

Battle of Perceptions

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Since beginning of US withdrawal, Taliban have been able to capture large swath of territory in Afghanistan, with little to no resistance from government forces or their allied militias. [Taliban claim capturing of more than half of the 421 Afghan districts](#). Over the years, Taliban have consolidated themselves as a well-organized and well-equipped force.

Successive American and Afghan governments have parroted accusations towards Pakistan for supporting Taliban. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in an interview with '[Der Spiegel](#)' magazine accused that Taliban had received logistics, finances and recruitment from Pakistan. Similarly, in a recently published report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) titled, "[Pakistan: Shoring up Afghanistan's Peace Process](#)", Pakistan has been baselessly implicated for providing logistical support to Taliban in their onslaught against the Afghan forces and aiding them to gain power by becoming part of an internationally recognized power-sharing arrangement. The report further alleged that Pakistan provided sanctuaries to the Taliban Shura and their families and that this was a major bargaining chip for Pakistan in its dealings with Taliban and to shape their behaviour.

However, the ground reality is that Pakistan has been hosting more than 3 million Afghan refugees without any bias or favour to any political, ethnic or linguistic group. It has always tried its utmost to expedite the peace process in every possible way to make it a success. For the said purpose, Pakistan facilitated the Doha Agreement between the US and Taliban to end the war. Further, Pakistan engaged and successfully encouraged Taliban to enter into negotiations with the Afghan government. [Prime Minister Imran Khan](#) recently stated that "no country has tried harder to get the Taliban on the dialogue table than Pakistan. We have made every effort, short of taking military action against Taliban in Pakistan." He further added that if any country was trying its best out of all other countries in the world, it was Pakistan. In fact, the same ICG report points to US Special Representative for Afghanistan, [Zalmay Khalilzad's statement](#) at a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on April 27th this year that, "Pakistan had been supportive of our efforts to press Taliban to reduce violence, to enter into negotiations with the

government of Afghanistan and to be an active participant in peace negotiations.” He acknowledged the fact that Pakistan had made all-out effort to support the peace process.

With regards to Pakistan providing sanctuaries to Taliban, the ground realities narrate a different story. Until recently, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border was unregulated with no barriers or physical delineations. People could travel between the two countries with little restrictions. After the US invasion of Afghanistan, there was yet another massive influx of refugees into Pakistan. Taliban and their families, under the guise of refugees, also entered and settled in different parts of Pakistan. In order to stop illegal crossing, Pakistan in 2017 started fencing its porous border with Afghanistan. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and volatile security environment, work on the border fence continued mostly uninterrupted and would be completed by August 14 this year, offering Pakistan a measured prospect of control over illegal human trafficking/border crossing.

Despite the fencing, if the current crises escalate and a civil war erupts in Afghanistan, the possibility of another huge influx of refugees into Pakistan, exists with absolute certainty. The already present Afghan refugees and additional ones will be a great burden on the country’s fragile economy.

Pakistan, after losing [70,000 citizens](#), successive military operations and huge economic losses, has managed to quell the menace of terrorism within its borders. However, now with the situation in Afghanistan deteriorating, Tehreek-e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorist elements, who had fled to Kabul after the military operations, may now re-enter Pakistan disguised as refugees. It is also likely that following a civil war, TTP and other terrorist outfits may be spurred to again pick up arms. Pakistan cannot allow such a situation to happen. An all-out effort is thus being made to enable a peaceful settlement of the Afghan quagmire.

In a bid to speed up the dialogue process, Pakistan organized a conference scheduled on 17th to 19th July, 2021. Afghan political leadership, including former President Hamid Karzai were invited. However, upon the request of the Government of Afghanistan, the [conference was postponed](#) to be rescheduled for a later date.

Pakistan has categorically stated that it [will not take sides](#) in the Afghan conflict and will stand alongside the decision taken by the people of Afghanistan. It has been making an all-out effort to ensure a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. In this scenario, the statements by Afghan officials falsely accusing Islamabad of steering unrest in their country are adding to the complexity of an already fragile situation. Rather than wasting their energies on Pakistan bashing, they need to focus on ways and means to resolve the conflict so that a peaceful settlement be achieved.

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