

PAKISTAN MILITANCY ASSESSMENT

JANUARY-JUNE 2026

A Bi-Annual Analysis of Militant Activity, Security Trends, and Conflict dynamics in Pakistan



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1 KEY TAKEAWAYS

1.1 Overall Assessment

CNAWS assesses that the operational environment in Pakistan experienced sustained, high-intensity conflict throughout the first half of 2026. The reporting period demonstrates a security trajectory characterised by persistent insurgent momentum across multiple geographic theatres. With **1,610** recorded incidents resulting in **2,927** total fatalities between January and June, the data indicates that violence remains deeply entrenched rather than episodic. The conflict increasingly reflected the parallel evolution of two distinct but mutually reinforcing security crises: the Pashtun militant¹ ecosystem operating predominantly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Baloch insurgent networks active throughout Balochistan. Together, these two threat environments generated significant operational friction for the Pakistani state, dictating the pace and spatial distribution of violence.

The available data indicates that militant networks largely retained the operational initiative. Although state security apparatuses executed a high volume of counterterrorism operations, these measures remained predominantly reactive, designed to contain immediate threats rather than dismantle structural insurgent capabilities. State forces absorbed disproportionate operational pressure, sustaining **1,087 fatalities**. The high attrition rate among military and police personnel suggests that insurgents successfully leveraged asymmetric advantages, exploiting difficult terrain, porous border dynamics, and advanced tactical capabilities to impose severe tactical costs on the state.

Analysis suggests that the overall conflict stabilised at an elevated baseline of lethality rather than escalating exponentially. However, this stabilization represents a strategic vulnerability for the state, as militants demonstrated sufficient freedom of movement to sustain complex, multi-modal campaigns. The environment was characterised by a blurring of traditional tactical boundaries; insurgent networks seamlessly integrated direct fire engagements, complex explosive deployments, and targeted infrastructure sabotage into their broader operational designs. This tactical diversity enabled non-state actors to stretch state resources, bypass conventional defensive postures, and maintain a pervasive climate of insecurity across peripheral provinces. CNAWS assesses that the failure of state forces to decisively disrupt militant command and control nodes ensures that the fundamental drivers of the conflict remain unresolved heading into the latter half of the year.

1.2 Key Findings

1. Militant Networks Retained the Operational Initiative

CNAWS assesses that insurgent elements initiated the overwhelming majority of the 1,610 recorded kinetic engagements, successfully dictating the tempo and location of the conflict. This operational freedom forced state security forces into a defensive posture, enabling militants to control the escalation ladder and launch complex attacks when strategically advantageous.

2. Violence Remained Geographically Concentrated but Tactically Diffuse

While the structural epicentres of conflict remained firmly rooted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, militant operations expanded across a wider array of internal districts. This geographic diffusion forced the state to disperse security assets over vast terrain, creating exploitable security vacuums that sustained insurgent momentum.

¹ Throughout this report, Pashtun militant ecosystem is used as an analytical term describing the network of predominantly Pashtun militant organizations operating in northwestern Pakistan, including TTP and its affiliated factions, ISKP, Al-Qaeda-linked elements, and partner organizations participating in collaborative platforms such as Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP). The term denotes a shared operational environment rather than a single organizational entity.

3. **Two Parallel Insurgencies Drove the Conflict**
The state actively contested two distinct threat environments: a Pashtun militant ecosystem focused on state attrition in the northwest, and Baloch insurgent networks executing kinetic and economic sabotage in the southwest. This dual-front operational environment effectively bifurcated and severely strained the strategic reserves of the state security apparatus.
4. **Counterterrorism Operations Imposed Tactical but Not Strategic Costs**
Despite conducting over 300 deliberate counterterrorism operations and airstrikes, state forces largely eliminated low-level operatives rather than dismantling critical insurgent leadership nodes. The rapid reconstitution of militant networks following battlefield losses indicates structural limitations in state intelligence integration and cross-border targeting.
5. **Infrastructure Sabotage Became Systematised and Strategic**
Baloch insurgent elements demonstrated a pronounced shift toward economic warfare by systematically targeting transport networks and energy pipelines. This deliberate degradation of critical infrastructure sought to maximize the economic costs of the conflict, disrupt state logistics, and undermine international investment corridors.
6. **Security Forces Absorbed Unprecedented Operational Pressure**
Military and under-resourced police personnel sustained exceptionally high casualty rates as insurgents systematically targeted checkpoints, convoys, and outposts. This persistent attrition degraded institutional morale and eroded local governance structures in highly contested regions.
7. **Tactical Diversity Increased Across Theatres**
Militant groups departed from rudimentary asymmetric harassment to employ highly integrated operational designs, combining direct armed clashes, sophisticated explosives, and targeted killings. This tactical evolution bypassed static defensive postures and forced state forces into a cycle of perpetual reactive adaptation.
8. **Cross-Border Dynamics Underpinned Militant Resilience**
CNAWS assesses that insurgent durability remains fundamentally dependent on unpoliced cross-border sanctuaries utilized for logistical resupply and operational planning. The ability to retreat across international boundaries effectively insulates militant command architectures from decisive state reprisal.

Pakistan Conflict at A Glance (Jan–Jun 2026)			
Operational Metrics			
Total Incidents	Militant Attacks	CT Operations	Airstrikes
1610	1215	304	9
Casualty Breakdown			
Total Fatalities	Militant Fatalities	Security Forces	Civilians
2927	1460	1087	380
Hotspots, Actors & Tactics			
Most Active Actor	Pashtun Militants		
Most Affected Province	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa		
Most Affected District	Bannu		
Most Common Attack	Clashes / Targeted Killing		
Primary Weapon	Small Arms		

1.3 Why the conflict matters

The instability in Pakistan holds profound implications beyond domestic security. As a nuclear-armed state navigating economic vulnerabilities, Pakistan's internal security trajectory directly impacts regional stability across South and Central Asia. The inability of state institutions to contain militant networks signals a structural fragility that risks emboldening non-state actors regionally.

For the international community, the conflict threatens transnational economic corridors. Sabotage by Baloch insurgent networks against transport and energy infrastructure directly challenges Chinese strategic interests, particularly investments comprising the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Sustained violence against these assets deters foreign direct investment, complicates maritime trade logistics, and forces multinational corporations to reassess operational risk premiums. This militancy undermines Pakistan's economic recovery efforts, perpetuating resource scarcity that further degrades state enforcement capacities.

Furthermore, the operational environment reflects a maturation of transnational extremist capabilities. The tactical evolution demonstrated by various militant ecosystems provides a blueprint for asymmetric warfare exportable to other theatres. The porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border facilitates the unhindered movement of fighters, materiel, and ideology, transforming the frontier into an incubation zone for militant innovation. The failure to dismantle these sanctuaries complicates global counterterrorism architectures by creating permissive environments for groups harbouring external operational intent.

Finally, localized violence influences diplomatic relations and border security dynamics with neighbouring states, particularly India and Afghanistan. The imperative for the Pakistani military to dedicate conventional resources toward internal security missions alters regional force postures and strategic calculations. CNAWS assesses that the continued empowerment of militant networks will act as a persistent destabilizing force, complicating international strategic engagement across South Asia.

1.4 Outlook

CNAWS assesses that the operational environment during the latter half of 2026 will likely mirror the entrenched volatility observed in the first six months. The failure of state security forces to degrade militant command architectures indicates that Pashtun and Baloch insurgencies possess the structural resilience to sustain their campaigns. The trajectory points toward a prolonged war of attrition rather than a decisive tactical resolution.

The state will likely maintain a high volume of reactive counterterrorism operations; however, these efforts are expected to yield diminishing strategic returns unless accompanied by comprehensive border interdiction and intelligence integration. Insurgent networks will likely adapt to state pressure by further dispersing their operational footprints, potentially expanding targeted violence into previously stable urban centres to stretch state resources. In Balochistan, the deliberate strategy of economic warfare is anticipated to intensify, with militants prioritizing sophisticated strikes against critical infrastructure and foreign investment assets to maximize political leverage.

Key drivers shaping this environment include the availability of cross-border sanctuaries, the internal cohesion of militant alliances, and the state's capacity to finance sustained military operations amid economic constraints. An emerging risk involves the potential for tactical convergence among disparate insurgent factions, where shared opposition to state authority fosters localized cooperation or the sharing of advanced weaponry.

1.5 Analytical Confidence

CNAWS maintains moderate-to-high confidence in the analytical judgments presented in this assessment. This confidence level is derived from a rigorous, structured incident database compiled through multi-source open-source intelligence (OSINT) collection throughout the reporting period. The foundational data incorporates structured incident coding, cross-referenced open-source reporting, official state communications, and militant propaganda. Where available, geospatial verification was employed to confirm the location and nature of critical

incidents. While CNAWS acknowledges inherent reporting limitations within heavily contested or geographically inaccessible conflict zones which may result in minor underreporting of low-level kinetic engagements the aggregated macro-level data provides a highly reliable foundation for strategic assessment. The consistency of operational trends across multiple independent sources ensures that the overall trajectory of the conflict, the identification of primary actors, and the strategic implications remain analytically sound and robust.

2 OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

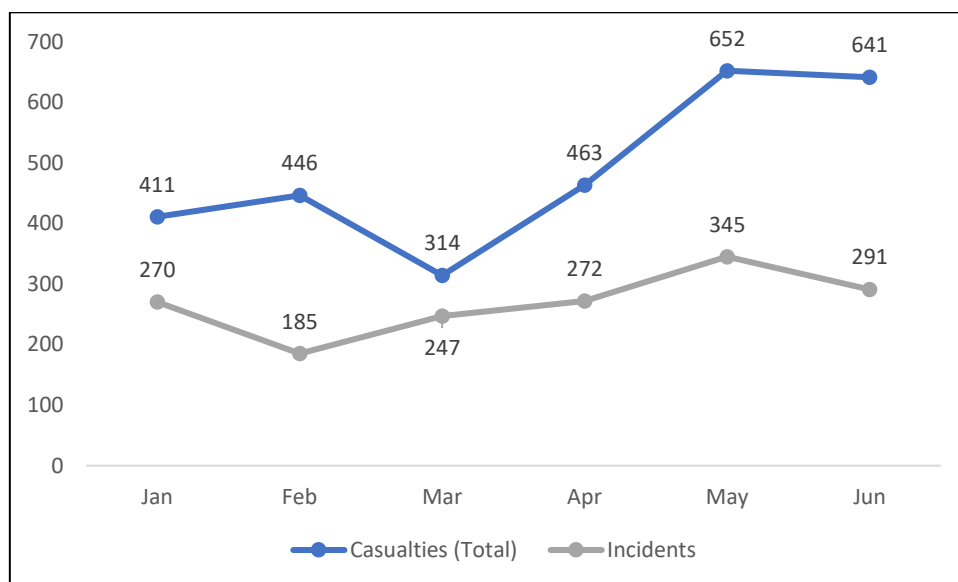
The strategic environment in Pakistan during the first half of 2026 was defined by multi-front asymmetric warfare. This chapter establishes the macro-level parameters of that conflict before subsequent sections deconstruct the specific militant ecosystems driving the violence. Analysing the distribution, frequency, and intensity of kinetic engagements provides critical indicators regarding militant logistical reach, command resilience, and the state's capacity to project authority.

This spatial and temporal analysis reveals who dictates the pace of violence, how seasonal factors influence tactical decision-making, and where the state security apparatus is structurally overextended. It distinguishes localized, opportunistic violence from systematic campaigns, identifying non-state escalation ladders and evaluating the state's counterterrorism posture.

Moving from national aggregate indicators toward theatre-specific dynamics, this chapter establishes the baseline operational tempo across the January–June 2026 reporting period. It tracks the geographic evolution of violence, identifying persistent hotspots and emerging vectors of instability. By establishing this context, the analysis provides the foundation for examining Pashtun militant networks, Baloch insurgent ecosystems, and state security responses. Ultimately, this national-level assessment demonstrates that the conflict has evolved into a sustained test of state endurance.

2.1 National Operational Overview

Between January 1 and June 30, 2026, CNAWS recorded 1,610 distinct security incidents across Pakistan. Non-state actors initiated 1,233 engagements, heavily skewing the tactical balance and indicating that militants retained the operational initiative. The conflict stabilized at an elevated baseline of lethality, forcing state forces into a perpetually reactive posture.



Monthly Trend of Casualties and Incidents (Jan-Jun 2026)

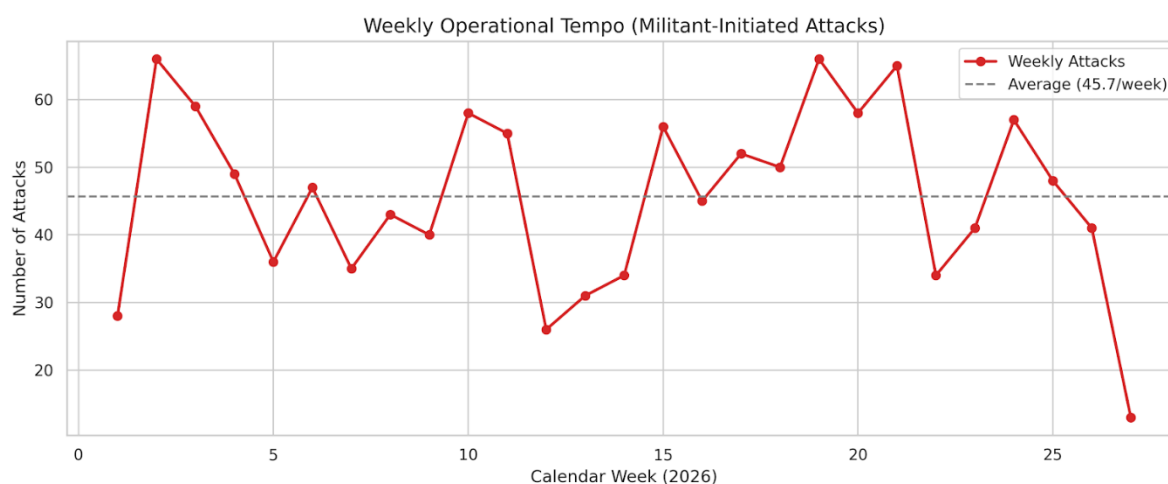
The monthly trend indicates a clear pattern of escalation, punctuated by seasonal adjustments. The year commenced with high intensity, recording 270 total incidents in January (230 militant-initiated), signalling a coordinated effort to disrupt state consolidation. This surge was followed by a pronounced deceleration in

February, which recorded a six-month low of 185 total incidents and 165 militant attacks. Evidence suggests this contraction resulted from severe winter weather restricting logistical mobility across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, alongside a deliberate tactical pause to prepare for spring operations, rather than decisive state intervention. Counterterrorism operations correspondingly reached a nadir of 19 in February.

As environmental conditions improved, the conflict expanded rapidly. The spring thaw facilitated the reopening of high-altitude passes and infiltration routes, driving a steady acceleration in kinetic activity. March and April recorded 247 and 272 total incidents, respectively, marking the beginning of a systematic offensive phase. Militant attacks stabilized at nearly 200 per month, while the state simultaneously scaled proactive measures, executing 50 counterterrorism operations in March and 61 in April. This concurrent escalation reflects a contested environment resulting in a severe war of attrition.

Violence peaked in May 2026 with 345 total incidents, the highest volume of the reporting period. Militants executed 248 distinct attacks, maximizing their capabilities and operating with uninhibited freedom of movement following spring logistical preparations. This volume severely stretched defensive perimeters, compelling state forces to respond simultaneously to complex assaults, infrastructure sabotage, and ambushes across multiple provinces.

The state attempted to violently reclaim the initiative in June. Total incidents remained elevated at 291, but counterterrorism operations peaked at 74, the highest sustained proactive tempo of the half-year. This aggressive push successfully suppressed militant-initiated attacks to 200. However, this marginal reduction highlights insurgent structural resilience; despite maximum state counterterrorism capacity, militants sustained a highly disruptive tempo without suffering organizational collapse.



Weekly incident data reinforces this assessment. Militants executed an average of 46 attacks per week. This consistency indicates that violence is characterized by persistent, localized pressure designed to methodically degrade state enforcement mechanisms, rather than isolated mass-casualty events. The conflict experienced peak weekly intensity in early January, with 66 militant attacks during the second week. This week-over-week pressure traps state forces in a continuous cycle of immediate crisis response, preventing long-term strategic planning.

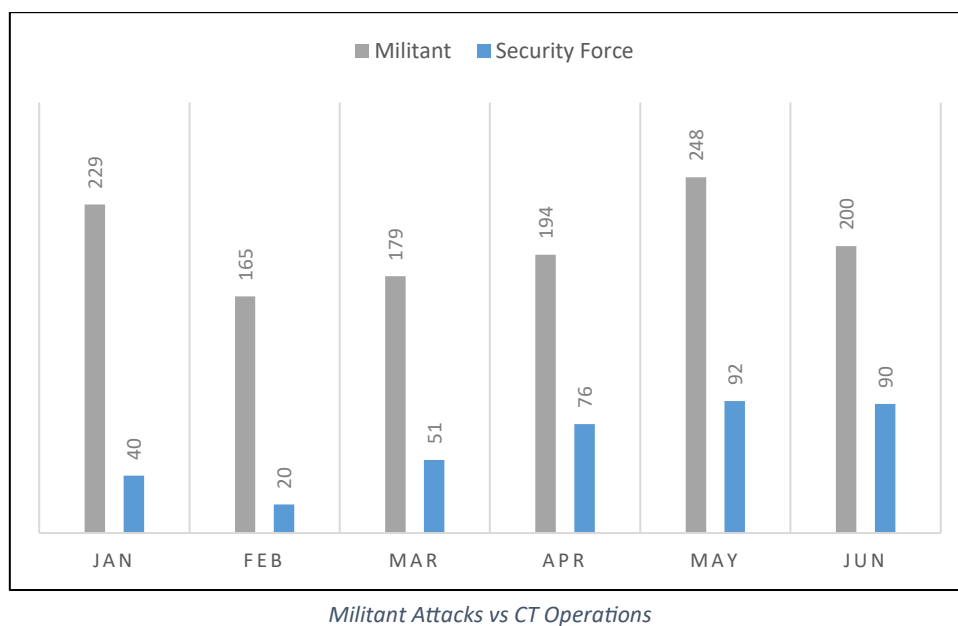
Furthermore, daily trends reveal a highly volatile tactical environment. With an average of nearly seven militant attacks daily, the state is subject to continuous operational friction. Daily volatility reached its zenith on January 18, which witnessed 17 distinct militant engagements. By controlling the timing and distribution of attacks, militants can rapidly concentrate forces to overwhelm isolated outposts and then dissolve into the surrounding populace or cross-border sanctuaries before specialized reaction forces mobilize.

Ultimately, the reporting period indicates non-state actors heavily dictated the conflict trajectory by exploiting structural vulnerabilities. The spring and early summer escalation phases demonstrate intact, functional militant supply chains. The steady increase in Q2 counterterrorism operations reflects a state attempting to offset this momentum, yet the persistent volume of violence implies these operations imposed localized tactical friction rather than achieving strategic dismantlement.

2.2 Initiative Assessment

In an asymmetric conflict, operational initiative is defined by the capacity of a combatant to independently control the timing, location, and intensity of kinetic engagements, thereby forcing the adversary to conform to their campaign design. It is the transition from localized tactical autonomy to the structural ability to dictate the battlespace. Analysing the interplay between militant-initiated attacks and state-led counterterrorism (CT) operations throughout the first half of 2026 provides a quantitative basis for assessing this dynamic. The data indicates that insurgent networks successfully maintained operational dominance, consistently anticipating state defensive postures and dictating the tempo of the conflict.

The trajectory of the reporting period demonstrates a pronounced asymmetry in force utilization. While state security forces steadily increased their operational output, escalating from 32 CT operations in January to a peak of 74 in June, this progression occurred almost entirely within a reactive paradigm. The state's operational tempo did not disrupt militant timelines; rather, it shadowed them. For example, the severe contraction in violence observed in February when militant attacks dropped to 165 and state CT operations fell to 19, was dictated by insurgent tactical pauses and environmental constraints, not pre-emptive state disruption. Insurgent commanders chose to pause operations to preserve combat power, and state forces, lacking the intelligence integration required to exploit this vulnerability, concurrently reduced their own tempo. Consequently, when militants decided to resume hostilities during the spring thaw, they did so unhindered.



This inability of the state to disrupt militant campaigns prior to execution is evident in the relationship between attack volume and CT responses. Between March and May, militant networks executed a sustained offensive phase, increasing their attacks from 196 to 248 per month. Simultaneously, state forces increased their CT operations from 50 to 68. However, this concurrent escalation reveals that the military was expanding its operations specifically to contain active breaches in its defensive architecture, rather than conducting intelligence-driven sweeps to dismantle militant supply lines. The state was fighting the battles that insurgents initiated.

The tactical manifestation of this imbalance is observed in the capacity of militant networks to execute complex, multi-stage assaults against hardened state infrastructure. The May 2, 2026, attack by the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) on the Hind Nag Garari police station in Washuk district illustrates this dynamic. Insurgents did not merely harass the perimeter; they systematically isolated the installation, neutralized the defending personnel, seized state weaponry, and extracted their forces before specialized reaction units could effectively intervene. This event demonstrates that militants possessed the requisite operational freedom to mass forces, exploit intelligence regarding state vulnerabilities, and achieve tactical objectives with impunity. The state response in such scenarios is inherently investigative and retaliatory, confirming that the initiative rested entirely with the attacking force.

Furthermore, the data suggests that increased CT operations functioned primarily to contain the geographic and temporal spread of violence, rather than degrade core insurgent capabilities. June represented the peak of state operational activity, with 74 recorded CT operations. This effort correlated with a suppression of militant attacks from the May apex of 248 down to 200. However, interpreting this as a recovery of the strategic initiative misreads the conflict environment. Suppressing 48 attacks by operating at the absolute maximum capacity of the state security apparatus highlights the profound structural resilience of the militant ecosystems. It indicates that the state can only marginally degrade insurgent momentum by expending disproportionate resources.

The relationship between these two variables reveals a fundamental deficiency in Pakistan's operational posture. State forces are optimized for localized crisis response rather than systemic dismantlement. By retaining the initiative, insurgent groups effectively dictate the allocation of state military resources, forcing planners to stretch specialized CT units across vast geographic theatres to defend static infrastructure. The military is trapped in a continuous cycle of attempting to reclaim tactical ground that insurgents have already chosen to contest.

Based on the available evidence, non-state actors firmly retained the operational initiative throughout the first half of 2026. The state's aggressive acceleration of counterterrorism operations, particularly in the latter months of the reporting period, represented a surge in reactive containment rather than a strategic disruption of militant campaign designs. This implies that the conflict will persist as a severe war of attrition, with the state perpetually forced to expend significant military and financial resources merely to stabilize the immediate tactical environment, leaving the underlying logistical and command structures of the militancy largely intact.

2.3 Geographic Evolution of the Conflict

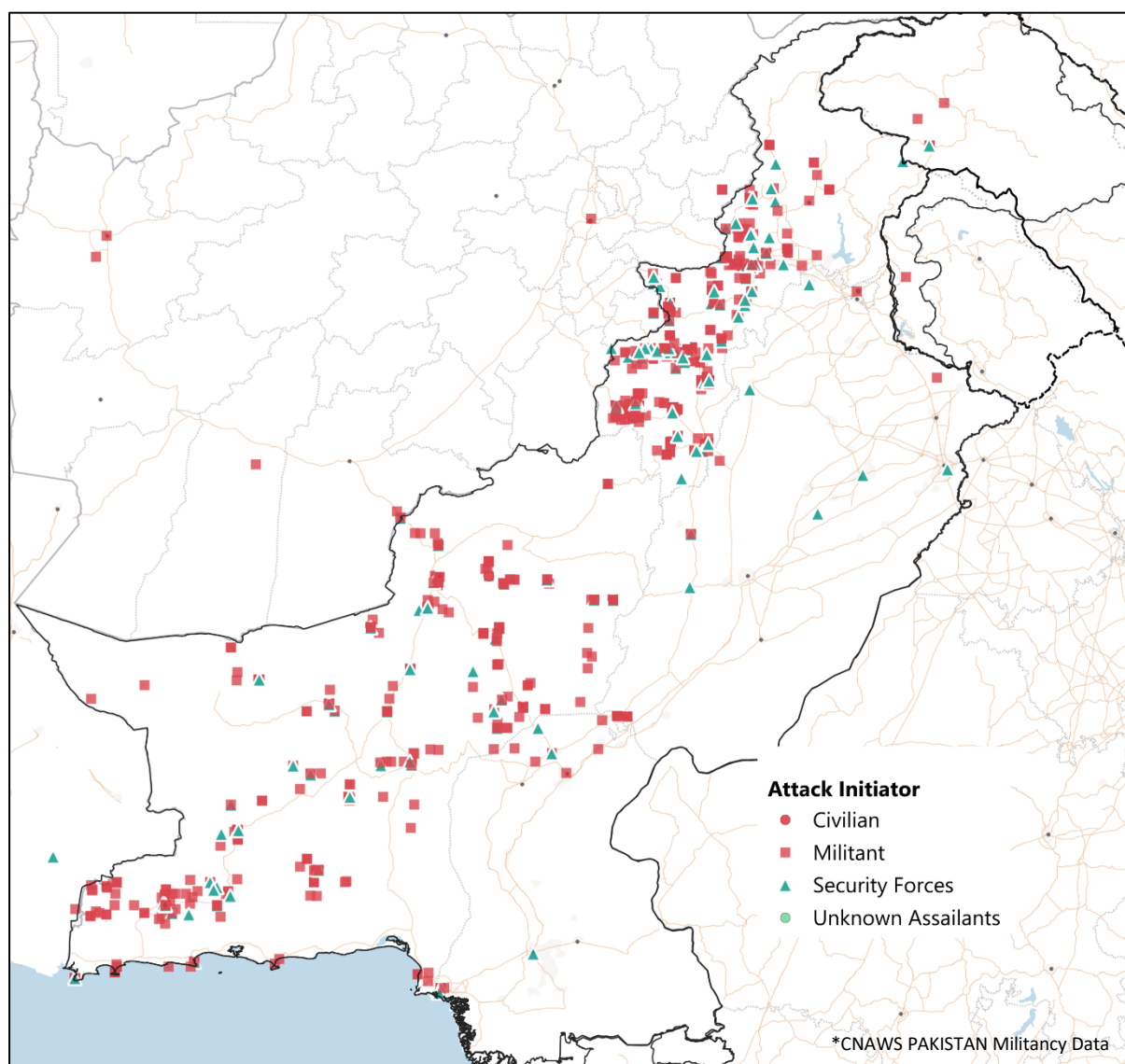
The battlespace during the first half of 2026 was defined by extreme spatial concentration coupled with an alarming pattern of peripheral diffusion. The geographic distribution of kinetic events demonstrates that the conflict is anchored in structural hubs, yet militant operational reach steadily expanded across the reporting period. The data reveals that insurgents utilized the specific terrain and border dynamics of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan to construct distinct operational theatres, stretching state security perimeters and exploiting vast, underdeveloped geographies.

The National Incident Density mapping establishes that over 96 percent of all violence was localized to the northwestern and southwestern frontiers. However, the internal geometry of this violence evolved significantly. Between January and June, the number of unique districts experiencing kinetic events expanded from 41 to 53. This diffusion indicates that militant logistical networks matured, enabling non-state actors to project violence beyond traditional strongholds and effectively contest areas previously considered stabilized by the state. This widening of the battlespace dilutes the concentration of state forces, creating exploitable security vacuums that further facilitate insurgent mobility.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the conflict geography is heavily dictated by the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier and the adjoining mountainous terrain. The district hotspots of Bannu (166 incidents), North Waziristan (122 incidents), and South Waziristan (100 incidents) functioned as the primary operational corridor for Pashtun militant networks. The sustained concentration of violence within this specific northwestern belt indicates that insurgent organizations prioritized continuous pressure within regions where terrain heavily favours asymmetric tactics. The

rugged, elevated topography degrades conventional military mobility and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, allowing insurgents to maintain localized freedom of movement despite the heavy presence of state military garrisons.

The structural dependency of Pashtun militant networks on these border-adjacent districts is inextricably linked to cross-border dynamics. The unpoliced frontier functions as a vital logistical artery and operational sanctuary. By staging operations within districts abutting the Durand Line, militants ensure a secure line of retreat beyond the jurisdiction of Pakistani security forces. This geographic exploitation was evident on April 19, 2026, when state forces intercepted and killed a militant attempting to infiltrate North Waziristan. While this specific interception was tactically successful, the continuous requirement to defend this porous frontier locks the Pakistani military into a static, defensive posture. The geography itself forces the state to dedicate immense resources simply to police a boundary, enabling militants to dictate the location of engagements.



Map - Spatial Distribution of Kinetic Incidents, January–June 2026

Conversely, the spatial evolution of the conflict in Balochistan reveals a substantially different operational model, driven by the requirement to cover vast, sparsely populated terrain. Violence in the province was heavily anchored in Kech district, which absorbed 117 incidents, establishing the southern Makran region as the central node for Baloch insurgent activity. However, unlike the localized border dependency observed in KP, insurgent violence in Balochistan demonstrated a pronounced geographic spread into central and northern districts, including Quetta,

Mastung, Khuzdar, and Panjgur. This spatial distribution indicates that Baloch networks utilize mobile, decentralized cells capable of striking across the entire provincial expanse.

Furthermore, the geography of violence in Balochistan is tightly correlated with economic and transport corridors. The mapping of infrastructure sabotage incidents demonstrates that insurgents systematically project violence beyond rural strongholds to target critical state logistics. On January 7, 2026, for example, an explosion destroyed sections of a railway track near Notal in Nasirabad district, successfully severing rail operations. This incident highlights a deliberate geographic strategy: by attacking transport infrastructure in secondary districts located hundreds of kilometres from their primary strongholds, militants exploit the vast geography of Balochistan to maximize economic disruption. The operational implication is severe; the state is forced to secure thousands of miles of exposed pipelines, railways, and highways, rendering conventional military concentration impossible.

The divergence in geographic behaviour between the two provinces forces the Pakistani security apparatus to adopt bifurcated military strategies. In KP, the military must conduct high-intensity counterterrorism operations within dense, mountainous terrain against an adversary utilizing cross-border sanctuaries. In Balochistan, the state is required to execute wide-area security operations to defend sprawling economic infrastructure against highly mobile insurgent cells. The concurrent expansion of violence across both theatres prevents the military from transferring specialized assets between provinces, thereby locking the state into a structurally overextended posture.

The geographic evolution of violence during the first half of 2026 reveals a conflict characterized by profound structural resilience on the part of non-state actors. The expansion of militant activity into secondary districts, combined with the successful exploitation of both border sanctuaries and vast internal terrain, indicates that insurgent networks are not geographically contained. This spatial reality ensures that the conflict cannot be resolved through localized tactical victories; the capacity of militants to navigate, exploit, and control the physical geography of the periphery enables them to sustain a severe war of attrition against the state.

2.4 Major Operational Developments

The operational environment during the first half of 2026 was defined not merely by the frequency of violence, but by a qualitative evolution in asymmetric capabilities. The significant events outlined in the timeline demonstrate that militant networks transitioned from conducting localized harassment to executing complex, resource-intensive campaigns designed to degrade hardened state infrastructure and maximize economic disruption. Conversely, the state's operational adaptations reflect a concentrated effort to achieve strategic decapitation, though these efforts ultimately yielded localized tactical successes rather than systemic dismantlement.

Evolution of Complex Assaults and Asymmetric Capabilities: The most consequential operational development during the reporting period was the maturation of complex, multi-modal insurgent assaults. Militant groups successfully integrated suicide cadres, heavy weaponry, and Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) to breach defensive perimeters that were previously considered secure. The February 16 assault by the TTP in Bajaur, which synchronized suicide detonations with missile strikes against a military camp, serves as a critical indicator of this tactical evolution. By combining standoff weapons with close-quarters suicide tactics, insurgents effectively bypassed static defences, forcing conventional troops into highly lethal engagements.

This tactical sophistication was not isolated to the Pashtun theatre. The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) demonstrated unprecedented synchronization during its Operation Herof Phase II on January 31. The ability to orchestrate simultaneous kinetic engagements across multiple districts indicates a robust, centralized command-and-control architecture capable of coordinating decentralized cells. Furthermore, the proliferation of high-yield explosive devices fundamentally altered the lethality of the battlespace. The May 9 assault in Bannu, where Pashtun militants utilized an explosive-laden vehicle to annihilate a police checkpoint, confirms that insurgents possess the logistical networks necessary to manufacture and deploy military-grade VBIEDs within contested

corridors. This evolution forces the military to continually expand the standoff distance of its security perimeters, heavily straining available manpower.

Institutional Vulnerability and Materiel Seizure: A secondary operational development was the systematic exploitation of vulnerabilities within local law enforcement structures. As the military concentrated its specialized assets around critical infrastructure, militant networks targeted under-resourced police forces to degrade local governance and replenish insurgent arsenals. The May 2 complex assault by the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) on the Hind Nag Garari police station in Washuk district highlights this vulnerability. By entirely overrunning the installation, neutralizing the defenders, and seizing police vehicles and weaponry, militants achieved a dual objective: they imposed a severe psychological blow against state authority while directly augmenting their own operational capabilities. This pattern of materiel seizure indicates that insurgents increasingly view isolated police garrisons as logistical resupply nodes, transforming state security outposts into tactical liabilities.

Economic Warfare and the Targeting of Strategic Interests: The reporting period also witnessed a deliberate escalation in economic warfare, characterized by the systematic targeting of civilian transport and international investment networks. Insurgent organizations prioritized operations that generated cascading logistical failures, calculating that economic disruption exerts greater strategic leverage than conventional battlefield victories. The May 24 suicide attack by the BLA's Majeed Brigade against a passenger train in Quetta illustrates a willingness to expend highly specialized suicide cadres on civilian infrastructure to achieve broad operational paralysis.

Moreover, the targeting of Chinese interests demonstrated a geographic and operational expansion. The January 19 attack by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) against a Chinese restaurant in Kabul highlighted the transnational dimension of the threat to Beijing's investments. Although executed outside Pakistani territory, the incident signals that militant networks view foreign economic footprints as a borderless target matrix. Within Pakistan, the persistent, low-level sabotage and blockades along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) routes forced the state to dedicate immense resources to wide-area security missions. This requirement effectively neutralized the offensive utility of conventional military formations by tethering them to static defence roles across vast geographies.

State Counter-Offensive and Leadership Attrition: In response to escalating insurgent momentum, Pakistani security forces fundamentally altered their operational posture, transitioning toward high-value leadership targeting. The state recognized that broad, terrain-clearing operations were insufficient to degrade militant capabilities and subsequently prioritized intelligence-driven decapitation strikes. The second quarter of 2026 yielded significant tactical dividends through this approach. The May 22 elimination of TTP commander Jan Mir alias Toor Saqib, followed by the June 12 operation in North Waziristan that killed 45 militants including commander Khalid Raza, represents the apex of this state counter-offensive.

These operations effectively demonstrated the lethality and precision of the state's intelligence and special operations apparatus. By neutralizing critical nodes within the militant hierarchy, security forces successfully imposed severe, localized attrition on insurgent networks. However, the operational lesson drawn from this period is the structural resilience of the targeted organizations. Despite the removal of senior commanders and the high volume of insurgent fatalities, the aggregate operational tempo of both Pashtun and Baloch networks did not precipitously decline. The ability of these organizations to rapidly reconstitute command structures and sustain parallel offensive campaigns indicates that state decapitation operations achieved tactical disruption rather than strategic paralysis.

The major operational developments of the first half of 2026 collectively reveal a conflict that has matured beyond localized insurgency into a sophisticated, multi-modal war of attrition. The evolution of complex suicide assaults, the deliberate integration of economic warfare, and the systematic targeting of vulnerable state institutions indicate that militant networks have successfully adapted to the state's defensive postures. Conversely, while Pakistani security forces demonstrated a high capacity for targeted leadership attrition, the failure of these decapitation strikes to permanently paralyze insurgent operations highlights profound structural limitations in the

state's current counterterrorism paradigm. Ultimately, the reporting period confirms that both sides possess the capability to inflict severe tactical costs, ensuring the persistence of a highly lethal and entrenched operational environment.

2.5 Operational Environment Assessment

The reporting period indicates that Pakistan's conflict has evolved from localized asymmetric outbreaks into a systemic war of attrition. CNAWS assesses that the internal security landscape is defined by an integrated, parallel threat matrix that simultaneously stretches state resources across multiple geographic theatres. The interaction of high operational tempo, geographic diffusion, and complex attacks demonstrates that the threat environment has institutionalized at an elevated baseline of lethality. Non-state actors have synchronized their campaigns to exploit conventional state vulnerabilities, transforming the periphery into a unified, volatile battlespace.

The operational environment demonstrates a significant advancement in militant adaptation. Insurgent networks have transitioned to multi-modal campaigns, combining advanced standoff weaponry, coordinated urban operations, and systematic economic sabotage. This evolution reflects robust logistical supply chains, cross-border resilience, and sophisticated command structures insulated from state pressure. By targeting critical economic infrastructure and under-resourced local law enforcement, these networks place continuous governance pressure on the state, forcing conventional military forces into a structurally reactive, defensive posture focused on wide-area asset protection rather than proactive threat neutralization.

The available evidence indicates that the Pakistani security response has achieved notable tactical successes that have not translated into strategic disruption. The state's acceleration of intelligence-driven counterterrorism operations and high-value leadership decapitation strikes underscores a highly capable special operations architecture. However, the rapid reconstitution of insurgent hierarchies following major command losses reveals that militant ecosystems possess high structural redundancy. The state's operational posture remains optimized for localized crisis containment rather than the systemic dismantlement of the logistical sanctuaries that underpin the insurgencies.

The interaction of these trends suggests the conflict has entered a new operational phase characterized by an equilibrium favouring non-state momentum. The concurrent exploitation of porous boundaries and vast internal geographies allows militant organizations to continually displace operations, rendering localized clearing efforts strategically indecisive. The state remains locked in a cycle of reactive containment while the underlying drivers of militancy remain unaffected.

CNAWS assesses that fully evaluating this structural resilience requires moving beyond national aggregate indicators. Understanding the conflict's trajectory necessitates a granular examination of the individual militant ecosystems generating these complex dynamics, beginning with the networks operating along the northwestern frontier.

3 PASHTUN MILITANT ECOSYSTEM

Evaluating the contemporary security architecture along Pakistan's northwestern frontier requires analysing the insurgency as an integrated militant ecosystem rather than a disparate collection of independent organizations. During the first half of 2026, the Pashtun insurgency functioned as a decentralized, self-sustaining network bound by shared strategic objectives, overlapping logistical arteries, and mutual ideological alignment. Approaching this threat environment through the narrow lens of individual group profiles, such as analysing the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in strict isolation, fundamentally obscures the true operational capacity and structural resilience of the insurgency.

Ecosystem analysis is critical because insurgent lethality is generated through network interdependence. While organizations maintain distinct administrative hierarchies, they routinely pool recruitment pipelines, utilize shared cross-border sanctuaries, and coordinate tactical deployments to overextend state security forces. This fluid architecture allows the militancy to absorb localized tactical defeats, dynamically reroute resources, and sustain a high-intensity campaign of state attrition. Understanding how this ecosystem evolved during the reporting period is essential for determining how non-state actors bypassed conventional military defences, adapted to state counterterrorism pressure, and maintained the operational initiative across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

3.1 Ecosystem Overview

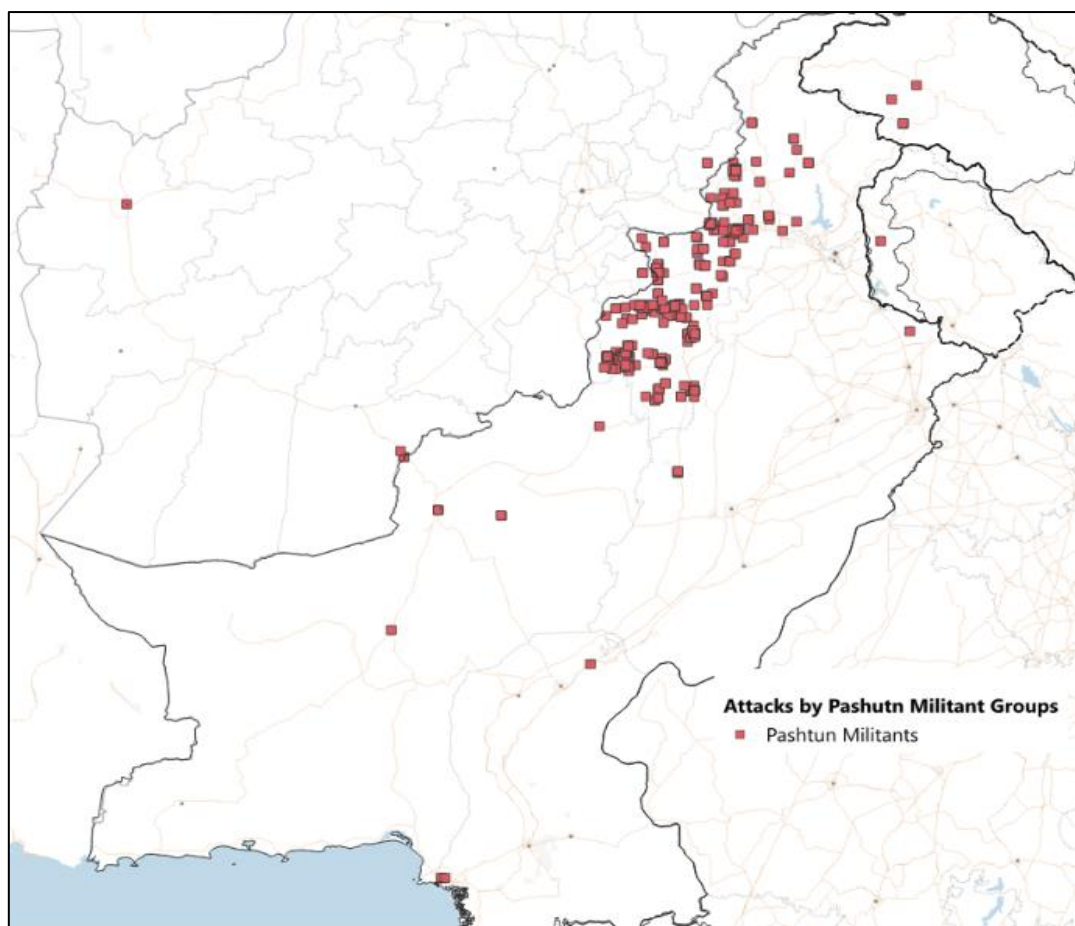
The Pashtun militant ecosystem is organized as a decentralized network of alliances anchored by the TTP, supplemented by specialized factions, and facilitated by transnational jihadist elements. The structural relationships within this network optimize operational efficiency. The TTP provides the overarching strategic direction and central administrative framework, while allied entities like the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGB) offer indispensable territorial depth and entrenched safe havens in North Waziristan. Concurrently, specialized splinter factions such as Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) and collaborative umbrella fronts like the Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP) provide tactical diversification, enabling the execution of complex urban assaults or high-yield explosive deployments with localized plausible deniability.

Operational cooperation is heavily facilitated by the exploitation of cross-border sanctuaries. The Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier functions as the ecosystem's primary logistical artery, allowing training camps, media production facilities, and command shuras to operate beyond the immediate jurisdiction of the Pakistani military. This geographic insulation is augmented by the presence of transnational entities, notably Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which provides critical technical specialization, particularly in drone telemetry and encrypted communications, rather than independent kinetic output.

The ecosystem derives its resilience from this structural redundancy. Because logistics and intelligence-gathering are decentralized across multiple allied nodes, the state's neutralization of a single commander or the disruption of an isolated supply route generates only temporary tactical friction. The network is engineered to rapidly backfill operational vacuums. Consequently, the ecosystem's survival is not dependent on a monolithic command structure, but on the preservation of shared ideological narratives and unhindered access to frontier safe havens.

3.2 Evolution of the Pashtun Campaign (H1 2026)

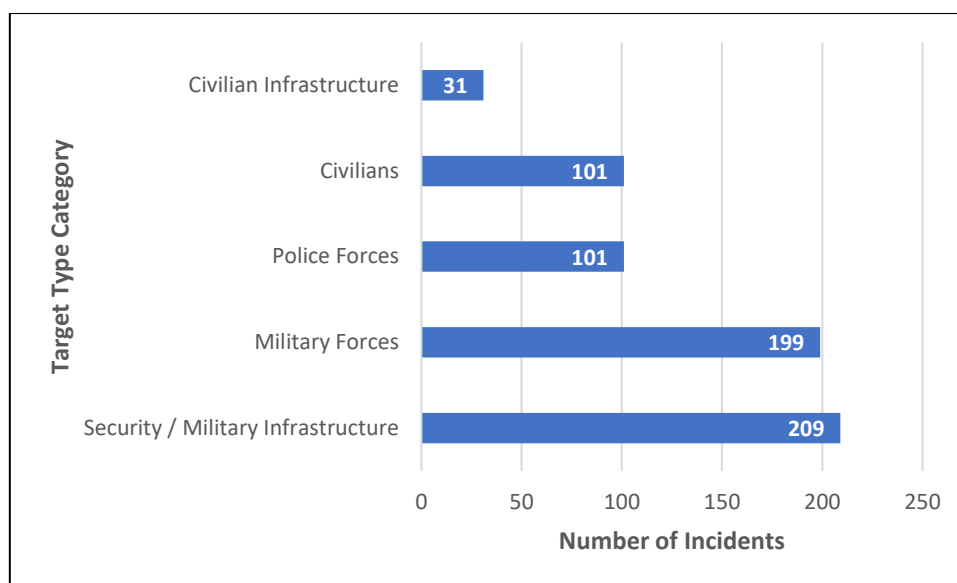
The Pashtun insurgent campaign evolved into a highly sustained, multi-modal war of attrition during the first half of 2026, characterized by an elevated operational tempo and significant technological adaptation. The reporting period demonstrates that the ecosystem successfully transitioned from localized, opportunistic harassment to executing synchronized campaigns designed to systematically degrade state enforcement mechanisms.



Map - Operational Footprint of the Pashtun Militant Ecosystem (January–June 2026).²

The operational tempo indicates a severe escalation in insurgent momentum. Between January and June, the CNAWS dataset recorded **710 kinetic engagements** attributed to the Pashtun militant ecosystem. While 367 attacks were explicitly claimed by or attributed to confirmed TTP elements, an additional 304 incidents were executed by "Unidentified Pashtun Outfits." Geographically concentrated in identical operational corridors and utilizing identical asymmetric methodologies, this probable ecosystem activity reveals an insurgency operating at a massive scale. Following a deliberate tactical contraction in February due to winter weather constraints, the ecosystem rapidly escalated its campaign during the spring thaw, sustaining an operational volume that consistently exceeded 100 engagements per month. This sustained pressure indicates that militant supply chains remained highly functional, enabling insurgent commanders to dictate the timing and intensity of engagements and locking state forces into a cycle of perpetual crisis response. The geographic evolution of the conflict demonstrates a deliberate expansion of the battlespace. While violence remained anchored in the traditional frontier strongholds of Bannu (166 incidents), North Waziristan (122 incidents), and South Waziristan (100 incidents), the reporting period witnessed severe operational diffusion into secondary districts such as Lakki Marwat, Bajaur, and Dera Ismail Khan. This spatial expansion indicates that the ecosystem has matured its logistical networks to project force deeper into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The operational implication of this geographic broadening is the forced dilution of state security assets. By expanding active operational corridors, the ecosystem creates exploitable security vacuums, preventing the military from concentrating overwhelming force in any single district.

² "Pashtun militant activity" includes attacks attributed to confirmed Pashtun militant organisations (e.g., TTP, HGB, JuA, LeI) and incidents assessed as probable Pashtun militant ecosystem activity based on geographic concentration, target selection, tactical characteristics, and available reporting. These incidents are analysed at the ecosystem level and should not be interpreted as confirmed attribution to any single organisation.



Pashtun Militant Ecosystem Target Selection (H1 2026)

Targeting patterns underwent a calculated evolution toward systemic institutional degradation. The ecosystem overwhelmingly prioritized kinetic engagements against security and military infrastructure (209 combined incidents) and active military personnel (199 incidents). However, a highly consequential shift was the intensified, systematic targeting of local police forces (101 incidents). This targeting shift demonstrates a deliberate strategy to dismantle local governance. By neutralizing under-resourced law enforcement units which lack the armoured protection of the regular military insurgents effectively erode civilian administrative control. The operational implication is severe; the collapse of local policing forces the military to assume routine internal security duties, tethering highly trained conventional troops to static checkpoints and stripping them of their offensive utility.

Tactically, the campaign evolved through the rapid integration of commercial technology, most notably weaponized unmanned aerial systems. The reporting period saw the proliferation of quadcopter drones modified to drop explosive munitions, with the TTP executing over 25 confirmed drone strikes against hardened targets, including Frontier Corps (FC) Headquarters in Bannu and military installations in Bajaur. This technological adaptation indicates a highly efficient institutional learning process within the ecosystem. The integration of drone warfare allows militants to conduct low-risk reconnaissance and bypass heavily fortified static perimeters, imposing continuous psychological and physical friction on state garrisons. This development forces the Pakistani state to rapidly and expensively procure localized counter-drone systems across hundreds of isolated outposts.

Despite facing intense state pressure, the ecosystem demonstrated profound organizational resilience following significant leadership losses. During the second quarter of 2026, Pakistani intelligence-based operations eliminated several high-value commanders, including Jan Mir alias Toor Saqib in May and Khalid Raza in June. However, the aggregate operational tempo did not precipitously decline following these decapitation strikes. This resilience indicates that the ecosystem's formalized shadow administration and decentralized execution model function as intended. The network effectively isolates its tactical output from its strategic leadership, ensuring that local cells can sustain combat operations autonomously while the central command seamlessly activates predefined successors. The operational implication is that targeted state killings, while tactically disruptive, are insufficient to generate strategic paralysis within the current ecosystem architecture.

3.3 Allied Networks and Internal Dynamics

The operational continuity of the Pashtun campaign is fundamentally sustained by the complementary integration of allied networks, though this architecture is not immune to internal friction. The Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group (HGB) and the Ittehad-ul-Mujahideen Pakistan (IMP) front functioned as critical force multipliers during the reporting period. HGB provided the ecosystem with indispensable territorial depth in North Waziristan, facilitating secure

staging grounds for allied operations. Concurrently, the IMP front enabled tactical diversification and joint operations. The May 9 suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack against a police checkpoint in Bannu, claimed under the IMP banner, indicates that allied actors share specialized explosive capabilities and utilize collaborative fronts to test advanced tactics while shielding core TTP leadership from direct reprisal. This resource sharing ensures that localized technical limitations do not inhibit the ecosystem's aggregate lethality.

However, the reporting period indicates that the ecosystem remains susceptible to organizational competition. In May 2026, internal tensions escalated into lethal friction when Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) elements reportedly killed a member of the TTP's dominant Noor Wali faction. CNAWS assesses that this dispute represents localized command friction over resource allocation and tactical autonomy rather than a structural fracture of the broader insurgency. Historically, JuA's prioritization of sectarian targeting and extreme urban violence has conflicted with the central TTP's attempts to present a more calibrated, state-focused insurgent narrative.

While this internal violence demonstrates the limits of complete ecosystem cohesion, it did not meaningfully degrade the insurgency's operational effectiveness against the state. The available evidence suggests that the overarching ideological objective of state attrition successfully mediated these tensions, preventing localized disputes from escalating into systemic internecine warfare. The operational implication is that while internal fragmentation presents localized intelligence exploitation opportunities for state security forces, the Pakistani military cannot rely on organizational disputes to organically dismantle the network.

3.4 Pashtun Theatre Assessment

The first half of 2026 demonstrated that the Pashtun theatre remained Pakistan's principal insurgent front, characterized by a resilient and adaptive militant ecosystem capable of sustaining prolonged operational pressure across multiple districts. CNAWS assesses that the ecosystem derived its strength less from the capabilities of any single organization than from the interaction of allied militant networks, decentralized command structures, cross-border facilitation, and the ability to rapidly absorb operational losses. Despite sustained counterterrorism operations and leadership targeting, militant groups maintained a consistent operational tempo while adapting tactically through coordinated assaults, selective targeting of security forces, and the growing use of commercially available technologies.

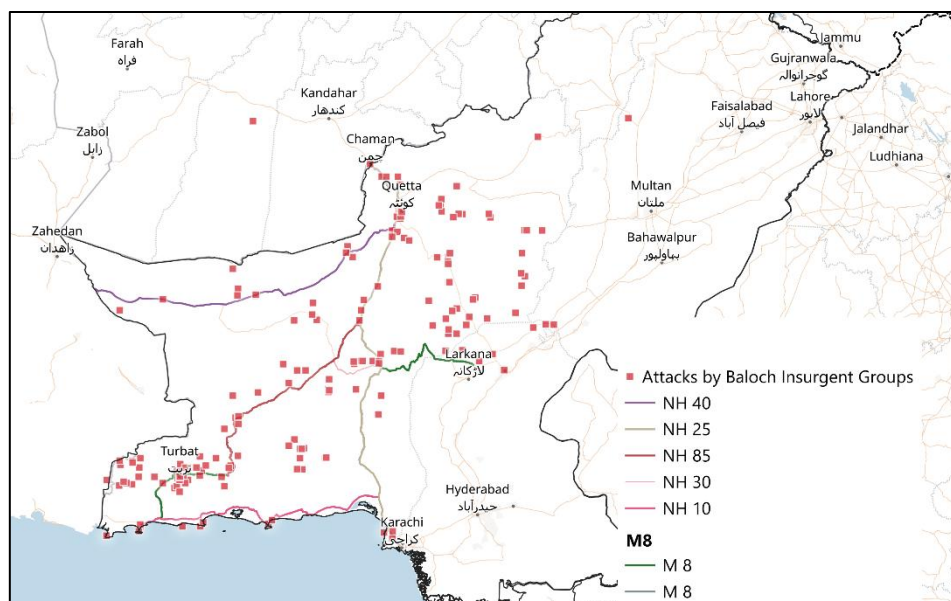
The reporting period also highlighted the ecosystem's structural resilience. Cross-border sanctuaries, logistical networks, and cooperation among allied actors continued to provide strategic depth, enabling militant organizations to regenerate combat capability despite persistent state pressure. At the same time, internal tensions including the reported JuA–TTP dispute demonstrated that the ecosystem is neither monolithic nor immune to organizational friction. However, available evidence suggests these disputes remained localized and did not materially reduce overall operational effectiveness during H1 2026.

Collectively, these trends indicate that Pakistan's counterinsurgency efforts continued to achieve tactical successes without significantly degrading the ecosystem's capacity to sustain its campaign. Leadership losses and localized operations-imposed costs on militant organizations but did not disrupt the decentralized structures underpinning the insurgency.

4 BALOCH INSURGENT ECOSYSTEM

The insurgency in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province is structurally distinct from the theocratic conflicts defining the northwestern frontier. Driven by secular, ethno-nationalist objectives, the Baloch militant landscape has consolidated into a highly specialized ecosystem of economic denial. During the first half of 2026, this network moved decisively beyond fragmented tribal skirmishes. Instead, multiple insurgent factions operated in tandem, subordinating historical rivalries to execute a unified strategy aimed at rendering the extraction of provincial resources and the maintenance of transnational transit corridors financially unsustainable for the Pakistani state.

Mapping this threat environment requires examining the connective tissue between these actors rather than profiling them in isolation. The Baloch ecosystem is characterized by a deliberate, collaborative division of labour: elite units conduct high-profile fedayeen (suicide) strikes in administrative centres, while deeply entrenched guerrilla fronts systematically sabotage pipelines, transport infrastructure, and foreign capital projects in the periphery. This chapter examines how this decentralized architecture, paired with sophisticated strategic messaging and continuous tactical adaptation, allows the insurgency to absorb state pressure while projecting severe political, psychological, and economic costs onto Islamabad.



Map - Operational Footprint of the Baloch Insurgent Ecosystem and Major National Highway Network, January–June 2026.

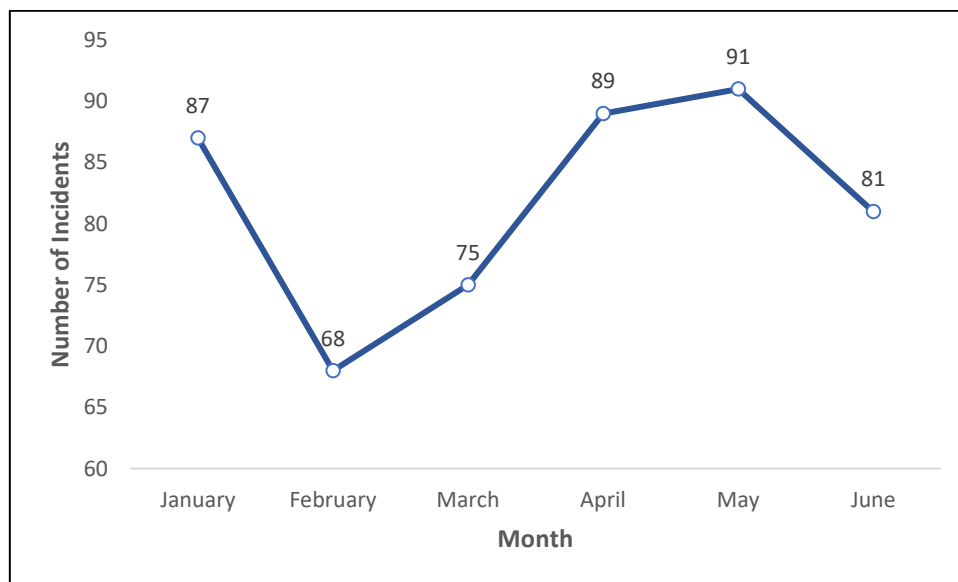
4.1 Ecosystem Overview

The Baloch insurgent ecosystem is structured as a decentralized, multi-tiered network that leverages organizational diversity to maximize strategic depth. The operational architecture features the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) at the apex, functioning alongside the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), the Baloch Republican Guard (BRG), the Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA), and a diffuse array of localized cells. Under collaborative frameworks like the Baloch Raji Aajoi Sangat (BRAS) umbrella, these distinct command structures deconflict territorial boundaries, share intelligence, and utilize common cross-border logistical routes traversing the Iranian and Afghan borders. This collaborative model transforms potential factional rivalries into structural redundancy; the lack of a monolithic command hierarchy ensures that state counterterrorism operations cannot achieve strategic victory through the decapitation of a single leadership node.

Within this framework, groups utilize deep tactical specialization. The BLA operates as the primary vanguard for high-impact symbolic violence and urban projection, relying heavily on its elite sub-units: the Majeed Brigade for specialized fedayeen (suicide) attacks and the Fateh Squad for coordinated tactical assaults against state military installations. Conversely, the BLF functions as the primary rural engine of the insurgency, maintaining deep territorial entrenchment in the rugged periphery to execute relentless guerrilla ambushes. Smaller factions like the BRG and localized cells specialize in localized infrastructure denial, targeting low-level law enforcement and utility lines. This asymmetric division of labour ensures that if state clearing operations temporarily degrade a specific rural guerrilla stronghold, the broader ecosystem dynamically offsets the setback by activating urban cells or scaling economic sabotage elsewhere, preserving the overall momentum of the campaign.

4.2 Evolution of the Baloch Campaign (H1 2026)

The Baloch insurgent campaign underwent a significant qualitative transformation during the first half of 2026, shifting away from rudimentary hit-and-run harassment toward a highly synchronized campaign of economic denial and strategic state attrition. The BLA and the BLF operated as the two dominant actors driving this evolution, maintaining distinct yet complementary operational roles that successfully exploited the vast geography of the province.



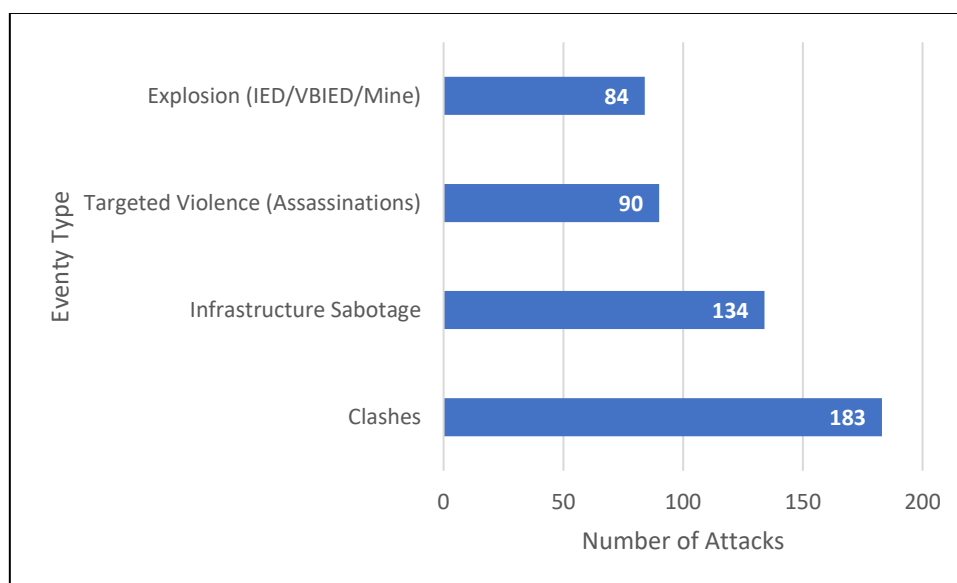
Monthly Baloch Insurgent Incidents (January–June 2026)

The campaign tempo demonstrates a highly active threat environment. Between January 1 and June 30, 2026, the CNAWS dataset recorded 491 security incidents directly initiated by Baloch insurgent factions. The chronological flow of these events reveals a resilient operational capacity; the network sustained a baseline of violence that consistently generated double-digit incidents monthly across all quarters. The tactical composition of this violence reflects the outsized emphasis on economic warfare, with infrastructure sabotage accounting for 134 discrete incidents, running parallel to 183 clashes, 90 acts of targeted violence, and 84 explosions. By avoiding single-event exhaustion, the ecosystem successfully maintained continuous operational friction, forcing the state to continually expend defensive resources.

The geographic evolution of the battlespace reveals a deliberate pattern of operational diffusion. While the structural core of the insurgency remained heavily anchored in Kech district which recorded a provincial high of 117 incidents militant operations experienced significant spatial expansion into central and northern belts, including Quetta (44 incidents), Mastung (43 incidents), Panjgur (42 incidents), and Khuzdar (39 incidents). This geographic broadening indicates that insurgent logistical supply chains have matured sufficiently to project violence across vast, inhospitable terrain. For the Pakistani military, the operational implication is severe; the

expansion of active corridors creates exploitable security vacuums, diluting conventional troop density and preventing the state from isolating the conflict to its traditional southern Makran coastal strongholds.

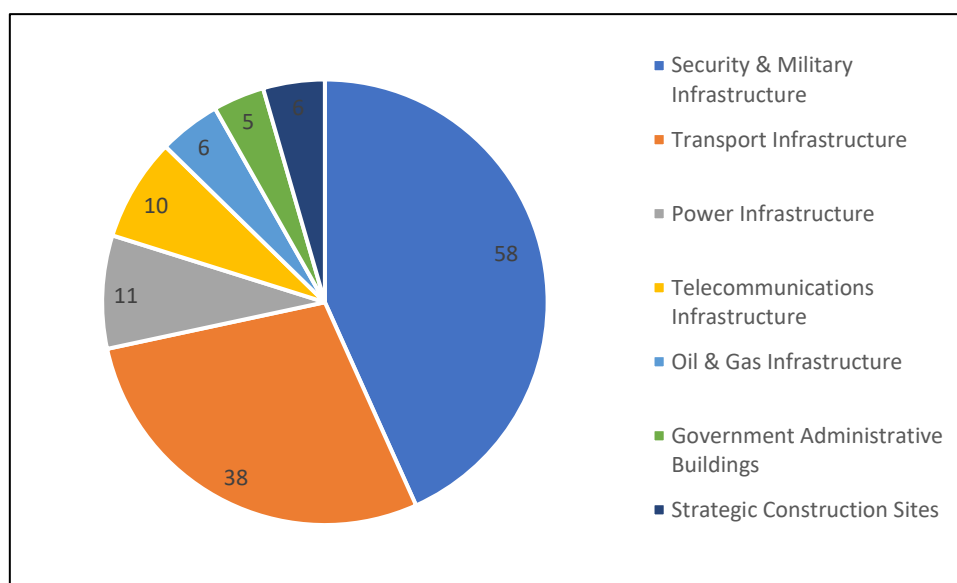
The interaction between urban and rural operations highlights the complementary roles of the primary ecosystem actors. The BLF focused on rural dominance, anchoring its operations in the rugged terrain of Kech, Awaran, and Khuzdar to restrict state freedom of movement. Simultaneously, the BLA demonstrated a highly sophisticated urban operational capability, executing high-impact assaults within heavily fortified administrative zones. The BLA's urban capacity was demonstrated on May 24, 2026, when the Majeed Brigade executed a suicide attack against a passenger train near Chaman Phatak in Quetta, derailing multiple bogies. While generating severe civilian casualties, this event illustrates the BLA's capacity to infiltrate elite suicide cadres into garrisoned provincial centres to target transport infrastructure.



Distribution of Baloch Insurgent Event Types, January–June 2026.

Tactically, the ecosystem institutionalized the use of temporary road blockades and snap checkpoints as highly effective tools for economic denial and state humiliation. The BLF and BLA routinely executed these blockades along critical transit routes, including the CPEC M8 Highway in Kech and the Makran Coastal Highway in Gwadar. During these operations, mobile insurgent cells systematically intercepted commercial shipping, destroyed heavy mineral transport vehicles, and dismantled state surveillance towers. On January 8, 2026, for example, BLF militants imposed a multi-hour blockade on the CPEC highway in Dasht, besieging a police checkpoint and seizing state weaponry. These incidents demonstrate an efficient application of force: by temporarily dominating critical lines of communication, the ecosystem asserts shadow governance, disrupts state supply lines, and creates a pervasive climate of insecurity without sustaining the heavy casualties associated with conventional static sieges.

Targeting profiles confirm a disciplined focus on economic and strategic assets. While security forces remained the primary kinetic target with 154 attacks directed at military infrastructure and 125 at active units, the ecosystem systematically projected violence against foreign capital interests, particularly Chinese investments comprising the CPEC network. Insurgent networks view these projects as colonial extensions of state power. Consequently, they directed low-level sabotage, IED deployments, and fedayeen plots against transport networks, energy pipelines, and construction personnel. By transforming the physical geography of the province into a highly volatile risk environment, the Baloch insurgent ecosystem successfully forces the state to tether its regular army formations to static defence roles, artificially inflating the security and insurance risk premiums of international investment corridors.



Distribution of Baloch Insurgent Attacks by Targeted Infrastructure (January–June 2026)

4.3 Baloch Theatre Assessment

The available evidence from the first half of 2026 reveals that the Baloch insurgency has achieved an unprecedented level of operational sophistication and ecosystem resilience. CNAWS assesses that the threat environment is no longer defined by disjointed tribal updates, but by an integrated system of economic warfare. The primary strength of the Baloch ecosystem lies in its highly effective tactical specialization and its decentralized, multi-frictional architecture. The BRAS umbrella successfully enforces strategic alignment, enabling groups to seamlessly coordinate urban suicide assaults, wide-area infrastructure sabotage, and persistent rural guerrilla warfare. This multi-dimensional approach effectively neutralizes traditional, linear counterinsurgency strategies.

However, observable vulnerabilities persist within the ecosystem. The insurgency's reliance on elite sub-units such as the BLA's Majeed Brigade introduces a structural limitation on its capacity to project high-end symbolic violence, given the resource-intensive nature of cultivating, vetting, and deploying suicide cadres. Furthermore, the network's logistical durability remains highly sensitive to border management policies along the Iranian and Afghan frontiers, leaving its supply lines vulnerable to geopolitical shifts outside its direct control.

The Baloch theatre differs fundamentally from the Pashtun theatre in both its ideological driver and its operational methodology. While the northwestern frontier faces a theocratic insurgency seeking territorial control and utilizing weaponized commercial drone technologies to inflict conventional force attrition, the southwestern frontier confronts a secular, eth-no-nationalist network focused on economic denial. The Baloch ecosystem does not prioritize holding physical terrain; instead, it exploits vast geography to sever transport links, disrupt resource extraction, and target foreign capital investments. Ultimately, H1 2026 demonstrates that the Baloch insurgency possesses the strategic depth and operational elasticity required to sustain a protracted war of economic attrition, presenting the state with a compounding long-term security challenge.

5 ISLAMIC STATE KHORASAN PROVINCE (ISKP)

Evaluating the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) within Pakistan's internal security matrix requires fundamentally distinguishing its operational logic from the broader Pashtun and Baloch insurgencies. While the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and allied ethno-nationalist networks prioritize territorial control and the systematic attrition of state security architecture, ISKP operates as a transnational Salafi-jihadist franchise focused on systemic destabilization and sectarian polarization.

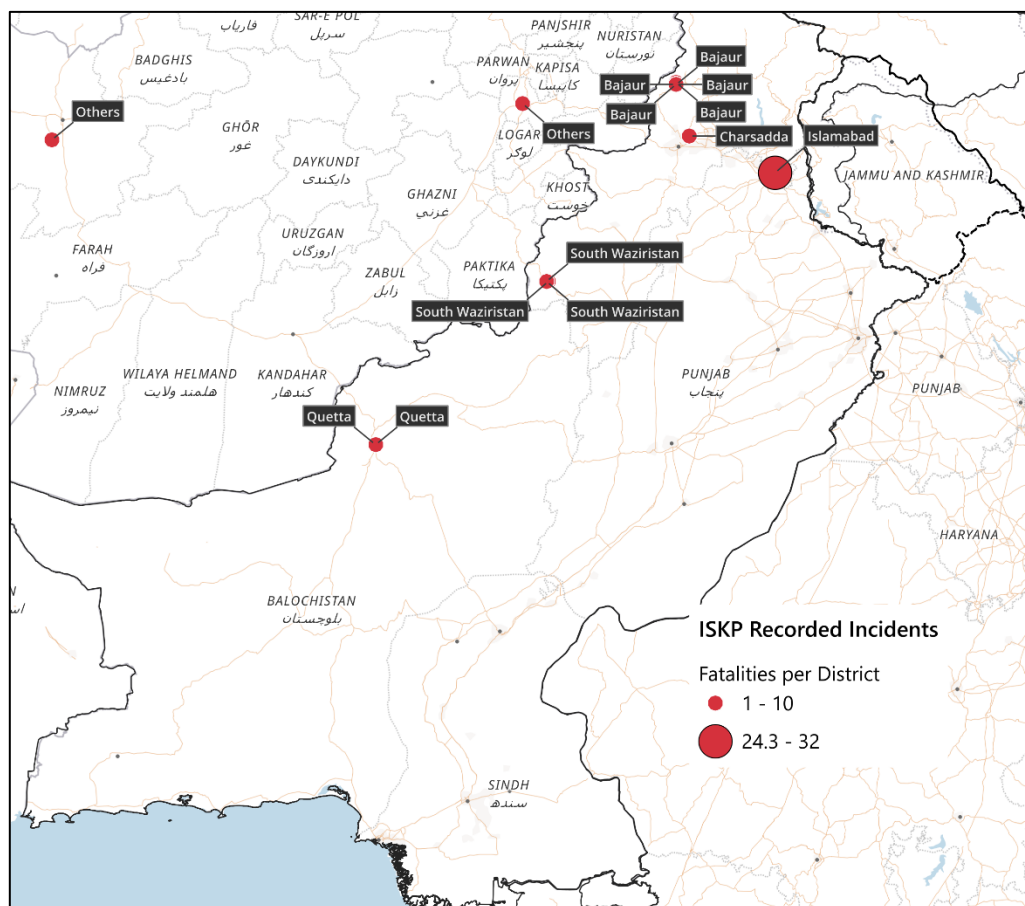
During the first half of 2026, ISKP maintained a comparatively limited operational footprint within Pakistan, generating a fraction of the kinetic incident volume attributed to the TTP or the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). However, the organization's strategic significance remains vastly disproportionate to its attack frequency. ISKP employs a deliberate, gap-driven methodology, compensating for its lack of territorial depth by executing high-lethality, mass-casualty attacks within major urban centres. By targeting religious minorities, foreign diplomatic interests, and political gatherings, ISKP seeks to humiliate the Pakistani state apparatus, inflame sectarian fault lines, and position itself as the uncompromising vanguard of global jihad. Consequently, while it does not pose a conventional military threat designed to overrun state infrastructure like the Baloch or Pashtun ecosystems, ISKP functions as a highly lethal asymmetric spoiler capable of generating severe, localized security crises that reverberate internationally.

5.1 Evolution of ISKP Activity (H1 2026)

The reporting period indicates that ISKP's operational tempo remains deliberately suppressed compared to localized insurgencies, prioritizing operational security and high-impact planning over daily kinetic friction. The CNAWS dataset recorded just 14 discrete kinetic engagements explicitly attributed to ISKP within Pakistan during the first half of 2026. Rather than the expansive rural footprint maintained by the Pashtun militant ecosystem across the tribal belt, ISKP's activity was highly concentrated in specific urban nodes notably Peshawar and the federal capital, Islamabad as well as critical cross-border transit corridors in Bajaur and Khyber districts. This low-volume, high-lethality footprint indicates that ISKP lacks the manpower, tribal anchoring, and territorial safe havens required to sustain a rural guerrilla campaign inside Pakistan. Instead, the group operates through clandestine, highly compartmentalized urban cells that focus almost exclusively on intelligence gathering, radicalization, and the orchestration of complex suicide operations. The organization explicitly avoids protracted firefights with conventional military forces, recognizing that its survival depends on remaining invisible until the moment of detonation.

ISKP's target selection during the reporting period demonstrated a ruthless, calculated focus on maximizing civilian casualties and exploiting sectarian vulnerabilities to achieve strategic shock. The defining incident of ISKP's domestic campaign occurred on February 6, 2026, when a suicide bomber affiliated with the group detonated explosives inside a Shiite Mosque in Islamabad, killing at least 36 worshippers and wounding over 170. This strike was followed by localized assassinations of religious rivals and intelligence personnel across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This attack profile highlights ISKP's strategic intent to project mass-casualty terrorism directly into the political and administrative core of the state. By systematically targeting the Shia minority, ISKP deliberately attempts to trigger communal violence, overstretch domestic law enforcement, and demonstrate the state's fundamental inability to protect its citizens. This target profile contrasts sharply with the TTP, which generally restrains from mass-casualty attacks on civilian populations in order to prevent alienating its tribal support base and inviting disproportionate military reprisal. ISKP's willingness to target soft, high-density civilian locations forces the Pakistani government to permanently deploy extensive security resources to protect religious sites, public gatherings, and urban commercial hubs. This defensive requirement continuously drains manpower that could

otherwise be utilized in offensive border interdiction operations, effectively granting ISKP a strategic force-multiplier effect.



Map - Geographic Distribution of Islamic State Khorasan (ISKP) Activity and Fatalities, January–June 2026³.

The reporting period further reveals that ISKP retains a sophisticated capability to orchestrate complex attacks and leverage external operational networks despite sustained regional counter-terrorism pressure. Beyond its domestic operations in Pakistan, ISKP elements operating within the broader Af-Pak theatre executed the January 19, 2026, complex attack on a Chinese restaurant in Kabul, Afghanistan, demonstrating the group's unwavering intent to target transnational capital investments. Within Pakistan, authorities dismantled several ISKP facilitation networks in Peshawar and Nowshera that were directly linked to the logistical planning of the February Islamabad bombing, leading to the arrest of an Afghan national identified as the alleged mastermind. ISKP's tactical methodology relies heavily on the deployment of highly trained fedayeen (suicide) cadres and the construction of advanced improvised explosive devices. The organization's ability to coordinate logistics, procure high-grade explosives, and successfully infiltrate operatives into heavily secured administrative zones like Islamabad indicates an unbroken chain of command and robust regional financing. The group actively exploits border permeability to shift operatives between Afghanistan and Pakistan, evading localized security sweeps. The transnational nature of ISKP's logistical architecture means that Pakistan cannot eliminate the threat unilaterally. As long as ISKP retains strategic depth and operational sanctuary in neighbouring Afghanistan or exploits unpoliced border corridors, it will possess the capacity to regenerate its strike cells and project violence back into Pakistani urban centres at will.

³ Point locations identify districts recording ISKP activity during H1 2026. Numeric labels indicate the total number of recorded ISKP incidents in each district, while proportional symbol size represents the associated fatalities. The distribution highlights ISKP's geographically limited but locally concentrated operational presence, with casualty burdens varying considerably across affected districts.

ISKP actively exploited the escalating military confrontation between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban during H1 2026 to rapidly enhance its recruitment pipelines and ideological narrative. Following the February 2026 border clashes and reciprocal airstrikes between Islamabad and Kabul, ISKP significantly intensified its digital propaganda output. The group consistently framed the Afghan Taliban as compromised Pakistani proxies who fail to protect Muslim communities, while simultaneously condemning the Pakistani state as an apostate regime. Reports indicate that ISKP heavily utilized digital platforms to identify, groom, and recruit younger demographics across the region. ISKP leverages these geopolitical crises to identify and recruit radicalized youth who view the TTP's localized, ethno-nationalist objectives as ideologically insufficient. By positioning itself as the only legitimate vehicle for an uncompromising, transnational Islamic caliphate, ISKP seeks to peel away hardline defectors from both the TTP and the Afghan Taliban. This ideological friction frequently results in shadow conflicts and intelligence turf wars between ISKP and the broader Pashtun militant ecosystem, as they compete for the same finite pool of recruits and illicit financing. The sophisticated digital radicalization pipeline ensures that ISKP can continuously replenish its urban cells without relying on traditional tribal recruitment networks. Furthermore, the ideological competition between ISKP and the Pashtun militant ecosystem introduces a highly volatile dynamic where competing groups may attempt to outpace each other in operational lethality to attract funding and recruits, artificially elevating the overall threat environment across the state.

5.2 ISKP Assessment

The available evidence from the first half of 2026 confirms that ISKP operates as a highly specialized, asymmetric threat that uniquely complicates Pakistan's internal security matrix. While responsible for only 14 recorded incidents in the CNAWS dataset, the group's execution of the devastating February 6 Islamabad Mosque bombing and its persistent targeting of sectarian minorities highlight a strategic impact vastly disproportionate to its numerical size.

CNAWS assesses that ISKP's operational significance lies in its capacity for sudden, strategic disruption. Unlike the Pashtun and Baloch insurgencies, which seek territorial domination and economic denial through sustained, daily campaigns of attrition, ISKP functions as a pure terror vanguard. Its principal strength is its highly compartmentalized urban network, its sophisticated digital recruitment architecture, and its willingness to bypass fortified state military infrastructure to strike highly vulnerable civilian targets.

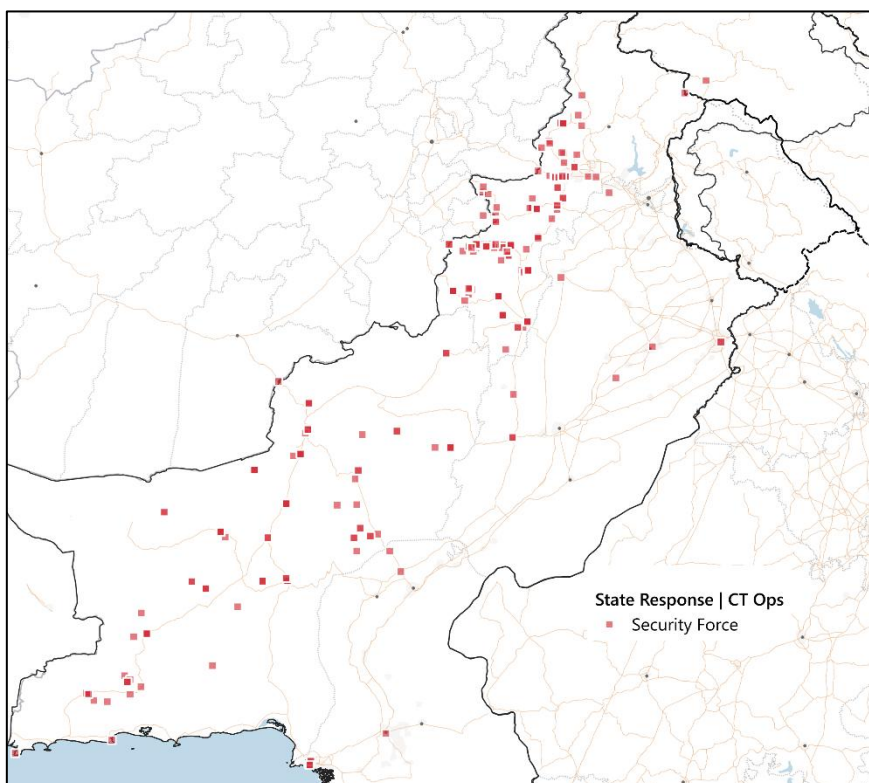
However, the organization faces severe operational constraints. Its uncompromising transnational ideology and extreme sectarian brutality limit its ability to build deep, sustainable popular support among Pakistan's tribal populations, isolating it from the broader populace. Moreover, ISKP is actively hunted by a convergence of hostile actors; it faces simultaneous kinetic pressure from Pakistani security forces, intelligence crackdowns, the Afghan Taliban, and competing domestic militant networks like the TTP, all of which view ISKP as a direct threat to their own authority.

The persistence of ISKP ensures that the Pakistani security apparatus remains strategically bifurcated. The state is forced to simultaneously conduct resource-intensive, conventional counter-insurgency operations in the rural peripheries of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while maintaining a vast, intelligence-driven counter-terrorism posture in its major metropolitan centres. Until the transnational sanctuaries and digital recruitment networks sustaining ISKP are comprehensively dismantled, the group will retain the capability to inject sudden, destabilizing mass-casualty violence into the Pakistani homeland, continually fracturing the state's focus and resources.

6 STATE RESPONSE

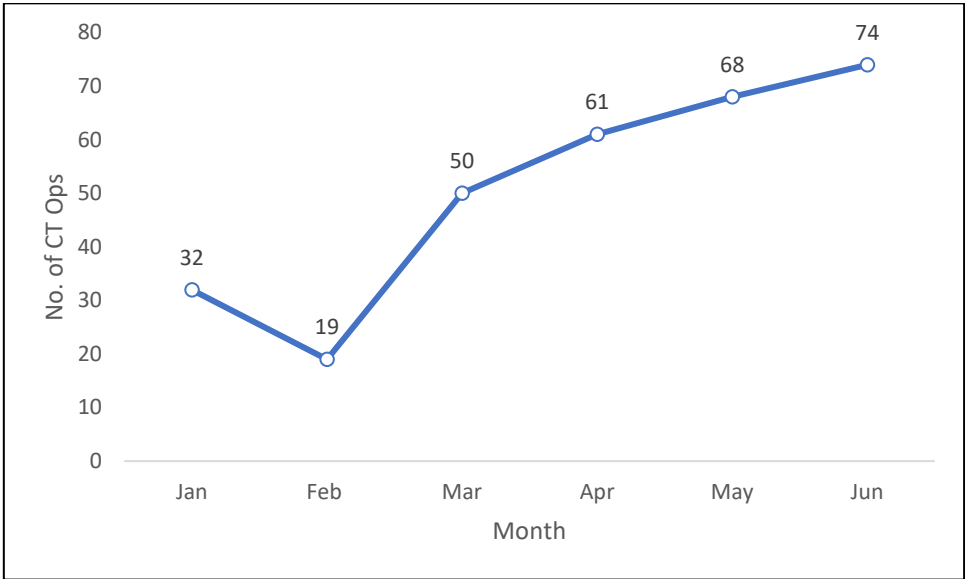
Evaluating the operational effectiveness of Pakistan's counterinsurgency campaign during the first half of 2026 requires analysing the state's response not merely through an accumulation of tactical operations, but as an integrated effort to degrade militant capability and restore territorial authority. The operational environment confronting Pakistani security forces is extraordinarily complex, characterized by simultaneous, multi-front insurgencies spanning vastly different geographic terrains and ideological landscapes. In the northwest, the state combats a deeply entrenched theocratic militancy that leverages cross-border sanctuaries and weaponized commercial technology. Concurrently, in the southwest, forces face a decentralized ethno-nationalist insurgency executing a systemic campaign of economic warfare and strategic infrastructure sabotage.

Assessing the state's operational response involves moving beyond institutional histories or generic troop numbers to evaluate how security forces adapted to these evolving threat matrices. Operational effectiveness is measured not simply by counting the volume of intelligence-based operations or militant fatalities, but by analysing the strategic impact of these interventions. Did state offensives successfully disrupt militant command and control? Did leadership decapitation yield lasting operational degradation? Crucially, did the state regain the operational initiative, or did it remain locked in a reactive, defensive posture? This chapter evaluates the trajectory, tactical adaptations, and structural limitations of Pakistan's counterinsurgency campaign during the reporting period.



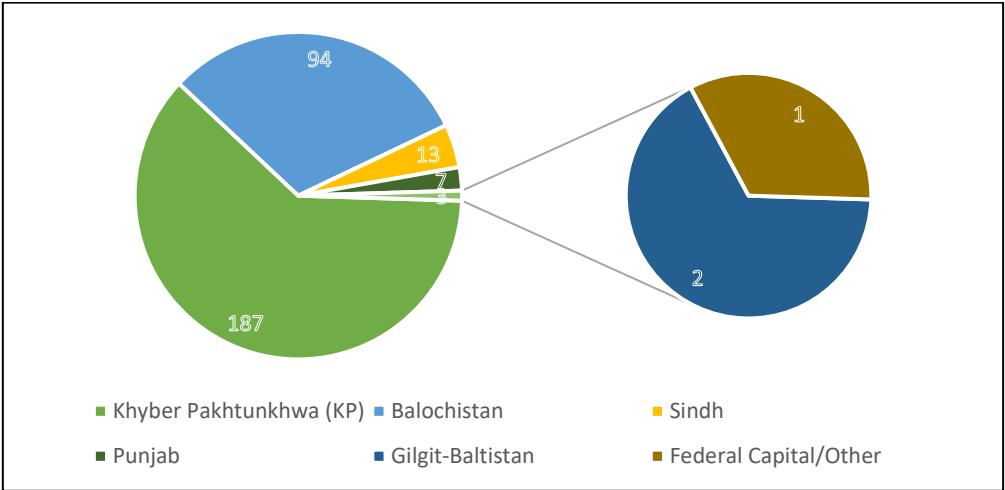
Map - Geographic Distribution State Response, including CT Ops, January–June 2026

6.1 Evolution of the State Response



Monthly Counterterrorism Operations

The operational tempo of Pakistani security forces underwent a substantial and deliberate escalation during the first half of 2026. The CNAWS dataset recorded 304 discrete Counterterrorism (CT) Operations directly initiated by state forces, alongside nine distinct airstrikes. The chronological distribution of these operations reveals a reactive escalation curve. Following a relatively subdued tactical posture in the first quarter (averaging roughly 33 CT operations per month), the state significantly intensified its kinetic response during the spring, culminating in 74 distinct intelligence-based operations in June alone. This surge correlates directly with the seasonal escalation of militant violence across the Pashtun and Baloch theatres. The operational implication of this delayed escalation is that state forces were primarily responding to the tempo dictated by insurgent networks, shifting into a high-intensity offensive posture only after militant cells had already established operational momentum.



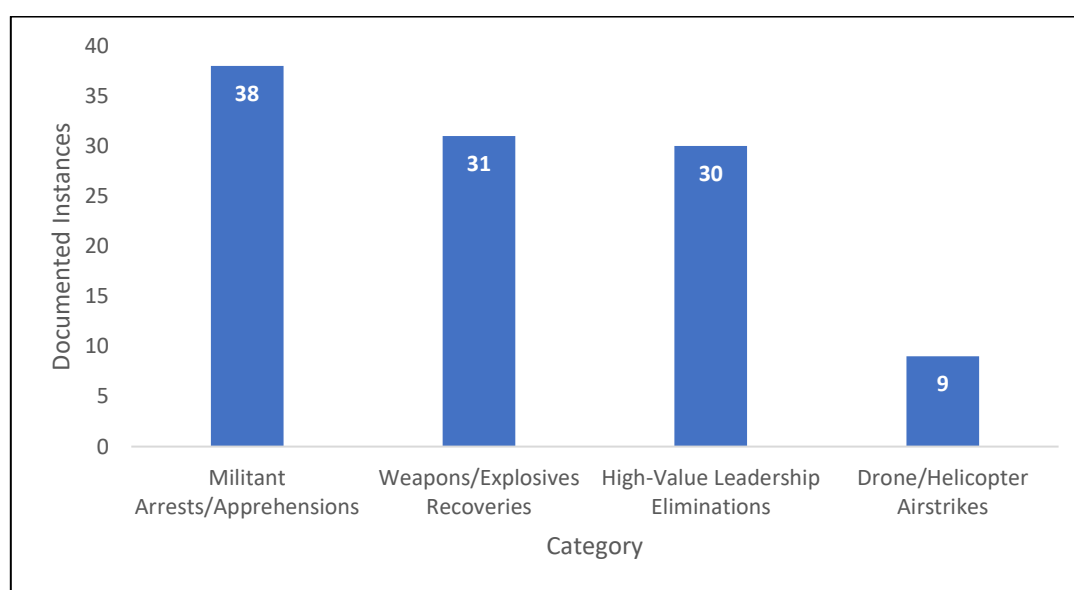
Provincial Distribution of CT Operations

The geographic prioritization of state resources aligned closely with the primary insurgent threat corridors, yet revealed structural overextension. The overwhelming majority of CT operations (187 incidents) were concentrated within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, specifically targeting the entrenched networks of the TTP and the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group in North and South Waziristan, Khyber, and Bannu. Concurrently, 94 operations were executed across Balochistan, focusing heavily on Kech, Panjgur, and urban nodes like Quetta. While this deployment pattern accurately reflects the dual epicentre of the national conflict, the requirement to

simultaneously conduct high-intensity clearing operations across two massive, non-contiguous provinces severely stretched conventional force density. The state's inability to concentrate overwhelming, decisive force in a single theatre allowed militant ecosystems in both provinces to absorb localized pressure and rapidly regenerate combat power elsewhere.

Tactically, the state's response evolved to rely heavily on intelligence-driven decapitation strategies and precision targeting. The reporting period indicates a deliberate pivot toward Intelligence-Based Operations (IBOs) designed to neutralize specific high-value militant commanders rather than conducting broad, conventional sweep operations. This approach yielded notable tactical successes; the dataset records at least 30 targeted operations resulting in the elimination of senior insurgent leadership, including the neutralization of significant TTP commanders in Bannu and Bajaur. These targeted operations were highly lethal to insurgent elements, with CT operations collectively generating over 1,180 militant fatalities compared to negligible security force casualties during the actual raids.

However, assessing the strategic effectiveness of this decapitation strategy reveals critical limitations. While the elimination of high-value commanders and the execution of 38 targeted arrest operations disrupted localized planning, these interventions failed to induce systemic paralysis within the broader militant ecosystems. The decentralized command architectures of both the Pashtun and Baloch insurgencies ensured that when a regional commander was eliminated, predefined successors rapidly assumed control, preserving the continuity of local operations. The operational implication is that while intelligence-led strikes are highly effective at generating militant attrition, they are insufficient as a standalone strategy to dismantle deeply institutionalized networks that possess redundant leadership structures and shared cross-border logistics.



Qualitative State Response Outcomes

In response to the growing sophistication of insurgent networks, Pakistani security forces integrated limited aerial capabilities to project force into inaccessible terrain. The dataset records nine distinct airstrikes primarily utilizing weaponized military drones and helicopter gunships targeting militant encampments and training facilities. Notable applications of this capability included a drone strike in Zamuran, Buleda, that neutralized four BLF militants at a remote camp, and a quadcopter strike in Kot Kali, North Waziristan, that eliminated six TTP fighters. Furthermore, the state demonstrated a willingness to project aerial force across the Durand Line, conducting cross-border strikes against TTP sanctuaries in April and targeting Afghan Taliban outposts in the Chaman sector. The integration of precision aerial fires indicates an operational adaptation designed to bypass hazardous ground terrain and mitigate the extreme risks associated with conventional infantry assaults in hostile border regions.

Despite these tactical adaptations, the operational effectiveness of the state response was fundamentally constrained by severe structural and geographic limitations. The most acute constraint was the continued permeability of the Afghanistan-Pakistan and Iran-Pakistan borders. Insurgent access to external sanctuary effectively nullified the long-term impact of domestic territorial clearing operations. When state forces intensified IBOs in districts like Kech or North Waziristan, militant cells dynamically retreated across international borders to recuperate, rearm, and restructure, only to infiltrate back once state clearing forces withdrew to their garrisons.

6.2 Counterinsurgency Assessment

The available evidence from the first half of 2026 reveals a counterinsurgency campaign that is tactically lethal but strategically constrained. CNAWS assesses that the Pakistani state successfully executed a high-intensity, intelligence-driven campaign that imposed severe localized attrition upon militant networks, effectively dismantling specific urban terror cells and eliminating numerous high-value insurgent commanders across both the Pashtun and Baloch theatres.

The principal strength of the state response lies in its intelligence-gathering apparatus and its capacity to execute precision, localized raids that minimize security force casualties while maximizing insurgent fatalities in specific engagements. The integration of localized aerial drone strikes further demonstrates an institutional capacity for tactical adaptation in highly restrictive environments.

However, the campaign's structural limitations are profound. The operational evidence indicates that the state failed to regain the broader strategic initiative during the reporting period. The reactive escalation of CT operations, the continuous requirement to defend static military infrastructure against coordinated insurgent assaults, and the persistent geographic expansion of militant violence demonstrate that the state remains locked in a defensive posture.

Consequently, the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency campaign is neutralized by the structural design of the insurgent ecosystems it combats. The state's reliance on leadership decapitation and localized territorial clearing cannot permanently dismantle decentralized militant networks that utilize cross-border sanctuaries to seamlessly regenerate combat power and logistical throughput. Until the fundamental strategic drivers of the conflict specifically, border permeability and external militant safe havens are comprehensively addressed, Pakistani security forces will be forced to sustain a highly attritional, resource-intensive containment strategy without a viable trajectory toward decisive conflict resolution.

7 EVOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT

During the first half of 2026, the character of conflict across Pakistan evolved from disjointed, localized friction into a formalized, multi-modal war of attrition. This evolution was defined by deliberate militant adaptation in tactical employment, geographic projection, and target prioritization.

7.1 Tactical Evolution

The reporting period indicates a deliberate tactical shift across militant ecosystems, transitioning away from rudimentary harassment toward complex, synchronized engagements designed to bypass static state defences. The CNAWS dataset records 452 distinct clashes and 349 incidents of targeted violence, indicating that direct-fire engagements and localized assassinations remained the kinetic baseline of the conflict. However, the qualitative nature of these engagements evolved. Militant networks increasingly abandoned massed, frontal assaults against fortified outposts, opting instead for highly coordinated, multi-axis ambushes against mobile security patrols and logistical convoys. This tactical shift maximizes insurgent survivability by forcing the state to fight outside its hardened perimeters, effectively neutralizing the military's localized superiority in armour and defensive fortifications. The operational implication is that the state cannot secure rural terrain merely by garrisoning troops; it must continuously expose its forces to high-risk mobility corridors to maintain administrative presence.

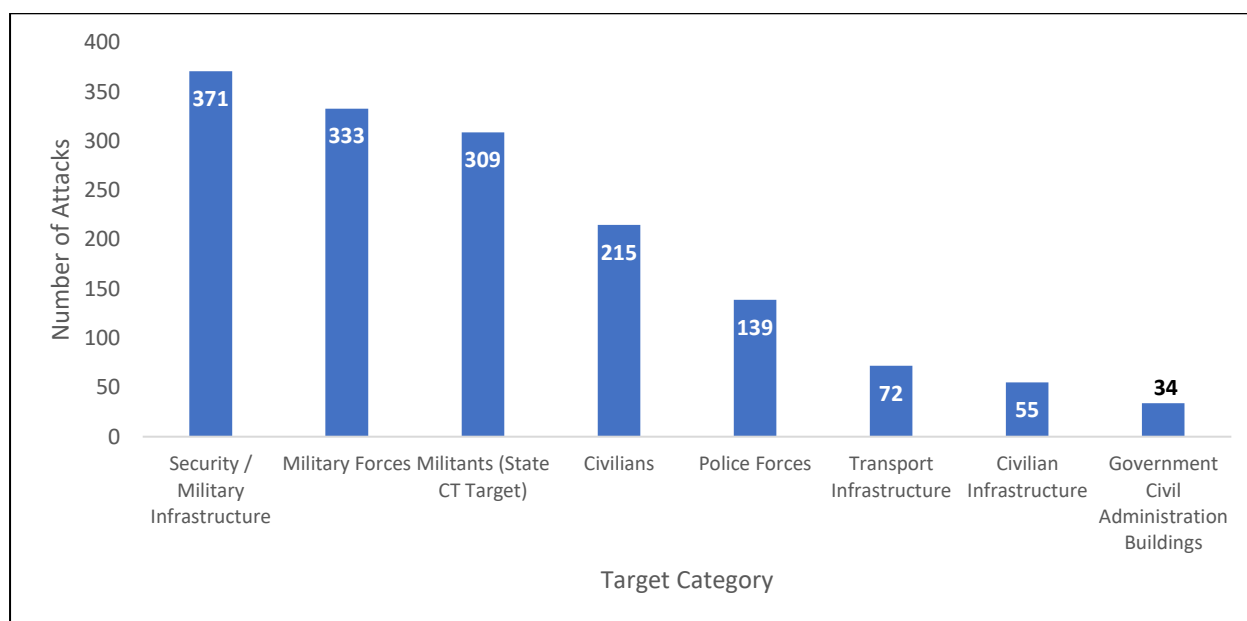
The deployment of explosive ordnance evolved from opportunistic area-denial into a precision-guided operational tool. The dataset records 288 explosion events, predominantly driven by 179 distinct Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detonations. Militant networks refined their explosive employment, utilizing advanced triggers and strategically placing IEDs along mandatory chokepoints such as bridges and rural intersections to paralyze state mobility. Concurrently, the employment of suicide tactics evolved significantly. While suicide bombings historically served as blunt instruments for mass civilian casualties, actors like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) increasingly deployed elite fedayeen elements (Majeed Brigade) as specialized breach units against hardened military or economic targets. This tactical calibration demonstrates that militant networks view suicide cadres as a finite, high-value asset, deploying them strictly to achieve operational objectives that conventional assault teams cannot breach.

The most profound tactical evolution during H1 2026 was the rapid institutionalization of commercial drone technology. The dataset records 84 incidents of weaponized drone employment, almost exclusively concentrated within the Pashtun militant ecosystem. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and allied factions modified commercially available quadcopters to drop standardized explosive munitions onto state garrisons and Frontier Corps headquarters. This integration represents a severe asymmetric escalation. It grants low-level insurgent cells organic, low-cost intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, alongside precision strike capacity. The operational implication of this technological adoption is the immediate obsolescence of traditional state defensive perimeters. Security forces are now forced to operate under constant aerial threat, requiring vast, expensive procurement of localized counter-drone systems and permanently elevating the psychological stress on deployed personnel.

7.2 Targeting Evolution

Militant targeting priorities underwent a calculated shift during the reporting period, moving beyond simple attrition to focus on the systematic dismantlement of state governance and economic viability. While the military and its associated infrastructure remain the primary kinetic focus sustaining 333 direct attacks and 371 infrastructure sabotage events the targeting of secondary enforcement mechanisms severely escalated. The Pashtun militant ecosystem systematically targeted localized police forces, recording 139 distinct attacks against

under-resourced civilian law enforcement units. This targeting shift represents a deliberate doctrine of administrative denial. By neutralizing the police, insurgents effectively collapse local civil authority, forcing the conventional military to assume routine policing duties. These tethering strips the military of its offensive utility and forces highly trained combat troops to manage localized civil disputes, accelerating state overextension.



Evolution of Targeting Priorities

Simultaneously, the conflict environment witnessed a vast escalation in the targeting of transport and civilian infrastructure, confirming a shift toward systemic economic warfare. The dataset records 72 direct attacks on transport infrastructure and 55 on broader civilian infrastructure, driven almost entirely by the Baloch insurgent ecosystem. Militant networks systematically targeted the logistical arteries associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), sabotaging railway tracks, detonating gas pipelines, and physically blockading major transit routes. This targeting evolution indicates that Baloch factions no longer view tactical clashes with state forces as the sole metric of success. By directing violence against foreign capital projects and transport links, insurgents seek to impose prohibitive security and insurance risk premiums on international investment. The operational implication is that the state must now dedicate substantial conventional military resources to guarding static economic assets, permanently diluting its offensive combat density.

The targeting of civilians (215 recorded incidents) remained a prevalent feature of the conflict, yet the underlying rationale varied significantly by theatre. In the northwest, the TTP largely restricted civilian violence to targeted assassinations of alleged state informants or those defying extortion demands, attempting to maintain localized tribal support. Conversely, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) actively prioritized mass-casualty attacks against sectarian minorities most notably the February 2026 Islamabad Mosque bombing to maximize political shock and trigger communal violence. The persistence of civilian targeting forces the state to maintain a massive, resource-intensive internal security apparatus in urban centres, diverting critical intelligence assets away from rural counterinsurgency efforts.

7.3 Spatial and Operational Evolution

The spatial dimensions of the conflict expanded significantly during H1 2026, demonstrating an elevated level of operational mobility and logistical maturity among militant networks. The conflict is no longer confined to isolated, localized pockets of resistance; it has metastasized across wide, interconnected operational corridors. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while violence remained heavily anchored in the traditional strongholds of North and South Waziristan (recording the highest casualty rates nationally), militant operations diffused systematically into adjacent districts like Lakki Marwat, Bannu, and Dera Ismail Khan. This eastward expansion indicates that the

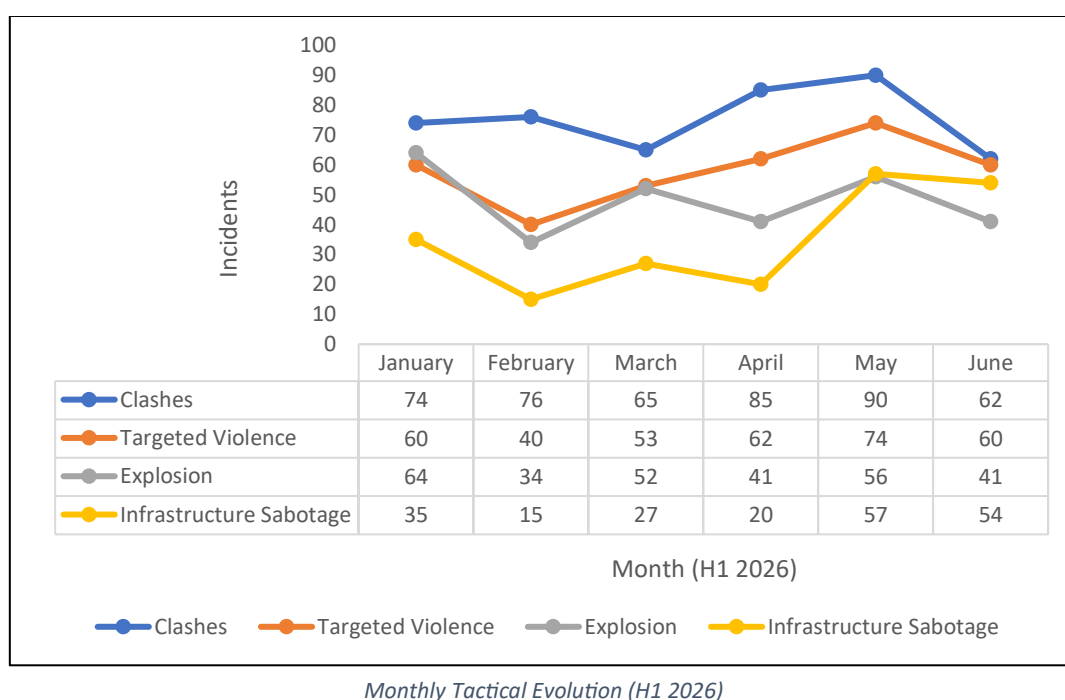
Pashtun ecosystem successfully matured its logistical supply lines, enabling it to project force deeper into settled areas.

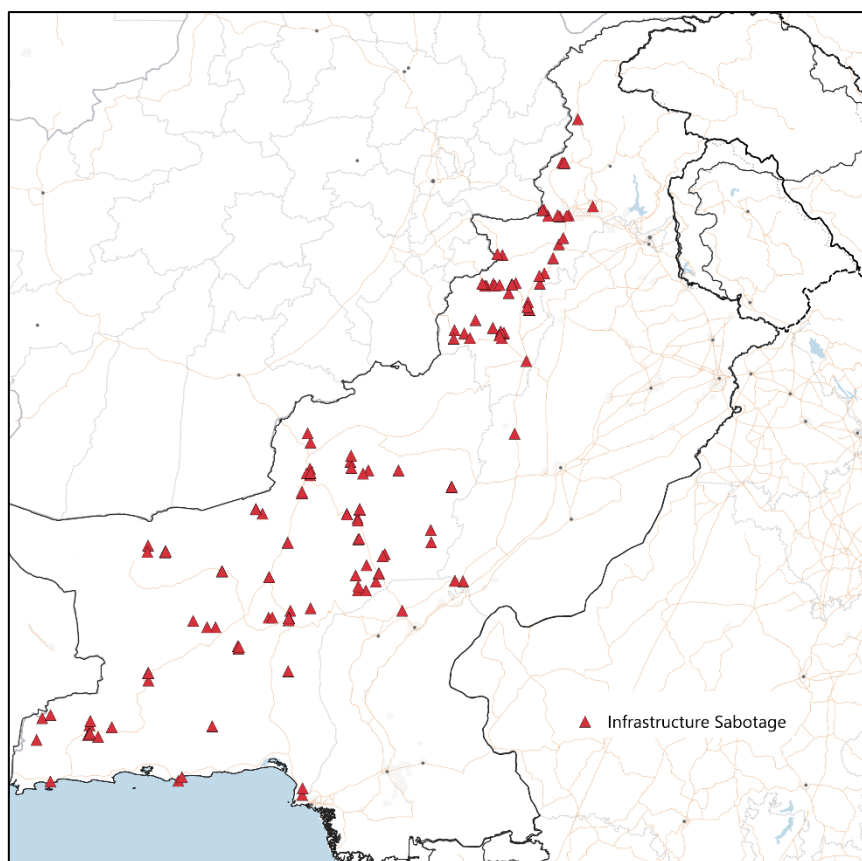
A parallel geographic expansion occurred within Balochistan. While the structural core of the insurgency remained in Kech (117 incidents), militant operations proliferated northward into Quetta, Mastung, and Khuzdar. This spatial evolution confirms that Baloch factions possess the decentralized architecture required to sustain simultaneous operations across vast, inhospitable terrain. The overarching operational implication of this geographic broadening is the severe dilution of conventional state forces. Because militants can operate across hundreds of kilometres of rugged terrain, the Pakistani military is prevented from achieving localized troop density.

The spatial evolution of the conflict remains fundamentally anchored in cross-border dynamics. The persistent permeability of the Afghanistan-Pakistan and Iran-Pakistan borders grants insurgent ecosystems inviolable strategic depth. Militant operational mobility relies entirely on the capacity to retreat across international lines to recuperate and resupply outside the jurisdiction of Pakistani military clearing operations. The evidence demonstrates that whenever state forces concentrated pressure in specific districts, insurgent cells dynamically shifted their operational weight across the border, effectively utilizing external sanctuary as an operational shock absorber to preserve combat momentum.

7.4 Innovation and Adaptation

The reporting period was defined by rapid, asymmetric innovation, demonstrating that militant networks possess institutionalized learning mechanisms that frequently outpace state adaptation. Warfare evolved from static engagements to highly dynamic, multi-modal operations. The most consequential innovation was the weaponization of the airspace through commercial drones in the Pashtun theatre. This development was not an isolated tactical experiment; the widespread deployment of quadcopter munitions across multiple districts confirms a formalized shift in militant operational doctrine. By integrating aerial capabilities, insurgents successfully neutralized the state's monopoly on close air support and ISR, fundamentally altering the tactical geometry of base defence.





Map - Infrastructure Sabotage Incidents Jan-Jun 2026

In the Baloch theatre, tactical adaptation manifested in the institutionalization of economic denial operations, specifically the widespread use of temporary road blockades and snap checkpoints. Rather than engaging in protracted firefights, Baloch insurgents routinely imposed blockades on critical transit arteries like the CPEC M8 Highway. Mobile militant cells intercepted commercial shipping, seized state weaponry, dismantled surveillance infrastructure, and withdrew before state reaction forces could deploy. This tactical innovation represents a highly efficient application of force. It allows insurgents to project shadow governance, sever internal lines of communication, and generate severe economic disruption without sustaining the heavy casualties associated with conventional assaults.

Militant adaptation to state pressure was further evident in the areas of information operations. Insurgent networks rapidly integrated high-definition combat footage, drone telemetry recordings, and ideological messaging to project an image of invulnerability. By dominating the digital battlespace, groups like the BLA and the TTP successfully accelerated their recruitment pipelines and undermined state narratives of tactical success.

The state's response to this rapid insurgent adaptation remained largely reactive. While Pakistani security forces demonstrated proficiency in executing intelligence-led decapitation strikes (neutralizing 30 high-value commanders), they struggled to counter systemic, network-level innovations. The state's reliance on reactive clearing operations and static checkpoint defence proved fundamentally misaligned with an adversary capable of aerial harassment, fluid geographic mobility, and decentralized economic sabotage.

7.5 Conflict Evolution Assessment

The available evidence from the first half of 2026 reveals that the character of conflict in Pakistan evolved into a highly sophisticated, multi-theatre war of attrition. CNAWS assesses that militant adaptation consistently outpaced the state's conventional counterinsurgency responses. The structural evolution of the battlefield characterized by the weaponization of commercial technology, the expansion of operational corridors, and the

deliberate targeting of civilian law enforcement demonstrates that non-state actors are no longer engaged in mere survival; they are systematically dismantling the state's capacity to govern its periphery.

The integration of economic warfare into militant doctrine signifies a fundamental shift in the strategic landscape. Infrastructure has become a primary battlefield, with insurgent networks recognizing that targeting transnational capital investments and logistical arteries inflicts greater strategic damage on Islamabad than localized military attrition. The tactical innovations observed during the reporting period specifically drone employment and coordinated economic sabotage greatly enhanced militant operational effectiveness, allowing decentralized networks to impose disproportionate costs on a massive conventional military apparatus.

These evolutionary changes imply that the conflict has reached a state of highly volatile equilibrium. Pakistani security forces retain the localized kinetic superiority required to prevent militants from permanently holding major urban centres. However, the state currently lacks the strategic depth, border control, and adaptive capability necessary to permanently dismantle the decentralized, technologically proficient militant ecosystems that dictate the tempo of violence across the country's western frontiers.

8 STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

8.1 State Capacity

The reporting period indicates that the Pakistani state possesses the institutional resilience and tactical proficiency to prevent militant networks from achieving decisive territorial capture, yet it fundamentally lacks the capacity to secure strategic conflict resolution. The evidence demonstrates that security forces successfully executed high-intensity, intelligence-driven operations across multiple theatres, consistently generating severe localized attrition against insurgent cells. However, CNAWS assesses that these tactical victories mask profound operational overstretch. The requirement to continuously deploy conventional military assets against two distinct, highly active insurgencies spanning the vast, non-contiguous geographies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan has forced the state into a perpetual cycle of reactive containment.

The interaction of these concurrent threat matrices demonstrates a severe dilution of state force density. The available evidence suggests that when security forces concentrate clearing operations in one specific operational corridor, such as North Waziristan or Kech, insurgent networks dynamically escalate violence in secondary districts to exploit the resulting security vacuums. CNAWS assesses that this dynamic effectively prevents the Pakistani security forces from massing the overwhelming force required to permanently dismantle militant infrastructure. The operational implication is that the state is forced to constantly reallocate defensive assets to plug emergent security gaps, trapping its highly trained conventional forces in static defensive postures and localized crisis response.

Furthermore, the systemic targeting of localized police forces and civilian administration by militant actors has fundamentally eroded civil authority in peripheral regions. The evidence indicates that the neutralization of under-resourced law enforcement units has forced the conventional military to assume routine internal security and policing duties. CNAWS assesses that this tethering of military assets to civilian administrative functions strips the state of its offensive mobility and operational initiative.

8.2 Insurgent Resilience

The available evidence from the first half of 2026 suggests that both the Pashtun and Baloch insurgent ecosystems have achieved an unprecedented level of organizational resilience, successfully insulating their aggregate combat capacity from state counter-offensives. Despite operating under disparate ideological frameworks, with Pashtun networks pursuing a theocratic administrative state and Baloch factions driven by secular ethno-nationalism, both ecosystems have converged on a decentralized, networked operational model. The reporting period indicates that while the state successfully eliminated multiple high-value commanders through precision strikes, these decapitation efforts failed to induce systemic paralysis or significantly degrade the overarching tempo of militant violence.

CNAWS assesses that this resilience is a direct byproduct of institutionalized decentralization. Within the Pashtun theatre, the overarching umbrella structures allow local cells to sustain autonomous combat operations, seamlessly activating predefined successors when leadership nodes are neutralized. Similarly, the Baloch insurgent ecosystem leverages collaborative frameworks to divide operational labour among specialized factions, ensuring that the degradation of a rural guerrilla stronghold is rapidly offset by the activation of urban fedayeen cells. The interaction of these structural dynamics demonstrates that neither insurgent movement relies on a monolithic, irreplaceable command hierarchy.

The operational evidence further suggests a highly sophisticated capacity for adaptation and regeneration. Militant networks rapidly institutionalized technological and tactical innovations, ranging from the weaponization

of commercial unmanned aerial systems in the northwest to the execution of synchronized economic blockades in the southwest. CNAWS assesses that these institutional learning mechanisms allow insurgents to continuously bypass static state defences and rapidly recuperate from localized tactical defeats. The strategic implication is that conventional state clearing operations are insufficient to defeat these networks; the decentralized architecture of the insurgencies ensures that they can perpetually regenerate combat power, sustain long-term operational pressure, and dictate the tempo of the conflict across multiple fronts simultaneously.

8.3 External Drivers

Evaluating the strategic trajectory of Pakistan's internal security environment requires acknowledging that the structural sustainability of these insurgencies is fundamentally anchored in regional geopolitics. The reporting period indicates that the persistent permeability of the western frontiers provides both the Pashtun and Baloch insurgent ecosystems with critical strategic depth. The available evidence demonstrates that militant logistical arteries, leadership shuras, and technical training facilities operate extensively outside the jurisdictional reach of Pakistani conventional forces, utilizing cross-border sanctuaries to shield their core infrastructure from domestic military pressure.

CNAWS assesses that this access to external sanctuary effectively neutralizes the long-term efficacy of Pakistan's domestic counterinsurgency operations. When state security forces intensify intelligence-based clearing operations in peripheral districts, militant networks systematically withdraw across international borders to refit and rearm, only to re-infiltrate once the state transitions back to a garrison posture. The interaction of these border dynamics demonstrates that the operational tempo of the insurgencies is inextricably linked to the degree of facilitation and safe haven afforded by neighbouring territories.

The available evidence suggests that this reliance on cross-border sanctuary introduces complex regional security dilemmas. The inability of the Pakistani state to unilaterally eliminate militant supply chains forces Islamabad to rely on the political will and enforcement capacity of neighbouring entities, introducing external variables that fall outside the state's direct control. The strategic implication is that Pakistan's internal security crises cannot be permanently resolved through domestic military force alone. As long as insurgent ecosystems retain access to unpoliced or passively tolerated external safe havens, they will possess the geographic insulation necessary to sustain a protracted war of attrition against the Pakistani state.

8.4 Strategic Infrastructure and Economic Security

The reporting period demonstrates a profound evolution in insurgent doctrine, characterized by the systemic integration of economic warfare into the conflict matrix. The available evidence indicates that militant networks, predominantly within the Baloch ecosystem, have deliberately expanded their targeting parameters beyond state military personnel to focus heavily on the destruction of strategic infrastructure. The systematic sabotage of energy pipelines, the physical blockade of primary logistical corridors, and the targeted disruption of telecommunications networks reveal a highly calculated strategy of economic denial.

CNAWS assesses that this targeting evolution signifies a shift from purely physical attrition to the psychological and financial exhaustion of the state. By directing violence against transport infrastructure and foreign capital projects, specifically those associated with transnational economic corridors, insurgents seek to render the extraction of provincial resources financially unsustainable. The interaction of these targeting priorities demonstrates that militants understand the vulnerabilities of a heavily indebted central government, intentionally seeking to artificially inflate the security and insurance risk premiums required to sustain international investment in peripheral regions.

The available evidence suggests that this strategy of economic sabotage yields disproportionate strategic dividends for insurgent networks. The operational consequence of this targeting shift is the forced reallocation of state military assets; the Pakistani army is increasingly compelled to dedicate substantial conventional combat power to guarding static economic infrastructure and commercial transit routes. CNAWS assesses that this

requirement severely limits the military's capacity to conduct proactive clearing operations. The strategic implication is that by transforming critical economic infrastructure into a contested battlespace, insurgent networks successfully constrain the state's economic viability while simultaneously degrading its operational military flexibility.

8.5 Indicators to Monitor

To accurately assess the future trajectory of Pakistan's internal security environment, specific operational and strategic indicators must be monitored during the subsequent reporting period. The available evidence from the first half of 2026 highlights several critical vectors of adaptation that will shape the operational geometry of the conflict.

First, the geographic expansion of militant operations requires continuous monitoring. Analysts should track whether the eastward diffusion of Pashtun militant activity into settled districts, and the northward expansion of Baloch insurgent operations into central administrative zones, solidify into permanent operational corridors. If militant networks successfully establish entrenched logistical architecture in these secondary districts, it will indicate a further, potentially critical, dilution of state security force density.

Second, the technological evolution of insurgent tactics serves as a vital indicator of militant capability. The proliferation of weaponized commercial drone technology, currently concentrated in the Pashtun theatre, must be monitored for potential diffusion into the Baloch insurgent ecosystem or adoption by transnational terror franchises like ISKP. Cross-pollination of this capability would severely elevate the threat to hardened economic and military infrastructure across the entire western frontier.

Third, shifts in the targeting of Chinese interests and transnational infrastructure projects must be evaluated. Analysts should monitor whether the frequency or sophistication of fedayeen attacks against foreign nationals and CPEC logistics increases, as this serves as the primary metric for the success of insurgent economic denial strategies.

Finally, the evolution of state counterinsurgency posture remains a critical indicator. Monitoring whether Pakistani security forces transition from localized, intelligence-based decapitation strikes toward broader, multi-divisional clearing operations will indicate the state's assessment of its own operational overstretch. Furthermore, any shifts in cross-border military engagement or adjustments in diplomatic posture toward neighbouring administrations will be essential for evaluating the state's capacity to disrupt the external sanctuaries that sustain domestic militant momentum.

8.6 Defining Characteristics of the Conflict

At the conclusion of the first half of 2026, CNAWS assesses that the defining characteristic of Pakistan's internal conflict is a state of highly volatile equilibrium driven by systemic state overstretch and decentralized insurgent adaptation. The reporting period demonstrates that the Pakistani security apparatus retains the raw kinetic power to prevent state collapse and deny militants permanent control of major urban centres. However, the state is structurally incapable of achieving decisive victory across multiple, simultaneous conflict theatres. Conversely, the Pashtun and Baloch insurgent ecosystems, insulated by cross-border sanctuaries and sustained by institutionalized decentralization, possess the operational resilience to perpetually regenerate combat power and impose severe economic and administrative costs upon the state. The strategic reality is a protracted, multi-modal war of attrition where tactical victories rarely translate into enduring strategic security, locking both the state and non-state actors into a compounding cycle of violence that steadily erodes the economic and administrative viability of the country's western frontiers.

9 METHODOLOGY

9.1 Scope of Assessment

This strategic assessment evaluates the trajectory and evolution of Pakistan's internal conflict environment during the first half of 2026, specifically covering the reporting period from 1 January to 30 June 2026. The geographic scope of this report encompasses the entirety of Pakistan, with a concentrated focus on the primary theatres of militant violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The assessment systematically examines the operational footprint and tactical behaviour of all major conflict actors, including ethno-nationalist insurgencies, theocratic militant networks, transnational terrorist franchises, and state security forces. The scope of analysed violence includes direct militant attacks, state-initiated counterterrorism operations, systemic infrastructure sabotage, targeted assassinations, and broader political violence where it directly intersects with the national security matrix. The fundamental objective is not merely to catalogue incident totals, but to rigorously assess how the character, intensity, and spatial distribution of warfare evolved during the reporting period.

9.2 Data Collection

The empirical foundation of this assessment is the proprietary CNAWS Pakistan Militancy Database. This database is built upon a continuous, structured collection cycle designed to capture a comprehensive spectrum of conflict data. To ensure accuracy and mitigate single-source bias, the database aggregates information through a multi-layered collection matrix, which includes:

- Official statements and press releases from Pakistani military and government institutions.
- Reporting from verified local, regional, and national media outlets.
- Direct exploitation of militant propaganda, primary claim channels, and digital platforms.
- Advanced Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) gathering.
- Geospatial verification of incident locations and infrastructure damage where possible.
- Rigorous secondary review and validation by regional conflict analysts.

This triangulated approach ensures a high degree of data integrity, allowing analysts to cross-reference state narratives with non-state claims and independent reporting to ascertain the most accurate operational reality.

9.3 Event Coding and Classification

To facilitate robust quantitative and spatial analysis, every conflict incident recorded in the CNAWS database is subjected to a standardized coding taxonomy. Each discrete event is classified across a stringent set of analytical fields, including:

- Precise temporal data (Date).
- Geographic administration (Province, District, and specific Location).
- Actor attribution (Primary and Secondary Conflict Actors).
- Target profile
- Kinetic classification
- Weaponry
- Verified casualty metrics
- Geospatial coordinates (Latitude and Longitude) where location data permits high-confidence mapping.

Incidents executed by unverified perpetrators are strictly retained under "*Unidentified Actor*" classifications. The methodology prohibits speculative attribution; incidents are only absorbed into broader ecosystem-level analysis

when geographic concentration, target selection, and tactical signatures provide overwhelming evidence of specific network involvement.

9.4 Analytical Method

This report employs a hybrid analytical methodology that fuses empirical data with structured intelligence tradecraft. The assessment combines quantitative conflict analysis to identify shifts in operational tempo, alongside geospatial analysis to map the expansion of conflict corridors and the density of infrastructure targeting. Temporal trend analysis is utilized to track tactical adaptation and seasonal escalation curves over the six-month reporting period. Furthermore, the report utilizes ecosystem analysis to evaluate the collaborative network dynamics of insurgent factions, and comparative conflict assessment to highlight the structural divergences between the Pashtun and Baloch threat theatres. Within this framework, all included charts, graphs, and maps are designed explicitly as analytical evidence to support strategic judgements, rather than serving as standalone statistical visualizations.

9.5 Limitations

As with all assessments derived from active conflict zones, this report is subject to inherent informational constraints. CNAWS acknowledges several structural limitations in the underlying dataset. First, delayed or suppressed reporting frequently obscures the immediate operational reality, particularly following high-intensity counterterrorism operations or covert targeted killings. Second, contested attribution remains a persistent challenge, as state entities and militant networks routinely issue conflicting narratives regarding casualty figures and operational intent. Third, data collection is structurally inhibited in highly remote or heavily militarized districts, potentially resulting in the underreporting of low-level kinetic friction in areas lacking independent media access. Finally, casualty information remains fluid; fatality metrics often evolve in the days and weeks following complex attacks. Consequently, the findings presented in this report represent the most rigorous and accurate strategic assessment available at the time of publication, acknowledging that isolated tactical data points may undergo subsequent refinement.

9.6 Data Availability

The quantitative analysis, spatial mapping, and strategic judgements contained within this report are derived directly from the CNAWS Pakistan Militancy Database. This database serves as a continuously maintained, structured intelligence dataset recording real-time militant activity, state counterterrorism operations, verified casualties, organizational actors, targeting profiles, weapon employment, and systemic infrastructure attacks across Pakistan.

The raw incident database, interactive analytical dashboards, high-resolution geospatial products, and customized longitudinal datasets utilized to produce this assessment are not included within this publication. These specialized resources are maintained separately and are available through institutional licensing, commercial subscriptions, or bespoke analytical service agreements.

Organizations, academic institutions, and defence entities requiring direct access to the underlying structured data, geospatial shapefiles, or tailored analytical support to inform their own strategic planning may access the portal or contact the Centre directly.

For access to the interactive database: <https://cnaaws.in/pakistan-militancy-dashboard>

For bespoke data inquiries and institutional access: contact@cnaaws.in