

# **Climate Change Perspective on National Security; The Case of Flood Disasters in Pakistan**

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## Abstract

Climate-induced disasters as a non-traditional security threat have significantly impacted the national security of the country. Such disasters not only worsen the socioeconomic conditions of the affected people but also provide an opportunity for the insurgent groups to create their influence in the affected region. This research study aims to explore the intricate relationship between climate-induced disasters such as floods and national security and explore how these disasters enhance the vulnerability of the affected people. This vulnerability helps insurgent organizations enhance their activities by providing relief assistance to the people and also weakens the government's legitimacy. Moreover, this study concludes by highlighting some of the major policy recommendations that help Pakistan deal with the complex challenges related to climate-induced disasters and the country's national security.

**Keywords:** *Climate-induced disasters, National Security, Insurgency, Vulnerability, Policy recommendations.*

## Introduction

In the last few decades, the security dynamics of Pakistan have shifted from traditional to non-traditional security threats (Awan, 2023, p. 15). These non-traditional threats incorporate a range of issues transcending conventional military conflicts and encompass threats like climate change, environmental degradation, and transnational crimes (Babar, 2023). The intersection between these threats is significant for understanding the changing security dynamics of the Country. Environmental Degradation has increased subsequently due to various factors ranging from widespread human activities to natural processes and is fueling the decline of natural biodiversity and ecosystems worldwide (Adla, Kulijer, Dedic, and Snjegota, 2022). Climate change is one of the determining factors in environmental degradation. Climate change has led to droughts, famines, floods, food insecurity, etc., and is harming a diverse population. With the increase in temperature and heatwaves, and with changing patterns of precipitation, the ecosystem has been altered at a greater pace threatening the life of many species and their ability to adapt (Environment, 2023; Britannica, 2010). The melting of glaciers is contributing to a rise in sea level waters which is a threat to coastal communities and the lives of people living in ablation zones. Thus, Climate change has a direct impact on the socio-economic lives of individuals (Malik, Ashraf, & Murtaza, 2023).

In recent years, Pakistan's national security has also been greatly influenced by climate change. Pakistan due to its complex geographical position, extreme weather patterns such as heatwaves,

temperature fluctuations, and frequent rainfalls is particularly more vulnerable to climate-induced disasters. (Akhtar, 2023). Climate change is a multi-dimensional threat and poses a significant concern to Pakistan's national security (Khan, 2015).

Extreme conditions such as drought, destruction of infrastructure, floods, heatwaves, excess rainfalls, and displacement generated by Climate Change have made Pakistan vulnerable to multiple threats. The frequency and intensity of these disasters further complicate the situation. The disruption caused by these natural disasters also provides breeding grounds for insurgent groups to exploit the vulnerabilities of victims. (United Nations Security Council, 2021). Oftentimes, in places where government responses are delayed and slow, a power vacuum is generated which is manipulated and exploited by insurgent groups. Insurgent groups step in to fill this void, catering assistance and services to the affected communities. This fosters their efforts to garner support from local people and bolster their recruitment endeavors, as marginalized and socially alienated groups are more susceptible to their influence. Evidence suggests that climate-induced disasters can lead to resource scarcity, displacement, and heightened tensions within and between communities. In the regions where governance is weak and resource management is poor, the outbreak and persistence of conflict is particularly recurring. Since the independence of Pakistan, societal inequalities have been discernible and have made Pakistan more exposed to national and transnational insurrections. The insurgent activities such as the activities of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan have been retaliated by Pakistan's military several times (Mir, 2022). However, during times of crisis such as floods when states and military's focus is shifted to rescue operations and relief missions the insurgent groups employ dissenting activities to achieve their objectives. Due to such diverse implications, feasible recommendations and policy measures are needed to mitigate the risk of conflict arising from environmental issues.

## Literature Review

Climate change, along with other factors, has become a significant threat to the national security of any country including Pakistan. It is stated that climate change acts as a threat multiplier because the effects like natural disasters, resource scarcity, and rising sea levels become a source of economic instability, poverty, unrest, and increased violence which eventually causes armed conflict. Moreover, the water scarcity caused by extreme weather patterns is likely to be a potential threat to future wars and armed conflicts among states, particularly between India and Pakistan (Malik, 2020).

The Center for Research and Security Studies (2024) report underscores that climate change can lead to not only food insecurity and water scarcity but also the proliferation of non-state violent actors. These groups take advantage of the people's vulnerabilities during catastrophic situations and provide them with the necessities which aid them in building their hegemony as done by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and Lashkar-e-Taiba during the floods of 2010. This eventually threatens the state's security and allows the violent actors to strengthen their control and authority over the state and its inhabitants. It is also observed that one of the most intricate factors, causing the mobilization of militant groups due to climate change in Pakistan is the eco-terrorism and wars caused by resource scarcity which allows the extremist organizations to take advantage of the environmental weaknesses of the country and work on their ideological, political and economic objectives. This trend has been notably observed in the regions of KPK and Baluchistan where the population affected by the natural disasters are targeted by the militant groups as they provide them with the basic resources, and in turn, legitimize their power in the respective regions. Correspondingly, it has also been stated that those regions where agricultural dependency is greater, are at higher risk of experiencing conflicts accompanied by inadequate economic growth and political exclusion (T Saad, Mahsud, and Mian, 2024)

The majority of the studies carried out on the intersection between climate change and national security reveal that effects of climate change like resource depletion, flooding, rising sea levels, heatwaves, and droughts can have drastic consequences like economic losses, terrorist activities, violent disputes, and much more. A case study conducted on "Climate Change Induced Conflicts in Pakistan: From National to Individual Level" stated that Karachi being the most populated city has not only been impacted by ethnic, religious, political, and sectarian distress but has also been significantly influenced by climate change, making the city highly vulnerable to violent conflicts. These conflicts include target killings, terrorist activities, civil disorder, and political disturbances. (Ali, Khan, Alamgir, & Khan, 2018, p. 595). Similarly, in another article, it has been emphasized that dynamics have been shifted towards energy and environment in terms of conflict rather than minerals and political power in contemporary times and Pakistan due to its geopolitical location has been drastically influenced by climate change. (Zeeshan and Khan, 2019)

Lastly, climate change has been reportedly a source of Islamist extremism particularly in countries like Pakistan. This has been observed after major natural disasters like the earthquake of 2005 in Pakistan when militant organizations provided necessities to the affected people and

utilized the circumstances as an opportunity to further undermine the government, which was already facing the impacts of climate change. (Vaughn, Carter, Sheikh, & Johnson, 2010, p. 15).

## Research Gap

Pakistan's policy lacks the interconnectedness of climate change and insurgencies. They do not address how climate change can worsen existing insurgencies and provide space for exploitation to the rebellious groups. Moreover, the policies of Pakistan fail to take into account the prospect that insurgent groups could capitalize on the impaired state efficacy to strengthen their positions. The strategies of Pakistan regarding counterinsurgency and disaster management are often developed and implemented independently. This approach is a fundamental concern in the country's effort to combat the insurgencies fueled by climate-induced disasters. This approach of Pakistan fails to address the influence of the two aspects on each other. Pakistan also lacks empirical data on how insurgent groups exploit such situations. There is no information on the activities of these groups in recruiting new members, destabilizing state assistance and relief initiatives, and strengthening their support by rendering aid. The current research and policy implementation by Pakistan is mostly focused on swift response to disasters, overlooking sustained and far-reaching activities of insurgent groups in impacted regions.

There is a significant **gap in the existing literature on counterinsurgency during crisis management in Pakistan and its ethical implications.** The measures taken by the state to counter the terrorist groups, inadvertently violate human rights and impact the vulnerabilities of the victims of climate-induced disasters. At times, during the crisis, the state prioritizes security over human rights, undermining trust in the government. There are no policies to compensate for the damages of affected people from counter-insurgency operations. Oftentimes, the government restricts access to the affected territory completely, isolating the victims and hindering the delivery of essential aid to the affected locality.

## Research Question

How do climate induced disasters like floods influence the activities of the insurgent groups and threaten the National security of Pakistan?

## Objective of the Research

The research aims to **evaluate the impact** of Climate Change on the National Security of

Pakistan and will encompass how environmental disruptions that are the result of extreme climate change can deteriorate the stability of a country. The research paper critically investigates how natural calamities, specifically flood disasters contribute to the rise and proliferation of the activities of Insurgent groups and lead to instability. Furthermore, the study seeks to examine vulnerabilities created by Climate-induced disasters, which are exploited by insurgent groups to maximize their objectives. It aims to propound on integrated strategies that can strengthen Pakistan's resilience against multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the issue, the study presents pragmatic policy recommendations that can inform the decision-makers and stakeholders about the need for a coherent approach that addresses the intersection between Climate Change, National Security, and insurgency. The paper asserts that to ensure the stability and security of Pakistan, strategies for both climate adaptation and counter-insurgency efforts are required.

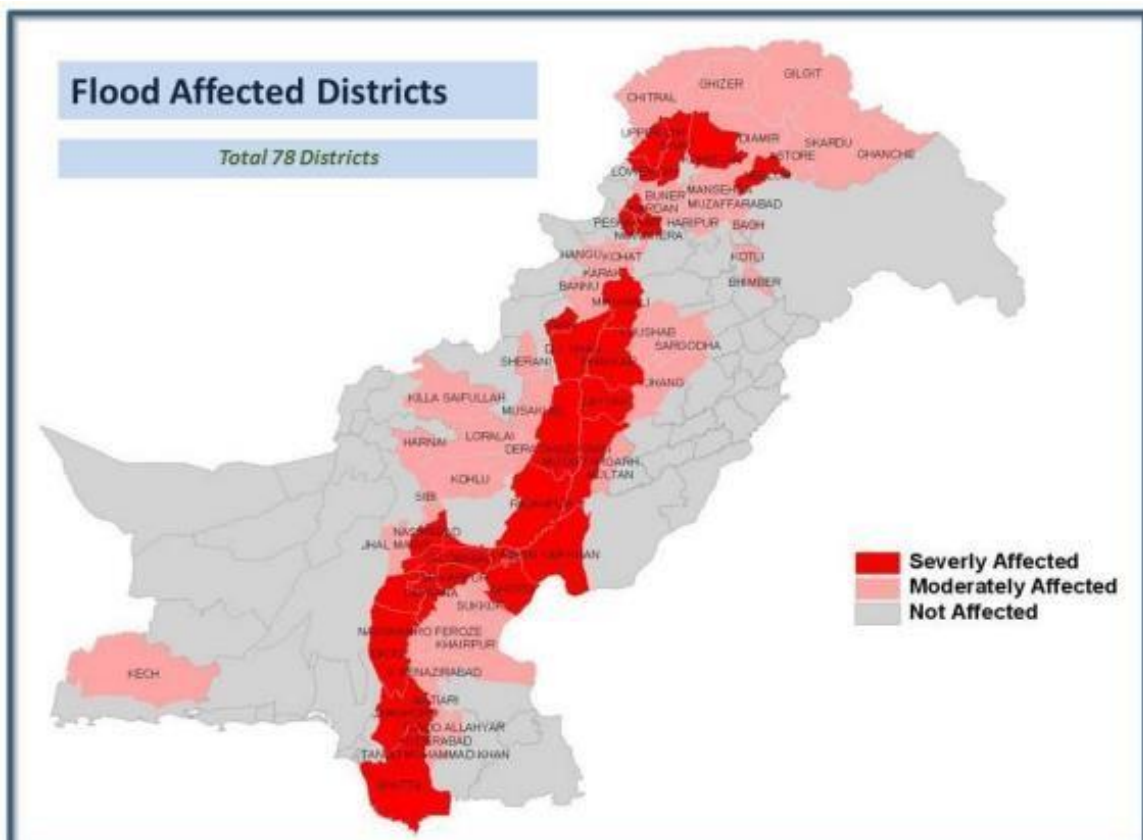
## Research Methodology

For this research, a qualitative design with a major focus on content analysis has been developed. Peer-reviewed articles, policy papers from reputable government organizations, and reports from well-sourced websites have been utilized as primary sources of information. All the sources of information are selected based on relevance to the research topic along with the key criteria of providing detailed knowledge and facts regarding the topic under discussion. The purpose of adopting content-analysis as the methodology is to explore the existing literature to identify the key themes, opinions, and arguments regarding the issue. While the limitation of using only secondary data sources has been lessened by adding multiple publications.

## Analysis

Pakistan has been a victim of climate-induced disasters for a considerable amount of time. Climate-induced disasters influence the socioeconomic landscape of the country and pose a threat to National security of Pakistan. Amidst them, the persistent ones are floods which have caused massive destruction to the country. From 1960 to 2010, 21 extreme floods were recorded, one flood per year on average, and the severity and frequency of these floods also increased over time (Ali et al., as cited by Waseem & Rana, 2023). The most devastating flood occurred in 2010, which spread throughout the country, and covered almost 15<sup>th</sup> of the land, and affected 18 million people. The death toll was around 1985 (Disasters Emergency Committee, n.d.), with an economic loss of \$9.7 billion (Waseem & Rana, 2023). This flooding has not only resulted in human loss and material destruction but has also caused increased militancy in the country.

Pakistan military launched Operation Black Thunder in April 2009 to curb the control for districts by TTP, one of the active insurgent groups in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. However, after the floods, the counterinsurgency efforts also washed away. Almost all the infrastructure was destroyed and the villages were flooded (Jan, 2010). Since independence, floods of 2010, resulted in the highest number of people being displaced. Federal Information Minister of that time Qamar Zaman Kaira announced that roughly 20 million people had been affected and 7.5 million people had been displaced by the floods of 2010 (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2010). Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) stated that 7,277 villages were impacted due to flood water, displacing almost 7 million people solely in Sindh. Moreover, Provincial authorities asserted that almost 1.2 million people were settled in government schools and relief camps. There were 3,606 relief camps across the country including 748 in KP, 327 in Punjab, 2473 in Sindh, 28 respectively in Baluchistan and Gilgit, Baltistan, and 2 in AJK (Ali, Sarwar, & Sajjad, 2010).



*Floods affected Districts*

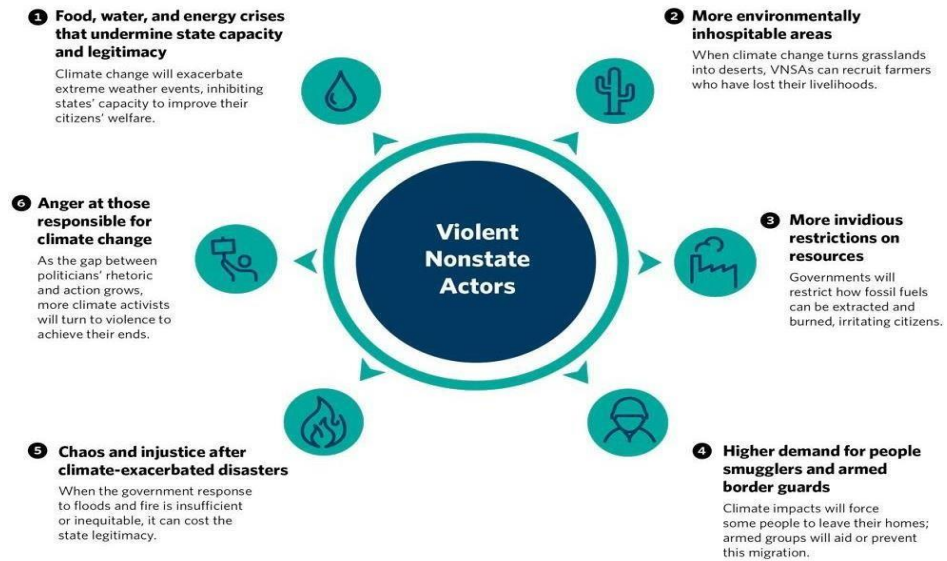
Floods destroyed around 436 health facilities that were the key source of health service primarily in rural areas. The medical workforce was also affected severely by floods. At least 35,000 Lady Health Workers (LHW) were displaced. (32). Moreover, floods disturbed

educational sector significantly and led to implications for future education in Pakistan. Almost 8151 Schools were damaged, and 5603 schools were used as relief camps. (Ali, Sarwar, & Sajjad, 2010).

	AJK	Balochistan	FATA	Gilgit/ Baltistan	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Punjab	Sindh	National
<b>TOTAL Secondary Schools Damaged/Destroyed</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>375</b>
<i>Completely Destroyed</i>	2	2	3	1	9	19	54	90
<i>Partially Damaged</i>	19	23	4	7	43	122	67	285
<b>TOTAL Middle Schools Damaged/Destroyed</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>565</b>
<i>Completely Destroyed</i>	16	1	2	6	20	34	43	122
<i>Partially Damaged</i>	31	36	12	19	61	230	54	443
<b>TOTAL Primary Schools Damaged/Destroyed</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>737</b>	<b>2,412</b>	<b>5,417</b>	<b>9,388</b>
<i>Completely Destroyed</i>	20	25	30	12	197	604	2,627	3,515
<i>Partially Damaged</i>	106	470	125	34	540	1,808	2,790	5,873
<b>GRAND TOTAL Schools Damaged/Destroyed</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>557</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>2,817</b>	<b>5,655</b>	<b>10,348</b>

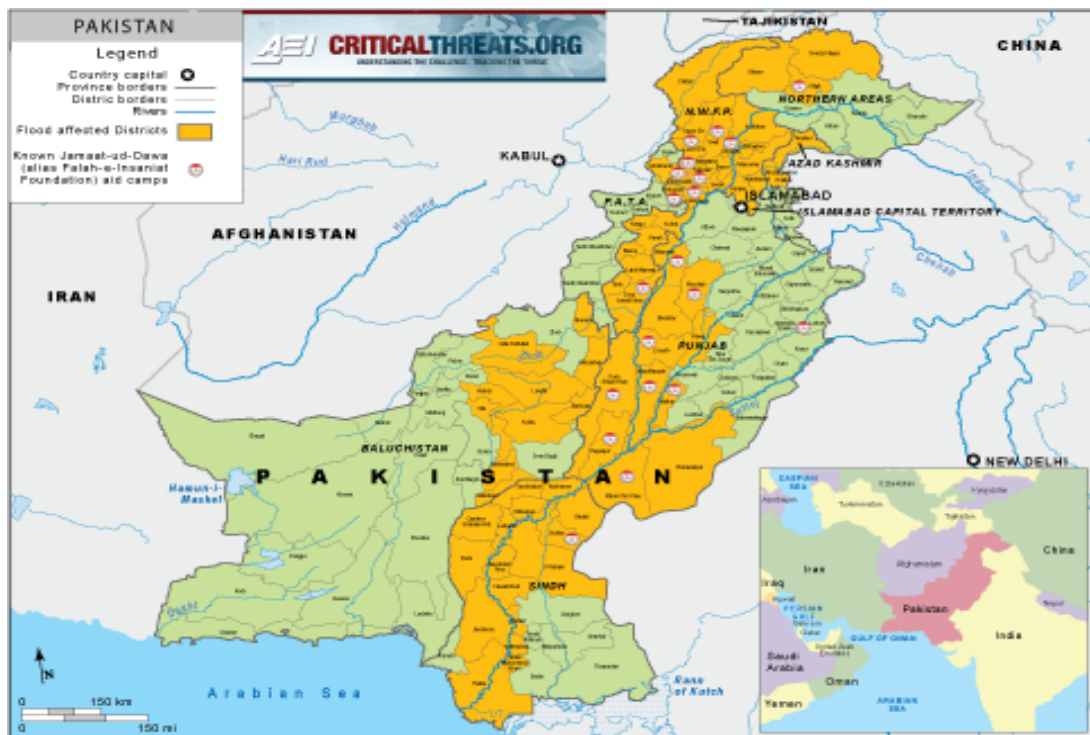
*Impact on educational sector; Joint Damage and Needs Assessment conducted by ADP*

Similarly, the transportation and communication infrastructure were affected by the flood. Around 400 miles of roads, 46 bridges and several railway lines were destroyed (Dixon & Schaffer, 2010). The state of Pakistan, however, responded swiftly and initiated rescue operations and relief programs but was unable to cope up with the massive destruction floods caused. These chaotic circumstances, weakened state legitimacy and capacity, resource competition, inadequate governmental responses, and various other factors paved the way for the insurgent groups to maximize their objectives, not only in Swat but also in the other affected regions of the country. Though, the military forces of the country have also made significant contributions by rescuing approximately 100,000 individuals (Fair, 2010). The inadequate response from the civilian government resulted in building mistrust among the people. The government's inadequacy in disaster management along with the food and water insecurity allowed the insurgents to step in and provide help to the affected communities (Center for Research and Security Studies, 2024). Violent non-state actors and groups began stepping forward, and assisted the vulnerable populations, which functioned as a barrier in protecting the national security of Pakistan.



*Climate-Related Factors That Drive Demand for Violent Non-State Actors (Gordan, 2022)*

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan offered \$20 million (Fair et al., 2017), while the other militant organizations like Jamaat-ud-Dawa operating under the support of Falah-e-Insaniyat were able to establish relief camps in various affected areas of the country (Jan & Patella, 2010). Moreover, it was revealed by the leaders of the organization, that 2,000 workers from their group Managed to provided aid to the affected individuals (Rodriguez, 2010).



*Aid Camps by Falah e Insaniyat (Jan & Patella, 2010)*

News reports around the globe were buried by headlines like “Pakistani flood disaster gives an opening to militants.” (Rodriguez, 2010). “Hardline groups step in to fill Pakistan aid vacuum.” (Hasan, 2010) “Race to provide aid emerges between West and extremists.” (Kazim, 2010), “Pakistan’s floods: a window of opportunity for insurgents?” (Righarts, 2010). The vacuum created by the lack of rigorous response from the government during the floods of 2010, paved the way for insurgent groups to rescue the affected communities. This led to increased reliance on these groups, while the government was dissented because of its inefficient policies. People were drawn more to such groups, which thereby facilitated these organizations to strengthen their power and hegemony. Although aids were provided by the international community but were not employed to safeguard the country from insurgent activities. The analysis significantly highlights the floods of 2010 because of the chaos it created for the national security of the country particularly in the form of increased exploitation by the insurgent groups and the availability of the data for the comprehensive study. However, a similar situation arose after the devastating monsoon floods of 2022. Insurgent groups by gathering people's support were able to achieve their objectives. Moreover, the insurgent groups also benefited from the earthquake of 2005 by providing aid to the earthquake survivors. The prominent groups were Jamiat-Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), The Al Rasheed Trust, and Jamaat-ud-Dawa. These groups succeeded in conducting rescue operations, providing medical assistance, building shelters, etc. to the people affected by the earthquake in Azad Kashmir. 37 out of 73 relief camps operating in affected areas of Kashmir at that time were operated by these militant organizations (Qureshi, 2006) suggesting that climate-induced disasters generate significant challenges for the national security of the country, by providing space to insurgent groups to carry out their activities, and by eroding public faith in the government.

## Policy Recommendations

- As insurgencies are escalated by vulnerability provoked by climate-induced disasters, therefore, a comprehensive approach is needed that advocates the interplay between both factors simultaneously.
- The government should facilitate industrialization by providing cheap labor, electricity taxes etc., and other private employment opportunities to the affected populations to reduce their economic desperation.
- There should be proper measures for resource allocation for the communities in climate-sensitive regions and for the climate refugees.
- There should be appropriate awareness to manage climate-induced disasters in the regions vulnerable to climate change. Furthermore, as displaced populations are more susceptible to being trapped by insurgent groups, therefore, the government should organize

awareness programs at refugee camps immediately after rescuing people.

- With the advancement in technology, it would be feasible for the government to use artificial intelligence to monitor insurgent activities, especially to detect unusual activities that indicate insurgent activities in the refugee camps.

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