**Afghan Refugee Conundrum**

**There should be some sort of confede-ration between Pakistan and Afghanis-tan, as people on both sides share many things from religion to ethnicity.**

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Finally, the cat is out of the bag: Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are at the lowest ebb, despite the wishful thinking of Pakistan that the Afghan Taliban were pro-Pakistani, but the reality is stuck in the opposite direction. In the wake of further deteriorating relations, Pakistan’s government has decided to repatriate illegal Afghan refugees, which are estimated around 1.3 million in the country. For obvious audience asked how we ended up having so many Afghan refugees in the country. Complex historical relations between neighbors is the simple answer. There are three vivid waves of Afghan refugees in Pakistan: The first one at the time of the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan during the 1980s, the second was about the USA’s invasion of Afghanistan to topple the Taliban government and finally last large influx of refugee came to Pakistan following reign of Taliban on Aug 2021. There are reports of 0.6 to 0.8 million Afghans leaving the country, since the rule of the Taliban, to settle down in Pakistan.

[Chinese engineer rescued from River Jhelum peril](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-May-2024/chinese-engineer-rescued-from-river-jhelum-peril)

Keep in mind that these Afghan refugees have become an integral part of Pakistan’s society, economy and politics, and there is no way to keep them all out of the country. For example, most Afghan refugees are the cornerstone of Pakistan’s informal economy which provides goods and services to people at a cheaper rate. In the political realm, nationalist parties of KPK and Baluchistan are sympathizers of these Afghan refugees due to shared cultural, social, religious and most importantly ethnic ties. Apart from the economic and political dimension of this complex equation, there is hardly any mega city of Pakistan that hasn’t seen Afghan restaurants yet. Now back to Pakistan’s government’s decision to deport these illegal Afghan refugees, we have to figure out why now government has taken this decision. The simple answer is spiking terrorism in Pakistan, especially in the wake of the reign of the Afghan Taliban in Kabul. During previous year, the former interim PM of Pakistan gave assertive marks over alleged relations between Afghanistan Taliban and Tehrik-e- Taliban Pakistan (TPP) as Pakistan has witnessed of 60 pc increase in terrorism activities since 2021; furthermore, most of these terrorist acts are against military personnel and other law enforcement security agencies. Therefore, the message from Pakistan is obvious to the Afghan Taliban: choose Pakistan or TTP.

[Islamabad to have new electricity substation by Aug 2026](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-May-2024/islamabad-to-have-new-electricity-substation-by-aug-2026)

Against this backdrop, many experts have viewed that Pakistan is exerting some kind of pressure tactics against the Afghan Taliban to mend their inactions about the safe havens of TTP inside Afghanistan. These pressure tactics are the deportation of Afghan refugees and scaling down diplomatic support in the favor of Afghan Taliban. As for refugees are concerned most of them don’t want to go, as their families, livelihoods and friends in Pakistan since the 1980s, especially in the times of the theocratic state of the Afghan Taliban. In the interview with an Afghan woman, she opined that she might better off dying here in Pakistan rather than leaving for Afghanistan due to the exclusive policies of the Afghan Taliban against women such as limiting their educational, economic and political rights. In addition to that, contrary to Pakistan’s expectation to mend the Afghan Taliban, the opposite takes place as many of Afghanistan’s Taliban administrations have given bitter statements against the deportation policy by Pakistan. What’s the solution to this conundrum? Not a simple answer, as the solution lies in multiple complex approaches. First of all, Pakistan should be in line with international laws and refugee treaties in the deportation plans as many rights groups, such as Amnesty International, have been raising questions about the whole deportation scheme. Pakistan should also legally refugee status to women and children as their risk of life being threatened by the Afghan Taliban. These gestures earn repute and goodwill from the international community for the deportation program. In addition to that Pakistan should galvanize its efforts for further documentation of Afghan refugees to shrink any connection between terrorist groups and these refugees.

[Teachers Panel sweeps ASA election at IIUI](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-May-2024/teachers-panel-sweeps-asa-election-at-iiui)

Pakistan and Afghanistan should maintain robust political, economic and military contacts to prevent any kind of further deteriorating of relations. Being so-entrench cultural, religious, ethnic, economic and shared history, it is not in the favor of any of these kinds to remain hostile towards others. In that context, the Afghan Taliban should also have re-examined their policy of patronage TTP that is causing a nosedive between Pakistan and Afghanistan relations. In that context, Pakistan should also refrain from taking any unilateral steps, especially in terms of the use of force. The country should use diplomatic and regional channels, such as the Moscow Format of Consultation and trilateral dialogue between Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, to gather other countries’ support against hiking terrorism in the region.

Lastly, back to again the question of Afghan refugees, as a keen student of History and International Relations, I can conclude that there should be some sort of confederation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as people on both sides share many things from religion to ethnicity, to settle down, once and in all, the issue of Durand Line(1893) between two countries. As the formation of a confederation between Pakistan and Afghanistan might not be visible down the road, Pakistan should utilize all sorts of incentives and disincentives for securing its national interests while preserving Afghanistan’s sovereignty and cordial relations between the two brothers.

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