

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

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After independence from the British Empire in 1947, Pakistan inherited territorial disputes with Afghanistan and India and relations with both have been conflictual from the start. Afghanistan was the only country that opposed Pakistan's membership in the United Nations due to the border demarcation issue over the Durand Line. Differences grew because of the mutual trust deficit as Kabul formed close relations with Pakistan's arch-rival India. Hence Islamabad has always desired a friendly government in Kabul which was not possible until the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in 1996. As a US frontline ally in the Afghan-Soviet War, Pakistan managed to forge close relations with Pashtun *mujahideen* of Afghanistan, including many who later created the Taliban.¹ In the shape of the IEA, Pakistan

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1 Ahmed, Zahid Shahab, "Political Islam, the Jamaat-E-Islami, and Pakistan's Role in the Afghan-Soviet War, 1979–1988", in Philip E. Muehlenbeck ed., *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2012, pp. 275-96.

found not just a pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul but also one that had no links with India. New Delhi had closed its only diplomatic mission in Kabul in 1996. Because of this, Pakistan was among the only three countries alongside Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that had recognised the IEA. Islamabad's support was the Taliban regime's lifeline as there was close cooperation in terms of human and financial resources, weapons and Pashtun combatants from Pakistan to fight the Northern Alliance.² Despite their head-on collision following Pakistan's partnership with the US under the 'war on terror', the Taliban and Pakistan did have cooperative relations. This was reflected by Islamabad facilitating the US-Taliban peace deal by hosting several Taliban delegations in Pakistan during 2020-2021.

Like all of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, Pakistan has also been supportive of the US-Taliban peace deal signed in Qatar in February 2020 and the ultimate withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan. As the withdrawal came closer, Islamabad was concerned about the possible spill-over of a rushed withdrawal of foreign troops without an intra-Afghan peace settlement.³ Worried about the developments in Afghanistan in July 2021, then Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan said, "We are petrified that there will be another influx of refugees and we do not have the capacity or the economic strength to bear it".⁴ Also, Khan directly replied

2 Safiullah Taye and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Dynamics of Trust and Mistrust in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Relationship", *Asian Studies Review*, Volume 45, Number 4, 2021, pp. 557-75.

3 Madiha Afzal, "An Uneasy Limbo for Us-Pakistan Relations Amidst the Withdrawal from Afghanistan", *Brookings*, August 6, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/06/an-uneasy-limbo-for-us-pakistan-relations-amidst-the-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/>.

4 Syed Irfan Raza, "PM Delivers Stinging Rebuke after Ghani's Outburst", *Dawn*, July 17, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1635491>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

to allegations from the former Ashraf Ghani government in Afghanistan by saying that it is unfair to blame Pakistan for the situation in Afghanistan.⁵ This approach also reflected that Pakistan did not want to take any blame for the Taliban's takeover of the country in July-August 2021. As the Taliban was capturing various regions, #SanctionPakistan was one of the most popular *Twitter* campaigns against Pakistan.⁶ Also, fake news was rampant blaming Pakistan's military support for the Taliban in crushing the last resistance in Panjshir. Simultaneously however Pakistan did help dozens of other states in rescuing their citizens from Afghanistan.⁷

The situation is already alarming for Pakistan as the number of terrorist incidents has increased significantly since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. In eight months during August 2021-March 2022, 272 terrorism-related incidents occurred in Pakistan.⁸ This is higher than in any year from 2018 to 2020.⁹ A UN report had already warned Pakistan that there were roughly 6,000 anti-Pakistan terrorists in Afghanistan, mainly Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) members.¹⁰ TTP has increased its activities in Pakistan,

5 Ibid.

6 Tallha Abdulrazaq, "Sanction Pakistan? Try Blaming America for Afghanistan." *TRT World*, August 13, 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/sanction-pakistan-try-blaming-america-for-afghanistan-49159>.

7 Jyoti Dwivedi, "Fact Check: Old Video Goes Viral with Claim of Pakistani Fighter Being Caught in Panjshir", *India Today*, September 7, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/fact-check/story/fact-check-old-video-goes-viral-with-claim-of-pakistani-fighter-being-caught-in-panjshir-1850272-2021-09-07>.

8 "Yearly fatalities – Pakistan", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>.

9 Ibid.

10 Kathy Gannon, "UN Says Thousands of Anti-Pakistan Militants in Afghanistan", *Associated Press*, July 26, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-afghanistan-international-news-islamic-state-group-taliban-ab3668337f310b4be8e1ed2442470992>.

mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), since August 2021.¹¹ Islamabad has been in discussions with the Afghan Taliban to address its terrorism problem. While the Taliban has assured all countries that it would not allow its soil to be used against other countries, it also brokered Pakistan's dialogue with TTP. Pakistan's success against terrorism depends on how it manages its relationship with the Afghan Taliban.

Despite the fact that Pakistan has achieved its national interest in the shape of India's exit from Afghanistan with the closure of all its diplomatic missions, Islamabad has its own growing worries regarding extremism and terrorism. There have been many incidents since the Taliban's takeover demonstrating that Pakistan has an uncomfortable relationship with the group. Islamabad however realises that it must cooperate with the Taliban to address its terrorism and other problems, for example, drug trafficking. This paper focuses on Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban to understand how that relationship will play out in terms of Pakistan's terrorism problem.

BACKGROUND

After Pakistan's creation in 1947, Afghanistan became the only country to oppose Pakistan's membership in the United Nations. It was mainly because Kabul disputed the validity of the Durand Line agreement with the British Empire and claimed huge territories of Pakistan's KP and Balochistan. The conflictual start to the relationship got worse after Afghanistan's attacks in ex- Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Balochistan in the 1950s. As Daoud Khan ousted King Zahir Shah, Pakistan faced a major challenge in

11 "TTP is asking for extortion in Peshawar, says Sheikh Rasheed," *Geo News*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/397037-sheikh-rasheed-reveals-ttp-has-started-asking-extortion-in-peshawar>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

the shape of a prominent advocate of Pashtunistan in Kabul.¹² This drastically affected the bilateral relationship as Khan was supporting Pashtun and Baloch groups in Pakistan. This eventually resulted in a shift in policy of Pakistan as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto established the 'Afghan Cell' within Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and began forging relations with anti-Daoud politicians like Burhanuddin Rabbani.¹³

Pakistan has always desired a friendly regime in Kabul but that was not possible until the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996. It was also for this reason that Pakistan became a frontline ally of the US in the Afghan-Soviet War. Also, the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan viewed this as an ideal opportunity to gain legitimacy at home and abroad.¹⁴ At that time, Pakistani security strategists believed that the USSR had a bigger ambition in Afghanistan and could attack Pakistan to reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea.¹⁵ Following withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, there was a civil war after which an interim government was established in 1996. Then Pakistan kept supporting Rabbani and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) continued to support the Islamist even after the creation of the Taliban in 1994. Hezb-e-Islami failed to capture Kabul and the government of Benazir Bhutto began looking for other options and forged relations with the Taliban while the ISI was still

12 Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2016: A Concise History*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2017.

13 Khalid Homayun Nadiri, "Old Habits, New Consequences: Pakistan's Posture toward Afghanistan since 2001", *International Security*, Volume 39, Number 2, 2014, pp. 132-68.

14 Mohammad Ziaul Haque Sheikh and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Military, Authoritarianism and Islam: A Comparative Analysis of Bangladesh and Pakistan", *Politics and Religion*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2020, pp. 333-60.

15 Abdul Sattar, op. cit.

supporting the Hezb-e-Islami.¹⁶ Eventually, the ISI also began backing the Taliban and this played a key role in the Taliban's establishment of the IEA in 1996.

After the fall of the IEA in 2001, many of its members and top leaders took refuge in Pakistan and formed the Quetta Shura in the capital city of Balochistan. As Pakistan again became a US partner, this time in the 'War on Terror', it faced pressure from Washington to 'do more' against terrorism. Then the regime of General Musharraf did launch some military operations to capture Taliban leaders but the conflictual relationship with the Afghan Taliban did not last long. As Pakistan's archrival India became a prominent actor in post-2001 Afghanistan – through aid and security cooperation¹⁷ – Pakistan looked towards the Taliban to have a friendly regime once again in Afghanistan. The Taliban also needed Pakistan's support in various forms, including diplomatic support, to win in Afghanistan. Islamabad was one of the prominent supporters of a political settlement with the Taliban and backed such negotiations in various ways, for example, hosting such dialogues and participating in other peace dialogues hosted in Qatar, Russia and China. Now that the Taliban have established the interim government after their takeover in August 2021, Pakistan is providing aid and diplomatic support in the shape of more aid for Afghanistan. Unlike the case of recognising the IEA in 1996, Pakistan's current approach is cautious as it does not want to unilaterally recognise the new Taliban regime. This however leaves Pakistan with a difficult choice as it wants to engage with

16 Khalid Homyun Nadiri, "Old Habits, New Consequences: Pakistan's Posture toward Afghanistan since 2001", *International Security*, Volume 39, Number 2, 2014, pp. 132-68.

17 Belquis Ahmadi and Wikram J Singh, "Can India Help Bring Peace to Afghanistan?", *The United States Institute of Peace*, April 21, 2020, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/04/can-india-help-bring-peace-afghanistan>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

the Taliban not just for its geopolitical and geo-economical gains but also to address its own security problems that have increased since August 2021.

Pakistan suffered tremendously after the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. This has been demonstrated through the loss of over 80,000 lives and economic damages of more than USD 100 billion from 2001 to 2021.¹⁸ This was mainly an outcome of Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban fighters relocating to KP and Balochistan in Pakistan. Then Pakistan's tribal areas – bordering regions with Afghanistan – known as the FATA were not merged with KP and it was very easy for Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters to settle in ex-FATA and the Afghani Taliban also managed to re-organise in Pakistan through Quetta Shura. As Lian Wang argues, the Talibanisation of Pakistan's peripheral areas facilitated the formation of several terrorist groups to the detriment of the country's domestic security.¹⁹

Table 1: Terrorist incidents in Pakistan, 2012-2021

Year	Incidents	Year	Incidents
2012	2,347	2017	294
2013	2,034	2018	162
2014	1,569	2019	136
2015	950	2020	193
2016	526	2021	267

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal²⁰

18 Adeel Mukhtar Mirza, "Pakistan Has Contributed Significantly to the Fight against Terrorism", *The Diplomat*, January 8, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/01/pakistan-has-contributed-significantly-to-the-fight-against-terrorism/>.

19 Lian Wang, "Talibanization in the Tribal Areas of Pakistan", *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)*, Volume 4, Number 1, 2010, pp. 74-100.

20 "Yearly fatalities – Pakistan", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>.

Pakistan's response to terrorism has witnessed ups and downs. Even in Swat, the government's first response was to peacefully handle the situation and a peace deal was signed in 2009. As the local Taliban began their control by challenging the writ of the state, the Pakistani military launched an operation and retook the area in 2009. Then it seemed that even the focus on kinetic measures was neglected and it was only after the terrorist attacks on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2015 that the government decided to develop a strategy involving kinetic and non-kinetic measures to address terrorism. This resulted in the development of the 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) and Operation Zarb-e-Azb was launched against various terrorist groups like TTP in 2015. This led to a significant decline in terrorism-related incidents in Pakistan from 2,347 in 2012 to 193 in 2020 (See table 1).

PAKISTAN AND THE AFGHAN TALIBAN

Firstly, it is important to understand the current level of relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban because that will play a key role in terms of Pakistan's ability to handle the terrorism problem. Historically Pakistan has managed its influence over the Taliban in various ways. After the collapse of the IEA in 2001, there were many key Taliban figures who took refuge in Pakistan alongside their families. Many who form the Taliban's current leadership have emerged out of the Quetta Shura. These include the Taliban's chief Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada.²¹ As however was the case in the past, the Taliban is not fully under the control of Pakistan. Even during the IEA's first term, the Taliban had never recognised the Durand Line as a permanent border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This happened even though when the Taliban

21 Hamzah Rifaat Hussain, "Haibutullah Akhundzada and the resurgence of the Taliban", *The Diplomat*, June 4, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/haibatullah-akhunzada-and-the-resurgence-of-the-taliban/>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

were more dependent on Pakistan by virtue of having limited external links. Now the case is different, as the Taliban have developed relationships with Iran, China, Russia and Gulf countries too.²²

Now let us see what has happened since the Taliban's takeover with a focus on Pakistan's role. Diplomatically Pakistan remains the most important actor as Islamabad has been lobbying for more international support for Afghanistan to avoid any humanitarian crisis. In this regard, Pakistan has been relying on other majority Muslim states and organised two events of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), including the 17th session of the emergency meeting of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministries in December 2021. Afghanistan was a key focus of the emergency meeting in which Pakistan advocated providing more aid to Afghanistan.²³ Islamabad had pledged USD 28 million in humanitarian aid for Pakistan including 50,000 metric tons of food and medical supplies.²⁴ Also, it has allowed aid from India to go by land through Pakistan to Afghanistan. Still, there have been incidents that show that Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban might not be a fully comfortable one. This is also because there are many within the Taliban who share anti-Pakistan sentiments with the

22 Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Abbas Farasoo and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "The Taliban develops regional relationships as it makes territorial gains in Afghanistan", *Melbourne Asia Review*, September 10, 2020, <https://melbourneasiareview.edu.au/the-taliban-is-actively-developing-relationships-with-regional-powers-as-it-makes-territorial-gains-in-afghanistan/>.

23 "OIC secretary general and Pakistan Prime Minister discuss the situation in Afghanistan and in Jammu and Kashmir, and Islamophobia", *Organization of Islamic Cooperation*, December 19, 2021, https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=30616&t_ref=19567&lan=en.

24 Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan Sends Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan", *Voice of America*, December 30, 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-sends-humanitarian-aid-to-afghanistan-/6375649.html>.

public of Afghanistan. In 2021, there was an incident involving a Taliban official who took the Pakistani flag from a truck carrying humanitarian aid from Pakistan and said he was going to burn it. This official was later arrested by the Taliban.²⁵

There have been other incidents that show that the relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan is conflictual on a major issue, i.e., the Durand Line demarcation. As was the case in the past, the Taliban do not recognise the Durand Line as the permanent border between the two countries. Abdul Qahar Balkhi of the Taliban wrote on *Twitter* that incidents along the Durand Line demand both sides address this problem.²⁶ Border management has been a key component of Pakistan's counterterrorism strategy due to which it has been fencing the Durand Line. Like the erstwhile government in Kabul, the Taliban also oppose the fence. Enayatullah Khwarazmi, the Afghan Defense Ministry spokesman, labeled the fencing as "illegal".²⁷ Hence, Taliban fighters have been stopping the Pakistani military from fencing the border.²⁸ Despite this opposition, Pakistan continues with the project that is estimated to cost more than USD 500 million but will play a crucial role in terms of handling terrorism as many terrorist groups have been using regions along the Durand Line for their operations.²⁹

25 Arif Hayat, "Afghan Taliban Arrest Officials Who Removed Pakistan's Flag from Aid Truck", *Dawn*, September 22, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1647759>.

26 Umair Jamal, "Taliban-Pakistan Ties Run into Trouble", *The Diplomat*, January 11, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/taliban-pakistan-ties-run-into-trouble/>.

27 "Taliban stop Pakistani troops from fencing border", *Reuters*, December 23, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1665245>.

28 Ibid.

29 Abdul Basit, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Fence, a Step in the Right Direction." *Al Jazeera*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/2/25/the-pak-afghan-border-fence-is-a-step-in-the-right-direction>.

PAKISTAN'S GROWING TERRORISM PROBLEM

The country has fought hard with substantial gains in the shape of a decline in terrorist attacks since 2010. All that now is at risk because the Taliban has a cooperative relationship with various terrorist organisations, especially TTP, but there are also risks associated with other terrorist groups having a strong presence in Afghanistan like the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP). TTP is a Pashtun Islamist terrorist group based along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and was formed in 2007 as an umbrella organisation of 13 groups. Since its inception, the group has consistently carried out terrorist attacks in Pakistan and it was declared as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) by the US in 2010. As a result of Pakistan's security operations in former FATA, thousands of TTP terrorists managed to take refuge across the Durand Line in Afghanistan. In 2020, a UN report had suggested that there were more than 6,000 anti-Pakistani insurgents in Afghanistan including TTP closely collaborating with the Taliban.³⁰ Some accounts suggest that the Taliban fighters not only released TTP and other prisoners from jails across Afghanistan, but that TTP helped the Taliban towards its ultimate victory.³¹ While TTP was in the past anti-Pakistan, it has recently started to

30 UNSC, "Twelfth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2557 (2020) Concerning the Taliban and Other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace Stability and Security of Afghanistan", June 1, 2021, <https://www.undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2021/486>.

31 Oved Lobel, "How Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban increases the global terrorism threat", *The Strategist*, September 6, 2021, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-afghanistans-fall-to-the-taliban-increases-the-global-terrorism-threat/>; Hannah Ellis-Petersen and Shah Meer Baloch, "Pakistan Divided over Success of Taliban in Afghanistan", *The Guardian*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/17/pakistan-divid-ed-over-success-of-taliban-in-afghanistan>.

target Chinese projects in Pakistan which indirectly hurts Pakistan's economic and geopolitical interests.

In July 2021, there was a terrorist attack on a bus in which nine Chinese citizens were killed in Dasu, KP. This was not the first time that Chinese citizens working on projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) were attacked but this time Beijing's frustration was clear. As the stakes are higher with USD 64 billion Chinese investment in Pakistan, both sides are closely collaborating to deal with the collective threat of terrorism. Initial intelligence from Pakistan found that the attack was launched by the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM),³² possibly in collaboration with TTP, Beijing was quick to invite a Taliban delegation to discuss this matter.³³ The Taliban has assured time and again that they would not let anyone use Afghan soil against other states but the Taliban-led new government does not have the capacity to do that as reflected through TTP's growing attacks against Pakistan.³⁴ Islamabad's worries are increasing, and it is pushing the Taliban to act against TTP which is operating from Afghanistan. There were rumours of the Taliban setting up an internal committee to investigate TTP's anti-Pakistan activities³⁵ but so far, the Taliban have not provided any clear

32 ETIM is an Uyghur Islamic extremist organisation which was founded in Xinjiang, China, and the United Nations Security Council declared it a terrorist group in 2002.

33 Stephanie Findlay and Christian Shepherd, "Taliban officials visit China to discuss security after US pulls out", *Financial Times*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/d7d7f627-92f9-4f1d-a07d-5c6a8ef18a2e>.

34 Gul Yousafzai, "Three soldiers killed in suicide attack in southwest Pakistan", *Reuters*, September 5, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/three-soldiers-killed-suicide-attack-southwest-pakistan-2021-09-05/>.

35 "Afghanistan's Taliban Forms Commission to Look into TTP's Anti-Pak Acts", *Livemint*, August 22, 2021, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/afghanistans-taliban-forms-commission-to-look-into-ttp-s-anti-pak-acts-11629590158995.html>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

roadmap on how they will counter TTP and other terrorist groups.

Since the start of the 'War on Terror' in 2001, Pakistan has been using a variety of kinetic and non-kinetic strategies to counter extremism and terrorism. While it has been successful in reducing the influence of numerous terrorist groups like TTP, it continues to struggle to handle the root causes, i.e., radicalisation and extremism. With the Taliban's success next door, many in Pakistan are worried that this might inspire mullahs and Islamists to demand the expansion of *Sharia* (Islamic law) in the country which for now exists parallel to Pakistani law which is based on the legal system of British India. Pakistani expert Ayesha Siddiqi argued in a newspaper interview that "the Taliban takeover will empower all extremist-religious elements in Pakistan".³⁶ It is therefore important to look at the initial reactions of how different religious groups and organisations have reacted to the Taliban's victory. While there are dozens of mullahs and Islamists that have congratulated the Taliban, it is important to see how and why the prominent Pakistani religious political parties view the situation in Afghanistan. In this regard, the discussion will focus on the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F) and the Jamaat-e-Islami because both these parties collaborated closely with the state of Pakistan during the Afghan-Soviet War and are historically pro-Taliban. The chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami "expressed jubilation over the return of the Taliban", JUI-F's chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman sent a congratulatory letter to Akhundzada.³⁷

36 Ellis-Petersen and Baloch, op. cit.

37 Khurram Abbas and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Why are some Pakistanis celebrating the Taliban takeover?" *The Diplomat*, September 30, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/09/why-are-some-pakistanis-celebrating-the-taliban-takeover/>.

Since August last year, TTP’s activities in Pakistan have grown. This has various dimensions, such as fundraising, recruitment and attacks. The group’s activities are no longer limited to just ex-FATA as it has been even collecting extortion money in KP’s capital, Peshawar. TTP has been against the fencing of the Durand Line and opposes FATA’s merger with KP. The terrorist group has increased its attacks against various targets in Pakistan but there are also other groups like IS-KP that have become more active in Pakistan since the Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan. The monthly data on terrorist incidents also show this trend, see Table 2.

Table 2: Monthly data of terrorist incidents in Pakistan during August 2021-March 2022

Month	Incidents	Month	Incidents
August 2021	46	December 2021	43
September 2021	30	January 2022	33
October 2021	38	February 2022	32
November 2021	28	March 2022	22

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal³⁸

Despite TTP’s offensive, the government of Pakistan’s initial reaction was to reach a political settlement with the group. These negotiations were facilitated by the Taliban, especially Siraj Haqqani who is the first deputy leader of the Taliban since 2016. The TTP initially also wanted the government to reserve its decision on ex-FATA’s merger with KP but then withdrew this demand as the negotiations proceeded.³⁹ In November 2021, the TTP announced a ceasefire in exchange for the government releasing TTP prisoners. In December 2021, Pakistan released

38 “Yearly fatalities – Pakistan”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>.

39 Jamshed Baghwan, “TTP Withdraws Demand of Reversing FATA Merger”, *The Express Tribune*, November 27, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2331189/ttp-withdraws-demand-of-reversing-fata-merger>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

80 TTP prisoners and there was a plan to release 46 more.⁴⁰ Still, the TTP suspended the ceasefire in December 2021 by blaming the government of Pakistan for not keeping its commitments such as releasing 102 TTP prisoners before November 2021. Also, the TTP blamed the government for violating the ceasefire agreement through security operations against the group in Lakki Marwat, Swat, Bajaur, Dir and Swabi.⁴¹ This could be because the Imran Khan government had reached no decision regarding amnesty for TTP.⁴²

The Khan government still wanted to reinstate negotiations with the TTP. The second round of negotiations started in February 2022 and the government until then had released at least 100 TTP prisoners. A major hurdle in the way was still the issue of a presidential pardon for the TTP which was not signed by President of Pakistan Arif Alvi. From March to April 2022, this was not a priority for the Khan government as it faced a major challenge in the shape of the vote of no confidence against the Prime Minister from opposition parties. No progress was therefore made with reference to a peace agreement with the TTP.⁴³

40 Mushtaq Yousafzai, "Govt releases dozens of low key prisoners as peace talks continue with TTP", *The News*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/915306-govt-releases-dozens-of-low-key-prisoners-as-peace-talks-continue-with-ttp>.

41 Asad Hashim, "Pakistani Taliban Ends Ceasefire, Future of Peace Talks Uncertain", *Al Jazeera*, December 10, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/10/pakistan-taliban-ceasefire-peace-talks-ttp#:~:text=Islamabad%2C%20Pakistan%20%E2%80%93%20The%20Tehreek%2D,peace%20talks%2C%20a%20statement%20says>.

42 "No decision on amnesty for TTP: Moeed Yusuf", *The Express Tribune*, November 12, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2329080/no-decision-on-amnesty-for-ttp-moeed-yusuf>.

43 Niha Dagia, "Talks with TTP Take Back Seat as Pakistan's Prime Minister Turns Attention to Political Turmoil", *The Diplomat*, March 16, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/talks-with-ttp-take-back-seat-as-pakistan-prime-minister-turns-attention-to-political-turmoil/>.

WHAT IS NEXT?

In April 2022, Imran Khan lost the no-confidence motion and was replaced by Shahbaz Sharif as the new Prime Minister of Pakistan. This however is not the only factor that will influence the government's negotiations with TTP as the military is in favour of a peaceful settlement. Nonetheless, there are two camps within the country, with some clearly against the idea of a peaceful settlement with TTP.⁴⁴ There are concerns that a settlement would just allow TTP to regroup – a process that is already underway. Syed Ali Zia Jaffery is of the view that Pakistan should use its leverage with the Afghan Taliban to crush TTP's roots in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ It is, however, clear that Islamabad is concerned about another wave of terrorism, as TTP has already demonstrated that they are stronger than before and can harm Pakistan. Pakistan clearly feels that it can gain from its geo-economic significance, but this would require peace and stability. These perspectives were clearly reflected in the country's first National Security Policy.⁴⁶ There is, consequently, no viable option other than to reach a peaceful settlement with TTP.

The new United Government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz has also allowed negotiations with TTP, and there was little alternative after the Afghan Taliban told Islamabad that it would not take any military action against the group, and there is little possibility of taking military action

44 Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, "Negotiating with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan is a bad idea", *Atlantic Council*, June 10, 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/negotiating-with-the-tehreek-i-taliban-pakistan-ttp-is-a-bad-idea/>.

45 Ibid.

46 Kashoon Leeza, "Pakistan's National Security Policy: Opportunities and contradictions", *South Asian Voices*, February 4, 2022, <https://southasianvoices.org/pakistans-national-security-policy-opportunities-and-contradictions/>.

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan & Terrorism in Pakistan

against TTP hideouts in Afghanistan.⁴⁷ Any expectations from the Taliban would be misplaced, as the regime is experiencing multiple crises, which are likely to worsen as the Taliban regime has not been recognized by any country, including Pakistan. Islamabad is also cautious because anti-Pakistan sentiments are very high in Afghanistan, as millions blame Pakistan for bringing back the Taliban.⁴⁸

TTP has unilaterally announced a ceasefire, and this shows its interests in creating a conducive environment for negotiations. For now, negotiations continue and the Pakistan Army is a key stakeholder, while the new civilian government has little involvement in the process.⁴⁹ The Pakistan Army is quite likely to use its influence with the Afghan Taliban and Pashtun leaders in former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA, now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) to reach an agreement. While these initiatives may serve Pakistan's interests in short-run, any settlement – and for now none is in sight – is unlikely to be sustainable in terms of resolving Pakistan's TTP problem.

If there is no settlement, TTP likely will again launch another wave of terrorism in Pakistan, especially against Pakistan's armed forces. If there is a peaceful settlement and TTP's demands are met, other terrorist groups could use the same strategy to achieve a settlement, paving the way for them to become legitimate political or community actors.

47 Naveed Hussain, "TTP talks: Lasting peace may still be a longshot", *The Express Tribune*, June 12, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2361085/ttp-talks-lasting-peace-may-still-be-a-longshot>.

48 Asfandyar Mir, "Pakistan's twin Taliban problem", *United States Institute of Peace*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/05/pakistans-twin-taliban-problem>.

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CONCLUSION

There is more at stake for Pakistan than was ever the case. A key factor in the situation is the CPEC, due to which Pakistan has shifted its focus towards geo-economics and Afghanistan is centrally placed within that vision. Pakistan does not enjoy full control over the Afghan Taliban, and the group also wants to gain more autonomy. While the Afghan Taliban in the past has fought IS-KP and very likely will continue to do so despite its limited capacity, Pakistan's key worries include the Afghan Taliban's refusal to act against TTP.

If Pakistan wants to comprehensively address its growing terrorism problem, then it needs to focus on collaborating with the Afghan Taliban. This again would require a regional approach in which Pakistan will have to count on regional actors like China, Iran and Russia. This is not easy as no country has recognized the Taliban-led interim setup in Afghanistan and unilateral actions may lead to international sanctions. This could be more problematic for Pakistan, which is already on the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force in connection with terrorism financing.

Pakistan's position is weak as the TTP leadership also understands that its sudden offensive has forced Islamabad or the Pakistan Army to the negotiating table. TTP has shown its willingness and desire to negotiate by extending a unilateral ceasefire, and negotiations brokered by the Afghan Taliban are likely to continue. For the time being, however, there is no end in sight, as both sides have stuck to their positions, and Islamabad is unwilling to accept TTP's terms, including a presidential pardon to TTP.

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