

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

Los Angeles Times

## As Pakistan eyes peace talks with the Taliban, anxiety builds

By Alex Rodriguez

11/13/2011

**Past deals with the militants have backfired, each time giving the insurgents an opportunity to regroup and replenish their ranks.**

Every time Pakistan hammered out peace agreements with militants, the results were disastrous. The groups grew stronger, and the toll their bomb blasts took on civilians steadily rose.

That history explains why anxiety is rippling through the country as talk builds of the prospect for peace negotiations with the Pakistani Taliban, the homegrown insurgency responsible for most of the suicide bombings and terrorist strikes that have killed thousands of people in recent years.

Pakistani leaders have expressed a newfound interest in tackling the problem of militancy through peace talks rather than military confrontation. At a Sept. 29 conference of more than 50 political leaders, participants signed a resolution endorsing the idea of negotiations with militants. " 'Give peace a chance' must be the guiding central principle," the resolution declared.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said in October that the government was prepared to negotiate with militants willing to lay down their arms. Elements within the Pakistani Taliban have signaled their willingness to talk, Interior Minister Rehman Malik said recently.

The movement to negotiate with the Pakistani Taliban comes at a time when, across the border in Afghanistan, peace talks with the Afghan Taliban are seen as Washington's only recourse after battling those insurgents for 10 years.

On both sides of the border, the prospect of peace negotiations is fraught with risk and uncertainty.

In Afghanistan, the government's bid to reconcile with Afghan Taliban leaders suffered a severe blow in September with the assassination of President Hamid Karzai's chief negotiator, former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani. Afghan officials accused Pakistan's intelligence arm, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency, of involvement in the killing, a charge Pakistan denied. In Pakistan, a peace accord could give insurgents the ideal tool to expand both influence and territory.

Like the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban is made up of factions united in the goal of toppling the current government and imposing sharia, or Islamic law. The Pakistani Taliban maintains links with Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban and other militant groups entrenched in Pakistan's tribal belt.

So far, there has been no endorsement of any overtures from the Pakistani military, historically the ultimate voice in the country's strategy against militants. But at a briefing last month for members of the parliament's defense committees, Pakistani army chief Gen. Ashfaq Kayani said any decision to begin talks with the Pakistani Taliban would have to be made by the country's civilian government.

A lawmaker who attended the briefing said army leaders made it clear that "if the government wants to give negotiations a chance, the army will wait for the results of those negotiations." The lawmaker spoke on the condition of anonymity because the briefing was held behind closed doors.

In the last few years, Pakistan has deployed more than 140,000 troops to battle the Pakistani Taliban across most of the tribal belt along the Afghan border. The army has retaken large swaths of territory once held by the militant group, but the Taliban still controls pockets throughout the area and continues to carry out attacks on targets including military checkpoints, mosques and markets.

Negotiating with the Pakistani Taliban would represent a marked shift in strategy for Islamabad, and some analysts are doubtful it would work.

"It's pretty clear it would be a bad idea," said Cyril Almeida, a columnist for Dawn, a leading English-language newspaper in Pakistan. "Past peace agreements gave the

militants breathing room and space to enlarge their control. And there's no reason to expect that this time, if they pursue another deal, that the result would be any different."

The last peace agreement with militants, reached between Pakistan and Taliban insurgents in early 2009 in the picturesque Swat Valley tourist region in the north, collapsed when militants refused to lay down their arms and instead expanded their reach to within 60 miles of Islamabad, the capital. That spring, the military launched an assault that retook the valley.

Peace agreements and cease-fires with Taliban militants in the volatile Waziristan tribal region in 2005, '06 and '08 also backfired, each time giving insurgents the opportunity to regroup and replenish their ranks.

"After each agreement," said security analyst Khadim Hussain, the Taliban "became bigger, more entrenched and stronger than before."

Authorities in Islamabad have blamed the Pakistani Taliban for some of the country's worst terrorist attacks, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007.

The group is led by Hakimullah Mahsud, a Pashtun militant who took over after a U.S. drone strike killed chieftain Baitullah Mahsud two years ago. Mahsud's second in command, Wali ur-Rehman, told a Pakistani newspaper last month that the group would want an Arab country to mediate before agreeing to enter talks.

Proponents of negotiations say fighting the militants with military blitzes hasn't stemmed suicide bombings, which since 2001 have killed at least 4,600 people and injured 10,000 in Pakistan.

"What's needed is dialogue," Imran Khan, a former Pakistani cricket star turned politician, told reporters after the Sept. 29 conference. "There are two approaches: military and political. And in my opinion and the opinion of most others [at the conference], a military approach won't solve the problem."

Others in Pakistani society aren't so sure. An Oct. 5 editorial in the Express Tribune newspaper warned that the movement toward talks with the Taliban "placed the [Pakistani Taliban] on a platform of strength in Pakistan from where, if the state negotiates, it would be tantamount to abject surrender."

Pakistanis who oppose talking with the Taliban can take encouragement in the knowledge that the military may not support the idea, either. Though the military has publicly said it would abide by the civilian government's decisions, it has also moved aggressively against the most recent Pakistani Taliban threat: cross-border attacks by militants using the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan as sanctuary.

Those attacks have killed more than 100 members of Pakistan's security forces this year. Pakistani military leaders have blamed U.S., NATO and Afghan forces for not uprooting Pakistani Taliban militants from their havens in eastern Afghanistan.

"The Pakistani Taliban's goals are well known," Almeida said. "I can't see the military having much of an appetite to cut a deal. But never say never."