

IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract: *Security, in non-traditional sense, is inclusive and comprehensive concept that covers various facets of human life including public health. But South Asian security agenda has always been dominated by a traditional and state-centric approach, leaving little or no space for non-traditional security issues including but not limited to environmental degradation, repression, hunger and disease. Pakistan is no exception where health security or public health has always remained on the margins of the country's overall security agenda. Therefore, Pakistan was caught off-guard and ill-prepared when Covid-19 struck the country in February 2020. The current paper seeks to document the impact of Covid-19 on Pakistan's various security sectors including economic, environmental, societal, and conventional security, government's response and outcomes. The paper concludes economic fallout caused by corona virus could potentially hit the sectarian and ethnic fault lines of the country hence restricting Pakistan's conventional options to respond to Indian belligerence during the pandemic. Since pandemics know no boundaries, a joint Indo-Pak cooperative approach on dealing with non-traditional security threats such as Covid-19 will offer a rare window of opportunity to partner in a noble cause to protect billions of South Asians against the modern plague.*

Keywords: Covid-19, Pakistan, Comprehensive Security, Green Stimulus, Disease Control

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The Context:

During the formative years of Security Studies (SS), the discipline was dominated by singular focus on causes and prevention of war. The traditional approach towards security was state centric and only considered response to threat against military and political survival of state.¹ A paradigm shift occurred in the immediate aftermath of second World War when intellectual capital was dedicated to answer more specific and technical questions such as nuclear proliferation and avenues of conflict and cooperation between the Capitalist and Socialists blocs. But as the Cold War ended in 1989-90, a new debate started within security studies' scholars and practitioners about the nature of security. The proponents of non-traditional security advocated for a more comprehensive definitions of security to look beyond the threats emanating from non-military sources such as environmental degradation, famines, poverty, water scarcity, societal issues, natural calamities and public-health hazards.²

The non-traditional approach towards security was pioneered by Barry Buzan and Copenhagen School of security studies. They defined security as *"freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity against forces of change which they see as hostile"*, while such threats that *"warrant emergency action and exceptional measures, including the use of force"* are considered as security threats.³ Another non-traditional definition of security was termed as "human security" by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Human Development Report 1994 as *"It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life-whether in*

¹Stephen M. Walt, "The Renaissance of Security Studies," *International Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (June 1991): 211, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600471>.

² For a detailed discussion on the debate see: Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 2–4; Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams, "Broadening the Agenda of Security Studies: Politics and Methods," *Mershon International Studies Review* 40, no. 2 (October 1996): 229, <https://doi.org/10.2307/222776>.

³Barry Buzan, "New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century," *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 67, no. 3 (July 1991): 431–51, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2621945>.

homes, in jobs or in communities.”⁴ The inclusion of economic, societal, environmental and human concerns, apart from traditional military-political concerns, into the framework of security is also sometimes termed as comprehensive security.

As the world moved from an orthodox to a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to security, many countries in the third and developing world including Pakistan remained glued to military aspect of security, committing little or no resources to other aspects of human and comprehensive security including public health. In recent history of country, there has been an expansion of scope of national security and a range of internal-security, political and societal threats have also been securitized.⁵ With the expansion of scope of national security, steps have been taken which suggest arrangements in health sector so as to prevent any existential threat or emergency situation.

In April 2010, the national assembly of Pakistan passed the 18th amendment to the constitution of Pakistan. Among many other steps taken to decentralize power, resources and issues, the operation and strategic planning for health was also made a provincial subject. The federal government only remained responsible for coordination and regulation of health. In 2013 Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination (NHSRC) was created to oversee health services in the country. Consequently in 2016, Government of Pakistan announced a National Health Vision 2016-2025 which set provision of universal healthcare and access to affordable, quality health services as its goal.

In 2015, Pakistan also volunteered to undergo Joint External Evaluation (JEE) by World Health Organization (WHO) in order to achieve compliance with WHO International Health Regulations (2005). Pakistan was the first country to undergo JEE in WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean region, and the fourth in the world. The JEE identified 19 technical areas which

⁴UNDP, ed., *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/255/hdr_1994_en_complete_nostats.pdf.

⁵Syed Najeeb Ahmad, “Pakistan’s National Security: A Cross-Sectoral Discourse Analysis of Securitization Process” (PhD Dissertation, Islamabad, National Defence University, 2017), 70, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d4aa/30f55ac158273b84236ccdab6e56993a2224.pdf>.

required 3 to 5 priority actions in each area.⁶ Consequently, a five-year National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) was formed to work on the identified issue areas as well as to achieve the common goal of providing universal health care in accordance with National Health Vision.⁷

Pakistan has also worked on epidemiology and epidemic management with WHO with regards to seasonal dengue fever outbreaks, which intensified in past few years and the most recent of which came in 2019. As per requirements of International Health Regulations (2005) Pakistan kept reporting to WHO on the dengue outbreak, which had reached 52,485 patients and 91 deaths until December 2019. An Emergency Operations Center was created at National Institute of Health to monitor the situation of dengue outbreak on daily basis which coordinated information with provinces, federation and other support organizations like WHO.⁸

Despite these constitutional and institutional reforms Pakistan's response to public health hazards remained unmethodical. Take for instance government's response to the H1N1 (Swine Flue) in 2010. Nishtar concluded that due to lack of epidemiological surveillance, a large number of viral cases went under-reported. Additionally the ongoing counter-terrorism efforts, law and order situation, medical facilities in rural areas and issues of energy security made effective transport of medicine and vaccines difficult. The study concluded Pakistan to be vulnerable to

⁶Malik Safi et al., "Development of a Costed National Action Plan for Health Security in Pakistan: Lessons Learned," *Health Security* 16, no. S1 (December 2018): S-25-S-29, <https://doi.org/10.1089/hs.2018.0072>.

⁷"Pakistan National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS)" (Islamabad: Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, 2018), <http://phkh.nhsrcc.pk/sites/default/files/2019-06/National%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Health%20Security%20%E2%80%93%20Pakistan%202018.pdf>.

⁸"Outbreak Update – Dengue in Pakistan," WHO EMRO, December 3, 2019, <http://www.emro.who.int/pandemic-epidemic-diseases/dengue/outbreak-update-dengue-in-pakistan-1-december-2019.html>.

systematic constraints and unprepared for pandemic management.⁹ The state of epidemiology in Pakistan continues to deteriorate due to the state's under-investment in public health sector.

It was in this context that Pakistan was hit by the modern plague, known as Covid-19.

The Pandemic (Scaling the Threat)

The recent Covid-19 (also generally called corona virus) pandemic has brought about a huge threat to health security across the globe. Several countries around the globe locked down to prevent the spread of infection. Global economy has seen major slowdown and disruption of supply chains around the world. There have also been diverse societal and traditional security implications as well as impacts on environment.

At the outset of global pandemic Pakistan faced hard choices as two of the country's four neighbors, China and Iran were hit hardest by the virus. Due to geographic, cultural proximity and economic interdependence, people to people contact among Pakistan, China and Iran has always remained very high, thus increasing the risk of imported infections manifolds. The first confirmed Corona virus case in Pakistan was reported on February 26, 2020, after the 22 years old Yahya Jaffry was reported positive after his return from a pilgrimage in Iran.

The total number of infections did not exceed 100 until March 15, 2020,¹⁰ with most of the infections emerging among Pakistanis returning from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Europe and America. However during the month of April, the number of outside infected cases fell down and a trajectory of local infection transmission started. By the time of writing of this paper the total number of confirmed cases stood at 555,511, out of which 1433 have been diagnosed in Zaireen coming from outside the country and the rest of cases have been locally transmitted.¹¹

According to WHO's most recent Covid-19 situation report, the fatality rate in Pakistan is 2.13% with 11,623 deaths so far. While in neighboring Iran the fatality rate is 4.10% in total

⁹Sania Nishtar, "H1N1 Outbreak in Pakistan: Lessons Learnt," Working Paper, NTS Working Paper Series (Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security (NTS) Studies, December 2010), http://www.heartfile.org/pdf/NTS_Working_Paper4.pdf.

¹⁰"A Month on, Pakistan's Covid-19 Trajectory from Patient Zero to 1,000 and Beyond," Dawn, March 30, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543683>.

¹¹"COVID-19 Situation!," Government of Pakistan, accessed February 08, 2021, <https://covid.gov.pk/>.

number of 1,411,731 cases, in India mortality rate is 1.43% with 10,746,183 cases, while in Afghanistan mortality rate is 4.36% with 55,023 cases.¹² The reason of comparatively lesser infection and low mortality rate in Pakistan during the early phase of pandemic was because of timely emergency measures by the government, indicating the securitization of Covid-19 as a health security crisis, and announcement to lock down the country on March 23, 2020.¹³ However situation started to change after the lockdown was lifted on May 09, 2020.¹⁴ A Reuters report concluded that around 20,000 Covid-19 cases were reported in three weeks before lifting the lockdown, while the number of new cases was more than double after the lockdown was lifted.¹⁵ The sudden increase in number of cases was largely because of increased commercial and consumer activity around Eid, during which preventive measures were not carefully observed among the public. Similarly, hundreds of thousands of Pakistani Shias flocked to attend religious gatherings on “Yuam-e-Ali” few days prior to Eid, in complete violation of government’s ban on such gatherings.

During November 2020, the Covid-19 cases in country saw a rise once again rising up to more than 1000 cases per day.¹⁶ This was the start of second wave of Covid-19 infections in Pakistan. The second wave initiated largely due to mass gatherings, anti-government protests, and political rallies during Gilgit-Baltistan elections. However during the second wave the

¹²“Covid-19 Weekly Epidemiological Update,” World Health Organization, February 02, 2021, https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20210202-weekly-epi-update-25.pdf?sfvrsn=b38d435c_4&download=true.

¹³“Pakistan Announces Lockdown of Major Provinces to Curb COVID-19 Spread,” Xinhua Net, March 24, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/24/c_138910694.htm.

¹⁴MumtazAlvi, “Lockdown Eases from Tomorrow,” The News, May 8, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/655448-lockdown-eases-from-tomorrow>.

¹⁵Charlotte Greenfield and Umar Farooq, “After Pakistan’s Lockdown Gamble, COVID-19 Cases Surge,” *Reuters*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-pakistan-lockdown-idUSKBN23CONW>.

¹⁶ S. Khan, “Coronavirus: Pakistan braces for a 'more lethal' second wave,” *DeutscheWelle*, November 19, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-pakistan-braces-for-a-more-lethal-second-wave/a-55662887>.

government did not impose a strict lockdown, rather adopted strategy for a smart lockdown with loose restrictions.¹⁷

In most of countries including South Korea, Spain, China and Italy, the fatality rate due to Covid-19 was highest among the age groups of 70-79 years and 80+ years.¹⁸ However in Pakistan the fatality rate is highest in age groups of 50-59 years and 60-69 years, while the distribution across other age groups was also comparatively more uniform.¹⁹ This, along with comparatively lesser mortality rate, may indicate a development towards herd immunity in the country. However the idea of herd immunity being successful is not certain, as was indicated in the Reuters report.²⁰

Covid-19 and Economic Security of Pakistan

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought about severe global economic repercussions. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global economic growth can fall up to - 3.5% in 2020.²¹ This will be even more severe than Global Financial Crisis of 2009 and will be the worst economic slowdown after the Great Depression of 1930s. It also brought global supply chains at halt as demand fell sharply after lockdowns across the world. Oil prices hit 21 year low globally, and oil price in US fell in negative value for the first time in history going to as low as - \$37 US dollars.²²

¹⁷Asif Chaudhry, "1,597 complaints against flouting of lockdown SOPs during second wave," *Dawn*, January 07, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1600074>.

¹⁸Max Roser et al., "Mortality Risk of COVID-19 - Statistics and Research," Our World in Data, accessed June 7, 2020, <https://ourworldindata.org/mortality-risk-covid>.

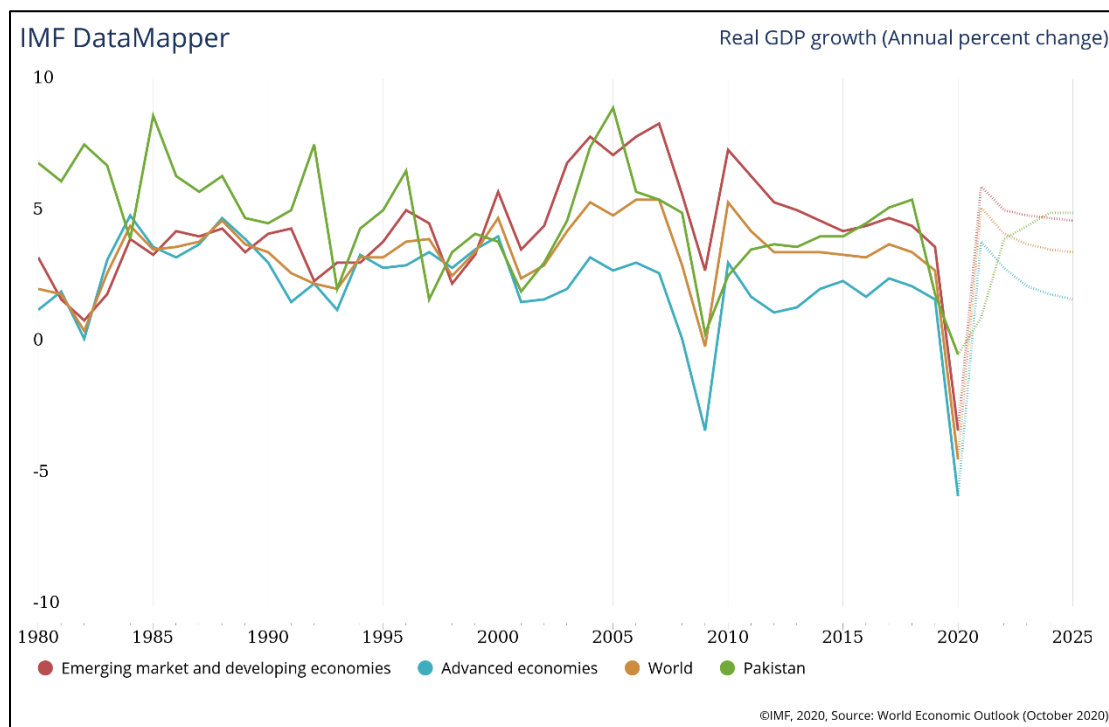
¹⁹"COVID-19 Live Dashboard - Pakistan."

²⁰Greenfield and Farooq, "After Pakistan's Lockdown Gamble, COVID-19 Cases Surge."

²¹ "World Economic Outlook Update," International Monetary Fund, January 2021, accessed February 08, 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/01/26/2021-world-economic-outlook-update>.

²²Lora Jones Palumbo Daniele and David Brown, "Corona virus: A Visual Guide to the Economic Impact," *BBC News*, April 30, 2020, sec. Business, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51706225>.

Figure 1. Graph indicating change in GDP per year, including in 2020 due to Covid-19 and prediction for 2021



Source: IMF Data Mapper

In the face of ongoing global recession, Pakistan is also set to face severe economic issues during the Covid-19 pandemic, which can turn into an economic security threat. Pakistan's GDP growth is expected to fall to -0.4% in 2020 according to IMF estimates. Pakistan's economy is largely reliant on exports and services sector. Foreign remittances also make up an important part of Pakistan's economy standing at USD \$21 billion in 2018-19, almost equivalent to Pakistan's exports.²³In such a scenario, any significant impact to national economy can raise the threat to security level. The coming part looks into how the economic situation has developed so far for Pakistan and what Pakistan is doing to contain it.

The exports sector of Pakistan started to dwindle as early as March, as the global supply chains disturbed, demand fell, and countries started entering lockdowns. In the same month, a managing director of a Lahore based textile factory told in an interview that 90% of their orders were on hold by the customers. CEO of another supply chain management firm noted that "the

²³Arhama Siddiq, "Pakistan and the Foreign Remittance Sector," *Asia Dialogue* (blog), March 23, 2020, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2020/03/23/pakistan-and-the-foreign-remittance-sector/>.

apparel export in 2020 could overall drop by 30 percent to 40 percent compared to 2019.”²⁴ Even though exports of Pakistan during the first three quarters of fiscal year 2019-20 increased slightly by 2.23%, it is expected that even this nominal rate will not continue in the last quarter.

The decline in global oil prices will also impact Pakistan’s foreign remittances, most of which come from oil-exporting Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.²⁵ According to Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Zulfikar Bukhari, around 17,743 Pakistani workers have already been laid off from jobs in United Arab Emirates (UAE) alone, while 1245 workers have been laid off in Saudi Arabia, 691 in Qatar, and 600 in Oman. Despite early lay-off of workers, Saudi Arabia also issued a decree forbidding companies to further lay off their employees and ensured that they receive full salaries for at least next three months.²⁶ This number is likely to dramatically increase after the oil-rich gulf countries seek to reset their economies hit by low oil-prices.

Agriculture sector, which is the mainstay of Pakistan’s economy, contributes 19 percent to country’s GDP and employs 39 percent of country’s labor force. The lockdown during Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in disruption of food supply chains by creating constraints for labor during the harvesting season. While the government allowed agriculture related machinery to move even during the lockdown, still many farmers could not operate their machines as the workshops to carry seasonal repairs were closed. Due to issues in food supply chain management, one food security expert noted that “We may witness food surplus in one place and demand somewhere else for which we should be prepared.”²⁷

²⁴Tara Donaldson, “Pakistan Lockdown Idles Factories—Where Orders Had Shriveled Up,” *Sourcing Journal* (blog), March 26, 2020, <https://sourcingjournal.com/topics/sourcing/pakistan-coronavirus-lockdown-garment-factories-closed-synergies-worldwide-levis-202444/>.

²⁵Haris Ahmed, “Pakistan’s Economy in Deep Trouble,” *The Express Tribune*, April 27, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2207551/2-pakistans-economy-deep-trouble/>.

²⁶Saima Shabbir, “Over 21,000 Pakistani Expats from Gulf Region Laid off amid COVID-19 – Zulfikar Bukhari,” *Arab News*, April 25, 2020, <https://arab.news/yh54f>.

²⁷Sana Jamal, “How Will COVID-19 Affect Pakistan Farmers, Food System?,” *Gulf News*, May 1, 2020, <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/how-will-covid-19-affect-pakistan-farmers-food-system-1.71196910>; Aamir Latif and Shuriah Niazi, “COVID-19 Lockdown Sparks Harvest Crises in Pakistan,

During the ongoing pandemic, unemployment has become another major economic issue for Pakistan. The informal sector of country's economy makes up around 18% to 71% of the national economy according to various estimates, and employs around 27.3 million workers.²⁸ This sector of the country's economy is set to be affected the most from ongoing pandemic. According to estimates from Pakistan Institute for Development Economics (PIDE), 3 million jobs are to be lost in the ongoing initial phase of Covid-19. While 18 million people may become unemployed in overall situation, and the number of people living below the poverty line may double up to 125 million due to the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁹

In order to contain this economic crisis and avoid an existential threat to the economy, government of Pakistan has taken measures that include social protection relief, stimulus package to the industry, and tax relaxation. Just at the start of the lockdown, government announced a 900 billion rupee (\$5.66 billion) relief package.³⁰ The package included 200 billion rupees (\$1.25 billion) for the low-income groups, 280 billion rupees (\$1.76 billion) for wheat procurement, and 100 billion rupees (\$63 million) for small industries and agriculture sector. The relief to low income groups included a bracket of 10 million people in three categories.³¹ By end of March, government had also cut taxes on import of food items and food suppliers to government owned stores, additional customs duty on oils had also been exempted. Government

India,” Anadolu Agency, April 10, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/covid-19-lockdown-sparks-harvest-crises-in-pakistan-india/1799536>.

²⁸“COVID-19 Pandemic | UNDP in Pakistan,” UNDP, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/coronavirus.html>.

²⁹Nadir Guramani, “3 Million Jobs Likely to Be Lost Due to Pandemic, Finance Ministry Tells Senate,” Dawn, June 5, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1561492>; Mehtab Haider, “Economic Fallout of COVID-19 in Pakistan: People under Poverty Line May Double to 125 Million,” The News, March 27, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/635146-economic-fallout-of-covid-19-in-pakistan-people-under-poverty-line-may-double-to-125-million>.

³⁰AamirLatif, “COVID-19: Pakistan Unveils Economic Relief Package,” Anadolu Agency, March 24, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/covid-19-pakistan-unveils-economic-relief-package/1777961>.

³¹“Rs12,000 to Be given per Family via Ehsaas Emergency Cash Programme: Dr Sania,” Pakistan Today, March 24, 2020, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/03/24/ehsaas-emergency-cash-programme-benefit-10m-corona-affectees-dr-sania/>.

also elevated construction sector to status of “industry” and provided various incentives to the new industry in order to boost economic activity and employment.³²

In addition to these steps to contain the economic fallout by government, Pakistan also received foreign aid and loans to deal with emergency measures. \$1.386 billion zero-interest loan was received under IMF’s Rapid Financing Instrument. World Bank and Asian Development Bank also provided loans of \$500 million and \$800 million respectively for emergency financial assistance to Pakistan.³³

China also provided considerable aid to Pakistan. According to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) of Pakistan, China’s assistance accounted for around 80% of foreign anti-pandemic assistance received by Pakistan. Chinese Embassy and various non-profit organizations also made large donations to Pakistan, including protective equipment amounting to ¥4.56 million Chinese Yuans in value from Red Cross Society of China. While in late April, a group of Chinese doctors also arrived in Pakistan along with medical personal protective equipment (PPE) to train Pakistani medical professionals in dealing the Covid-19 pandemic.³⁴ Chinese Ambassador Yao Jing during a webinar in July told that China has provided \$15 million USD worth of aid to Pakistan in fight against Covid-19 pandemic.³⁵

³²“Pakistan: Tax Developments in Response to COVID-19,” KPMG, May 14, 2020, <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/pakistan-tax-developments-in-response-to-covid-19.html>.

³³Raphaël Cecchi, “Pakistan: External Support and Debt Relief to Face the Covid-19 Crisis,” Credendo, April 28, 2020, <https://www.credendo.com/country-risk-monthly/pakistan/pakistan-external-support-and-debt-relief-face-covid-19-crisis>.

³⁴“China’s Support to Pakistan on COVID-19 Reflects Deep-Rooted Friendship,” The News, April 21, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/647477-china-s-support-to-pakistan-on-covid-19-reflects-deep-rooted-friendship>; Aamir Latif, “Chinese Doctors to Join Pakistan’s COVID-19 Battle,” Anadolu Agency, April 24, 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/chinese-doctors-to-join-pakistans-covid-19-battle/1817676>.

³⁵ “China provided \$15mn aid to Pakistan to fight COVID-19: envoy,” *Geo News*, July 23, 2020, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/299447-pakistan-china-institute-hosts-webinar-on-cpec-post-coronavirus-relations>.

With these internal and external efforts, government of Pakistan attempted to contain the economic crisis, which came about amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Impacts on Societal Security

Societal security is concerned with protection of different identities and groups within a state and society without any conflict or tensions that may threaten the normal interaction between and among those identities. Societal insecurity is felt when a particular identity group feels a development or event to be threatening to its existence.³⁶In Pakistan, the societal security issues that were observed during the Covid-19 pandemic related mostly to a communal debate between Shia pilgrimages returning from Iran and Tablighi Jamat, a missionary organization of Sunni Deobandi sect. While a political-societal clash between federation and provincial government also ignited. However, neither could turn into an explosive or existential threat.

The communalization of the pandemic started when the earliest cases of Covid-19 were reported in Zaireen (pilgrims), belonging to Shia-Muslim sect, coming from Iran.³⁷ Until April a large number of Covid-19 cases in Pakistan remained to be those having a recent travel history to Iran.³⁸ The communal debate intensified when 40 cases of Covid-19 were also detected among the members of Tableeghi Jamaat who had attended annual gathering of around 2,50,000 people connected to Tableeghi Jamat before the lockdown.³⁹ In coming days a communal debate intensified on social media each group accusing the other for spreading Corona virus. This argument, however, soon vanished into thin air without culminating into violence.

The Covid-19 outbreak also exposed inter-provincial fault lines on the issue of distribution of resources. Since the start of pandemic, there have also been tensions between

³⁶Buzan, Waeber, and de Wilde, *Security*, 119.

³⁷“Pakistan Confirms First Two Cases of Corona virus,” France 24, February 26, 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200226-pakistan-confirms-first-two-cases-of-coronavirus>.

³⁸Saima Shabbir, “46% Pakistanis with Corona virus Have Travel History to Iran — WHO,” Arab News PK, April 4, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1653006/pakistan>.

³⁹Suddaf Chaudry, “Corona virus: Pakistan Quarantines Tablighi Jamaat Missionaries,” Middle East Eye, April 4, 2020, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-pakistan-tablighi-jamaat-missionaries-quarantined>.

federal government and provincial governments, particularly Sindh government, ruled by Pakistan Peoples' Party.

According to 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, provinces were made autonomous and various federal ministries, including ministry of health, came under provincial jurisdiction. After initial cases were reported from Sindh, the Sindh government immediately announced strict measures to contain the outbreak of Covid-19. However the federal government hesitated to put the country on lockdown in order to prevent socio-economic downfall. In order to improve coordination between all provinces, a National Command and Control Center (NCOC) was also established with representation from all provinces and different stakeholders.⁴⁰The debate of either having strict lockdown or more lenient “smart” lockdown continued between Sindh and federal governments, with Sindh favoring the former and federal favoring latter option.⁴¹

In the meanwhile, another debate on 18th Amendment started when Federal Information Minister declared the Amendment a hurdle in fighting Covid-19.⁴²The issue of 18th Amendment has been a subject of debate between ruling and opposition parties. Sindh government's Pakistan Peoples' Party introduced the Amendment in 2010 and is strictly against any change to it. This further increased the tensions between federal and provincial government. And the first session of National Assembly which was convened after the Covid-19 pandemic was occupied more with debate on 18th Amendment rather than on the Covid-19 crisis.⁴³ However the debate

⁴⁰“Command & Control Center Set up for Inter-Provincial Coordination on COVID-19: FM,” The Nation, March 28, 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/28-Mar-2020/command-control-center-set-up-for-inter-provincial-coordination-on-covid-19-fm>.

⁴¹Syed IrfanRaza, “Centre Assails Sindh Govt over ‘stricter’ Lockdown Measures,” Dawn, April 16, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1549621>; Tahir Siddiqui, “Sindh Entering Second Phase of Lockdown with ‘Some Extra Restrictions’, Says Murad,” Dawn, May 9, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1555630>.

⁴²Kalbe Ali, “Info Minister Terms 18th Amendment Hurdle in Fight against Covid-19,” Dawn, May 2, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1553906>.

⁴³RizwanShehzad, “18th Amendment Overshadows Covid-19 in NA Session,” The Express Tribune, May 12, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2219542/1-18th-amendment-overshadows-covid-19-na-session/>.

subsided when Supreme Court of Pakistan criticized both provincial and federal government and ordered to lift the lockdown restrictions, which left health implications regarding the ongoing Covid-19 situation uncertain for the governments.⁴⁴

Covid-19 and Extremism and Terrorism

Extremism and terrorism lie within the purview of internal security, effecting the traditional military-political sector as well as societal sector in comprehensive security of a country. Terrorist and extremist groups always attempt to find opportunities in crises. The Covid-19 crisis was not an exception to the trend. Even though UN Secretary General Antonio Gueterres appealed for a universal ceasefire during the ongoing pandemic, terrorist groups in the region intensified their activities despite the Covid-19 pandemic. A weekly newsletter of ISIS in March declared the Covid-19 pandemic as God's torment that befell mostly upon non-believers. They advised the fighters to use the current opportunity to wage war against the enemies in order to free their prisoners.⁴⁵

Among the active groups of terrorists amid the pandemic, the most prominent was ISIS-K (Khorasan), the Afghanistan wing of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, which attacked maternity ward in a Kabul hospital and a funeral in Nangarhar province recently.⁴⁶ Similarly, number of terrorist attacks in Pakistan's border region adjoining Afghanistan also increased.

In Pakistan province of Balochistan remained a center of focus for Baloch separatist extremist and terrorist groups. During the months of March and April, most of their activities centered on social media activism and propaganda. Some separatist groups declared Covid-19 as

⁴⁴AsifShehzad, "Coronavirus 'not a Pandemic in Pakistan' Says Top Court, Ordering Curbs Lifted," *Reuters*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-pakistan-lockdown-idUSKBN22U2NV>.

⁴⁵AymennJawad Al-Tamimi, "Islamic State Editorial on the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi* (blog), March 19, 2020, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2020/03/islamic-state-editorial-on-the-coronavirus>.

⁴⁶"'Islamic State' Responsible for Deadly Afghanistan Bombings, Says US," *Deutsche Welle*, May 15, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/islamic-state-responsible-for-deadly-afghanistan-bombings-says-us/a-53444892>.

a hoax and even attempted to run trend #Covid19PakBioWeaponAgainstBaloch, but the trend failed to generate any impressions and died away.

However, in the month of May the incidents of violent terrorist attacks saw an increase in Balochistan. On May 8, six personnel including an officer of Pakistan Army were martyred in an IED blast in Kech district of Balochistan. In two more separate attacks on May 19, seven soldiers were martyred.⁴⁷ Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for all the attacks. Even though violent attacks from Baloch separatist groups are carried out whenever they find any space. The mix of social media propaganda along with resurgence of violent activity showed that the terrorists in Balochistan might exploit the Covid-19 situation to achieve their goals. Such activities may result in a greater threat to political-military security coming from insurgent groups.

Impacts on Environmental Security

In the wake of ongoing global pandemic, environment has been the only component which has become more secure rather than facing any threats. According to satellite imaging, nitrogen dioxide levels significantly dropped across the globe, owing to closure of large scale industries as well as transport and other fossil fuel emissions.⁴⁸

In Pakistan too, there was significant reduction in pollution with decreased nitrogen dioxide concentration and decreased number on PM2.5 index, which measures concentration of particles having less than two and a half micrometer size in the air. According to a study, huge changes were observed in levels of nitrogen dioxide across major cities of Pakistan due to

⁴⁷Ali Hussain and Fazal Sher, "6 Soldiers, Driver Martyred in Balochistan," Business Recorder, May 20, 2020, <https://www.brecorder.com/2020/05/20/598933/six-soldiers-driver-martyred-in-balochistan/>.

⁴⁸"COVID-19: Nitrogen Dioxide over China," European Space Agency, March 19, 2020, https://www.esa.int/Applications/Observing_the_Earth/Copernicus/Sentinel-5P/COVID-19_nitrogen_dioxide_over_China; "Coronavirus Lockdown Leading to Drop in Pollution across Europe," European Space Agency, March 27, 2020, https://www.esa.int/Applications/Observing_the_Earth/Copernicus/Sentinel-5P/Coronavirus_lockdown_leading_to_drop_in_pollution_across_Europe.

decrease in economic activity and urban traffic.⁴⁹ An Environment Protection Agency (EPA) official in an interview also reported decrease in PM2.5 index from 90 to 11 microns.⁵⁰ These indicators showed an overall improvement in environmental security of Pakistan.

In addition to this natural improvement of the environment, government of Pakistan also sought to turn this crisis into an opportunity to restore the country's eco-system. The incumbent government introduced a "green stimulus" amid the economic crisis during lockdown in order to provide employment while improving the environment. Government hired 63,600 unemployed farmers and laborers to plant trees in designated areas. In the second phase of "Green Stimulus" the government envisaged creating 600,000 jobs in the sector. This initiative was also intended to compliment the government's 10 Billion Tree Tsunami project, which seeks to secure the environment by increasing forest cover of Pakistan.⁵¹ According to WWF forests cover only 6% of total area in Pakistan, making it a "forest poor" country. From 1998 to 2018, Pakistan has also faced estimated 150 extreme weather events.

However environmental experts have suggested going beyond these measures to ensure more environmentally sustainable development amid the Covid-19 pandemic. One study noted that tree plantation is only sustainable if "human-planted forests are maintained for decades before their benefits as carbon sequesters and wildlife sanctuaries are realized. More often than not, they are cut down before then to clear land for farming".⁵²

⁴⁹Sunil Dahiya and Dawar Butt, "Air Quality before and after National Lockdown during Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak across Pakistan," *Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air* (blog), April 24, 2020, <https://energyandcleanair.org/air-quality-before-and-after-national-lockdown-during-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-outbreak-across-pakistan/>.

⁵⁰"Virus Curfew Leads to Clearer Skies in Pakistan," Arab News, April 13, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1658161/pakistan>.

⁵¹Rina Saeed Khan, "COVID-19: Pakistan's 'green Stimulus' Scheme Is a Win-Win for the Environment and the Unemployed," World Economic Forum, April 30, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/green-stimulus-pakistan-trees-coronavirus-covid10-environment-climate-change/>.

⁵²Sara Hayat, "Pakistan Needs to Go beyond Tree Planting to Thrive after Covid-19," Dawn, June 3, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1561024>.

Covid-19 and Conventional Security of Pakistan

Pakistan's conventional security has always been threatened by its eastern neighbor, India. During the pandemic Indian strategic posturing became even more aggressive, with dramatic increase in the number of ceasefire violations, Israeli-style military suppression of Kashmiri's struggle for self-determination, supplanted by dramatic increase in Indian defense expenditures. Tensions increased when Indian Army Chief MM Naravane was quoted by a news source alleging that Pakistan was sending terrorists to India during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵³ While Foreign Office of Pakistan rejected the Indian allegation and said that baseless allegations from India are aimed at diverting the attention from increasing human rights violation across India, particularly in Indian occupied Kashmir.⁵⁴

Increasing ceasefire violations by India were also highlighted by Director General of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Pakistan Army's public relations department, in a press conference on April 24. It was told that India had committed 848 ceasefire violations in 2020, among which 392 were carried from January to February 26, while 456 violations were carried after detection of first Covid-19 case in Pakistan on February 26.⁵⁵ By the end of year, the number had risen up to 3012 ceasefire violations with 2620 violations happening during the Covid-19 crisis which started on February 26.⁵⁶ New Delhi was seen to be flexing its muscles simultaneously against three of its neighbors (Nepal, Pakistan and China) to divert attention from a massive economic fallout due to Covid-19. Unemployment rate in India increased from 8% to

⁵³“‘India Exporting Medicines While Pak...’: Army Chief’s Stinging Takedown of Islamabad,” Hindustan Times, April 17, 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/we-are-fighting-covid-19-pakistan-is-only-exporting-terror-says-army-chief/story-YVINlgRrzy0zM40adQwZeN.html>.

⁵⁴Naveed Siddiqui, “FO Blasts Indian Army Chief for ‘irresponsible, False’ Allegations against Pakistan,” Dawn, April 17, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1549989>.

⁵⁵“Saffronisation of Indian Army amid Corona virus Crisis Sad Spectre, Says ISPR,” The Express Tribune, April 24, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2205967/1-attempt-india-link-coronavirus-pakistan-muslims-failed-dg-ispr/>.

⁵⁶Naveed Siddiqui, “FO summons Indian envoy to lodge protest over LoC ceasefire violations,” Dawn, December 23, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1597398/fo-summons-indian-envoy-to-lodge-protest-over-loc-ceasefire-violations>.

staggering 26%, leaving 140 million workers unemployed. Goldman Sachs estimated India's economy to contract by 5% in 2020.⁵⁷

Despite this severe impact on economy India increased its military expenditure, owing to its increasing ambitions in Indian Ocean region as well as an increasingly aggressive policy towards Pakistan and China. India's military expenditure grew by 6.8 percent to \$71.1 billion making it third largest military spender in the world after US and China, according to a report from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).⁵⁸

Even in the economic slump due to ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, India might not like to cut down its military expenditure. Therefore in its bid to continue the expansion of military expenditure, India may adopt an even more aggressive posture by securitizing a threat from Pakistan and then using it to justify its ballooning defense spending. Such efforts may even include a false flag operation, as indicated by Prime Minister of Pakistan recently.⁵⁹ Thus in this backdrop, Pakistan has been more vigilant recently against a greater traditional military threat coming from India's aggressive ambitions.

Conclusion

Covid-19 pandemic has impacted economic, societal, human and environmental spheres and has brought about huge change in how we view security. It has given a renewed priority to non-traditional security threats, especially in public health sector. Global scale of death and destruction caused by this pandemic may also cause a shift in global security agenda and how security policy and strategy is planned.

Pakistan will also have to rapidly revamp its security strategy by incorporating both traditional and non-traditional aspects in its national security policy after the Covid-19 pandemic

⁵⁷“India's Economy Has Suffered Even More than Most,” *The Economist*, May 23, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2020/05/23/indias-economy-has-suffered-even-more-than-most>.

⁵⁸ShauryaKaranbirGurung, “India Third Largest Military Spender in World, after US and China,” *The Economic Times*, April 27, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/global-military-spending-saw-largest-increase-in-decade-in-2019-china-india-in-top-3-study/articleshow/75404166.cms>.

⁵⁹Syed IrfanRaza, “India May Conduct False Flag Operation, Says Imran,” *Dawn*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1557912>.

due to the threats it poses to both traditional and non-traditional security areas. In order to achieve this, Pakistan needs to incorporate disease control and counter-epidemic exercises in military strategy, as well as improve civil-military cooperation for disease control.

In this regard, Pakistan can also learn from China's military-civilian cooperative emergency response to disease prevention and control, which incorporates various laws mandating military-civilian cooperation, information sharing and joint operations to prevent and control infectious diseases.⁶⁰ Chinese cooperation framework also mandates China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) to initiate the emergency research mechanism in case of any health emergency or infection outbreak.

In view of Indian strategic posturing during the pandemic, it is unlikely that Pakistan may witness any paradigm shift in its security agenda. National security calculation will continue to be dominated by traditional threat of Indian hegemonic design, perceived or real. Given a weak economy, Islamabad can ill-afford a "tit-for-tat" response to New Delhi's growing defense expenditure. Rather, cooperation on dealing with non-traditional security threats such as Covid-19 will offer a rare window of opportunity to partner in a noble mission to protect billions of South Asians against the modern plague.

⁶⁰Hui Ma et al., "Military-Civilian Cooperative Emergency Response to Infectious Disease Prevention and Control in China," *Military Medical Research* 3, no. 1 (December 30, 2016): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40779-016-0109-y>.