The Critical Assessment of Militancy in South Waziristan in the Post American Forces' Withdrawal from Afghanistan

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Abstract

Militancy has gained a universal recognition. Voluminous literature exists on this subject matter. South and Central Asian regions could not escape from this monster. Afghanistan has remained a nursery of militancy that also affected Pakistan and its people. The former USSR's invasion of Afghanistan created a militant culture therein and also in Pakistan and other parts of South Asia. Later on, Taliban's regime exacerbated this culture and many militants established their strong holds in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Similarly, the withdrawal of US and allied forces from Afghanistan in 2019 paved the way to militants to raise their heads and started their activities inside Pakistan. They also started terrorist activities in South Waziristan Agency. This study evaluates the militancy in South Waziristan Agency after the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan.

Keywords: *Militancy, South Waziristan, Allied Forces, Afghanistan, FATA.*

Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11 incident, the global and regional strategic environment compelled the political and military leadership in Pakistan to join the global club against terrorism (Mahboob and Alqama, 2020); and this incident severely affected the internal and external security of Pakistan (Akhtar, et al., 2021). Later on, the US army withdrawal from Afghanistan during 2022 casted drastic implications on Pakistan's security structure the Taliban (Islamic Emirates Afghanistan) assumed the control over the government by toppling Ashraf Ghani's regime and the reemergence of splinter groups of militants like Haqqani and Gul Nahadur groups (Rohman, et., 2024; & Arghandwal, et,. 2025)).

Like other parts of tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, local residents of South Waziristan District (SWD) also confronted with economic, social, political and security issues due re-insurgency of militants therein. Previously, it was governed under Frontier Crimes Regulations, 1901 wherein Political Agent (a senior civil servant) with assistance of Assistant Political Agents and tehsildars administered the tribal affairs. The 25th Constitutional Amendment changed the political, administrative, legal and judicial governance structure of former tribal areas and merged them with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The SWD is consisted of Wazirs, Mehsuds, Bhittanis, Dotanis, and Burkis. The SWD has three main subdivisions: Ladha, Sarwekai, and Wana. In 2022, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government divided South Waziristan into two districts – Upper South Waziristan (with Ladha Headquarter) and Lower South Waziristan (with Wana Headquarter)

(Mehsud, 2026). The population of Tehsils in Upper and Lower South Waziristan are given in Table-1 and Table-2 (Mehsud, 2026; & Pakistan Bureau of Statistics).

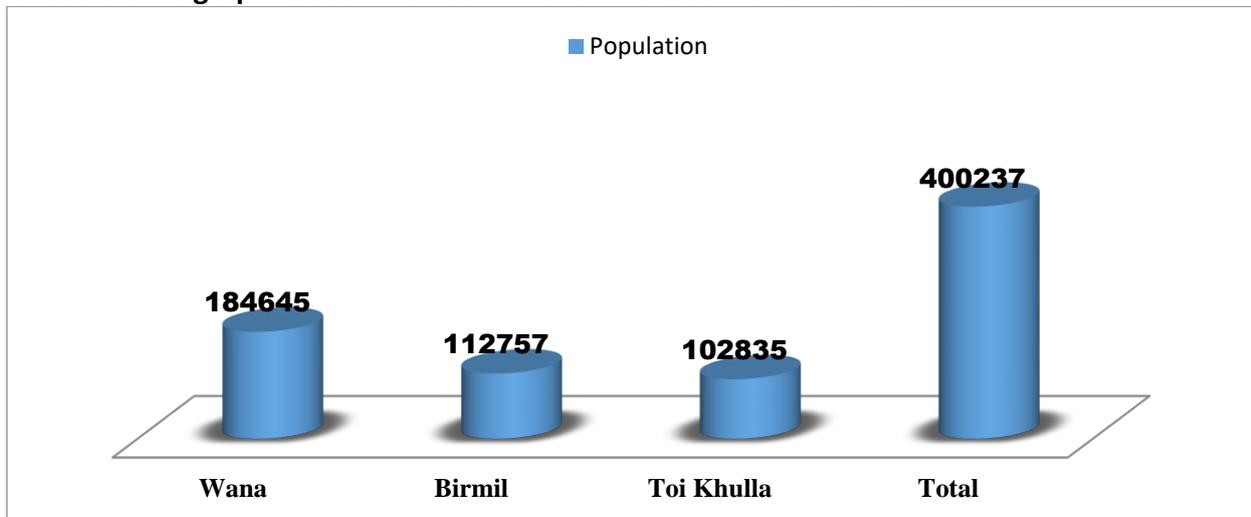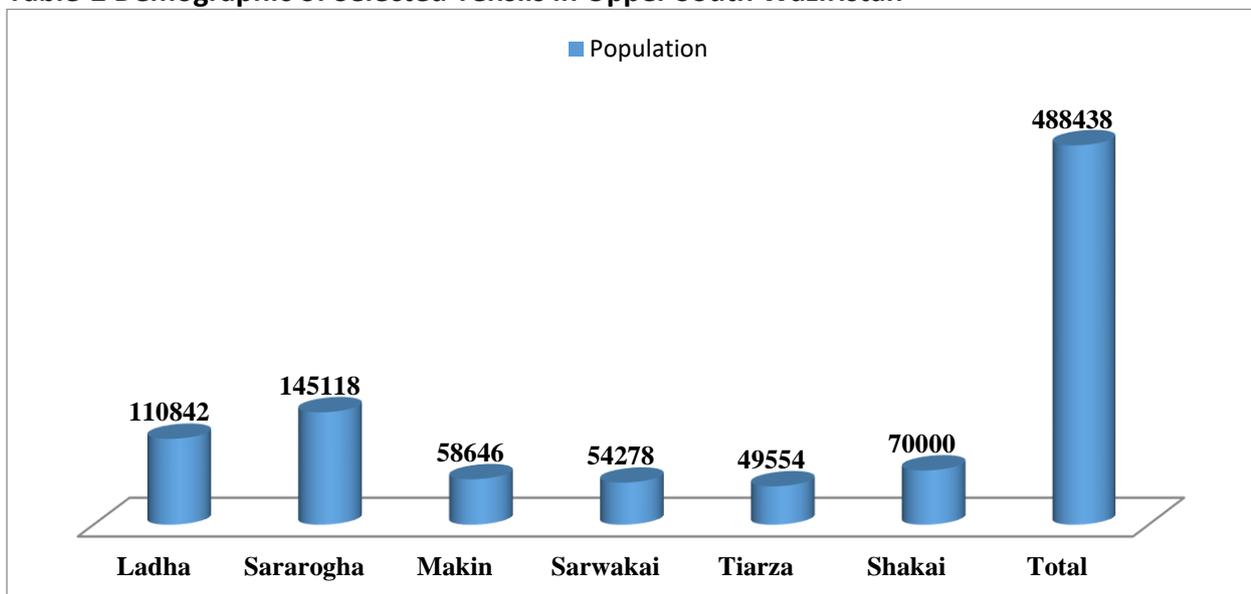**Table-1 Demographic of Selected Tehsils in Lower South Waziristan**

Table-2 Demographic of Selected Tehsils in Upper South Waziristan

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

Literature Review

Ali and Rahman argued that United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan 1980s harbingered Soviet-Afghan war. This created a militant culture in South Asia and also casted drastic impact on Pakistan's internal security and also promoted a radical culture (Ali & Rahman, 2025). Mahboob and others highlights that policy makers has always followed an ambiguous role to cope with militancy and insurgency in various parts of the country especially in tribal areas (Mahboob et al., 2020). Similarly, Jadoon traced the historical evolution of militant culture in Pakistan and found out the governance issues as the root causes of this culture (Jadoon, 2025).

Tazeem and others also considered the social and economic issues that fomented militancy in Pakistan like poverty, unemployment, and inaccessibility to modern education (Tazeem et al., 2025). Likewise, In addition, Khalid and Roy tried to discuss militancy in Pakistan from foreign policy and strategic doctrine perspectives; and declared militancy as strategic policy tool in pursuit of "strategic depth" in Afghanistan so as to counterbalance Indian influence therein. The authors declared understanding of regional security dynamics for understanding militancy in

Pakistan (Khalid & Roy, 2016). In addition, Shahzad and Ahmad considered the prolonged U.S. military presence in Afghanistan as a cause of instability because of the people's resentment on drone strikes, night raids, and large-scale military operations (Shahzad and Ahmad, 2023).

Mehsud pointed out the internal security threats in Pakistan due to Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan and their cross-border infiltration into Pakistan (Mehsud, 2012). Khan and others has pointed out some issues within the security policy of Pakistan and inconsistencies in it. They discussed from local, regional and global perspectives and declared that the security policy makers ignored the non-traditional security aspects due to which internal security issues have taken place (Khan et al., 2017).

Methodology

This study is mainly based upon mixed-method both qualitative and quantitative; and also on both primary and secondary sources. A semi-structured interview schedule in addition to a questionnaire has been used to get firsthand information from community elders, political leaders, and local representatives. The findings are based on survey research and data collected from local tribal elders, political parties representatives, government officials, local government representatives, and local people hailing from the Tehsils reflected in Figure-1 (Mehsud, 2026)

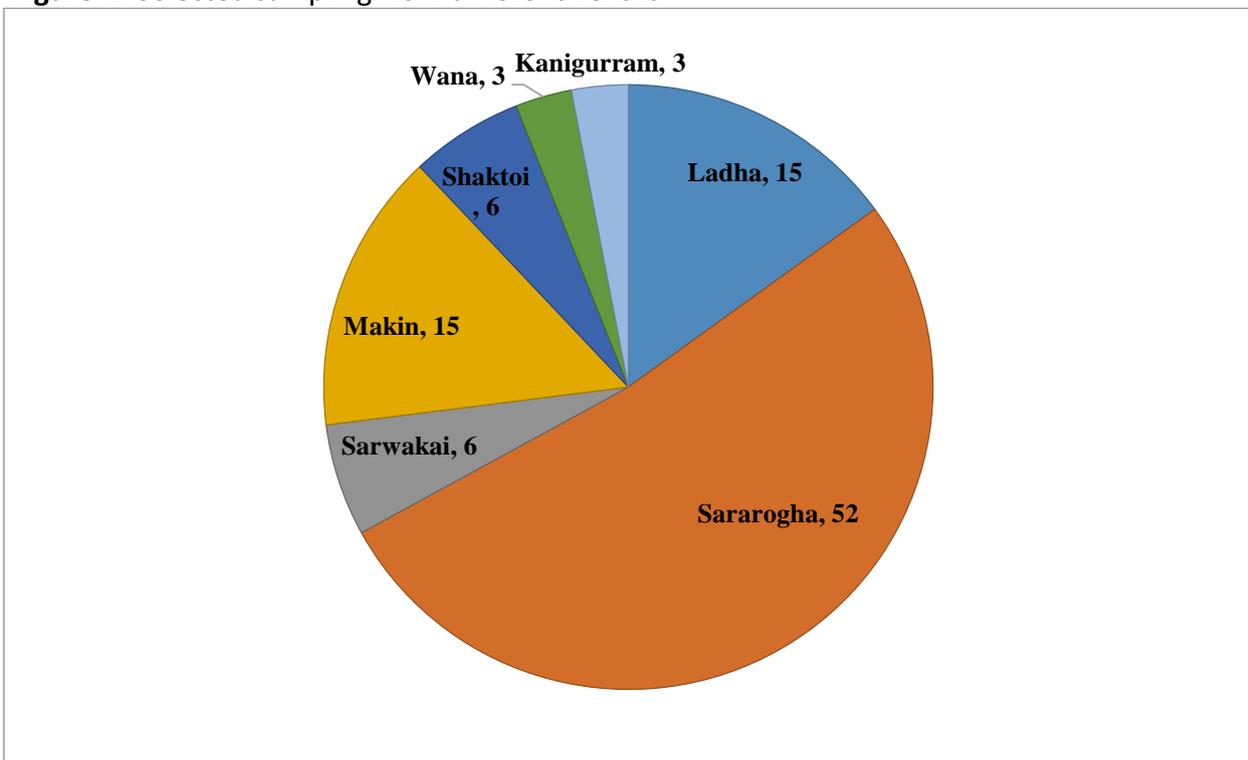**Figure**-1: Selected sampling from different Tehsils
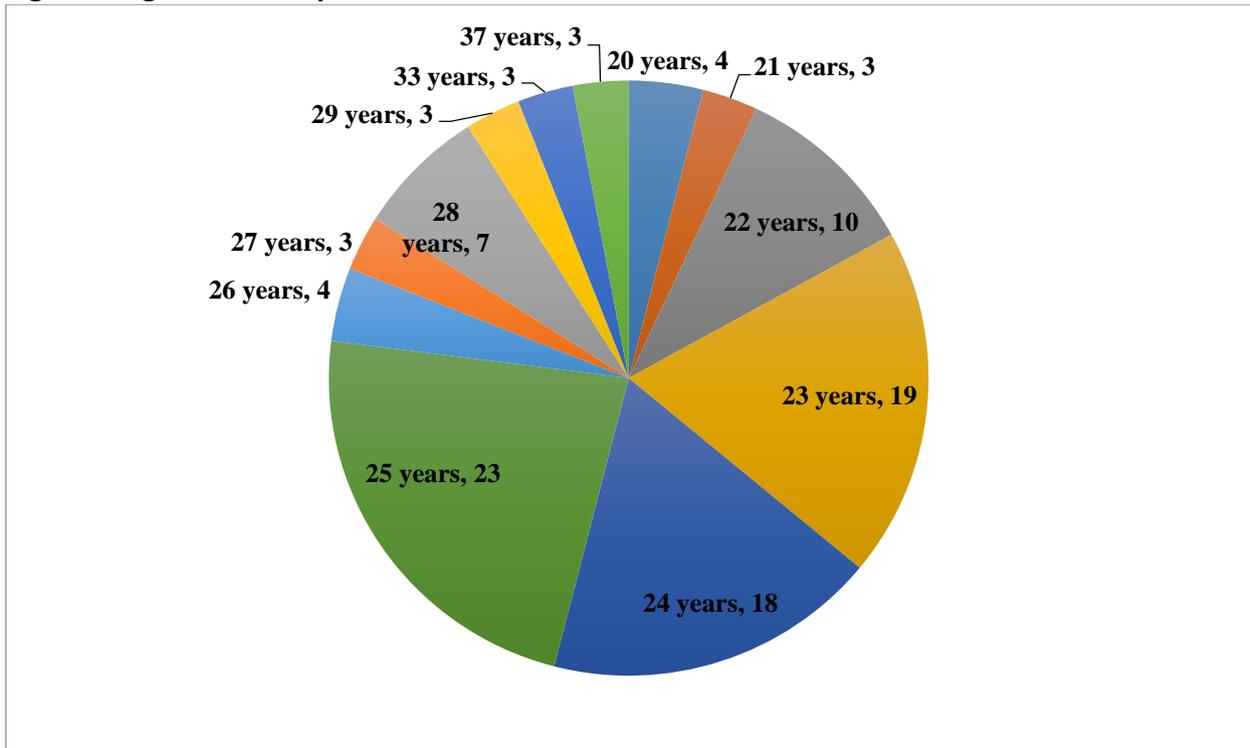
Figure-2 Age-based Respondents

Figure-3: Gender-based Respondents

Figure-4

Pie chart showing: Intermediate, 3; F.A/ F.Sc, 6; M.Phil, 18; LLB / Law, 12; B.A/B.Sc/ BS, 57

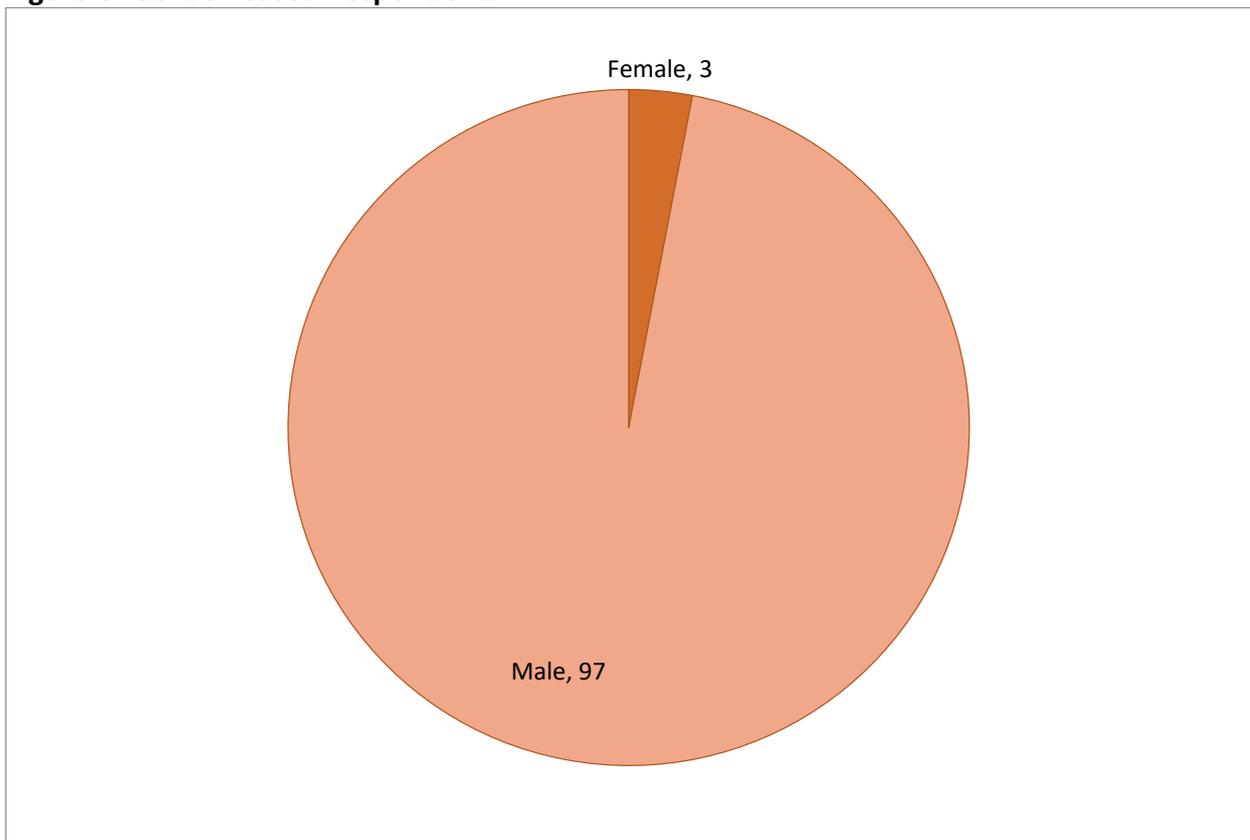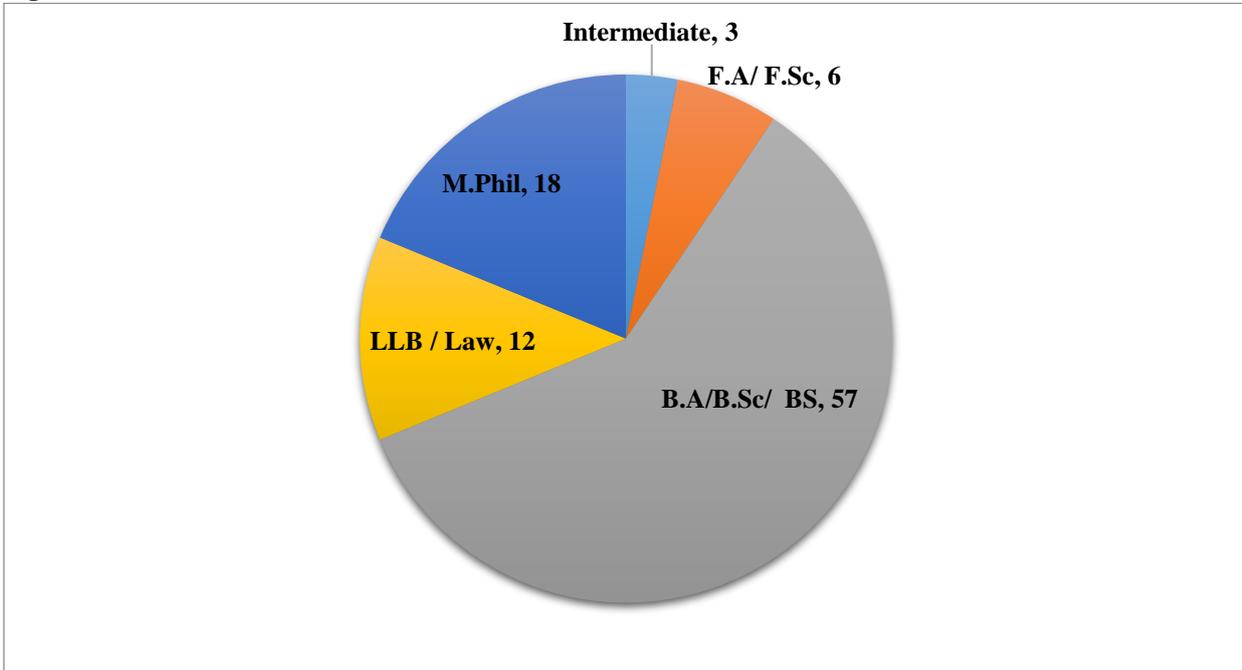**Major challenges**

The survey shows multi-dimensional but inter-linked causes of re-emergence of militancy in South Waziristan district. First, the poor border management is the fundamental cause of this menace. Second, the withdrawal of forces of US and its allies created a space for TTP and also helped it to gain more strength. Third, TTP also enjoys IEA's support. Fourth, it also earns support from local people. Fourth, the local people are being recruited in TTP. Fifth, it introduced new methods of recruitment of local people especially through social media. Sixth, the repatriated Afghan citizens also joined TTP. Seventh, the erroneous Afghan policy of PTI-led government also facilitated these militants to regroup and reorganize them inside Pakistan. Eight, TTP cashes sympathies of local people on various issues especially displacement of local population. Lastly, the religious seminaries students also join these militants (Mehsud, 2026).

Recommendations

In the light of collected data, following recommendations are made (Mehsud, 2026):

1. The government needs to follow a civilian-protection-first approach in all counter-militancy operations because there is fear among the general masses.
2. In addition, the government needs to establish liaison between security forces at each tehsil level with designated focal persons to arrange periodical Jirga-style consultative meetings to address the grievances of the local people and also to vanish trust deficit between them.
3. The government agencies need to focus on services delivery (provision of health facilities, availability of clean drinking water, uninterrupted supply of electricity, and construction and repairing of roads) in affected areas.

4. The government should launch programme for youth like skills training, apprenticeships, sports galas, scholarships, and counseling mechanism) so as to minimise the chances of recruitment of youth in these militant groups.

5. Political accountability of local political representatives must be ensured through holding open discussion.

6. The government should focus on strengthening of local governance and policing system.

7. The government must introduce socio-economic reforms in the affected areas.

8. Regional coordination should be strengthened through border management and intelligence cooperation, focusing on disrupting cross-border movement, financing, and logistical support networks linked to militant groups.

9. A reintegration and rehabilitation framework must be established for low-level recruits and surrendering individuals, including de-radicalization support, vocational pathways, and community-based monitoring to prevent relapse.

10. Media and communication strategies should be improved to counter militant narratives, using credible local voices (elders, teachers, religious scholars) and evidence-based messaging that emphasizes lawful governance and community safety.

11. Independent monitoring and evaluation must be introduced for both military and civilian interventions, with periodic assessments of civilian harm, public trust, and local security outcomes, so policy adjustments are based on real community feedback.

Conclusion

In the light of aforementioned discussion, it may be said that multi-dimensional factors are involved in the resurgence of TTP (*Fitna Al-Khawarij*) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially in Southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including South Waziristan. The lacking of concrete policy towards Afghanistan and Afghan refugees, poor border-management, poor governance, hasty 25th constitutional amendment, the trust deficit between security forces and local people, lack of socio-economic reforms and development, the use of social media for political purpose against security forces, use of social media by the militants for brainwashing and recruitment of teenagers in their groups, the support of Islamic Emirates Afghanistan to *Fitna Al-Khawarij,* the financing of *Fitna Al-Khawarij* by Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of India and MOSAD of Israel, and the lack of political will of political parties and their leaders to counter such menace are some major challenges to the security forces to restore peace to local areas.

There is still a silver lining to overcome these challenges if the provincial government takes initiatives to introduce reforms in governance, strengthening policing, bridging the gap between security forces and people, launching social and economic developmental projects, launching of security operations against the militants, and taking stringent actions against the handlers and sympathizers of these militants.

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