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Afghan Taliban and TTP Nexus: Reshaping Pak-Afghan Bilateral Relations

Abstract

Pakistan and Afghanistan are two neighboring states sharing both religious and cultural identities as well as multiple crossing points along their borders. Both countries have had ups and downs in their bilateral relations, however, the takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the nexus between Taliban and Tebreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led to intensifying security situations in Pakistan which ultimately resulted in tightening bilateral relations between the two countries. This paper uses a secondary qualitative research design where data has been collected from already existing sources and analyzed with the help of the content analysis method. The nexus between the Taliban and TTP is a result of factors such as religion, common ethnicity, and ideological monolith. TTP allegedly used Afghanistan soil to engage in terrorist activities against Pakistan which brought mistrust and uncertainty in bilateral relations between them.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, TTP, Pakistan, Bilateralism

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Abstract

Pakistan and Afghanistan are two neighboring states sharing both religious and cultural identities as well as multiple crossing points along their borders. Both countries have had ups and downs in their bilateral relations, however, the takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the nexus between Taliban and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led to intensifying security situations in Pakistan which ultimately resulted in tightening bilateral relations between the two countries. This paper uses a secondary qualitative research design where data has been collected from already existing sources and analyzed with the help of the content analysis method. The nexus between the Taliban and TTP is a result of factors such as religion, common ethnicity, and ideological monolith. TTP allegedly used Afghanistan soil to engage in terrorist activities against Pakistan which brought mistrust and uncertainty in bilateral relations between them.

Keywords:

[Afghanistan](#), [Taliban](#), [TTP](#), [Pakistan](#), [Bilateralism](#)

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Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan the two South Asian countries not only share multiple crossing points and borders but also have a long root of communal, cultural, and social relations. The situation in any of these countries impacts the other directly. Afghanistan has been in a war-like situation, regime changes, and extremism and Pakistan has been directly impacted by this. It is worth mentioning that the United States (US) left Afghanistan and brought the neo-Taliban back into power in the month of August 2021, Pakistan expected the Taliban interim government

to usher in a period of peace and stability and also help evict the TTP leadership (Sayed, 2023). However, these expectations were never met. Post US withdrawal, TTP escalated in border tensions and terrorist attacks against Pakistan's security forces, the two facilitated each other and helped in facilitating a nexus between TTP and other foreign extremist groups in Afghanistan.

Being located in such a vital geo-strategic location infringes such challenges and opportunities for Pakistan at the same time. One of the major challenges along with other important aspects is the common border, the



Durand Line, between Pakistan and Afghanistan. At the same time, the Pak–Afghan relations have always been puzzling in practice. The bilateral relations have been quite complex since the independence of Pakistan, when the government of Afghanistan did not back the membership of the newly emerged Pakistan's membership in the United Nations, trust was breached (Ahmad & Ahlawat, 2023). Just like Pakistan's role in Afghan history played its part in turning against the erstwhile Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and played another in the War on Terror, it led to doubts in Afghanistan's people about Pakistan's unnecessary interference in their country. This developed a strong anti-Pakistan sentiment among the common Afghan citizens (Khattak, 2021). However, Pakistan has always blamed Afghanistan for helping India on its soil against Pakistan. Such sentiments on both sides have significantly hindered the Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations despite these two countries sharing religion, language, and other ethnic factors.

The two countries of South Asia are highly interdependent owing to religious, social, and cultural affinities along with the Durand Line. This border has brought a gulf between Pakistan and Afghanistan with the creation of various dimensions of security. Some of the major tensions that Pakistan is facing on the Pak-Afghan border include the controversial status of the Durand Line, across-the-border insurgencies, human trafficking, threats of non-state actors, etc. All these factors have played a role in collectively deteriorating Pakistan and Afghanistan relations (Humza & Khan, 2022). Pakistan had expected an improvement in bilateral relations and, therefore, had hoped to get significant interest in the development. However, the Taliban's conduct made the relationship between the two countries more difficult, rather than what was expected, while it also fuelled the security atmosphere and disorder along Western Borders (Khattak, 2021). The security situations were currently hard to a great extent in the NorthWestern borders of Pakistan that is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Such devastating security situations cause tangible consequences have a significant effect on Pakistan and Afghanistan's bilateral relations, and place the two countries in uncertain times. Therefore, this article aims to investigate the nexus between TTP and Afghan Taliban, its impacts on the security situation in Pakistan as well as implications for the bilateral relations between these two South Asia countries.

Statement of Problem

The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan led to the formation of a new Taliban government in the country, and the country once again in history went into a phase of instability. The situation in Afghanistan, not only impacts the peace and stability in Afghanistan but also the

regional countries particularly Pakistan which is an immediate neighbor to Afghanistan and shares multiple borders as well as strong cultural and religious bonds. The religious monolith of Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan led to the formation of a nexus between them and hence, TTP involved itself in terrorist operations inside Pakistan. This not only impacted the security situation in the country but also impacted the bilateral relations between Pakistan and the Taliban-sitting government in Afghanistan. While there have been attempts to normalize, the TTP and Afghan Taliban Nexus remain a serious security question for the security of Pakistan.

Literature Review

“The Afghanistan Factor: Its Influence on Regional Competition in South Asia” an article written by Khan, Nazir, and Jabeen (2025) discusses the impacts of changing situation in Afghanistan on the security of the region in particular, issues relating to security in Pakistan. Ideologically aligned, culturally and ethnically coherent, and having a common interest, TTP and the Afghan Taliban have a close relationship. Pakistan has witnessed an increase in TTP attacks since the Afghan Taliban came into power in Afghanistan (Khan, Nazir, & Jabeen, 2025). Such rising prominence of the TTP has a huge bearing on bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although, the leadership of Pakistan at times stressed normalizing relations and taking steps in order to prevent cross-border terrorist activities, from Afghanistan into Pakistan, yet, the bilateral relationships between both countries are cold.

Tebrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) And Internal Security Dynamics of Pakistan: Challenges and Policy Responses After US-Withdrawal from Afghanistan” a book written by Asif (2024) focuses on the momentum of TTP after the Taliban government in Afghanistan. It further suggests that one of the serious implications for Pakistan in the current scenario is that the TTP has become more active and dangerous now in Afghanistan as they seized the opportunity to gain a stronghold in operating terrorist networks from Afghanistan after the Taliban government. The TTP is one such terrorist organization that possesses close strategic ties with the Afghanistan Taliban thus it is the largest terrorist organization that benefits from implementing anti-Pakistan policies courtesy of the Taliban government in Kabul (Asif, 2024). TTP has a long history of the Afghan Taliban supporting it. The presence of Taliban safe havens for the TTP in Afghanistan and the resumption by the TTP of using Afghanistan as a base to conduct violence in Pakistan gives rise to apprehensions.

“Tebrik-i-Taliban Pakistan: Emerging Threats and Pakistan's Counterstrategies” authored by Ahmad and Ahlawat (2023) elaborates on the rising tensions between

Pakistan and the current government of Taliban in Afghanistan and suggests that insurgent attacks against Pakistan from cross-border. It further suggests that after the crackdown of Kabul by the new Afghan Taliban, tensions have increased between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, in most parts of Pakistan, unexpected cross-border military clashes and terrorist insurgencies have increased. In the tribal areas of Pakistan, there has been an increase in the activities of the TTP and other militant organizations such as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) (Ahmad & Ahlawat, 2023). Following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, instability inside Afghanistan increased, and that ultimately resulted in terrorist activities inside Pakistan from Afghanistan.

“Afghan And Pakistani Taliban: A Comparative Study Of Their Political Ideology And Religious Affiliations” an article written by Khan Bakar (2023), focuses particularly on the nexus of TTP and Afghan Taliban on the basis of their religious ideologies. This article suggests that evidently Pakistani leadership strongly believes that due to the religious monolith, the Afghan Taliban is supporting TTP to operate inside Pakistan. Pakistan's former prime minister, Shahbaz Sharif, in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, indicated that Pakistan shared global concerns about the threat posed by the major terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan, in particular Islamic State, ISIL-K and TTP, and al Qaeda, they added (Khan & Bakar, 2023). Furthermore, Pakistan urged the Afghanistan authorities to take strong initiatives to prevent these terrorist organizations from attacking Pakistan.

“Taliban leadership discuss security issues and economic cooperation in wide-ranging talks” written by Tahir (2023) discusses agreements and security dialogues between Pakistan and Afghan Talin to prevent terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, several controversies and tensions have emerged in their bilateral ties though it also has not been void of moments of cooperation and friendship of course. Currently in a historical agreement between the ties of Afghanistan and Pakistan. For instance, tensions in bilateral ties are key precipitates, including for example, the Durand line, which is the border line between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained closed for a long time (Tahir, 2023). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan's role in that war are taken to be a dominant factor in transforming the world's geo-strategic landscape. Additionally, it affected the relations vis à vis Afghanistan and Pakistan as the US war on terror and the US role in Afghanistan brought major instability in the region. The war on terror has also made Pakistan the subject of blame for its dual role in the war both against and with the Taliban.

“The Tebrik-i-Taliban Pakistan After the Taliban's Afghanistan Takeover” authored by Sayed (2023) focuses on the bilateral relations of Pakistan and Afghan Taliban after the Withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. When the Afghan Taliban gained control over Kabul and ousted President Ashraf Ghani in August 2021, policymakers in Pakistan were hopeful as they saw it as a positive alteration between the two countries that have been at odds among themselves ever since there is the security crisis there (Sayed, 2023). Many in Islamabad believed in reforming the bilateral ties and the brand-new strategy of re-engagement and cooperation which was lacking in the past in the bilateral ties. Pakistan had expected the new regime of the Taliban to launch a serious crackdown on TTP. Pakistan had built a rapport with a number of Afghan Taliban groups, including the Haqqanis, and so expected the Taliban regime would cooperate in counterterrorism. What Pakistan has always done in the past is provide evidence to the Ghani and Karzai regimes which allowed Afghan soil against Pakistan.

“Afghanistan-Pakistan Ties and Future Stability in Afghanistan” a book authored by Threlkeld and Easterly (2021), discusses the relations between the current Taliban government with Pakistan and suggests that it is likely that the interim government in Afghanistan by the Taliban will come out as the most impactful actor on the regional security and Pakistan. The internal dynamics of the Taliban and Pakistan are known and known to them. The two neighbors of the country are facing some challenging problems and for having a good relationship between the two neighboring countries, it must be addressed. Lack of trust between the two governments, the perception that Pakistan interferes in Afghanistan's internal affairs, the presence of terrorist groups on both sides of the border, and the refugee crisis are challenges (Threlkeld & Easterly, 2021). Pakistan should find that Afghanistan is working to follow the LeT and compatriot social groups out of its country and also progress on governance. Good relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan will contribute greatly to the stability of both countries. In order for the two countries to find synergy for a more peaceful and prosperous region, they have to cooperate in respect of counterterrorism and border security.

“Pakistan-Afghan Taliban relations face mounting challenges” an article written by Kaura (2020), elaborates on the challenges both Pakistan and Afghan Taliban face in their bilateral relationships. It is very clear in terms of both military and security prospects that Afghanistan holds great significance in the region itself and Pakistan, as a neighbor of Afghanistan, feels much affected by the untimely situations in Afghanistan. Due to these security concerns, there are challenges to normalize bilateral relations between both. Although both countries share, a

religious and ideological association, yet, to safeguard their interests, Pakistan supported in the past various war groups and military militias based on strategic interests (Kaura, 2022). This is the deep connection Pakistan has with Afghanistan, and it truly feels that the situation in Afghanistan directly affects Pakistan. In addition, internally, Afghanistan, after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, became a war-torn area impacting peace and stability in Pakistan.

Literature Gap

The withdrawal of US troops and take over of the Afghan Taliban in 2020 has become a hot research topic in the domain of international relations and political science. There has been a wide range of literature addressing the impacts of the Taliban government in Afghanistan on the security of the region particularly the internal security dynamics in Pakistan. The nexus between the Afghan Taliban and the challenges it poses to the bilateral relations between Pakistan and the Taliban government has also been reviewed by scholars and researchers. However, this article focuses on a different direction of the topic investigating the religious monolith between the Taliban government in Afghanistan and TTP that impacts the internal security of Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. How TTP and Afghan Taliban Nexus is impacting Pak-Afghan relations?

Pakistan and Afghanistan Bilateral Relationships

Afghan-Pak relations have been at odds historically despite being two neighboring states and shared religious and cultural values. The border issues, boundary lines, and then in the Cold War era the backing of Pakistan to the United States against the communist regime in Afghanistan, all contributed to tightening bilateral relationships between the two countries. After 2001 with the US rhetoric of war against terrorism, Pakistan once again offered its support and has been a key ally of the US against this war in Afghanistan. Later on, with the invasion of the Taliban, in Afghanistan, Pakistan anticipated good relations with the new interim government in the country, however, due to cross-border presence and activities of TTP, the relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan did not come to normal as expected.

TTP and Afghan Taliban Nexus

TTP is itself a product of the US war against terrorism after 9/11 which existed in the ex-FATA region of Pakistan and remained a semi-autonomous region till 2017. In the post 9/11, US forces invaded Afghanistan and the government of Taliban witnessed a quick defeat

where leadership and fighters sought refuge in the ex-FATA region where they were warmly welcomed by their fellow tribes alongside the Durand line. The fighters, who fought with the Taliban against Russia offered them shelter and they later started to attack the US in Afghanistan. Formally, TTP was founded in 2007 as an extension of the Taliban to establish a theocratic government in Pakistan (Rehman, 2024). Many of the Taliban and TTP leaders joined the same Madrsas in Pakistan. Therefore, the nexus and alliance between TTP and the Afghan Taliban was natural and expected.

Afghan Taliban, in a sudden blow in August 2021 ousted the sitting government of Ashraf Ghani and took over Kabul. This was a serious blow to not only the United States but also to the countries around the region, particularly Pakistan. However, the think tanks and policymakers in Pakistan anticipated a positive change to reshape the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the new government. Pakistan expected that the new government would crack down against TTP and assist Pakistan in the counter-terrorism efforts due to its strong ties with some of the Taliban groups in power such as the Haqqani Network (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). The previous government of Ghani often had been provided with solid evidence of the presence of TTP in Afghanistan, but due to internal instability and mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Ghani government never responded in the way that was expected.

Pakistan expected to start reshaping its bilateral relationships with Afghanistan and to reengage with the post-Ghani administration in the country. However, these expectations were ruined soon when in the initial days of their regime, the Taliban released thousands of TTP members and their leaders. Fighters of TTP were not only released but allowed to take over the remaining weapons of US forces and to roam with entire freedom (Ali & Verma, 2025). TTP was allowed to reorganize and rearrange its fighters in order to start another heinous war in Pakistan. TTP started cross-border activities against Pakistan soon using the latest weapons and allegedly using the grounds of Afghanistan under the support of the Afghan Taliban. The activities of TTP have increased remarkably the nexus between the Taliban and TTP has become evident.

There are several contributing factors to the natural nexus of an alliance between TTP and the Afghan Taliban. In post 9/11 when the US invaded Afghanistan, religious groups in the region decided to join the Taliban in order to resist the US invasion and TTP was remarkable in these groups. The ideology of implementing Shria and a theocratic government in Afghanistan also inspired TTP to do same in the Pakistan. The religious monolith and the ideology of establishing so-called emirates in Afghanistan and

Pakistan inspired the TTP and Taliban nexus as well and established strong ties between them (Asif, 2024). During the US war against terrorism, TTP offered safe havens and shelter to the Afghan Taliban fighters and leadership as well. In addition to that, both TTP and Afghan Taliban blame Pakistan for acting against the Taliban and joining the US in the Afghan war which is also a major contributing factor to the nexus of the Taliban and TTP.

Furthermore, TTP not only looks inspired by the religious ideology of the Taliban but also adopted a similar organizational structure in late 2020, declaring its governors along various states and regions in Pakistan (Ney & Bidgoli, 2024). TTP leadership candidly expressed that to oust the liberal democratic system in Pakistan and to establish a theocratic religious Sharia is to follow the strategies and footsteps of the Afghan Taliban. In the recent operations and activities, TTP looks to be influenced highly by the ideology as well as organizational structure and war strategies of the Taliban in Afghanistan which manifests that both have strong ties and associations.

Another factor that led to the Nexus of Taliban and TTP is the communal and ethnic relations between them alongside the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The majority of TTP and Afghan Taliban share similar communal and ethnic backgrounds and belong to the Pashtun ethnicity which brings them closer (Khan & Bakar, 2023). During the war against terrorism, TTP offered shelter to Taliban leadership because of the same ethnicity as well as similar ideologies, and in return, the Taliban did the same to express their loyalty to TTP and did not agree to expel them from Afghanistan.

Impacts on Pak-Afghan Bilateral Relations

Pakistan shares multiple cross points and borders with Afghanistan and any deteriorating situation in Afghanistan directly impacts Pakistan's security situation. After the invasion of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, another wave of terrorism has hit Pakistan, particularly the provinces of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where, TTP has claimed responsibility for major attacks. This has tightened the bilateral relationships of both countries. In a recent visit to Afghanistan, the deputy prime minister of Pakistan, Ishaq Dar raised these concerns with senior Afghan Taliban leadership and invited them to visit Islamabad to discuss disputes between both countries and to normalize bilateral relations (Hussain, 2025). Pakistan has several times shared its concerns with the officials of the Afghan Taliban and requested to expel the TTP leadership and fighters, however, the interim Taliban government denied any such accusations that TTP operates against Pakistan from Afghanistan.

The post-Ghani era and the over of the Taliban became a safe shelter for TTP in Afghanistan and the attacks against Pakistan, from Afghanistan have increased in 2023 and 2024. In the year 2023, the number of attacks was 79 and the intensity continued since then. In the year 2024, clashes along the Torkham and Chaman borders also occurred between Taliban and Pakistan forces and threats to the security of Pakistan from its western borders remain increasing after the invasion of Taliban in Afghanistan (Adnan & Hamid, 2024). Additionally, in the current India, Pakistan war after Pahalgam, where Pakistan felt security concerns on its eastern borders, the country had also security threats on its western borders. On April, 27 in a press conference, the DGISPR of the Pakistan military claimed that they had killed 54 fighters of TTP who tried to cross the border and attack multiple targets in Pakistan (Massood, 2025). Security threats to Pakistan, from its western borders, pose serious restrictions to the bilateral relations between the two countries.

As a result, the military and political leadership have been convinced that Afghanistan is allowing anti-Pakistan groups to use its land against Pakistan. Pakistan on various occasions called upon Afghan Taliban authorities to expel such elements and to get engaged with them in order to eradicate terrorism, however, the Taliban government denied these allegations. The intensity between both states regarding security threats and border issues led Pakistan to send back Afghan refugees and the process started in 2023 and is still in progress (Bukhari, Chandio, & Ullah, 2025). Afghan Taliban, raised serious concerns regarding this, however, Pakistan stood by its narrative. Although some of the tribal leaders and politicians such as Moulana Fazl-ul-Rehman of JUI attempted to normalize the bilateral ties between both states, the bilateral relations are tense.

Although Pakistan has been the key state for multilateral relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan was highly optimistic about having a new policy towards the current regime of the Taliban when it took over Afghanistan in 2021, yet, the present relations between both countries are full of mistrust and misunderstandings. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan accuse each other of being involved in the security situation in the other states (Akhtar & Ahmed, 2023). Pakistan could have generated a brand-new diplomatic strategy with the Taliban, however, when the Taliban invaded, the attacks and complicated operations of TTP increased within Pakistan from Afghanistan, which led Pakistan to rethink its expectations and its strategy.

Conclusion

With the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the invasion of the Taliban, the security situation of the entire region particularly Pakistan had been

compromised. While cross-border attacks increased a new nexus between Taliban in Afghanistan and TTP emerged. Pakistan has been accusing the Taliban of offering safe havens and hence as a result it intensified relations between them. As they say, states can change their friends and neighbors cannot be changed, therefore, both Pakistan and Afghanistan should join hands for the betterment of the region as well as of the people in both

countries. Despite the nexus of TTP and Taliban, there are several factors that could lead to strengthening ties between them. Both states have common trade routes, common cultures, common people, and common religions, hence despite creating security challenges against each other, they could contribute to confidence-building measures in order to strengthen their bilateral relations.

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