

The Geopolitical Implications of Clashes between Pakistan and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

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The rapidly deteriorating security situation between Pakistan and the TTP is raising alarm bells in Islamabad. In 2024 alone, Pakistan lost around 685 security personnel and 915 civilians to TTP attacks. [1] The losses suffered by the Pakistani army are a culmination of a broken truce in November 2022, which the TTP blames Pakistan for breaching and then directing military operations against its fighters and other militants allied to the movement. [2]. Much to Pakistan's consternation, the ruling Afghan Taliban government has been extremely reluctant to take stern action against the TTP safe heavens in Afghanistan.

The hesitation of the Taliban government stems from several factors that have strained relations with Pakistan. Since, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Afghans have mistrusted Pakistan due to its unbridled interference in the internal politics of the country. Pakistan's overt support for different Afghan mujahideen fighters in the 90s, followed by the rapid takeover the country by the Taliban under the auspices of the ISI, and then the decades of betrayal as Islamabad diligently prosecuted America's war on terror post September 11. All of this has left a negative impression amongst ordinary Afghans about Pakistan's duplicitous motives regarding their country.

Such adverse attitudes are further compounded by Pakistan's fortification of its border with Afghanistan known as the Durand Line (Afghans widely regard this as a hypothetical line), the reinstatement of the Taliban government by ISI in 2021, and numerous Pakistani military forays into Afghanistan—often resulting in civilian casualties. If this was not bad enough, Pakistani authorities frequently block freight from land-locked Afghanistan to the port of Karachi, thereby damaging Afghanistan's fragile economy and causing hardship amongst its population. However, the forced repatriation of over 500,000 Afghan refugees out of 1.73m undocumented Afghans in 2023 plummeted relations between the two neighbors. [3] This deep-seated resentment of the Afghan population towards Pakistan has prevented the Afghan Taliban to come good on its repeated assurances of containing TTP.

Pakistan's behavior has also compelled Taliban government to explore new opportunities and relations with other countries. In March 2023, the Taliban government pledged \$35m in Iran's strategic Chabahar port to lessen its dependence on the transit route to Karachi and Gwadar ports. Additionally, just a few days ago, Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi met the Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and discussed amongst other things the importance of trade between the two countries via the Chabahar port. Muttaqi summed up the meeting in glowing terms "the Islamic Emirate aims to strengthen political and economic ties with India as a significant regional and economic partner". [4] Equally, Afghanistan has been pursuing relations with Russia, Central Asian states and China. These countries see no harm in doing business with the Taliban government but have stopped short of official recognition.

From a geostrategic perspective, America has exploited the sentiments on both sides of the border to secure its own foreign policy aims. America deliberately left behind its military hardware, so that the Taliban could use it to strengthen separatist movements either hiding in Afghanistan or operating close to its borders. The Afghan Taliban have given weapons to TTP and sold American military hardware to Balouch nationalist movements that are waging a low intensity conflict against the Pakistani army in Baluchistan. [5] As consequence Pakistan is preoccupied on its Western border and is struggling to provide security for Chinese nationals engaged in CPEC projects. It is in the interest of both America and India, that Pakistan is not only weakened but China's CPEC project fails, and Beijing is unable to use Gwadar to transport goods to Kashgar, a city in China's western Xinjiang region.

Moreover, Jaish al-Adl an Iranian Balouch separatist group based in Pakistan has been conducting military style operations inside Iran. The aim of the Balouch nationalist movements in Iran and Pakistan is to carve out a separate homeland for the Balouch people. The uptick in TTP operations as well as Balouch nationalist attacks coincides with the second presidency of Trump. Trump has gone on record to put immense pressure on Tehran to abandon its Shia Crescent project, and the Iranian Balouch nationalist movement is another card he can use to coerce a weakened Iran into a deal. Likewise, America is exploiting the TTP and Pakistan's Balouch separatist movements to kill off CPEC, as Trump seeks to counter China's ascendancy.

This is the reality of the Muslim countries, where the foreign nations powers use its rulers and manipulate the aware and naive Islamic movements to cut the Islamic lands into pieces for their own benefit. It also illustrates the immense strength that the Muslim world possesses if its leadership is placed under a single leader the Khaleefah who will return honor and dignity to the Ummah. Allah (swt) says: **يَسِّرْ** **الْمُنَافِقِينَ بِأَنَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا * الَّذِينَ يَتَّخِذُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلْبَسُوا لَهُمُ الْعِزَّةَ فَإِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا** **“Whoever seeks honor [should know that] honor entirely belongs to Allah”** [TMQ: Fatir:10].

Reference:

[1] Al Jazeera, (November 2022). Pakistan Taliban ends ceasefire with gov't, threatens new attacks. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/28/pakistan-taliban-ends-ceasefire-with-govt-threatens-new-attacks>

[2] VOA, (December 2024). Militancy surge in Pakistan kills 1,600 civilians, security forces. *VOA*. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/militancy-surge-in-pakistan-kills-1-600-civilians-security-forces-/7919142.html>

[3] BBC, (November 2023). Afghan refugees forced to leave Pakistan say they have nothing. *BBC*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-67281691>

[4] Business Standard, (January 2025). Taliban hails India as 'significant partner' after high-level talks. *Business Standard*. Available: https://www.business-standard.com/external-affairs-defence-security/news/taliban-india-dialogue-chabahar-port-humanitarian-aid-refugee-125010900988_1.html

[5] Foreign Policy, (July 2023). The Taliban Are Now Arms Dealers. *Foreign Policy*. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/05/taliban-afghanistan-arms-dealers-weapons-sales-terrorism/>

[6] Alarabiya, (2024). What is Jaish al-Adl, the militant group targeted by Iranian strikes in Pakistan?. *Alarabiya*. Available at: <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2024/01/17/What-is-Jaish-al-Adl-the-militant-group-targeted-by-Iranian-strikes-in-Pakistan->