



and Kabul cannot effectively manage their relations, Afghan territory could once again become a stage for regional and global competition of interests.” “The free movement of terrorist elements along the border, the issue of repatriating Afghan nationals from Pakistan, and differing security priorities have severely impact-

ed the tense relations between the two countries, and have, overall, created an atmosphere of mistrust between them.” This Pakistani professor warned that the current situation provides an opportunity for external powers to justify increasing their interference. “The continuation of these tensions increases the likelihood that external actors will present themselves as essential for regional security while subtly advancing their own strategic objectives,” she added. Syed Faisal Ali Shah, a retired Rear Admiral of the Pakistani Navy, told an IRNA reporter that Is-

lamabad has always been suspicious of New Delhi’s role in tensions with Kabul, and the recent trip by Amir Khan Muttaqi points to Pakistan’s serious considerations that Kabul’s maneuvers are obvious. The rear admiral called for enhanced Pakistan-Afghanistan engagement and maintained, “Terrorism should have no place in the relations between the two countries. Instead of fostering a competitive environment outside the shared borders with Pakistan, Afghanistan must take a significant step, which is to address the legitimate concerns of neighboring

countries regarding cracking down on terrorist elements.” Given the lack of formal recognition of the Afghan Taliban government by the international community, especially some of Afghanistan’s neighbors, issues such as the fight against terrorism, refugee management, drug trafficking, and other technical border-related matters still need to be addressed between Afghanistan and other countries. However, the use of force, military movements, or disrespect for mutual sovereignty has never been the solution to challenges, only serving to worsen the situation and

eroding the situation in the region. Islamabad and Kabul must, by avoiding the escalation of tensions — especially preventing any scenario against regional peace and security — take the path of diplomacy and, notwithstanding their respective relations with any particular country or faction, identify the root of the problems and, with wisdom, take steps to repel challenges and create new opportunities for cooperation. On this path, an announcement by Afghanistan’s neighboring and surrounding countries of their readiness to help remove hostil-

ities between Pakistan and Afghanistan and to call on them to exercise restraint is considered highly significant. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, reacting to the recent developments between Pakistan and Afghanistan, announced, “Iran stands ready to extend any assistance conducive to reducing tensions between the two neighboring and Muslim countries.” Esmail Baqaei, expressing concern over the developments of the past few days related to Pakistan and Afghanistan, highlighted the necessity of mutual



respect for the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of both countries and called for restraint and the immediate start of dialogue between the parties with the aim of reducing tensions and resolving differences through diplomacy.

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# A new Afghan war?



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## ANALYSIS

Reports coming in from Afghanistan claim an aerial attack Saturday night on a few places in Kabul and some other parts of Eastern Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan. There is speculation about possible United States (US) involvement in the attacks. If indeed the Americans were involved, was it at the technical level, or was it to the extent of intelligence sharing, or did it involve kinetic action remains in the realm of speculation. The target of the attacks is believed to be the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emir, Noor Wali Mehsud. However, an audio clip purportedly of Mehsud surfaced soon after the attack, claiming that he is in the tribal districts of Pakistan, not Afghanistan. This is not the first time that Pakistanis have used air power against alleged terrorist targets in Afghanistan. However, past attacks were generally limited to border areas, which were remote and inaccessible. This is the first time that Pakistan has decided to

strike at the heart of Afghanistan. The repercussions of such an audacious attack will be far-reaching. Earlier attacks were downplayed by the Taliban and not made much of an issue, at least not to a point where it would have led to a major break with Pakistan. A strike on Kabul will, however, be difficult, if not impossible, to brush under the carpet. Although the initial reaction from the official spokesman of the Taliban, Zabiullah Mujahid, and the Kabul police chief has been measured, the Taliban will have to take a strong stand on the Pakistani attack on the capital city. To not do so will seriously dent the legitimacy of the Taliban regime and raise questions or even challenge their authority. While the Taliban are not in a position to respond to Pakistan in kind as they lack an air force and an effective air defence system, they do have other ways to hit back. Broadly, there are four options available to the Taliban. The first is to do nothing. Make a bit of noise and then move on. But such restraint will raise serious questions about their legitimacy as the Taliban would appear fearful of

Pakistan or being compromised by their long association with Pakistan. Even if the senior leadership prefers not to escalate, the foot soldiers will want to take revenge. The second option is to speak softly but ramp up the attacks. This will mean lifting the restraints imposed on Taliban cadres to not joining the ranks of TTP and desisting from participating in attacks inside Pakistan. The third option is to declare war on Pakistan and unleash guerrilla forces to exact retribution. Finally, there is a remote possibility that the Pakistani attacks will have a salutary impact on the Taliban and force them to either expel or curb the activities of TTP inside Afghanistan. Regardless of the option that is picked, as long as the TTP continues to bleed Pakistan, there is no solution to the problem. The fact that the TTP attacks have increased in intensity, ferocity, and even geography — with recent claims by the anti-Pakistan jihadist alliance Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan of carrying out attacks even in Jammu and Kashmir — means that it will not be easy to eliminate them.

Taliban fighters celebrate the third anniversary of the withdrawal of US-led troops from Afghanistan on August 14, 2024.  
● ABDUL KHALIQ/AP

The TTP and other groups claim that they are now operating from inside Pakistan. The Taliban authorities in Afghanistan also insist that this is Pakistan’s problem and that Afghanistan is being made a scapegoat. But Pakistan insists that not just the Islamist



The issue for Pakistan is that bombing targets in Afghanistan won’t solve the problem. All it will do is satisfy public opinion, especially in Punjab, where an anti-Pashtun sentiment is simmering. If anything, attacks on Afghanistan will only lead to Afghans, even those who are against the Taliban, closing ranks against Pakistan. Interestingly, the Pakistani attacks have been criticised by some senior military officials of the erstwhile Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

jihadists but also Baloch freedom fighters are operating from bases inside Afghanistan. The issue for Pakistan is that bombing targets in Afghanistan won’t solve the problem. All it will do is satisfy public opinion, especially in Punjab, where an anti-Pashtun sentiment is simmering. But kinetic military action has its limitations. If anything, attacks on Afghanistan will only lead to Afghans, even those who are against the Taliban, closing ranks against Pakistan. Recent reports suggest that the Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani was being sidelined by the Kandahar clique that calls the shots. But the Haqqanis won’t be caught dead siding with Pakistan against the Taliban Emir. Interestingly, the Pakistani attacks have been criticised by some senior military officials of the erstwhile Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The other option for Pakistan is to unleash another round of destabilisation in Afghanistan. The instruments for this will be sections of the erstwhile republic who are carrying out a low-level insurgency



Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi (L) is welcomed by an Indian official on his arrival at New Delhi, India, on October 9, 2025.  
● RANDHIR JAISWAL/X



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