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Pakistan's Ambition to Invade Wakhan Corridor

The escalating border tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, fueled by cross-border terrorism and unresolved disputes, threaten to destabilize the region and draw international attention to their growing conflict.



The persistent across-the-border terrorism from the terrorist groups present in Afghanistan has escalated border tensions with its neighbor Pakistan. However, the ignorance of Pakistan's repeated warnings by the interim Taliban* government in Afghanistan has led to direct armed conflict between the two countries and speculations have emerged that Pakistan is vying to invade Wakhan Corridor.

Invading the Wakhan Corridor could be the worst strategic mistake of the Pakistani state

Rising Tensions and Military Escalation: Pakistan's Airstrikes and Regional Concerns

Pakistan and Afghanistan are experiencing another zenith of their bilateral relations, following Pakistan's airstrikes in Afghanistan on terrorist hideouts. This was the second time after the Taliban* takeover in Kabul that, the Pakistan army launched airstrike in Afghanistan. Relations between the two sides soured to an unprecedented level. Things

turned worse after the interim Information Minister of the Taliban* government in Afghanistan declared Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a terrorist organization operating in Pakistan using Afghan soil, their guest and held that the government must have the honor to safeguard them.

This further heightened the tensions between the two sides. Different news agencies reported the invasion of several Afghan check posts by the Pakistan army in cross-border fights, showing the Pakistani establishment's determination to counterterrorism emancipating from Afghanistan. In the past, Pakistani officials had asked the Afghan government to stick by the Doha agreement by not letting the terrorist organizations use the Afghan soil against the neighboring countries. However, the interim Afghan government remained oblivious to Pakistan's concerns, motivating the latter to take military action against TTP.

Other neighboring countries of Afghanistan are also concerned over the presence of terrorist organizations in the country. In March 2024, ISKP, a terrorist organization present in Afghanistan, conducted a terrorist attack at the Crocus Hall in Moscow, Russia. China, Tajikistan, and Iran are also worried about the terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan. The Taliban* takeover of Kabul has concerned China over the possibility of radicalization among the Uyghur Muslims. China, being the new superpower of the world and a direct rival to the United States, seeks regional stability and peace. However, the presence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan remains a persistent threat to its pursuit of peaceful South Asia.

The Wakhan Corridor Dilemma: Strategic Risks and Diplomatic Solutions

Lt. General Asim Malik, Pakistan's DG ISI, visited Tajikistan on 30th December 2024. This visit has sparked numerous controversies around the globe. Many analysts and observers hold that the actual ambition of this visit was to forge relations with the Tajik leaders of Afghanistan's Badakhshan province. It is also reported that the Pakistani establishment now seeks to support the rival groups of the Taliban*, especially the supporters of democracy. Different Pakistani news agencies have even reported that the country, with the approval of China and Tajikistan, seeks to invade the Wakhan Corridor, a 350 km long and 34 km wide narrow strip, a significant strategic region connecting Afghanistan with Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan.

Invading the Wakhan Corridor could be the worst strategic mistake of the Pakistani state. The Taliban* government in Afghanistan would resist vehemently any such attack. Moreover, their support to the terrorist organizations will intensify, increasing the terrorist activities in the country. A significant number of people in the tribal areas of Pakistan hold sympathies towards the Taliban* and TTP. Therefore, the country could observe domestic instability.

Analysts advocating the invasion of Wakhan hold that this will enable Pakistan to reach Central Asian markets. However, they ignore that a politically unstable and economically weak country cannot establish long-term healthy relations with the Central Asian countries.

Pakistan has already provided diplomatic leverage to India in Afghanistan by violating the latter's sovereignty. Indian diplomats have already used the opportunity to engage with the Taliban* government. The latter has declared India a significant developmental partner. Being the arch-rival of Pakistan, India will exploit this opportunity to its advantage. Pakistan's attempt to invade would further cement India-Afghanistan ties, a friendship extremely detrimental to Pakistan's regional interests. In addition, this invasion will also weaken Pakistan's stance on the Durand Line, the Pak-Afghan border which the latter considers illegitimate. Pakistan will itself be violating the Durand Line.

Some analysts and experts also hold that Pakistan can use the Tajik leaders of the Wakhan region to establish a parallel government in the Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, with China and Tajikistan's support. They hold that this would empower Pakistan to gain strategic leverage over the Afghan Taliban* and will also create a buffer zone for China and Tajikistan. However, Afghanistan's history demonstrates that this would only increase the complexity inside the country and will not be a long-term solution to the terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan. The only pragmatic option Pakistan holds is to diplomatically pressurize and engage the Afghan Taliban* to refrain the terrorist groups from using their soil against the neighboring countries. Supporting the anti-Taliban democratic groups in Afghanistan can prove beneficial to Pakistan in its pursuit of stopping cross-border terrorism. Moreover, both sides should remember that the solution to their bilateral problem only lies in diplomacy, and military conflict will further destabilize them.

**-banned in Russia*

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