**Pak-Iran Encounter**

**Pakistan suspended official visits and meetings while expressing deep concern.**

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The recent military encoun­ter between Pakistan and Iran exemplifies two distinct scenarios. Firstly, it highlights the vulnerability to conflict es­calation when a minor terrorist incident/s cre­ates a situation where two sizable and well-equipped nations, ordi­narily on friendly terms, find themselves on the brink of a potentially hazard­ous confrontation or even a local­ized war. Secondly, it underscores the potential for de-escalation and a return to amicable relations if a foundation of goodwill exists and the engaging actors share a long­standing history of positive interac­tions. In such cases, hostilities can swiftly recede, and a commitment to diligently address any identified loopholes in the future can pave the way for a return to normalcy.

The unforeseen and unjustifi­able missile and drone exchange be­tween Iran and Pakistan from Janu­ary 16-18 caught every segment of Pakistani society by shock and sur­prise. The two nations, sharing a vol­atile and unmanned 900km border, found themselves in heightened ten­sions due to the acts of the separatist terrorist group, Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), hiding in the village of Koh-e-Sabz in Kulag, merely 60 ki­lometers from Panjgur district in Pakistani Balochistan. Iranian secu­rity forces targeted the Jaish, an out­lawed outfit with aspirations for the independence of Iran’s Sistan-Balu­chistan province, known for claim­ing responsibility for the January 10 attack in the Iranian city of Rask, re­sulting in the deaths of 11 police of­ficers. Jaish al-Adl, an offshoot of the now-defunct Pakistan-based terror­ist group Jundullah, previously led by Abdolmalek Rigi, executed by Iran, underscored the potential for small terrorist groups in unstable re­gions to escalate conflicts between historically friendly nations.

[Peshawar police excuses itself from providing security to election candidates](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Feb-2024/peshawar-police-excuses-itself-from-providing-security-to-election-candidates)

In response to what Pakistan termed an “airspace violation,” its Foreign Ministry swiftly condemned the act, warning of “serious conse­quences.” It recalled its ambassador from Iran and asked the Iranian am­bassador not to return to Islamabad. Pakistan suspended official visits and meetings while expressing deep concern. The ministry highlighted its surprise, stating, “It is even more concerning that this illegal act has taken place despite the existence of several channels of communication between Pakistan and Iran.”

On January 18th, Pakistan retaliat­ed with a “highly coordinated” mil­itary operation named “Marg Bar Samachar” (Death to Militants). This intelligence-based operation aimed at Saravan, a border city targeting Pakistan-related militant hideouts in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan province. The objective was to eliminate safe havens used by Pakistani-origin ter­rorists taking refuge in Iran. Pakistan claimed to have previously shared concrete evidence and multiple dos­siers with Iranian authorities regard­ing the presence and activities of these terrorists. Pakistan stated that it had targeted members of two sepa­ratist groups, the Balochistan Libera­tion Army (BLA) and the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF). Iran, on the other hand, contended that Pakistan-based hideouts were responsible for numerous terrorist attacks in Iran, resulting in significant casualties.

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Both countries blame each other for not doing enough to curtail the insur­gents hiding in their respective coun­tries. Further, both profess that they have long warned the other of the ac­tivities of hostile groups in their ter­ritory. In the backdrop, friendly na­tions like Turkey, Afghanistan, Qatar, China, and Russia promptly advocat­ed for “maximum restraint” and em­phasized the importance of resolving the issues through diplomatic means and negotiations.

Following the tit-for-tat missile exchange, both Pakistan and Iran straightway expressed their desire to normalize relations and refrain from any further hostile acts. The foreign ministers of both countries commu­nicated over the phone, assuring a peaceful resolution of any misunder­standings between them.

Pakistan took decisive steps to re­store diplomatic relations with Iran at an emergency National Security Committee meeting. The committee also pledged to reduce tensions and emphasized strengthening close, brotherly ties with Iran based on trust and mutual understanding. The Iranian government reciprocated in the same spirit. The swift response and urgency for normalization, re­verting to the pre-January 16 situ­ation, suggest that both countries recognized a miscalculation in their actions and a hasty approach.

[IMF chief says central banks need to be guided by data in monetary policy](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Feb-2024/imf-chief-says-central-banks-need-to-be-guided-by-data-in-monetary-policy)

Recognizing the longstanding and strong ties between Pakistan and Iran is essential. The two nations share an extensive border and scores of border markets bustling with bar­ter trade. They have no border dis­putes, and maritime jurisdiction matters have been resolved amicably. The historical, cultural, and linguistic bonds between them are profound, exemplified by Urdu, Pakistan’s na­tional language, having roots in Per­sian, the language of Iran.

It appears that the current Pak­istani regime overlooked Iranian requests to address the presence of a terrorist group within Paki­stani territory responsible for nu­merous terror acts. Simultaneously, the Iranian government may have felt pressure from Iraq and Syria, where Israeli-backed groups posed threats to Iranian security. In haste, they might have perceived a magni­fied threat from the Pakistani-based Balochi group.

Officials on both sides of the border have traditionally engaged in mutu­al blame, with each country point­ing fingers at the other for not tak­ing sufficient measures against such groups. The reality, however, is that on both sides of Balochistan, there are challenging areas to govern. Col­laboratively, if Iran and Pakistan join hands, sharing intelligence and oth­er resources, they have the potential to gain control of the situation.