



A gift from the Afghan Taliban to Pakistan and China

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Abstract

A month-long ceasefire agreement between the Pakistan government and the terrorist group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which came into force on 9 November 2021, was result of the mediation by the Afghan Taliban. Apart from ensuring peace in Pakistan, it is primarily directed at addressing Chinese concerns about the TTP's hostile actions directed against the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects in Pakistan. While the Afghan Taliban is trying to send a message to the international community about being a messenger of peace, its approach to global and regional terrorism remains selective.

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Analysis

Ever since it captured power in Kabul on 15 August 2021, the Afghan Taliban's Islamic Emirate has desperately tried to assuage the concerns of regional countries and the international community that Afghanistan could once again become a hotbed of terrorism. The Taliban's intent to rein in their former allies like al-Qaeda has been questioned, so too has their capacity to deal with the spike in violence carried out by the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP). Amid such negative publicity, [the month-long cease-fire agreement](#) between the Pakistani government and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) announced on 8 November and taking effect on 9 November, can be seen as a sort of offer of proof by the Taliban that they indeed wish to portray themselves as harbingers of peace rather than a source of instability. The real story, however, is that of their selective approach toward terrorism.

A day before the announcement of the cease-fire agreement, [Tolo News reported](#) about a two-week-long negotiation between Islamabad and the TTP in Afghanistan's eastern province of Khost. Afghan Minister of Interior Sirajuddin Haqqani of the Haqqani Network played host to both sides. The confirmation of the Islamic Emirate's role was provided by its foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, on 14 November.

While the Islamic Emirate would like the world to believe that it has transformed into a peace envoy, the "cease-fire gift" merely assuages the concerns of its friends: Pakistan and China. Reports from the field suggest that the Taliban have already acted to control the activities of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), made up mostly of Uyghurs, by relocating them from Badakhshan (with a border with China) to Nangarhar in the east. The deal with the TTP, thereby, constitutes a second gift to Beijing.

The TTP, an ally of the Afghan Taliban, has been blamed for some of the recent attacks in which Chinese nationals, including those working on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects, have been injured and killed. While Islamabad has tried to blame Indian intelligence agencies for the attacks, Beijing is unconvinced. As indicated in a [report in the Chinese state-run daily *The Global Times*](#), it considers the "TTP's enmity toward Pakistan" a risk for Chinese projects. There is understandably immense Chinese pressure on Islamabad to rein in the TTP — and quickly.

The agreement with the TTP, thereby, provides the Pakistani state with a shortcut to peace, without having to undertake a lengthy and costly military operation against a group responsible for the [killing of nearly 140 school children](#) in 2014. Not surprisingly, within Pakistan, the agreement's intent, utility, and timing have been questioned by the media, intelligentsia, as well as the country's Supreme Court.

An agreement made under duress — i.e. Afghan Taliban pressure — is unlikely to hold. The TTP, which had previously been weakened by sustained military operations by the Pakistani military, has resurged recently. Its demand for the release of its imprisoned cadres has not been acceded to by Islamabad, which now acknowledges that there could be 500 to 600 moderate elements within the TTP vis-à-vis an estimated 2,200 hardcore cadres. There is a precedence for the TTP's acquiescence, however.

Previously, in 2010 and 2014, the TTP made cease-fire declarations, only to renege on them afterwards. There is little reason to believe that the same will not happen again. On 13 November, [five security force personnel](#) were killed in three attacks by unidentified militants in areas along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, where the TTP operates. More importantly, inside Pakistan there remain serious concerns that the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan could embolden the TTP in Pakistan, leading to a serious security issue for the country.



The bigger question, however, is about the Islamic Emirate's overall approach to global and regional terrorism: Will the Taliban break their lingering ties with al-Qaeda and regional anti-Indian groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad? Their further commitment to a terror-free region and world would be tested against those benchmarks.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. This article has been published firstly in *Monday Briefing*, Middle East Institute (MEI), Washington D.C., 15 November 2021, [Monday Briefing: Last-minute deal pushed through at the conclusion of COP26, but was it enough? | Middle East Institute \(mei.edu\)](#)

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