[**Appeasing terrorists**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1647735/appeasing-terrorists)

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FIRST, it was the president and then the foreign minister who appeared ready to offer amnesty to the terrorist group which has been responsible for the killing of thousands of people. Curiously, the statements came as the outlawed TTP intensified its attacks on the security forces. Casualties have included scores of soldiers over the past few months in clashes with the increasingly emboldened militants operating from their sanctuaries across the border.

In a recent [interview](https://www.dawn.com/news/1645439) to *Dawn News*, President Arif Alvi said that the government could consider granting amnesty to the militants who lay down their arms. A few days later, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi [made a similar offer](https://www.dawn.com/news/1646548) in an interview to a British newspaper.

Interestingly, these assertions from the country’s top political leadership followed a [declaration](https://www.dawn.com/news/1645448) by the National Action Plan apex committee to step up efforts to deal with the rising terrorist threat. One wonders how amnesty for the militants can help deal with the emerging national security challenges. The policy of appeasement has not worked in the past and it certainly will not work now.

Such statements are more puzzling as there is no indication that the militants are willing to renounce violence. According to some media reports, a TTP spokesman has rejected the government’s peace offer and vowed to continue with the group’s battle against the Pakistani state. The amnesty move is certainly seen as a sign of weakness and adds to the confusion in our counterterrorism policy.

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The TTP has been revitalised in the past few months. Some 4,000 to 5,000 Pakistani militants are reportedly operating from across the Durand Line. Most of them had fled to Afghanistan after the Pakistani military operations in North and South Waziristan. The outfit disintegrated because of internal fighting. Some of them had joined the Middle East-based Islamic State that has been active in eastern Afghanistan. The split had affected the capability of the group to launch high-profile attacks in Pakistan. But early this year, various TTP splinter groups reunited. Al Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban reportedly played an important role in getting the group together.

Pakistani intelligence agencies had long suspected that the group had been closely linked with the former Afghan intelligence agency and India’s RAW. After regrouping, the TTP stepped up its activities in North and South Waziristan targeting Pakistani security forces. There have also been reports of the TTP reviving its organisation in the region. Many recent terrorist attacks in different parts of the country lead to the TTP. In fact, the group has been linked to the [bomb attack](https://www.dawn.com/news/1635150) on the bus carrying Chinese workers involved in the Dasu hydropower project that killed many of them.

It’s not surprising that the TTP’s revival has coincided with the Afghan Taliban gaining ground next door. The two groups may have different priorities but their objectives are more or less same. Most of the TTP commanders had also been fighting along with the Afghan Taliban against the foreign forces. On its formation in 2007, the TTP had declared its allegiance to the late Mullah Omar, the founder and supreme leader of the Afghan Taliban movement. Some senior security officials agree that they are the two sides of the same coin.

That umbilical cord has never been severed despite Pakistan’s efforts to delink the two. In eastern Afghanistan, Abdul Qayum Zakir, a top Afghan Taliban commander in the region and an important member of the group’s leadership council, is said to have facilitated the TTP sanctuaries. The return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan seems to have revitalised the TTP.

Scores of TTP militants have been [freed](https://www.samaa.tv/news/2021/08/key-ttp-leaders-released-from-afghan-prisons/) from the jails after the Taliban swept major Afghan cities. Among them is Fakir Muhammad, who once headed the TTP in the former Fata agency of Bajaur. He had fled to the Afghan province of Kunar after the military operation. The former Afghan government had arrested him a few years ago. He was given VVIP treatment after his release. Pictures of him being driven in a SUV went viral on social media.

An emboldened TTP has recently issued a [warning](https://www.dawn.com/news/1644930) to the Pakistani media to refrain from calling it a terrorist outfit. The group seems to be closely monitoring publications in the country. It is not for the first time that the TTP has threatened journalists. The group has killed many journalists in the past. The latest threat to the media must not be taken lightly given the group’s past actions.

**Editorial:** [*TTP amnesty?*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1646805/ttp-amnesty)

In such a situation, the president’s peace offer to the outfit is incomprehensible. Moreover, it’s not clear whether it’s the president’s own wish or if he is enunciating the government’s new approach in dealing with the terrorist group. In either case, such statements are highly damaging for a country facing multiple security challenges.

Given the PTI’s soft spot for the militant group, such statements from the top government leadership may not come as a surprise to many. Imran Khan in the past as opposition leader had [called for](https://www.dawn.com/news/1045342) allowing the TTP to open its offices. The suggestion had come at the height of terrorist attacks carried out by the banned outfit.

One wonders if the latest amnesty offer is a manifestation of the same viewpoint. For any such move, the government must come out with a clear policy to be debated in parliament. It’s a very serious issue concerning our national security. The consequences of pardoning hardcore terrorists responsible for the death of thousands of Pakistanis could be disastrous. The country has paid a huge cost for the peace deals that the state has made with militant groups in the past.

The new Taliban regime in Afghanistan has repeatedly assured Pakistan and the international community that it will not allow its country’s soil to be used for terrorist action against any state. Pakistan’ military spokesman this week [said](https://www.dawn.com/news/1647461/pakistan-satisfied-with-security-assurances-by-afghan-taliban-ispr) that there is no reason to doubt the assurances held out by the Taliban regime. Yet there is no indication that the Taliban authorities would be willing to take action against the TTP sanctuaries in Afghanistan. A Taliban spokesman has reportedly advised the Pakistan government to make peace with the militants. This is certainly not very assuring for Pakistan.

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