

## REDEFINING PARTNERSHIP: NORWAY'S RECOGNITION OF PAKISTAN'S SECURITY PROGRESS

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



Due to effective diplomatic efforts and counter-terrorism initiatives, Norway removed Pakistan from its National Threat Assessment list in April 2024.<sup>1</sup> The announcement was made by Norway's Police Security Service report, which is responsible for investigating serious national security threats within the country.<sup>2</sup> This decision marks a major achievement in Pakistan's global reputation, opens doors for enhanced educational and research opportunities, and boosts international cooperation.

### Background

Pakistan was included on the threat list for several years. The 2022 and 2023 Norwegian National Threat Assessments identified Pakistan, along with other countries, as engaging in covert efforts to acquire dual-use technology and illegally transfer knowledge from Norway to enhance their capabilities for mass destruction devices. Indian media further propagated these threat reports, contributing to a negative portrayal of Pakistan as a country perceived to be a security threat on the global stage.<sup>3</sup> This propaganda impacted Pakistan's international standing by damaging the country's

1 Muhammad Saleh Zaafir, "Norway Removes Pakistan from Its National Threat Assessment List," The News International, April 8, 2024. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1176741-norway-removes-pakistan-from-its-national-threat-assessment-list>.

2 PST, "National Threat Assessment 2024," Norwegian Police Security Service, 2024 [https://politietstryggingsteneste.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024\\_engelsk\\_web\\_.pdf](https://politietstryggingsteneste.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024_engelsk_web_.pdf).

3 Monitoring Desk, "A Great Success for Pakistan's Diplomacy, Exposes Indian Media Propaganda," WORLDECHO NEWS, April 7, 2024. <https://wenewsenglish.pk/a-great-success-for-pakistans-diplomacy-exposes-indian-media-propaganda/>.

credibility, sabotaging external political strength by influencing global perception, and creating barriers in trade, education, and diplomatic relations with other nations.

In addition, this list created hurdles for Pakistani students and researchers wanting to pursue higher education in Norwegian universities as well as for Pakistani citizens, aiming to move to Norway for better economic opportunities. The main challenge was the low visa approval rate.<sup>4</sup> During this era, Pakistan continuously monitored all scenarios and made significant diplomatic efforts to withdraw its name from the threat assessment list.

### **Norway Threat List**

Norway's threat list, an unclassified assessment by the Norwegian PST, examines potential risks to Norwegian citizens each year, covering foreign intelligence efforts and terrorist threats. As per the assessments, foreign intelligence agencies used several ways to threaten Norwegian national security including cyber-attacks, recruitment of human resources, sabotage, and intelligence involving civilian vessels.<sup>5</sup>

In previous years, the list identified multiple countries, including Pakistan as potential threats due to concerns regarding technology transfer and military modernization efforts, which affected the defense and public security sector, policy-making, and advanced sectors like semiconductors and space technology.<sup>6</sup>

This year, individuals with extreme right-wing ideologies have been identified as a significant terrorist threat to Norway. PST assesses there will be a high chance that these groups will attempt terrorist actions in Norway. The report states that radicalization of potential terrorists occurs through both physical interaction with extremists and online platforms.<sup>7</sup>

According to PST threat assessment 2024 reports, Al-Qaeda and ISIL pose major threats to Norway. Key factors include “a perception that the West has a war with Islam, treat Muslim minorities harshly in the European countries, and Norway’s support for Israel in ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict which make Norway a high priority target”. In addition, incidents like the burning of the Holy Quran

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<sup>4</sup> Desk Web, “Norway Removes Pakistan from Threat Assessment List”, Aaj English TV, April 7, 2024. <https://english.aaj.tv/news/30357373>.

<sup>5</sup> PST, “National Threat Assessment 2024,” Norwegian Police Security Service, 2024 [https://politietstryggingsteneste.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024\\_engelsk\\_web\\_.pdf](https://politietstryggingsteneste.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024_engelsk_web_.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> PST, “National Threat Assessment for 2022,” Norwegian Police Security Service, 2022. <https://www.pst.no/globalassets/2022/ntv-22/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2022-pa-engelsk.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> PST, “National Threat Assessment 2024”, Norwegian Police Security Service, 2024 [https://politietstryggingsteneste.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024\\_engelsk\\_web\\_.pdf](https://politietstryggingsteneste.no/globalassets/2024/ntv2024/nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2024_engelsk_web_.pdf).

in Sweden in 2023, and publications of the caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provide grounds and justify the terrorist attacks from terrorist organizations in Europe in the future.<sup>8</sup>

### **Pakistan's efforts and response:**

Since the 9/11 incident, Pakistan experienced a loss of 83000 lives and bore a financial loss of 35 trillion rupees,<sup>9</sup> which shows that the country itself is a victim of terrorism which undermines the country's socio-political structure, and economic development.

Pakistan has shown remarkable efforts and resilience in combatting terrorism. Compared to the last decade, the number of terrorist incidents declined significantly,<sup>10</sup> due to multiple counter-terrorism initiatives, which show significant improvements in the country's internal security situation. In 2014, twenty points National Action Plan (NAP) was formulated to review the efforts to eliminate extremism and terrorism in the country.<sup>11</sup>

Before NAP, Operation Zarb-e-Azb<sup>12</sup> was initiated on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014 in tribal areas, and Operation Rad-ul-Fassad<sup>13</sup> was launched on February 22, 2017, which targeted terrorism and extremism through both military and socio-economic initiatives. These military operations have effectively addressed internal and external threats, contributing to improved internal security. In addition, Pakistan's first National Security Policy 2021(NSP) pursued a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism and extremism.<sup>14</sup>

Internationally, the success of Operation Zarb-e-Azb has been recognized. A top US General in Afghanistan said in his statement that this operation helped to disorganize the Haqqani network's ability to attack Afghan territory. <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> NACTA, "Pakistan's National Narrative against Terrorism and Extremism," National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), 2018. <https://nacta.gov.pk/laws-policies/pakistans-national-narrative-against-terrorism-and-extremism/>.

<sup>10</sup> Institute for Conflict Management, "Terrorism in Pakistan-Yearly Fatalities." South Asia Terrorism Portal, September 12, 2024. <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>.

<sup>11</sup> NACTA, "NAP Monitoring," National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), December 24, 2014. <https://nacta.gov.pk/functions/administration-wing/me-d/nap-monitoring/>.

<sup>12</sup> Ismail Khan, "All-out Military Operation Launched in North Waziristan," DAWN.COM, June 16, 2014. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1112949>.

<sup>13</sup> Desk News, "ISPR Marks Five Years of Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad," The Express Tribune, February 22, 2022. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2344722/ispr-marks-five-years-of-operation-radd-ul-fasaad>.

<sup>14</sup> NSD, "National Security Policy of Pakistan (2022-2026) Summary," National Security Division- Government of Pakistan, January 14, 2022. <https://www.nsd.gov.pk/SiteImage/Misc/files/NSP%20summary.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Dawn.com, APP, "Operation Zarb-i-Azb Disrupted Haqqani Network: US General," DAWN.COM, November 6, 2014. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1142664>.

Furthermore, Pakistan's removal from the FATF grey list on October 21, 2022,<sup>16</sup> was also a significant achievement. After making significant progress in FATF tasks in anti-money laundering, combating terrorism finance, and action against armed groups and individuals, Pakistan managed to curb such menaces in a promising manner.

However, despite successes, threats remain. Pakistan needs to address political and economic instability, weak law and order, the current rise of terrorism, and extremism through comprehensive policies and strategies.

In addition to its counter-terrorism efforts, Pakistan has also engaged in successful negotiations with Norway. Last year, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had a meeting with his Norwegian counterpart Ms. Anniken Huitfeldt at the United Nations General Assembly session.<sup>17</sup> Both ministers agreed to enhance legal migration opportunities for Pakistanis and bilateral ties, including trade, investment, development, and the Pakistani diaspora's positive impact in Norway.

Norway's removal of Pakistan from its threat assessment list recognizes Pakistan's significant progress against counter-terrorism, extremism, and terrorism financing which also meets FATF requirements. This development admits Pakistan's successful reforms and diplomatic efforts. The updated threat assessment list aligns with FATF evaluation, recognizing Pakistan's improved global security profile and presenting an opportunity for its diplomatic officials to highlight Pakistan's diplomatic achievements through high-level diplomatic engagements and to engage with international media, and influencers to spread a positive narrative about Pakistan's progress.

### **Implications for Pakistan-Norway Relations**

The longstanding relations between Pakistan and Norway are strengthened by shared perspectives on different global issues like climate change, human rights, and the Afghan peace process.<sup>18</sup> Norway's decision to remove Pakistan from the threat list will likely enhance collaboration in education, trade, tourism, environment, and investment. Currently, bilateral trade stands at \$128.4

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<sup>16</sup> MOFA, "Pakistan Exits FATF Grey List," Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Government of Pakistan, October 21, 2022. <https://mofa.gov.pk/pakistan-exits-fatfs-grey-list>.

<sup>17</sup> MOFA, "Meeting of the Foreign Minister with the Foreign Minister of Norway," Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Government of Paakistan, September 19, 2022. <https://mofa.gov.pk/meeting-of-the-foreign-minister-with-the-foreign-minister-of-norway-2>.

<sup>18</sup> Islamabad Post, "PM Shehbaz Meets Norwegian Prime Minister on Sidelines of COP 27," Daily Islamabad Post, November 8, 2022. [https://islamabadpost.com.pk/pm-shehbaz-meets-norwegian-prime-minister-on-sidelines-of-cop-27/#google\\_vignette](https://islamabadpost.com.pk/pm-shehbaz-meets-norwegian-prime-minister-on-sidelines-of-cop-27/#google_vignette).

million,<sup>19</sup> offering potential for growth through reduced tariff barriers and new investment opportunities.

Apart from trade relations, Norway sees Pakistan as an attractive place for investment. Approximately, 10 business companies are operating in Pakistan, including Telenor having invested more than \$ 4 billion from 2004 to 2023. Furthermore, around 50,000 Pakistanis are residing in Norway, which contributes to the socio-economic development of both nations.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Norwegian alternative energy company Scatec Solar ASA has completed the construction of a solar power plant in Sukkur, Sindh, and has started generating clean energy of 150 MW.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusion

The removal of Pakistan from Norway's threat assessment list underscores the country's progress in counter-terrorism and diplomacy. This positive development will enhance bilateral relations, enriching people-to-people exchange, and cooperation in different sectors including trade, education, research, visa policies, tourism, and investment. To boost its future standing, Pakistan should strengthen international partnerships with other countries, especially with those that are prominent in key international forums. Moving forward, Pakistan must address internal security and governance challenges, ensuring political and economic stability to present itself as a peaceful and progressive country.

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<sup>19</sup> Embassy of Pakistan, "Bilateral Relations," Embassy of Pakistan, Oslo Norway, n.d., <https://www.pakistanembassy.no/bilateral-relations/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Kine, "Scatec Starts Commercial Operation of Solar Power Plants in Pakistan," Scatec, January 31, 2024. <https://scatec.com/2024/01/31/scatec-starts-commercial-operation-of-solar-power-plants-in-pakistan/>.