

Analyzing the Evolving Relationship Between TTP and BLA

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Introduction

Balochistan, Pakistan's most disadvantaged province with the lowest living standards and per capita income, is also the largest in area and rich in natural resources. It hosts a complex militant landscape with local, regional, global, and sectarian terrorist groups operating throughout the province. Since Pakistan's independence, Baloch nationalist-separatist insurgencies have repeatedly challenged the state's authority in the province. Beginning in 1948, Balochistan has remained a focal point of political grievances that have periodically escalated into violent conflict (Khattak et al., 2022). The most recent phase of insurgency, which began after the death of tribal Sardar Akbar Bugti, is led by Baloch nationalist-separatist groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), formed in 2000, and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), along with several others.

Contrary to the BLA, an ethno-nationalist-separatist organization, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a purely Islamist violent non-state actor and a proxy of the Afghan Taliban, fighting against the Pakistani state. Established in 2007, the TTP served as an umbrella for Pashtun jihadist groups operating in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), bordering Afghanistan (Zahid, 2026). Although unified under a common ideological framework, the TTP is not a monolithic organization; rather, it comprises multiple factions with varying degrees of autonomy. The TTP waged a campaign for Sharia governance, primarily in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA regions. Its strength is estimated at between 2,500 and 6000 militants, active in KPK and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan (National Counterterrorism Center, 2026).

The Afghan Taliban's return to power in August 2021 significantly altered the regional security environment. The takeover enabled the TTP to re-establish sanctuaries and operational bases along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (the Durand Line), enhancing its ability to launch cross-border attacks into Pakistan. At the same time, Baloch nationalist-separatist militant groups also exploited the post-withdrawal security vacuum. Reports suggest that these groups gained access to advanced military equipment abandoned following the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces, either

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through illicit arms markets in Afghanistan or other regional networks, thereby enhancing their operational capabilities (Rai, 2022).

Terrorist violence in Pakistan intensified following the Afghan Taliban's takeover of Kabul in August 2021. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS, 2024), militant attacks increased by approximately 70% in 2023 compared with the previous year, while fatalities rose by 81% and injuries by 62%. The PICSS database recorded at least 645 militant attacks across Pakistan in 2023, resulting in 976 deaths and 1,354 injuries, compared with 380 attacks, 539 deaths, and 836 injuries in 2022 (PICSS, 2024).

Moreover, there has been a subsequent rise in high-profile operations, including the March 2025 hijacking of the Jaffar Express, which resulted in 31 deaths, as well as coordinated terrorist activities such as Herof-1 (August 2024) and Herof-2 (January 2026) (Verma et al., 2025; Nasar, 2026). These events exhibited unprecedented levels of coordination and brutality, all carried out and claimed by the BLA. The Pakistani government has brought this issue to the UN Security Council, presenting evidence of close links between the BLA, particularly its suicide wing of the Majeed Brigade, and the TTP (Pakistan Presses UN Security Council, 2026). The main aim of this article is to evaluate whether a genuine connection exists, its characteristics, the evidence supporting it, and its strategic consequences.

BLA and TTP Cooperation and Undercurrents

The BLA is an irredentist terrorist organization. By its very nature, it is a secular, nationalist-separatist organization seeking an independent Balochistan. Moreover, its ideology draws on historical Baloch autonomy narratives and opposes the Pakistani state. As for the BLA's agenda, there are certain rallying demands beyond independence, including control over resources (gas, minerals, Gwadar port). The BLA is well organized and has several specialized units, such as the Majeed Brigade, which specializes in high-risk operations, including suicide attacks; the Fatah and STOS (Special Tactics and Operations) wings; QAHAR (drone wing); the female militant wing; and ZIRAB (the intelligence wing).

On the other hand, the TTP is purely an Islamist terrorist organization with a Deobandi-jihadi agenda. It is an umbrella organization comprising more than 40 terrorist groups and mostly operates from Afghanistan under Taliban rule, launching attacks in the KPK and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan. The TTP endeavours to overthrow the Pakistani state and replace it with an Afghan-Taliban-like Sharia-governed society. It is led by Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud and has a centralized command, emulating Afghan-Taliban governance models in Pakistan with shadow provinces. Post-2021, its strength is estimated at 6,000 fighters, bolstered by Taliban logistical support and leftover U.S. weaponry. The TTP has expanded beyond Pashtun areas by exploiting local grievances, including in Balochistan.

There is an ideological divide between the two militant groups, yet they appear to find room for a pragmatic alliance. The groups are antithetical, as BLA is profoundly secular and ethnic in character, whereas the TTP is pan-Islamist and jihadist with a Pashtun tinge. There is common ground; both share a common enemy, i.e., the state of Pakistan. Amid this situation, ground conditions and an enabling environment suggest that both work together in the turbulent Balochistan province despite their ideological differences, avoiding clashes and turf wars that could have weakened them. It is also apparent that there are certain levels of mistrust, such as BLA's fear of TTP's reconciliation (amid failed peace talks in Kabul with the Afghan Taliban's aegis in

2021) with the state (personal communication with an Islamabad-based security analyst, June 2026).

Following the collapse of negotiations with the Pakistani government, the TTP resumed its violent campaign against the state's security forces. Alongside its insurgency, the group expanded its Balochi-language propaganda through Umar Media, highlighting issues such as enforced disappearances, alleged extrajudicial killings, and the perceived exploitation of Balochistan's resources. The TTP has also publicly praised attacks by the BLA. Following the 2022 Nushki and Panjgur attacks, TTP spokesperson Muhammad Khurasani stated, "The Pakistan Army is carrying out the massacre in Balochistan... Our enemy is common" (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2023).

It is also believed that Al-Qaeda has played a facilitative role by providing ideological support and training, helping to bridge the gap between secular Baloch nationalist militants and Islamist jihadist groups (personal communication with security analysts, June 2026). Evidence is increasingly pointing toward an emerging connection. Credible reports of tactical cooperation have been documented since 2022, confirmed by multiple independent sources. This includes sharing spaces (not camps) and acquiring weapons such as sniper rifles, thermal imaging devices, night vision goggles, M4 and M16 rifles (leftover US military stock), high-tech binoculars, and other advanced US equipment, which the BLA purchased from TTP (personal communication with a Quetta-based security official, June 2026).

TTP Organizational Expansion into Balochistan

The TTP has a stronger presence in Pakistan's KPK province. Reports indicate that TTP expanded its network into Balochistan with assistance from BLA. During 2022–2023, TTP's Baloch jihadist factions established themselves in districts with Baloch majorities, including Panjgaur, Kalat, parts of MusaKhel, and Quetta. Previously, TTP had already set up chapters in Pashtun-majority districts like Zhob, Loralai, Pishin, Qila Abdullah, Qila Saifullah, Chaman, among others. The entry of TTP into districts with Baloch majorities seems to be a calculated move into BLA heartlands, likely due to an implicit agreement between the groups. At the same time, BLA conducted terrorist attacks against security forces and police in Pashtun-majority districts, which was unusual. These attacks targeted areas such as Ziarat, Harnai, Musakhel, and Pishin. Regarding the convergence of media and propaganda, TTP media routinely amplify BLA claims. On the other hand, BLA's Hakkal media channel reciprocates by disseminating TTP statements. This mutual amplification suggests at least informational coordination.

According to the Pakistani government's claims in January 2025, the TTP provided training to militants inside Balochistan on coordinated timing, diversionary tactics, safe houses, and exfiltration. The government further claims that it has identified at least four joint training camps in southern Afghanistan's Walikot and Shorabak districts for training in explosives, small-unit tactics, and cross-border logistics (Anwar, 2026; *UNSC Report Affirms BLA-TTP Nexus*, 2025).

After the arrests of high-profile TTP commanders in Balochistan, it was revealed during the course of investigations that Indian intelligence agencies also sought to invest in BLA-TTP collaborations. The arrested TTP commanders, Nasrullah (aka Maulvi Mansoor) and Idrees (aka Irshad), revealed a coordination plan with the BLA Majeed Brigade commander, Bashir Zeb. The plan detailed militant infiltration routes from Afghanistan into southern Balochistan, including facilitators and

logistics. It was also revealed that the BLA has received TTP expertise in IED construction and provided reciprocal logistics in return for safe passage and intelligence (India "investor" of TTP, 2024).

However, the United Nations Security Council Monitoring Team Report S/2024/556 (22 July 2024) does not explicitly identify an operational nexus or formal alliance between the TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). Although the report discusses TTP in considerable detail, it does not conclude that TTP and the BLA are engaged in joint operations or coordinated attacks. Consequently, assertions regarding sustained operational collaboration between the two groups remain beyond the report's explicit findings. The reports of a TTP-BLA nexus first emerged in December 2025, when Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN told the Security Council that Pakistan had evidence of collaboration between the TTP and BLA, including joint training, movement of fighters, illicit weapons trade, and coordinated attacks from Afghan territory. Those remarks were Pakistan's statement to the Security Council.

Nature of the Nexus and Implications

In the current scenario, the TTP-BLA nexus is best understood as tactical and opportunistic rather than strategic or ideological. Both groups take advantage of the situation and operate through shared Afghan sanctuaries. There is no strong evidence of merged command structures or shared long-term goals. It is more of a marriage of convenience against a common enemy. The BLA has benefited largely since the fall of Kabul to the Afghan Taliban and has since seen elevated threats in Balochistan, including an increasing number of terrorist attacks and greater sophistication. The BLA has threatened and targeted security forces, CPEC infrastructure in Gwadar, and the blocking of national highways and railways, with increasingly high economic fallout and impact on Chinese investment. Pakistan has accused the Afghan Taliban of providing safe havens to TTP and BLA, complicating Pakistan-Afghan Taliban relations.

Conclusion

There is no substantial evidence of a formal alliance between TTP and BLA, but circumstantial evidence suggests a tacit agreement exists between the two. In fact, it's a pragmatic convergence of interests following the fall of Kabul in August 2021 and the subsequent proliferation of high-tech US military leftover weapons into Pakistan through the Afghan Taliban and TTP. BLA has certainly benefited from this scenario and, despite ideological barriers with TTP, appears to work with it. Moreover, the Afghan Taliban regime is the primary actor behind the scenes, providing safe havens, sanctuaries, and weapons to both TTP and BLA. Pakistani security policymakers must respond in a calibrated manner against the Afghan Taliban, which acts as a hydra-headed monster. Security measures need to be in place, including increased border security, anti-smuggling operations, plugging smuggling routes, intelligence gathering, and kinetic operations near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border areas. Only a well-coordinated strategy would thwart this Afghan Taliban-TTP-BLA triad and disable this evolving cooperation between these terrorist entities.

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