**TTP seeking merger with Al-Qaeda and other terror outfits**

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A report submitted to the UN Security Council on July 25 this year has warned that the outlawed Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is seeking a merger with the global Sunni pan-Islamist terrorism group Al-Qaeda to formulate an umbrella organization to provide safe refuge to all the terror groups operating in South Asia.  
The report elaborated: “TTP shares ‘close and symbiotic’ ties with the Afghan Taliban and is seeking a merger with the regional affiliates to expand its terror operations... The report on global operations of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State [ISIS] by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the UN Security Council said: ‘While Al-Qaeda has an estimated 400 fighters in Afghanistan, its affiliate, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), has an estimated 200 fighters led by the emir of AQIS, Osama Mehmood.’”  
It further indicated: “The return of the Afghan Taliban to power has ‘emboldened’ the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which is seeking to re-establish control in the erstwhile Pakistani tribal areas... AQIS to be providing guidance to the TTP for conducting increased attacks within Pakistan. The member states are concerned that the TTP could become a regional threat if it continues to have a safe operating base in Afghanistan.”  
The report added: “ETIM (East Turkestan Islamic Movement) training camps in Kunar province [Afghanistan] were being used for the TTP fighters... concerns increasing about the ability of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan to project a threat into the region and Europe.”  
In fact, the Indian intelligence agency RAW, which is in collusion with Israeli Mossad, supports the TTP and other terror groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), Jamat-ul-Ahrar (JuA), and Hizb-ul-Ahrar (HuA) in Afghanistan—and Balochistan Liberation Army, and their linked outfits such as Jundullah, which have been fully assisting terror activities in Pakistan’s various regions as well as in other regional countries such as China, Iran, etc. These terror groups claimed responsibility for many terrorism-related assaults.  
It is notable that Pakistan’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Munir Akram, had handed over to the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres a dossier on India’s campaign to promote terrorism in Pakistan.  
Earlier, in a press briefing which was a follow-up of their joint press conference of November 14, 2020, the then DG ISPR Maj-Gen. Babar Iftikhar and the then Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi unveiled a dossier containing “irrefutable evidence” of India’s sponsorship of terrorism in Pakistan.  
DG ISPR Maj-Gen. Babar had disclosed: “RAW has given banned organizations the task to target [major] cities... to sabotage CPEC [China-Pakistan Economic Corridor] ... India united Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan with banned dissident [terror] organizations... the Indian intelligence agencies are also trying to establish Daesh-e-Pakistan... has recently shifted 30 terrorists of Daesh to Pakistan.” Foreign Minister Qureshi almost expressed similar thoughts.  
It is mentionable that TTP is an umbrella terror outfit of various militant groups, belonging to different nationalities, ethnicities, and tribes, operating along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Formed in 2007 by Baitullah Mehsud, its current leader is Noor Wali Mehsud, who has publicly pledged allegiance to the Afghan Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Both the entities share a common ideology, which assisted them in the war against the NATO.  
Due to certain differences, however, some groups also maintain their separate status. A marked sectarian tinge has colored the TTP ideology as their leaders and cadres are from different sectarian backgrounds. TTP leaders now appear to have adopted a rigid anti-democracy stance—spreading Sharia—have their own interpretations. It is unclear whose interpretation of Sharia will be endorsed as the final product.  
After Pakistan’s military operations, a majority of the TTP militants fled to Afghanistan where some of them joined ISIS, while others remained part of the TTP.  
In June 2022, the federal government and the military started talks with the TTP to conclude a peace deal, and the Afghan Taliban were acting as mediators between the two sides.  
Sources pointed out that the TTP had put forward several demands, such as the reversal of the merger of FATA with KP, enforcement of Sharia courts in Malakand, etc., allowing the TTP to keep their arms. But the Pakistani side rejected their demands.  
When the Taliban fighters in August 2021 took control of Afghanistan, their government clarified that Afghan soil would not be used for any terrorist groups like TTP, Al Qaeda, ISIS, etc., for terror attacks against neighboring countries, including Pakistan. But terror assaults continued in Pakistan.  
Pakistan’s Armed Forces and primary intelligence agency ISI have successfully broken the backbone of the foreign-backed terrorists. Peace has been restored, particularly in Balochistan province and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, as well as in other vulnerable regions. But, in the recent past, terrorist attacks mainly in these provinces show that external intelligence agencies, especially RAW, are destabilizing Pakistan and want to damage the CPEC.  
These terror assaults occurred after the TTP on November 28 last year ended the ceasefire agreed with the Pakistan government in June and ordered its militants to stage attacks across the country. Both the TTP and Afghan Taliban share a similar hardline ideology.  
Taking cognizance of the latest terror assaults by the TTP, a high-level Pakistani delegation led by Defense Minister Khawaja Asif along with Lt. Gen. Nadeem Ahmed Anjum—head of the ISI—visited Kabul on February 22, 2023.  
The GDI-Afghan intelligence agency briefed the Pakistani delegation and accepted the problem of terrorism originating from Afghanistan soil. They also presented details of the solution but were found unsatisfactory. Therefore, Pakistan warned the interim Afghan Taliban administration that if TTP involved in cross-border attacks are not eliminated, Islamabad would take action against them within Afghanistan.  
In the meantime, at least 54 people were killed, while over 150 were wounded in a suicide blast at a Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) workers’ convention in KP’s Bajaur district on July 30 this year. The blast in Bajaur was claimed by a local affiliate of the “Islamic State” militia. The ISISK accused JUI-F of hypocrisy for being an Islamic political group that has supported secular governments and the military.  
Despite all of this, TTP cannot become the Interim Taliban Authority (ITA) owing to dissimilarities in power, perception, unavailability of public support, diversity of Pak society, lack of support from religious and political parties, and opposition in the former tribal areas.  
Nevertheless, after the Bajaur attack, Islamabad has once again warned the Afghan government it will take direct action against the sanctuaries of the TTP based in Afghanistan.