

The Taliban's Takeover of Afghanistan and Pakistan's Terrorism Problem

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Abstract

While Pakistan mainly focuses on its geopolitical gains vis-à-vis India in the shape of the Afghan Taliban's return to Kabul, the developments since the Taliban's takeover have brought serious security challenges for Pakistan. Besides, the resurgence of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State-Khorasan Province has also increased its terrorist attacks in Pakistan. As both terrorist groups have a strong presence in Afghanistan, Islamabad has no other option but to work with the Taliban. By examining terrorism in Pakistan since August 2021, this paper focuses on how Pakistan has responded to its growing terrorism problem. This paper argues that a variety of domestic and external factors will influence Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts, including its own political instability, relationship with the Taliban and a political settlement with the TTP.

Keywords: Pakistan, Afghan Taliban, Afghanistan, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, Terrorism, Counterterrorism, State fragility

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Introduction

Immediately after its independence in 1947, Pakistan faced territorial disputes with Afghanistan and India. Due to its opposition to the validity of the Durand Line agreement – signed between Kabul and British India – after 1947, Afghanistan became the only country to oppose Pakistan’s membership of the United Nations. At this conflictual start, it is no surprise that Afghanistan-Pakistan relations were dominated more by differences at that time. They grew significantly as Afghanistan moved closer to Pakistan’s archrival, India. This led to the dominance of Pakistan’s strategic depth approach vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Consequently, Pakistan decided to establish relations with Afghan Islamists, however, the desire for a friendly regime in Kabul was not realized until the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in 1996.¹ 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 in the early 1990s.² In the shape of the IEA, Pakistan found not just a friendly regime in Kabul but also the one that had no links with India because New Delhi had closed its embassy in Kabul in 1996. Then, the IEA was only recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Islamabad’s support was the Taliban regime’s lifeline as there was cooperation in terms of human and financial resources, weapons and Pashtun combatants from Pakistan to fight the Northern Alliance.³ Notwithstanding their conflictual relations as a result of Pakistan’s partnership in the ‘War on Terror,’ the Taliban and Pakistan revived their relations around 2005/06. This was reflected in Islamabad’s support for the US-Taliban peace deal as Pakistan hosted

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- ¹ Zahid Shahab Ahmed, “The Taliban’s Takeover of Afghanistan and Pakistan’s Non-traditional Security Challenges,” *Global Policy* 13, no. 1 (2022): 125– 131.
- ² Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Political Islam, the Jamaat-e-Islami, and Pakistan’s Role in the Afghan-Soviet War, 1979–1988." In *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective*, edited by Philip E Muehlenbeck, 275-96. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012.
- ³ Safiullah Taya and Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Dynamics of Trust and Mistrust in the Afghanistan–Pakistan Relationship," *Asian Studies Review* 45, no. 4 (2021): 557-75.

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several Taliban delegations in Pakistan during 2020-2021. Since the Taliban's takeover, Pakistan continues to lobby internationally to avoid humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. This is shown through Pakistan's advocacy at bilateral and multilateral levels. The biggest worry for Islamabad remains the presence of anti-Pakistan terrorists, especially TTP, in Afghanistan. Within this context, this paper focuses on how Pakistan's security has been adversely affected since the Taliban's capture of Afghanistan and what are Islamabad's counter-terrorism options.

Like all of Afghanistan's immediate neighbours, Pakistan supported the US-Taliban peace deal which was signed in Qatar in February 2020. A key aspect of this deal included a full withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. As the withdrawal approached in June 2021, Islamabad was concerned about the possible repercussions for Pakistan from a rushed withdrawal of foreign troops without a settlement between the Taliban and the Ashraf Ghani government.⁴ Concerned about what was happening 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".⁵ Also, Khan urged the international community to not blame Pakistan for the situation in Afghanistan. This was a response to allegations from Kabul on Pakistan's support for the Taliban.⁶ It was also a high time of negativity against Pakistan as #SanctionPakistan was a popular campaign on Twitter.⁷ Also, fake news was widespread accusing Pakistan military of the Taliban's victory in Panjshir where Ahmad Massoud, son of Ahmad Shah Massoud, was leading a major resistance against the Taliban's

⁴ Madiha Afzal, "An Uneasy Limbo for Us-Pakistan Relations Amidst the Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Brookings*, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/08/06/an-uneasy-limbo-for-us-pakistan-relations-amidst-the-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/>

⁵ Syed Irfan Raza, "PM Delivers Stinging Rebuke after Ghani's Outburst." *Dawn*, July 17, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1635491>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tallha Abdulrazaq, "Sanction Pakistan? Try Blaming America for Afghanistan," *TRT World*, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/sanction-pakistan-try-blaming-america-for-afghanistan-49159>

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complete control of Afghanistan. This propaganda against Pakistan continued while Pakistan was helping many states rescue their citizens from Afghanistan.⁸

The situation is already alarming for Pakistan as the number of terrorist incidents has increased significantly since August 2021. In eight months during August 2021-March 2022, there were 272 terrorism-related incidents in Pakistan.⁹ This number is higher than in any year from 2018 to 2020.¹⁰ This, however, is not a surprise because a UN report had already warned Pakistan that there were roughly 6,000 anti-Pakistan terrorists in Afghanistan, mainly belonging to TTP.¹¹ Since August 2021, TTP has increased its activities in Pakistan, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).¹² Islamabad has been in discussions with the Afghan Taliban to address its TTP problem and the Taliban mediated dialogue between Pakistan and TTP in 2022. Simultaneous attacks by the TTP and the Islamic State-Khorasan Province are responsible for increasing terrorism in Pakistan. According to the Global Terrorism Index of 2022, terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan increased from 263 in 2020 to 275 in 2021.¹³ The Index also reported that deaths from terrorism had fallen by

⁸ 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>

⁹ "Yearly fatalities – Pakistan," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 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>

¹² "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>

¹³ Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the impact of terrorism (Sydney: Institute of Economics and Peace, 2022).

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over one-third after 2015 in Pakistan.¹⁴ This is mainly an outcome of military operations against terrorist organizations and now this hard-fought success is in danger due to Afghanistan's state fragility.

For now, Pakistan has achieved its national interest as India has no diplomatic presence in Afghanistan but not all of Pakistan's concerns are over. Islamabad has its own increasing fears regarding extremism and terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. There have been many incidents since the Taliban's takeover demonstrating Pakistan's uncomfortable relationship with the group. Islamabad, however, realizes that it must cooperate with the Taliban to address its terrorism and other problems, for example, drug-trafficking. In terms of the structure of the paper, it begins with an overview of the context focusing on Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan and engagement with various actors in the country. This follows analysis of Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban and how state fragility in Afghanistan influences security in Pakistan. The analysis particularly focuses on terrorism in Pakistan.

The context

Relations with India remain a key security problem for Pakistan. This is evident through ongoing tensions and the fact that the two countries have fought four wars, including the most recent Kargil War in 1999. Naturally, India remains Pakistan's key security problem but relations with Afghanistan have been affecting Pakistan's security. Moreover, Afghanistan's domestic dynamics and state fragility allows the presence and growth of terrorist organizations. It continues to create security problems for Pakistan.

Differences over the validity of the Durand Line agreement led to a conflictual start of the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship that got more problematic after Afghanistan's attacks in ex-FATA and Balochistan in the 1950s. When former president of Afghanistan, Daoud Khan, ousted King Zahir Shah in 1973, Pakistan faced a major challenge in the shape of

¹⁴ Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the impact of terrorism (Sydney: Institute of Economics and Peace, 2022).

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a prominent advocate of Pashtunistan in Kabul.¹⁵ This drastically affected the bilateral relationship as Khan began supporting Pashtun and Baloch groups in Pakistan. It eventually resulted in a policy shift in Pakistan. Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government established an 'Afghan Cell' within Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and began forging relations with anti-Daoud politicians like Burhanuddin Rabbani.¹⁶

Pakistan's desire for a friendly government in Afghanistan was not achieved until the establishment of the IEA in 1996. This desire led Pakistan to become a frontline ally of the US in the Afghan-Soviet War. Later, during 1977-1988, the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan viewed this as an ideal opportunity to gain legitimacy at home and abroad.¹⁷ Pakistani security strategists believed that the Soviet Union had a bigger ambition in Afghanistan and could attack Pakistan after its victory in Afghanistan to reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea.¹⁸ After the Soviet troops left Afghanistan in 1989, there was a civil war after which an interim government of Burhanuddin Rabbani was established in 1992. As Rabbani refused to step down, a civil war broke out and eventually the Taliban emerged and established the IEA in 1996.¹⁹ After September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the US by Al Qaeda, the US and NATO troops attacked Afghanistan. This military operation quickly led to the Taliban's defeat and the IEA fell in 2001. The US-led NATO victory was quick as the Taliban regime was defeated and many of its leaders took refuge in Pakistan. It was in Pakistan that the Taliban managed to re-organize, for example through the Quetta Shura. Under

¹⁵ Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2016: A Concise History*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017.

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

¹⁷ Md 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.

¹⁸ Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2016: A Concise History*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017.

¹⁹ Nadiri, "Old Habits, New Consequences."

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international pressure, Pakistan launched several military operations and captured high-profile Taliban leaders like Mullah Jalil and Abdul Latif Hakimi in 2006.²⁰ However, Islamabad maintained its links with the Taliban and began advocating for a political settlement when the war intensified in Afghanistan in 2010. A key step in this direction was the establishment of the Taliban's political office in Doha through which the group managed to negotiate not just with the US but also established diplomatic links with other countries, including China and Russia.²¹ After various rounds of negotiations, a peace deal between the Taliban and the US was signed in 2020, but the Ashraf Ghani administration was not a party to this deal. As per the agreement, the Taliban engaged with the Ghani government under intra-Afghan dialogues on power-sharing, but no agreement was finalized. With the change of administration in the US, President Joe Biden announced to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of 9/11. While the international troops were leaving Afghanistan, the Taliban began capturing additional areas and eventually took over Kabul in August 2021.

As Pakistan's arch-rival, India became a prominent actor in Afghanistan after its fall in 2001, through aid and security cooperation.²² Pakistan looked towards the Taliban to have a friendly regime once again in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the Taliban also needed Pakistan's diplomatic support to achieve its political objectives 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, by hosting such dialogues and participating in other sessions of Peace Dialogue hosted in Qatar, Russia and China. Now that the Taliban

²⁰ Nadiri, "Old Habits, New Consequences."

²¹ 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/>

²² Belquis, Ahmadi and Wikram J Singh, "Can India Help Bring Peace to Afghanistan?," Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 2020.

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government is established, Pakistan is providing both aid and diplomatic support. Unlike the earlier policy of recognizing the IEA in 1996, Pakistan's current approach is more cautious and is in sync with the world's view. It does not want to unilaterally recognize the new Taliban regime. This, however, leaves Pakistan with a difficult choice as it wants to engage with the Taliban not just for its geopolitical and geo-economic gains but also to address its own security problems that have increased since August 2021.

Terrorism in Pakistan: After 9/11

Pakistan suffered tremendously after the US intervention in Afghanistan in 2001. The loss of over 80,000 lives and economic damages of more than US\$100 billion from 2001 to 2021, are the most painful experiences.²³ This was mainly an outcome of Al Qaeda and Afghan Taliban fighters, relocated in KP and Balochistan in Pakistan. Since Pakistan's tribal areas – bordering regions with Afghanistan – known as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), were not merged with KP, it was very easier for Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters to settle in ex-FATA and the Afghan Taliban also managed to re-organize in Pakistan through the Quetta Shura. As Wang argues, the Talibanization of Pakistan's peripheral areas facilitated the formation of several terrorist groups to the detriment of the country's domestic security.²⁴

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 and challenged the writ of the state, the Pakistani military launched an operation *Rah-e-Rast* and retook the area in 2009. It seemed at that time that even the focus on comprehensive measures was neglected

²³ 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/>

²⁴ 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.

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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 led to the creation of the 20-point National Action Plan (NAP), and Operation *Zarb-e-Azb* was launched against various terrorist groups like TTP in 2015. This played a key role in the decline of terrorism in Pakistan from 2,347 in 2012, to 193 in 2020 (See Table 1).

Table 1: Terrorist incidents in Pakistan, 2012-2021

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

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal²⁵

Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban

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 its terrorism problem which has a strong correlation with fragility in Afghanistan. Historically, Pakistan has

²⁵ "Yearly fatalities – Pakistan", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>

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managed its influence over the Taliban in various ways. After the collapse of the IEA in 2001, there were many key Taliban figures that took refuge in Pakistan and their families also accompanied them. There are many who form the Taliban's current leadership, originally belonged to the Quetta Shura. These include the Taliban's chief Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada.²⁶

Unlike past, the Taliban are not fully under Pakistan's control. Even during the IEA's first-term, the Taliban had never recognized the Durand Line as a permanent border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This happened even though the Taliban regime was more dependent on Pakistan by virtue of having limited external links. Now that is not the case as the Taliban have relationships with Iran, China, Russia and Gulf countries too.²⁷

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 Muslim states and has organized 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 demanded more aid for Afghanistan.²⁸ Islamabad had pledged US\$28 million in humanitarian aid,

²⁶ Hamzah Rifaat Hussain, "Haibatullah Akhundzada and the resurgence of the Taliban," *The Diplomat*, June 4, 2016.
<https://thediplomat.com/2016/06/haibatullah-akhundzada-and-the-resurgence-of-the-taliban/>

²⁷ Ahmed, Abbas and Akbarzadeh, "The Taliban develops regional relationships as it makes territorial gains in Afghanistan," *Melbourne Asia Review*, September 2020.

²⁸ "OIC secretary general and Pakistan Prime Minister discuss the situation in Afghanistan and in Jammu and Kashmir, and Islamophobia," *Organization of*

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including 50,000 metric tons of food and medical supplies.²⁹ Pakistan has also allowed aid from India to go by land through its territory to Afghanistan. Yet 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 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.³⁰

Other incidents also demonstrate that Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban is a troubled one. During the IEA period of (1996-2001), the Taliban did not recognize the Durand Line as a permanent border between the two countries. Abdul Qahar Balkhi of the Taliban wrote on Twitter that incidents along the Durand Line demand both sides to resolve this dispute.³¹

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."³² Hence, Taliban fighters have been stopping the Pakistani military from erecting a fence in several locations.³³

Islamic Cooperation, 19 December 2021, https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=30616&t_ref=19567&lan=en

²⁹ 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>

³⁰ Arif Hayat, "Afghan Taliban Arrest Officials Who Removed Pakistan's Flag from Aid Truck," *Dawn*, September 22, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1647759>

³¹ Umair Jamal, "Taliban-Pakistan Ties Run into Trouble," *The Diplomat*, January 11, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/taliban-pakistan-ties-run-into-trouble/>

³² "Taliban stop Pakistani troops from fencing border," December 23, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1665245>

³³ Ibid.

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Despite this resistance, Pakistan continues with the project that is estimated to cost more than US\$500 million but will play a crucial role in terms of handling terrorism as many terrorist groups have been using areas along the Durand Line for their operations.³⁴

State fragility in Afghanistan and Pakistan's terrorism problem

Historically, Afghanistan's state fragility has affected Pakistan in multiple ways. Afghanistan has experienced instability in various forms since the 1970s, pushing millions across its borders to take refuge in neighbouring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan. After the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979, there were more than four million Afghan refugees in Pakistan.³⁵ Drug-trafficking, originating from Afghanistan, also expanded during the 1980s and, by 1984, Afghanistan supplied 60% of the US and 80% of the European market demand. As most of those drugs were trafficked through Pakistan, the number of heroin addicts in Pakistan increased from 5,000 in 1980 to 1.3 million in 1985.³⁶ Not much has changed since, as Afghanistan still remains fragile. This fragility increased during the US-led military operations in the country, and Afghanistan was ranked as the seventh most fragile state in the world in 2014, by the Fund for Peace organization.³⁷ Afghanistan ranked ninth in

³⁴ 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>

³⁵ "Afghanistan's refugees: forty years of dispossession," *Amnesty International*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/afghanistan-refugees-forty-years/#:~:text=By%20the%20end%20of%201980,world's%20largest%20protraced%20refugee%20population.>

³⁶ Alfred W McCoy, "How the heroin trade explains the US-UK failure in Afghanistan," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jan/09/how-the-heroin-trade-explains-the-us-uk-failure-in-afghanistan>

³⁷ "Afghanistan, the world's 7th fragile state," *Tolo News*, June 27, 2014, [https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-worlds-7th-fragile-state#:~:text=Afghanistan%20is%20declared%20as%20the,for%20Peace%20\(FFP\)%20organization.](https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-worlds-7th-fragile-state#:~:text=Afghanistan%20is%20declared%20as%20the,for%20Peace%20(FFP)%20organization.)

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the 2021 Fragile States Index,³⁸ and it is likely that state fragility will further grow as the Taliban struggle to establish a workable or legitimate governance system in the country. It is, therefore, important to assess the impact of fragility in Afghanistan on Pakistan, especially in connection to terrorism.

Pakistan's success against terrorism has not come easy. Its achievement in the shape of a significant decline in terrorism is at risk due to the change of regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban maintain a relationship with a major anti-Pakistan terrorist group, i.e., the TTP. Also, there are risks linked to the IS-KP's operations inside Pakistan. Since its establishment in 2007, the TTP has been engaged in terrorist attacks in Pakistan. As a result of Pakistan army operations, more than 6,000 TTP terrorists took refuge in Afghanistan.³⁹ The level of the TTP's relationship with the Taliban was also noticeable as the latter released many TTP prisoners from Afghan jails during July-August 2021.⁴⁰

Since 2001, Pakistan has used multiple strategies to address terrorism and violent extremism. Despite successes in terms of reducing the influence of many terrorist groups, such as the TTP, Pakistan has not fully addressed the root causes of terrorism, like radicalization and extremism. With the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, there are concerns in Pakistan that they might motivate Pakistani Islamists to demand full implementation of *Sharia* in the country. Siddiqi argued, "The Taliban takeover will

³⁸ Fragile states index: annual report 2021 (Washington: Fund for Peace, 2021).

³⁹ "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," United Nations Security Council, <https://www.undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/S/2021/486>

⁴⁰ Oved Lobel, "How Afghanistan's fall to the Taliban increases the global terrorism threat," *The Strategist*, <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-divided-over-success-of-taliban-in-afghanistan>

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empower all extremist-religious elements in Pakistan.”⁴¹ Islamists in Pakistan have already been joyous at the Taliban’s victory and sent congratulatory messages to the chief of the Jamaat-e-Islami and “expressed jubilation over the return of the Taliban.” Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazal’s chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman also sent a congratulatory letter to Akhundzada.⁴²

Since August 2021, the TTP’s activities in Pakistan have grown exponentially. 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. The 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 August 2021. 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	Number of incidents
August 2021	46
September 2021	30
October 2021	38
November 2021	28

⁴¹ Ellis-Petersen and Baloch, "Pakistan divided over success of Taliban in Afghanistan."

⁴² 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/>

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December 2021	43
January 2022	33
February 2022	32
March 2022	22

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal⁴³

Despite the 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 reverse its decision on ex-FATA's merger with KP but then withdrew this demand as the negotiations proceeded.⁴⁴ In November 2021, the TTP announced a ceasefire in exchange for the government releasing the TTP prisoners. In December 2021, Pakistan released 80 TTP prisoners and there was a plan to release 46 more.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ This could be

⁴³ "Yearly fatalities – Pakistan," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/pakistan>

⁴⁴ 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>

⁴⁵ 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>

⁴⁶ 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->

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because the government had not reached to any decision regarding amnesty for the TTP.⁴⁷

Despite all the fallouts, the Imran Khan government 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 has not been signed by the President of Pakistan, Arif Alvi. From March to April 2022, it was not the priority for Imran Khan's government due to political upheavals within the country. No progress has, therefore, been made with reference to a peace agreement with the TTP, and it is unclear how the group will react to this while the country goes through heightened political instability.⁴⁸ Despite internal political instability, the new government under Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif must prioritize counterterrorism. The new government has also decided to continue negotiations with the TTP. The results though look far-fetched. Pakistan also needs to focus on the root causes of terrorism which are equally linked to the fragility of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

State fragility in Afghanistan continues to adversely affect Pakistan's security. There is more at stake for Pakistan than ever before. A key factor in this is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (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 Taliban as the group also wants to gain more autonomy. Though

ttp#:~:text=Islamabad%2C%20Pakistan%20%E2%80%93%20The%20Tehreek%20D,peace%20talks%2C%20a%20statement%20says.

⁴⁷ "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>

⁴⁸ 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-pakistans-prime-minister-turns-attention-to-political-turmoil/>

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the Taliban have fought IS-KP, they might continue to do so despite their limited capacity. On the other hand, Pakistan's key worries are regarding the Taliban's will to address its TTP problem. If Pakistan wants to comprehensively address its growing terrorism problem, then it needs to focus on collaborating with the Taliban on a counter-terrorism strategy. This again would require a regional approach in which Pakistan needs to rely on regional actors like China, Iran and Russia. This is not easy as the Taliban's new government is yet to be recognized. This could be more problematic for Pakistan which has been struggling to graduate from the grey-list of the FATF in connection to terrorism financing. Hence, Islamabad maintains a position that it is not going to recognize the Taliban government alone. Pakistan's own political instability is likely to affect negotiations with the TTP and cooperation with Afghanistan on the issue of terrorism. ■