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**Narrative Resilience and Strategic Recalibration: An Analysis of TTP Propaganda
Following the Afghan Taliban's Ascendancy**

Majid Khan Afridi¹, Dr Ahmed Farhan Saeed², Dr. Abida Bano³.

1. Ph.D. Scholar, Area Study Centre (Russia, China and Central Asia) University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan. majidafridi2003@gmail.com (Corresponding author)
2. Assistant Professor, Area Study Centre (Russia, China and Central Asia), University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan. drfarhan@uop.edu.pk
3. Dr. Abida bano, Lecturer, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Peshawar, Peshawar, Pakistan. abidabano@uop.edu.pk

Abstract

This article has attempted to present a rigorous analysis of the strategic adaptation within the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) propaganda apparatus. The analysis has particularly focused on development(s) following August 2021 Afghan Taliban's takeover of Kabul. The event would in-fact mark a pivotal 'inflection point' in South Asian security dynamics. This research paper has employed a qualitative content analysis. The analysis covers approximately 1,500 propaganda artifacts produced between 2014 and 2023. It is further supplemented by 12 semi-structured expert interviews. The study has contended that TTP demonstrates a sophisticated form of 'narrative resilience'. This is particularly operationalized through the systematic application of Erving Goffman's concept of "keying". The process has helped enable a fundamental recalibration of the group's strategic communication. It would transform a geopolitical event into a core ideological asset. The study has delineated three core mechanisms of this adaptation. First, it identifies a strategic pivot from a narrative of localized resistance to one of regional vanguardism. This has been observed to have been achieved through temporal keying. Second, the study has highlighted the discursive reframing of operational setback(s) into narratives of divine validation and spiritual

testing. Third, it has emphasized the tailored amplification of this new narrative through a resilient, multi-platform digital ecosystem designed for persistence and reach. TTP's successful adaptation, therefore, have underscored the function of propaganda not as a peripheral activity, but as a central, non-kinetic component of contemporary asymmetric warfare. This proficiency has in-fact engendered a dangerous strategic asymmetry. This illuminates a critical and persistent vulnerability in state-centric counterinsurgency models that dogmatically privilege kinetic operations over sustained ideological engagement. The findings, therefore, necessitate a fundamental doctrinal shift towards anticipatory counter-narrative strategies. In the context, specifically, “anticipatory counter-keying” can proactively contest and dismantle the discursive terrain upon which modern insurgencies thrive and regenerate.

Keywords: Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Propaganda, Framing Theory, Keying, Narrative Resilience, Counterinsurgency, Afghan Taliban, Strategic Communication, Asymmetric Warfare

Introduction

The persistent and adaptive challenge in particular posed by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) represents a complex and enduring feature of Pakistan’s internal security landscape. The group (TTP) since its formal consolidation in 2007 has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for organizational adaptation and strategic persistence. In the context it would weather multiple large-scale military offensives and leadership decapitations (Abbas, 2008; Rahman et al., 2025). A critical and recurring deficiency in Pakistan’s counterinsurgency (COIN) response that has been observed has been a pronounced strategic asymmetry. This doctrine is in-fact characterized by a heavy reliance on large-scale kinetic military operations. Operations including ‘*Zarb-e-Azb*’ (2014) and ‘*Radd-ul-Fasad*’ (2017) in the context stands in contrast to a chronic and systematic under-investment in contesting the ideological and narrative dimensions of the conflict (Abbas, 2015; Khalid & Roy, 2016; Wahab, 2023). This lopsided approach has therefore focused on the physical battleground that cedes the cognitive one. It has cultivated a persistent vulnerability in the state's security posture. The TTP has been observed to adeptly and consistently exploit this vulnerability. The group through the development of an increasingly sophisticated digital propaganda infrastructure has managed to preserve operational cohesion. It has been able to

maintain ideological appeal even after experiencing significant territorial displacements and leadership losses (Irshad & Qasim, 2025; Sayed & Hamming, 2023). At the same time, it has sustained recruitment pipelines despite these setbacks. The U.S. withdrawal and rapid seizure of power by the Afghan Taliban (2021) in Afghanistan constitute a geopolitical watershed moment. This event would also reconfigure the strategic calculus and security architecture of the entire region (Bukhari et al., 2024; Jadoon & Fair, 2022; Schroden, 2025). For jihadist movements globally, and for the TTP in particular, this transition represented far more than a political realignment; it was a seminal psychological and narrative event. It served to validate long-held ideologies of divine favour and the inevitability of jihadist victory, while also presenting a radically altered operational environment with a sympathetic regime in Kabul. While the existing body of scholarship has provided competent documentation of the TTP's military trajectory and organizational evolution (Jadoon, 2021), and other studies have mapped the broad contours of jihadist propaganda strategies (Kluver et al., 2020), a salient empirical gap persists. There is also lack of fine-grained, systematic analysis that details the micro-level adaptations and internal recalibrations of an insurgent group's propaganda machinery in direct response to discrete, transformative geopolitical turning points.

This study is therefore design to address this specific lacuna. The study in this context conducts a meticulous examination of the TTP's strategic narrative recalibration in the immediate aftermath of the inflection point [August 2021]. This paper advances the central contention that the TTP leveraged this event not for simple triumphalism, but as a strategic catalyst to engineer a profound reframing of its entire insurgency. The group exhibited a sophisticated form of what Conway (2017) conceptualizes as "narrative resilience". This is a dynamic capacity that allowed it to strategically enhance its perceived legitimacy and reinforce organizational solidarity. The group would achieve this by discursively re-positioning its previously parochial struggle within a grander meta-narrative of an inevitable, divinely ordained regional triumph. The group would thus move from a defensive to an offensive narrative posture. This study has therefore, attempted to dissect the mechanisms of this recalibration. The paper argues that TTP's propaganda adaptation is not a secondary or supportive function. In the context, it is rather a core component of its strategic arsenal. It is particularly a component that has been largely marginalized and inadequately

countered by the state's overwhelmingly kinetic-focused security apparatus. The article will therefore proceed by outlining the integrated theoretical framework. It also details the robust methodology employed for the subject examination. The study presents its empirical findings on the architecture of the TTP's propaganda shift. The paper also discusses the implications for asymmetric warfare theory and COIN doctrine. It concludes with recommendations for a more effective, narrative-centric security policy.

Theoretical Framework: Keying and Narrative Resilience

In order to deconstruct the TTP's strategic communicative maneuvers, the analysis is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework. The framework has attempted to synthesize the nuanced concept of “keying” (Goffman, 1974) with model of “narrative resilience” (Conway, 2017). This in-fact helps provide a robust and multifaceted len(s) to interrogate both the specific mechanisms and the overarching outcomes of the TTP's propaganda evolution. This synthesis therefore allows the study to move beyond descriptive framing analysis to explain how resilience is actively produced through discursive labour.

Keying: The Mechanism of Discursive Transformation

The analytical foundation of this research is rooted in framing theory. In the context, framing is broadly defined as “the strategic process of selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text” (D’Angelo, 2017). This process is carried out in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993, p. 52). The ‘framing’ helps provide an essential starting point for understanding how meaning is constructed. However, Goffman’s (1974) concept of “keying” has offered a more dynamic, precise, and powerful analytical instrument in order to grasp the plasticity and agility of insurgent propaganda. ‘Keying’ in particular refers to the systematic transmutation of interpretive frames to deliberately alter the fundamental meaning of a social activity, event, or situation. It is an active, performative process of redefinition and recontextualization. It is where a given activity is transformed into something patterned on it but seen by the participants as something entirely else. In the context of militant communication,

‘keying’ functions as the primary discursive mechanism that allows a propagandist to, in the words of Basit (2024), “fabricate facts in order to induce a false sense of belief in the audience (p. 114)”.

‘Keying’ for TTP has become the essential tool. The tool now helps it re-signifies a routine military engagement against a state into a sacred act of religious duty, or a state-led drone strike with civilian casualties into definitive evidence of collective ethnic persecution against the Pashtun people. It is the process through which ambiguity is resolved in favour of the insurgent narrative. The post-2021 environment necessitated a particularly sophisticated form of temporal keying. Through this mechanism, the group has re-contextualized its ongoing localized campaign within a new, triumphant historical trajectory. It effectively grafted its own struggle onto the Afghan Taliban’s successful narrative arc and projected its own future victory as an historical inevitability.

Narrative Resilience: The Strategic Outcome and Process

The concept of narrative resilience constitutes an essential complementary dimension within this analytical framework. Conway (2017) has developed this concept in order to capture a militant group’s sustained capacity under pressure. In this context, it refers to the ability to maintain ideological coherence, internal morale, and supporter commitment. This resilience is observed to persist even in the face of military defeats, leadership losses, and concerted counter narrative campaigns. The resilience for TTP is not a passive or inherent quality. In the context it is rather an active, ongoing achievement, engineered through the agile and strategic application of keying. TTP in several cases when confronted with operational reversals or state-led narratives that highlight its brutality or foreign backing, its media apparatus (Umar Media) would consistently and rapidly re-keys these events.

For the TTP, tactical defeat(s) are discursively reframed as divine tests of faith. These tests are particularly intended to purify believer(s). Furthermore, collateral damage is re signified as martyrdom and advanced as incontrovertible evidence of state perfidy. This discursive agility functions as the core engine of the TTP's long-term narrative endurance. In the context, it allows TTP to weather kinetic storms and maintain its ideological appeal. A senior counterterrorism official interviewed for the author’s PhD Thesis has corroborated this dynamic. He interviewee

stated: “TTP has mastered the art of narrative recovery. They in-fact possess an almost preternatural ability to transform every tactical setback into a testament of their divine favor and the inevitability of their ultimate victory. It is a force multiplier that costs them very little” (M. Khan, personal communication, March 15, 2023). In this framework, therefore, keying is the mechanism, and narrative resilience is the “strategic outcome and enduring process”.

Methodology

This research paper has been fundamentally guided by a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design. Its principal methodology is ‘Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)’. This methodological approach has been selected for its demonstrated efficacy in facilitating a structured, context-sensitive interrogation of complex textual and visual data. This has helped enable the researcher to make replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24).

Corpus Construction and Temporal Delineation

The primary dataset for this study has consisted of a comprehensive corpus. It includes approximately 1,500 distinct TTP propaganda artifacts. These artifacts were produced between January 2014 and December 2023. The collection includes: professionally produced videos from the group’s official media wing, ‘Umar Media’. It also encompasses audio communiqués issued by senior leadership. In addition, the dataset contains official press releases and ideological statements. Finally, it incorporates a wide array of social media content disseminated through platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and the encrypted messaging service Telegram. These item(s) were particularly collected through systematic monitoring of known TTP-affiliated channels and keyword searches, with non-English materials translated and verified by bilingual researchers.

The selection of 2014 as a temporal baseline for this paper is methodologically deliberate and significant. This year would coincide with the launch of Pakistan’s major military Operation “*Zarb e Azb* (lit. 'Single Strike')”. The operation has precipitated TTP’s forcible displacement from its territorial strongholds in North Waziristan. This displacement, in turn, has helped catalyze a critical

strategic pivot. The pivot was wherein the group began to place a far greater emphasis on digital propaganda and asymmetric tactics as primary means of maintaining its influence and operational reach (Jadoon, 2021). The analytical process specifically isolated the impact of the ‘inflection point’ [August 2021] through a structured, multi-stage temporal comparative strategy. This would particularly involve segmenting the dataset into distinct chronological periods in order to have detailed comparative analysis. The pre-inflection point era [2014-August 2021], has been analyzed to establish a robust baseline of the TTP's dominant narrative themes and communicative tactics. The post-inflection point era [August 2021 to 2023], was then examined. This latter period has been further subdivided. In the context, it was to capture the nuanced evolution of the adaptation. The first subdivision is the immediate rhetorical response in the 30 days following the event. The second is the short term adaptive phase. It spans from September 2021 to February 2022. The third is the long term strategic shift observable from March 2022 onward. This includes the unification of various factions under the TTP banner.

Coding and Triangulation

The coding procedure was rigorously operationalized through a detailed protocol derived directly from the integrated theoretical framework. This protocol concentrated on identifying specific keying mechanisms. The analysis was conducted across Entman's (1993) four principal dimensions of framing: i) problem definition (e.g., what is the core conflict?), ii) causal interpretation (who is responsible?), iii) moral evaluation (is it good or bad?), and iv) treatment recommendation (what should be done?). The codes were developed in order to capture instances of temporal keying, sacralization, and platform-specific messaging. In order to ensure analytical robustness, methodological transparency, and inter-coder reliability, a second trained researcher independently coded a randomly selected 15% subset of the data. The calculated Cohen's kappa coefficient was 0.82. This result therefore, indicates a high level of substantial agreement beyond chance and meets accepted standards of reliability in qualitative content analysis (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Furthermore, to provide essential contextualization and triangulation for the findings that were derived from the content analysis, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews

involved a purposively selected group of experts. This cohort included serving and former counterterrorism practitioners. It also comprised independent security analysts. In addition, academic researchers specializing in South Asian militancy were part of the group. Finally, local journalists with deep, on-the-ground knowledge of the region and the TTP's operations were also included. Their insights proved instrumental in interpreting the observed propaganda trends, assessing their perceived real-world impact, and grounding the analysis in the complex realities of the conflict, thus mitigating the limitations of relying solely on digital artifacts.

Findings: The Architecture of Strategic Recalibration

The empirical evidence for this research is derived from a systematic analysis of the propaganda corpus and interview data. This evidence reveals a deliberate, sophisticated, and multi-layered recalibration of the TTP's propaganda strategy. The recalibration was decisively initiated that was particularly enabled by the Afghan Taliban's victory. In response, TTP demonstrated remarkable narrative agility. It would effectively exploited this geopolitical shift to its advantage.

Pre-2021 Baseline: The Grammar of Localized Insurgency

In the period that would precede the 'inflection point' [August 2021], TTP propaganda predominantly was characterized by the construction of a stark, oppositional identity. The group would meticulously frame its struggle as a defensive jihad against a purportedly apostate, corrupt, and oppressive Pakistani state. The narrative architecture during this phase rested on several core and internally coherent themes. These themes were narrowly focused on the Pakistani political and social context. The primary theme among these was of 'religious justification'. Political violence in the context was not merely presented as a tactical choice but was meticulously framed as a "*farz-e-ain*" [an individual religious obligation incumbent upon every Muslim]. It was in parts achieved through the selective deployment of Quranic verses and prophetic traditions. This would provide a theological veneer to its militant actions and cloaking them in a mantle of religious necessity (Khan, 2024).

This religious framing has been further compounded by the persistent articulation of anti-state grievances. The Pakistani state has been portrayed consistently as a neo-colonial entity. It is

depicted as a secular puppet regime that is actively towing to the Western powers agendas, particularly of the United States. Historical grievances have also heavily leveraged in order to fuel popular resentment and a sense of political dispossession. In the contemporary environment, political issues arising from merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018 are also framed in their anti-state narratives. In the context, Bader Munir (personal communication, May 2, 2023), tribal elder from Bajaur, notes, “*the TTP narrates the merger not as a step towards integration and development, but rather a form of annexation.... a state-led assault on Pashtun autonomy, cultural traditions, and land rights. This message has found receptive ears among those who felt marginalized by the state for decades*”.

Furthermore, under its present leadership of Noor Wali Mehsud, TTP would begin a strategic ethno-nationalist pivot (Feyyaz, 2016). This involved a conscious effort to integrate elements of the Pashtunwali code. It would place emphasis on its deep cultural concepts like *nang* (honor) and *badal* (revenge), into its global jihadist ideology. This synthesis has particularly fostered a potent hybrid identity. It aims at resonating more deeply with local populations along the Pashtun belt. This would effectively localize “global jihad” in a strategic manner (Berti, 2013). In essence, the pre-2021 narrative, though undeniably potent and effective in certain constituencies, however, it’s fundamentally circumscribed and reactive. It has primarily focused on legitimizing a defensive resistance struggle. This focus is within the specific geographical and political context of Pakistan’s tribal periphery. However, according to Gul (personal communication, 16 June, 2024), a counter-terrorism expert: “*it lacks a grand, forward-looking vision of victory*”.

Post-2021 Shift: Re-keying the Struggle for Regional Victory

The Afghan Taliban’s success evidently has provided a powerful validating event that the TTP strategically operationalized. In the context, it has helped transcend the limitations of its localized narrative and project a new, triumphant identity.

1. **From Local Resistance to Regional Vanguardism (The Master Key):** The most significant and consequential shift evidently was a masterful act of ‘temporal keying’. TTP has strategically reframed the Afghan victory not as a separate or parallel event, but as the

inaugural, victorious phase of an inevitable regional transformation. This new narrative, TTP has terra-transformed their own campaign in Pakistan as the logical, necessary, and consequential next chapter. Umar Media's video production, prominently titled “The Dawn of Victory”, served as the quintessential embodiment of this new framing. It would in-fact expertly juxtapose compelling imagery of Taliban forces triumphantly entering Kabul and seizing advanced military hardware with carefully curated scenes of TTP militants conducting operations in Pakistan's tribal areas. The narration explicitly and powerfully linked the two struggles. The narrative declared that “the era of infidel and their associates is over”. The video would further claim that TTP's jihad will “cleanse the land of Pakistan” (Umar Media, 2021). This sophisticated keying operation, therefore, fundamentally helps elevate TTP's identity from that of a beleaguered local insurgency to a central actor. This narrative places the insurgency as triumphant, divinely-sanctioned, and expanding regional movement. It provided a tangible, recent historical precedent for their own claimed inevitability.

2. **Amplifying Cross-Border Solidarity: Material and Symbolic Consolidation:** TTP beyond the mere rhetoric has aggressively leveraged the material and symbolic capital afforded by the new Taliban regime in Kabul. The liberation of thousands of prisoners from Afghan jails would also include a significant number of seasoned TTP commanders and fighters. This development was not framed as a mere political coincidence. In the context, it was portrayed as a deliberate act of divine intervention. This framing would in-fact emphasize its role in strengthening the ranks of the faithful (Ankel, 2021). This influx of these experienced personnel would directly facilitate TTP's subsequent organizational efforts. This would help most notably in its successful attempt to merge various splinter factions under its central banner in 2022. The merger, subsequently was marketed through a powerful narrative branded as “The Dawn of Unity.” This framing was designed to project the image of a unified and formidable fighting force. It emphasized a cross border front in the broader war for the region’s ideological future (Mohammad & Noorzai, 2020; Sayed & Hamming, 2023). This narrative of seamless solidarity was meant to strategically counter Pakistani state narratives. The state had actively portrayed TTP as a foreign backed

proxy. In contrast, the group presented itself as an organic and legitimate part of a wider regional uprising. A security analyst with extensive field experience observed: “*The TTP immediately constructed a narrative of symbiotic victory. They did not just celebrate the Taliban’s win; they positioned their own struggle as the natural, justified, and inevitable extension of that success into Pakistan. This indeed would create a powerful sense of historical momentum that was particularly difficult for state propaganda to counter*” (A. Hanan, personal communication, April 10, 2022).

3. Re-keying Setbacks as Divine Validation: Engineering Perpetual Resilience

According to media and terrorism experts, TTP’s narrative resilience is perhaps most critically evident in its sophisticated management of ongoing adversity and operational failures. This resilience has been particularly pronounced in the post 2021 period. Losses now including death of a senior commander, the failure of an attack, or the withdrawal from territory was no longer would be depicted as simple tactical sacrifices for the cause. In the context, it would rather systematically reframe and discursively constructed as necessary divine trials. These setbacks were moreover, now presented as tests (*ibtila*) sent by God to purify the believers. For the receptive audience it was meant to separate the steadfast from the weak, and to demonstrate the depth of their faith to a watching world. This theological re-framing in-fact provided a powerful psychological and motivational buffer against demoralization. This would help in effectively inoculating the support base against the discouraging effects of kinetic pressure. It also perpetuated a divinely-sanctioned, perpetual justification for their continued violent resistance. This was moreover, irrespective of the immediate tactical or operational outcomes on the ground (Mehsud, 2024). This mechanism therefore, helped ensure that TTP's narrative could not be easily falsified by events on the ground; indeed, setbacks were incorporated as further "proof" of the narrative's validity (Bowes, 2024).

4. Platform-Specific Amplification: Tailoring the Narrative Ecosystem: The strategic narrative recalibration has been particularly disseminated and amplified through a sophisticated, resilient, and multi-platform propaganda ecosystem. According to Media

and Counter terrorism experts TTP has clearly demonstrated a practical understanding of “platformization” (Amjad, personal communication, 23 June, 2024). The group’s official media wing has strategically tailored its new victory narrative to the specific technical and social affordances of different digital environments (van Dijck et al., 2018). The group is actively utilizing dynamic platforms that includes X (Twitter). Its efforts have centered on real time operational claims and rapid engagement including with trending topic(s). It has relied heavily on shareable multimedia content to maximize reach. In many cases, these activities are amplified through artificial boosting or platform manipulation strategies designed to draw broader attention to its messaging (Al Abd, 2022). At the same time, the encrypted messaging platform Telegram functions as the durable backbone of the group’s distribution network. Its closed channel(s) and group(s) functions as a secure alert system. They also operated as a content repository, preserving narrative continuity. This structure has therefore; ensure reliable content delivery to a dedicated core audience. It remains effective even as mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Twitter engaged in suspension and takedown campaigns (Bowes, 2024). In the context, Umar Media’s dedicated productions are designed for deeper ideological inculcation and long form engagement. These productions have often hosted on its own channels or mirrored on platforms such as YouTube. They are observed to weave the new regional framing together with complex religious justification and historical references. High quality cinematic values further reinforced the persuasive power of this content. This multi layered and redundant approach has help the group to ensure that the recalibrated narrative reaches its intended diverse audience segments. It is also disseminated through the most appropriate and effective channels. It ranges from the casually curious to the deeply committed. The result is an information ecosystem that has proved both pervasive and highly resistant to disruption.

Discussion: Propaganda as a Central Front in Asymmetric Warfare

The TTP’s adept and rapid recalibration of its propaganda apparatus following the ‘inflection point’ [August 2021] is significant. It helps provide compelling empirical evidence that narrative

contestation constitutes a central, not peripheral, front in contemporary asymmetric conflict. The group's ability particularly to engage in strategic keying underscores its communicative sophistication, strategic foresight, and institutional agility. These attributes collectively has eclipsed the operational capacities of conventional, state-centric propaganda framework(s). This proficiency therefore, epitomizes the "netwar" paradigm. In the context it is where the organization that best masters the informational and narrative dimensions of a conflict can generate power and influence disproportionate to its physical resources (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 2001). The TTP, in essence, has become a learning organization. It treats its media wing not as a publicity department but as a strategic command centre for shaping the cognitive landscape of the conflict.

This communicative proficiency has therefore, engenders a profound and dangerous strategic asymmetry. Pakistan's counterinsurgency framework in the context, continues to prioritize and allocate resources to kinetic operations. However, TTP has simultaneously pursued a parallel war of ideas. This ideological campaign is both cost-effective and disproportionately impactful, often undermining state efforts in more insidious ways. Initiatives including "#IamAPS" campaign, introduced in the aftermath of the Peshawar school massacre, illustrate the reactive nature of state-led counter-narratives. However, the efforts fragmented across agencies and poorly coordinated, have been critically deficient in the narrative fidelity necessary to align with the lived experiences and cultural frameworks of target audiences (Snow & Benford, 1988). The state efforts are predominantly focused on deconstructing TTP narratives. For instance, it now continuously emphasizes TTP's brutality or its alleged foreign backing. Pakistan's counter-narrative efforts have fallen short in the crucial task of proactively inoculating vulnerable populations against extremist messaging. The state even more significantly, has failed to construct compelling and authentic alternative narratives capable of positively resonating with target audiences and addressing the structural grievances exploited by the TTP (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2018). A local journalist from Peshawar, who reports extensively from conflict-affected zones in the tribal region, has articulated this fundamental disconnect. He explained: "*State messaging often feels imposed, generic, and disconnected from local realities and grievances. It speaks at people, not with them. In contrast, TTP propaganda, however malign and manipulative, is meticulously tailored to exploit specific, deeply felt grievances with a cultural and linguistic precision that the state's efforts*

entirely lack. They sound like they are from here; the state sounds like it is from Islamabad” (B. Munir, personal communication, May 5, 2023).

Therefore, in order to effectively counter this sophisticated and adaptive threat, a fundamental doctrinal shift towards a posture of anticipatory counter-keying would become imperative (Mr. Munir Khan, counter terrorism expert). This strategic reorientation therefore, moves beyond reactive debunking. In this context, effective counter-narrative strategy would in-fact require proactive deconstruction of adversarial ideological frameworks. In the context, by anticipating and dismantling the frames and keying strategies, the insurgents may deploy in response to geopolitical events, military engagements, or moral controversies, analysts can better prepare. This process is reinforced through narrative ‘war games’ that simulate and forecast insurgent maneuvers in the information domain. The TTP’s master frame of *“Armed Jihad as Religious Obligation”* requires systematic and consistent re-keying. It must be reframed as *“Theological Deviance”* and *“Takfiri Extremism”* by a coordinated coalition of mainstream Islamic scholars and religious institutions. Such reframing should underscore its divergence from established Islamic jurisprudence on rebellion. It must also highlight its incompatibility with the consensus of the global Muslim community. The group’s grandiose claims of providing *“Islamic Governance”* must be systematically re-keyed. They should be reframed as *“Criminal Syndication”* and *“Extortion”* through evidence-based messaging. Such messaging must meticulously document the group’s draconian punishments and summary executions. It should also expose its parasitic economic practices that inflict harm on local communities. A digital communication specialist with expertise in countering violent extremism online starkly contrasted the current resource allocation. He observed that “the state’s investment in strategic communication and digital counter-narratives is infinitesimal when compared to its vast kinetic expenditure.” This imbalance, he argued, creates a crippling and self-inflicted disparity in the modern informational battle-space. It effectively cedes a critical advantage to insurgents, who prosecute a hybrid war while the state continues to prepare for a conventional one (M. Fahad, personal communication, April 8, 2023). Strategic counter-keying operations must be implemented through coordinated, platform-specific protocols across the digital ecosystem. Such measures are essential to achieve meaningful

cognitive inoculation against extremist messaging. They are also necessary to sever the connection between the TTP's narrative and the genuine grievances it seeks to exploit.

Conclusion

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's strategic response to the inflection point [August 2021] constitutes a definitive case study in insurgent strategic communication and organizational adaptation. Through the agile and consistent application of Goffman's concept of 'keying', the group in-fact reveals a highly developed form of narrative resilience. It would successfully transmute a regional geopolitical shift into a potent strategic tool for ideological validation, organizational consolidation, and continued recruitment. The group has systematically re-signified its previously localized and defensive campaign. It would re-frame it as an integral and vanguard component of an inevitable, region-wide jihadist victory narrative. This is particularly achieved through a multi-pronged strategy. It includes: i) master key of regional vanguardism, ii) psychological fortification through sacralizing setbacks, and iii) infrastructural resilience of a multi-platform digital ecosystem.

This successful adaptation therefore underscores the strategic paucity and inherent limitations of state-level approaches. These approaches have dogmatically privileged military operations over sustained, sophisticated narrative engagement. The TTP's persistent influence demonstrates its capacity to resurge and adapt remains striking. This resilience has endured despite sustained and costly kinetic pressure exerted by one of the world's largest army. It offers a definitive and urgent lesson for the formulation of modern security policy. In the landscape of twenty-first-century insurgency, the contest to control meaning has become paramount. It encompasses efforts to both shape identities and to dominate the narrative terrain. This struggle is co-equal to, and in certain contexts a prerequisite for, the contest to control physical territory. The battlefield is as much in the minds of vulnerable youth and local communities as it is in the rugged terrain of the tribal regions.

Therefore, counter terrorism and counterinsurgency doctrine must undergo fundamental evolution in order to secure dominance within the ideological and informational domains. This evolution

moreover, necessitates a committed, strategic, and resource-backed national approach. The approach becomes necessary to systematically understand, deconstruct, and dismantle insurgent propaganda. This can only be achieved through the consistent application of anticipatory counter keying. It also requires the cultivation of authentic and resonant alternative narratives developed in genuine partnership with at risk communities. In addition, it demands the development of integrated counter propaganda frameworks that are dynamic, resilient, and strategically astute. These frameworks therefore must be designed to match and ultimately defeat the sophistication of the threats they confront. The future of security in Pakistan and similar contexts depends not just on winning the war of weapons, but on decisively winning the war of ideas.

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