

## **How an Unstable Afghanistan Poses Threats to Pakistan's Security and the Region**

Afghanistan's instability, characterized by governance failures, terrorism, and economic collapse, has profound implications for Pakistan and the broader South Asian region. This instability fuels cross-border terrorism, exacerbates refugee crises, and hampers regional connectivity initiatives.

### **1. Security Threats to Pakistan**

#### **a) Rise of Cross-Border Terrorism**

- **Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP):** With safe havens in Afghanistan, the TTP has intensified its attacks on Pakistan. This includes high-profile incidents targeting security forces, tribal leaders, and civilians.
- **Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP):** ISKP's expansion poses a direct threat, not just to Afghanistan but also to Pakistan's internal stability. Their sectarian agenda targets Shia minorities in Pakistan.
- **Arms and Drug Trafficking:** Weak Afghan border security facilitates smuggling of arms, narcotics, and militants into Pakistan, undermining local law enforcement.

#### **b) Destabilization of Tribal Areas**

Militants exploit the porous Durand Line, leading to violent incursions into Pakistan's tribal regions. These areas, previously destabilized during the war on terror, are once again becoming hotbeds for extremism.

#### **c) Strain on Military Resources**

Pakistan's armed forces have had to escalate counterinsurgency operations in border regions, diverting resources from development to security. This hinders the military's focus on other strategic challenges, including tensions with extremism.

### **2. Humanitarian and Economic Strains**

#### **a) Refugee Crisis**

- Over 1.5 million Afghan refugees reside in Pakistan, with additional undocumented migrants arriving since the Taliban's takeover. Refugees strain Pakistan's economy, particularly in sectors like healthcare, housing, and education.
- Refugee camps near border areas often serve as recruitment grounds for extremist groups, exacerbating security threats.

#### **b) Economic Consequences**

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- Smuggling of goods from Afghanistan undermines Pakistan's formal economy. Additionally, the collapse of Afghanistan's economy affects bilateral trade, which had been a source of income for border communities.

### 3. Regional Implications

- a) Undermining Regional Connectivity
  - Afghanistan's instability threatens projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) ventures. Disruption of transit routes undermines regional economic integration.
  - Instability limits Pakistan's ambition to become a regional trade hub connecting Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East.
- b) Spillover of Extremism
  - Afghanistan remains a breeding ground for extremist ideologies, which could destabilize neighboring countries like Iran, China (Xinjiang), and Central Asian republics.
  - The resurgence of militant groups also fuels regional rivalries, particularly between India and Pakistan, over influence in Afghanistan.

### What Pakistan Should Do

To mitigate these threats, Pakistan needs to adopt a multi-faceted approach focusing on security, diplomacy, and economic strategies.

#### 1. Enhance Border Security

- Strengthen surveillance along the Durand Line with advanced technologies such as drones and thermal imaging.
- Complete and maintain the border fencing project to prevent illegal crossings and smuggling.
- Establish robust border management systems, including biometric identification for legal crossings.

#### 2. Counterterrorism Measures

- Conduct coordinated military operations against cross-border terrorist networks like the TTP.
- Strengthen intelligence-sharing with allies, particularly China, Iran, and the Central Asian states, to monitor extremist movements.
- Pressurize the Taliban regime to fulfill its promise of not allowing Afghan soil to be used against Pakistan.

#### 4. Diplomatic Engagement

- Pakistan should work with the international community to ensure humanitarian aid reaches Afghanistan, reducing the refugee outflow.

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- Advocate for regional cooperation through platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to stabilize Afghanistan.
- Maintain constructive dialogue with the Taliban while holding them accountable for harboring militants.

#### 5. Economic Initiatives

- Invest in border trade infrastructure to boost legal trade with Afghanistan, benefiting both economies.
- Facilitate development projects in Afghanistan to create economic interdependence that discourages support for militancy.
- Collaborate with China to ensure Afghanistan's inclusion in the CPEC framework for long-term stability.

#### 6. Strengthen Refugee Management

- Engage international organizations like the UNHCR to gain financial and logistical support for Afghan refugees.
- Develop policies to integrate skilled Afghan refugees into Pakistan's economy while ensuring repatriation programs align with international standards.

#### Conclusion:

An unstable Afghanistan poses serious threats to Pakistan's security, economy, and regional standing. To address these challenges, Pakistan must adopt a proactive approach combining robust security measures, effective diplomacy, and economic strategies. Stability in Afghanistan is critical for Pakistan's development and for ensuring peace across South Asia.