly impacted the country's stability and development. These threats, often exacerbated by non-state actors like terrorist groups, insurgent factions, and criminal organizations, pose complex challenges that transcend conventional military solutions. As a result, Pakistan's role in the South Asian region has become increasingly crucial, not only for its own security but also for regional stability and cooperation.

## 2. Non-Traditional Security Threats in Pakistan:-

Pakistan faces a myriad of non-traditional security threats that undermine its national security and development prospects.

### i) Terrorism and Extremism:-

Despite ongoing military operations, terrorism and extremism in Pakistan remain pervasive.

Groups like TTP and ISIS-K continue to launch deadly attacks. In January 2024, a suicide bombing at a mosque in Peshawar, carried out by TTP, killed over 50 people.

This tragic incident underscores the persistent and severe threat posed by these militant groups, highlighting the challenges faced by Pakistani security forces in ensuring stability and safety.

### ii) Cybersecurity Threats:-

Pakistan is increasingly targeted by cyber-attacks affecting its governmental, financial, and infrastructural (actors are responsible) sectors.

Both domestic and international actors are responsible for these cyber threats, which

compromise critical data and infrastructure.

### **Case Study: Cyber Attack on Pakistan's National Bank, November 2023,**

NBP suffered a major cyber attack that disrupted its operations nationwide. This incident not only caused significant financial losses and inconvenience to customers but also highlighted vulnerabilities in Pakistan's financial cyber-security infrastructure. The NR3C collaborated with international cybersecurity agencies to investigate and mitigate the impact, underscoring the critical need for stronger cyber defenses and proactive measures to protect vital financial system.

### **iii) Environmental Challenges:-**

Climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation pose severe threats to Pakistan's livelihoods and economic stability. These challenges are exacerbated by factors such as deforestation, inadequate infrastructure, and poor environmental management. Pakistan's geography makes it particularly vulnerable to climate-induced disasters like floods, droughts, and glacial melting. **In May 2024, the**

Shisper Glacier in Gilgit-Baltistan experienced a significant surge, leading to a catastrophic glacial lake outburst flood. This disaster highlighted the dire need for effective climate adaptation and disaster management strategies.

#### iv) **Economic Instability:-**

Pakistan faces significant economic instability characterized by high inflation, rising unemployment, and substantial external debt. These challenges strain the nation's economic resources and can lead to widespread social unrest and political instability. **As of early 2024, Pakistan's inflation rate stands at approximately 27%**, significantly impacting the cost of living and purchasing power of citizens. Moreover, **according to State Bank of Pakistan, Pakistan's external debt has surged to over \$130 billion**, placing a heavy burden on the country's economy and limiting fiscal space for development projects.

#### v) **Health Crises:-**

Pakistan faces numerous endemic health issues, including dengue fever, polio, and malnutrition. These health challenges strain the country's healthcare system, expose systemic weaknesses, and highlight the need for substantial improvements in public health infrastructure and policies. **According to World Health Organization,** In 2023, there were over 50,000 reported dengue fever cases and 84 reported Polio cases found in Pakistan.

### 3. Role Of Non-State Actors in Pakistan:-

#### i) Chronology of Non-State Actors' Influence in Pakistan:-

In 1970s, the initial emergence of various ethnic and sectarian groups such as the Baloch insurgents occurred, who began to challenge the state's authority due to grievances over political representation and resource distribution. In 1980s, the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) significantly impacted Pakistan. The country

became a frontline state, supporting Mujahideen fighters against Soviet forces. The 1990s witnessed increased sectarian violence particularly Shia and Sunni groups such as SSP and TJP. Moreover, Non-State actors like LeT and JeM emerged focusing on the insurgency in Indian ~~administered~~<sup>occupied</sup> Kashmir, often with alleged support from Pakistan's military and intelligence services. Following the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US-led invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan faced immense pressure to curb extremist groups. This period saw the rise of TTP, which began launching attacks against the Pakistani State. Even today, despite military operations, TTP and other militant groups continued to pose a threat. High profile attacks, such as the Peshawar Mosque bombing in January 2024, underscored the persistent threat of terrorism.

## ii) Role of Militant Groups in Pakistan:-

Militant groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) and Baloch separatists exploit socio-economic disparities and weak

governance to operate effectively. These groups capitalize on local grievances and inadequate state presence to recruit members and launch attacks, undermining national security and stability. **Gwadar Port**

**Attack:** In March 2024, Baloch militants attacked Chinese workers at the Gwadar Port, a key site in the CPEC. This attack highlighted the ongoing threat to strategic infrastructure projects aimed at boosting economic development.

### iii) **Role of Sectarian Militias in Pakistan:-**

Sectarian militias, often linked to Sunni and Shia extremist groups, incite violence and exacerbate sectarian tensions, leading to destabilization of communities. These militias exploit religious differences and historical grievances to promote their agendas, resulting in frequent clashes and cycles of retribution. **Karachi Sectarian Clashes, April 2024,** Karachi witnessed violent sectarian clashes between Sunni and Shia groups, leading to multiple fatalities and signi-

ficant property damage. These events reflect the deep-rooted sectarian divisions that non-state actors exploit to maintain influence and control over certain areas.

#### iv) **Organized Crime:-**

Organized crime syndicates in Pakistan are heavily involved in drug trafficking and smuggling, which undermine law and order and fuel corruption. These activities not only finance militant operations but also destabilize the socio-economic fabric by perpetuating violence and insecurity.

#### **Reports by the Anti-Narcotics Force**

(ANF) detail the extent of drug trafficking through Pakistan, with the country being a major transit route for narcotics from Afghanistan.

#### v) **Environmental Degradation by Illegal Activities:-**

Non-state actors engage in illegal logging, unregulated industrial practices, and pollution, contributing significantly to environmental degradation. These activities not only harm the environment but also affect livelihoods,



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exacerbate natural disasters, and reduce biodiversity, compounding the challenges faced by already vulnerable communities.

### **Deforestation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:**

In April 2024, extensive illegal logging was reported in the KPK region, leading to severe deforestation.

## **4. Pakistan's Crucial Role in the Region:-**

Given these challenges, Pakistan's role in the region is pivotal. Its geographical position, linking South Asia with Central Asia and the Middle East, makes it a strategic player in regional security and economic networks. Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism and extremism such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb 2014, National Action Plan 2015, are crucial for regional stability, as militant groups operating in Pakistan often have cross-border linkages. Effective counter-strategies and regional cooperation can help to mitigate the spread of extremism and violence. In terms of cybersecurity, Pakistan's initiatives to enhance cyber defense capabilities and international cooperation can contribute to regional

cyber stability. Furthermore, Pakistan's economic development and stability are vital for regional trade and connectivity projects such as CPEC, which has broader implications for regional economic integration.

## 5. Conclusion:-

Non-traditional security threats in Pakistan, exacerbated by non-state actors, present significant challenges that have far-reaching implications for regional stability. Addressing these threats requires comprehensive and multi-faceted strategies, involving not only national efforts but also regional and international cooperation. Strengthening Pakistan's capacity to manage these challenges will not only enhance its national security but also contribute to a more stable and prosperous region.