**Absolutely not**

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‘Absolutely not’ was Prime Minister Imran Khan’s magnificently on point, two-word, response to Axios on HBO on whether Pakistan will allow the American government to establish CIA bases for any sort of action in Afghanistan on its land. He stunned many including the interviewer, Jonathan Swan, who could not help but utter, “Seriously?” to reconfirm the Premier’s words.

Imran Khan’s clear-cut and consistent response to the question that he was being asked for the billionth time should not have surprised anyone as he has been opposing Pakistan’s role in the US-Afghan conflict since the day it commenced.

Ever since the PTI-led Federal Government took over, the drone attack count in Pakistan has gone down to ‘zero’. As per the official statistics, the done attack count in Pakistan was 13 during 2004-2008, 340 during 2008-2013, 61 during 2013-2018 and zero since 2018.

The US and NATO forces’ withdrawal from Afghanistan after this twenty-year prolonged military campaign entails serious potential threats to its neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan. Pakistan and other regional countries have long feared this phase, which can potentially be more dangerous for hard earned regional peace and stability. No country, including Pakistan, is now in a position to withstand a fresh wave of unrest and chaos in war-torn Afghanistan as it will completely jeopardise regional security.

[Cuban banks stop accepting US dollar cash deposits](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jun-2021/cuban-banks-stop-accepting-us-dollar-cash-deposits)

Pakistan has already paid an unbelievably high cost owing to this conflict. The estimated count of Pakistani lives lost has crossed 100,000. The financial cost is no less either. As per the State Bank of Pakistan, from 2002 to 2016, Pakistan lost $118 billion. In contrast, the infamous US aid given to Pakistan only totalled to $14 billion. Money can be recovered. The precious lives lost cannot be. Hence, Pakistan has been actively pushing for a peaceful political settlement to avoid any further chaos in the region.

The reason PM Imran Khan’s ‘absolutely not’ response has hit the nail on the head is because Pakistan, along with its security concerns, cannot really afford to put CPEC and the allied potential financial stability fruit at stake. Pakistan, Afghanistan and China’s geographical position in the region has immense opportunities for harnessing mutually beneficial economic and development cooperation.

Durable peace and stability in the region is a mighty win-win for all. Pakistan is eyeing Afghanistan and other regional partners as its potential partners in upcoming joint economic ventures. For this, a peaceful, conducive environment is a must so that regional connectivity and economic interdependence helps in uplifting all the players alike. Pakistan has made the right decision to not let any potential spoilers exploit the Afghan drawdown which has entered the most crucial stage, where no security vacuum can be left unfilled.

[Pakistan reports 663 coronavirus cases in one day](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jun-2021/pakistan-reports-663-coronavirus-cases-in-one-day)

While Imran Khan has maintained, since day one, that there is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and a well thought-out and well-negotiated meaningful political settlement is the only way forward, the armed forces of Pakistan have also played a splendid role in helping the government live up to its word.

In addition to numerous kinetic operations, like Radd-ul-Fasad and Zarb-e-Azb, to cleanse the tribal belt from the menace of terrorism, the Pak-Afghan border fencing is the most phenomenal feather in Pakistan’s Armed Forces’ hat, as they march on in their fight against terrorism. Fencing the 2640 kilometre-long Pak-Afghan border that passes through densely forested valleys and gigantic mountains has been quite a challenge but it is now nearing its end after serious hard work of four long years.

Not rendering the ‘absolutely not’ response to the US at this critical stage of the withdrawal from Afghanistan would have surely meant endangering Pakistan’s stability and the entire region’s potential to grow and thrive at the countless economic opportunities that are coming our way. Also, it would have destroyed our forces’ strenuous struggle to organise cross-border movement from Afghanistan, which was almost impossible to be kept under check back in the chaotic day. Now, it has been confined to 16 designated points which will be fully administered to ensure there are no miscreants making their way to Pakistan yet again.

[Cuba says homegrown COVID vaccine shows 92% efficacy](https://nation.com.pk/22-Jun-2021/cuba-says-homegrown-covid-vaccine-shows-92-percent-efficacy)

So, for now, not only has Imran Khan successfully lived up to his pre-election vows, when his firm stance on the foreign involvement in Pakistan’s affairs was as unflinching as today, but he has also proved all the political pundits wrong. Whether he will be able to sustain the pressure that is expected to mount from the US through the IMF and FATF in the days to come will tell who will have the last laugh. If he successfully passes that tough stage, the US will probably have a hard time remembering the old Pakistan which could never really muster the feeblest possible courage to say no to them with such conviction, let alone ‘absolutely not’.