

## **SUMMARY of “Pakistan’s Afghan predicament,” Maleeha Lodhi, January 15th, 2024**

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The article by Maleeha Lodhi discusses the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, primarily fueled by Pakistan's concerns about the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating from Afghan territory. Despite warnings and assurances from the Taliban, the TTP's activities have increased, leading to escalated border tensions and attacks on Pakistani security forces. Efforts, including talks and warnings, to address the issue have yielded no positive outcomes. The situation worsened in 2023 with a surge in terrorist activities, leaving Islamabad frustrated. The article highlights a shift in Pakistan's approach towards Kabul, adopting a tougher stance by rejecting talks with the TTP, deporting undocumented Afghans, and imposing trade restrictions. A recent visit by an Afghan delegation to Pakistan aimed at defusing tensions showed minimal progress on the core issue of TTP. The article concludes with uncertainties about the Taliban's intentions and questions Pakistan's options if the Taliban continues to be unwilling to act against the TTP.

### **Easy/Short SUMMARY:**

The article discusses the strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan due to Pakistan's security concerns regarding the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) based in Afghanistan. Despite warnings and assurances from the Taliban, TTP attacks on Pakistan have increased, leading to heightened tensions. Efforts to address the issue through talks and warnings have been ineffective. In response, Pakistan adopted a tougher stance, including rejecting talks with the TTP, deporting Afghans, and imposing trade restrictions. A recent visit by an Afghan delegation to Pakistan showed minimal progress on the core issue. The article concludes with uncertainties about the Taliban's intentions and questions



Pakistan's options if the situation persists.

## **SOLUTIONS of The Problem:**

### ***Enhance Bilateral Security Cooperation***

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan should enhance cooperation in addressing shared security concerns, especially regarding the activities of outlawed groups like the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

### ***Establish Clear Timelines for Action***

During talks, set clear timelines for Afghanistan to take meaningful actions against TTP, avoiding delays and uncertainties.

### ***Strengthen Intelligence Sharing***

Improve intelligence sharing between Pakistan and Afghanistan to effectively monitor and counter the activities of extremist groups operating in the region.

### ***Engage in Track-II Diplomacy***

Encourage non-governmental initiatives and people-to-people dialogues to build trust and explore alternative solutions to the security challenges.

### ***International Mediation***

Seek the assistance of international mediators or organizations to facilitate constructive dialogues and resolutions between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

### ***Humanitarian Assistance and Development Initiatives***

Address the root causes of extremism by investing in humanitarian assistance and development projects in the border regions, fostering stability and cooperation.

### ***Enhance Border Management***

Implement effective border management strategies to prevent the illegal



movement of individuals and activities contributing to regional instability.

### ***Joint Military Operations Against TTP***

Consider coordinated military operations between Pakistan and Afghanistan to eliminate TTP safe havens and disrupt their activities.

### ***Encourage Regional Cooperation***

Engage neighboring countries and regional organizations in collaborative efforts to address security challenges and promote stability in the region.

### ***Promote Diplomatic Dialogue***

Continue diplomatic engagements between Pakistan and Afghanistan to maintain open channels of communication and resolve issues through peaceful means.

## **How to Improve Pakistan-Afghanistan Taliban Relationships:**

### ***Establish Trust through Diplomacy***

Initiate diplomatic efforts to build trust between Pakistan and the Taliban leadership. Create open channels of communication to foster understanding and cooperation.

### ***Joint Counterterrorism Operations***

Collaborate on joint counterterrorism operations against common threats like the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Shared security concerns can be a basis for mutual cooperation.

### ***Mediation by Regional Partners***

Engage regional partners or international organizations to mediate and facilitate constructive dialogues between Pakistan and the Taliban. Neutral mediators can



help bridge gaps and find common ground.

## ***Address Root Causes of Extremism***

Collaborate on addressing the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, lack of education, and economic disparities. Implement joint initiatives for socio-economic development in border regions.

## ***Enhance Intelligence Sharing***

Strengthen intelligence-sharing mechanisms between Pakistan and the Taliban to effectively monitor and counteract extremist activities. Shared information can contribute to improved security.

## ***Economic Cooperation***

Explore opportunities for economic cooperation and development projects that can benefit both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Joint ventures can contribute to regional stability.

## ***People-to-People Contacts***

Encourage people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges to create positive interactions between the citizens of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Promote understanding and reduce mistrust.

## ***Humanitarian Assistance***

Collaborate on providing humanitarian assistance to areas affected by conflict. Joint efforts can alleviate the suffering of affected populations and demonstrate shared responsibility.

## ***Educational Exchanges***

Facilitate educational exchanges and scholarships between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Shared educational experiences can foster goodwill and



understanding among the youth.

## ***Establish Clear Communication Channels***

Establish clear and transparent communication channels between Pakistan and the Taliban leadership. Clarity in communication can prevent misunderstandings and ease tensions.

It is crucial to note that building relationships requires patience, continuous efforts, and a commitment to resolving differences through peaceful means. Additionally, involving relevant stakeholders and ensuring inclusivity in diplomatic initiatives can contribute to long-term stability in the region.

## **IMPORTANT Facts and Figures Given in the article:**

- Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have increased over the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating from Afghan territory.
- Despite warnings and assurances, the TTP's activities have escalated, leading to increased border tensions and attacks on Pakistani security forces.
- Talks and warnings to address the issue have not yielded positive outcomes.
- The surge in terrorist activities in 2023 resulted in a significant rise in casualties of security personnel, hitting an eight-year high.
- Efforts, including talks and warnings, to address the issue have been ineffective.
- Pakistan shifted to a tougher policy, rejecting talks with the TTP, deporting undocumented Afghans, and imposing trade restrictions.

## **MCQs from the Article:**

### **1. What is the primary concern leading to tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan?**

- A. Economic disputes
- B. Border demarcation



**C. Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) activities**

D. Political alliances

**2. What significant event occurred in August 2021 related to the Taliban?**

A. Ceasefire agreement

B. Border resolution

**C. Taliban's return to power**

D. Peace talks with Pakistan

**3. What was the outcome of several rounds of talks and interactions with Taliban officials last year?**

A. Resolution of security concerns

**B. No positive outcome**

C. Mutual agreement on TTP's actions

D. Strengthened diplomatic ties

**4. What actions did Pakistan take to adopt a tougher policy towards Kabul?**

A. Economic sanctions

**B. Deporting undocumented Afghans, imposing trade restrictions**

C. Military intervention

D. Diplomatic withdrawal

**5. What was the impact of the surge in terrorist activities in 2023?**

A. Improved security conditions

B. Diplomatic breakthrough

**C. Significant rise in casualties of security personnel**

D. Successful counter-terrorism operations

## VOCABULARY:

1. **Predicament** (noun) (پريديڪامنٽ): A difficult, unpleasant, or embarrassing situation.
2. **Elicited** (verb) (ايڪيلٽڊ): Drew out or obtained a response or information.
3. **Outlawed** (adjective) (اوتلاؤڊ): Prohibited or banned by law.
4. **Escalation** (noun) (ايسڪاليشن): An increase in the intensity or seriousness of something, especially conflict.
5. **Parleys** (noun) (پارليز): Informal discussions or conferences, especially between enemies.
6. **Impediment** (noun) (ايمپيڊمنٽ): An obstacle or hindrance.
7. **Decouple** (verb) (ڊيڪوپل): Disconnect or separate, especially in terms of trade and terrorism in the context of the article.
8. **Defuse** (verb) (ڊيفوز): Make a situation less tense or dangerous.
9. **Levers** (noun) (ليورز): Means of influencing or exerting pressure.
10. **Rupture** (noun) (رپچر): A break or breach in friendly relations.
11. **Minimal Progress** (phrase) (مينيمل پروجيس): Limited or insignificant advancement.
12. **Intentions** (noun) (انٽنشنز): The aim or purpose behind someone's actions.
13. **Leverage** (noun) (ليوريج): Influence or power used to achieve a desired result.
14. **Coercive Approach** (phrase) (ڪوئرسو ايپروچ): Forceful or threatening measures to achieve compliance.
15. **Jurisdiction** (noun) (جوريسڊڪشن): The official power to make legal decisions and judgments.

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## **Pakistan's Afghan predicament**

Maleeha Lodhi

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WHILE engagement continues between Pakistani officials and Taliban authorities the core issue at the heart of tensions between the two countries is nowhere near resolution. Over the past year relations have become increasingly strained as Pakistan's security concerns about the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), based in Afghanistan, have not elicited a meaningful response from Kabul. Pakistan's repeated public warnings to the Taliban about the consequences of TTP's cross-border attacks seemed to have little effect.

When the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, Islamabad hoped this would help Pakistan secure its western border. But this expectation was not met. Instead, there was a marked escalation in border tensions and terrorist attacks targeting Pakistan's security forces. Successive reports by the UN Security Council's Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team found the "TTP benefitted the most of all the foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan from the Taliban takeover". Pakistan's own assessment, contained in a leaked defence ministry report last May, was similar. The report said that Kabul's unwillingness to act against the TTP and its regrouping in Afghanistan after the Taliban's assumption of power posed a growing threat to Pakistan's security. Meanwhile statements by the military voiced serious concerns about "the safe havens and liberty of action available to the TTP in Afghanistan". In July, Army Chief General Asim Munir warned of an "effective response" by the country's security forces if attacks continued from Afghanistan. Other Pakistani officials asked Kabul to



choose between the TTP and Pakistan.

The surge in terrorist activities in 2023 led to a significant rise in the casualties of security personnel, which hit an eight-year high. This left Islamabad increasingly frustrated. Attacks by TTP became more audacious after the collapse of its ceasefire with the government in November 2022. The short-lived ceasefire was itself a misguided and futile attempt by the Pakistani authorities to end the armed group's 14-year war on Pakistan. A wave of violence followed. In one of the worst incidents of terrorism, the TTP attacked a mosque in Peshawar's police lines in January 2023, which claimed nearly a hundred lives and shook the country. Then too dire warnings were issued by Pakistani officials to the Taliban authorities. But to little avail.

Several rounds of talks and multiple interactions with Taliban officials last year produced no outcome. In these talks Taliban leaders offered assurances about restraining the TTP but asked for time to accomplish this. They also argued that containing TTP was a question of their capacity and not commitment. But Islamabad's patience was beginning to wear thin.

The core issue at the heart of tensions between the two countries is still unresolved.

A high-level delegation was dispatched to Kabul in February 2023 to convey Pakistan's red line on terror attacks from Afghan soil and secure a firm commitment from Kabul to rein in TTP and deny it the sanctuary its fighters enjoy there. In these parleys Taliban leaders apparently asked for financial help, ostensibly to disarm and resettle TTP fighters, estimated to be around 5,000, away from the border with Pakistan. All this amounted to nothing especially as this was accompanied by Taliban leaders' 'advice' that Pakistan should revive negotiations with the TTP. This in fact proved to be a turning point urging Islamabad to rethink its Afghan policy.

Against this backdrop Pakistani authorities began to shift course and adopted a tougher policy towards Kabul. Any talks with TTP were firmly rejected. A number of actions followed, designed to mount pressure on the Taliban leadership and raise the costs of its non-cooperation on TTP. They included the decision to

deport tens of thousands of undocumented Afghans from the country and substantial change in regulations governing transit trade by imposition of a ban on many import items from Pakistan (which led to thousands of stranded containers that were prevented from going to Afghanistan.) Islamabad also intensified public criticism of Kabul, accusing it of harbouring Pakistan's enemies. All this showed that Islamabad was prepared to deploy several levers to pressure the Taliban.

In response Kabul indicated its keenness to mend ties with Islamabad while urging it to decouple trade from terrorism and desist from forcing it to take actions under pressure. The recent visit of an Afghan delegation to Pakistan marked an effort to reengage on issues of priority for both sides at a time when a regular meeting of the joint coordination committee was also due. Led by Kandahar Governor Mullah Sherin Akhund, reputed to be a close confidante of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, the delegation was deemed as a serious effort to defuse tensions. The Afghan delegation's 'asks' included the release of containers among other trade issues and a slowing down of the repatriation process for the winter months. The Pakistani side made it clear that movement on the core issue of TTP was essential to address other issues and that patience on that count had already run out.

From accounts of the exchanges on TTP it did not appear any progress was made on this issue. As in the past the Afghan side asked for more time to deal with TTP citing winter as an impediment this time. It also said it would shift TTP members away from the border but that too would start some months from now. In playing for time and not setting out any plan of action to deal with TTP, this again raised the question of the Taliban's seriousness. That Mullah Sherin offered to take Pakistan's message back to the Taliban chief was about the only outcome from the parleys on TTP. Pakistani officials see this as a test in coming months of the top Taliban leadership's intentions. They say the jury is out on whether it will change course and address the issue. But then the jury has been out for quite some time. The key question is what are Pakistan's options if the Taliban show continued unwillingness to act against the TTP. There are no easy answers as there are limits to the leverage Pakistan can use in a coercive approach without risking a rupture in relations, which it would want to avoid.

*The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK and UN.*



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