**[The cross-border challenge](https://www.dawn.com/news/1765598/the-cross-border-challenge)**

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LAST week’s coordinated [assault on an army garrison in Zhob](https://www.dawn.com/news/1764380) was yet another grim reminder of the growing terrorist threat emanating from cross-border sanctuaries.

The highest single-day casualties suffered by the security forces in a long time shows that the militants are now well equipped and better trained. The high-profile attack was claimed by a faction of the outlawed TTP that seems to have now extended its operation from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Balochistan.

There has been a marked escalation in militant attacks targeting the security forces in the troubled region. Balochistan’s Zhob division that borders South Waziristan has become the main centre of militant activities. This was the second attack on security forces in the area this month.

Earlier in the month, on July 2, militants [raided](https://www.dawn.com/news/1697941) three security check-posts on the main highway linking the region to KP. In another incident on the same day, security personnel were martyred in a gun battle with militants in Sui district.

It is evident that the [return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan](https://www.dawn.com/news/1640974) has given a huge impetus to militant groups [operating from their sanctuaries](https://www.dawn.com/news/1764803) across the border. There is little doubt that the current wave of militancy has its roots across the border. But it is also our disastrous appeasement policy in the past that is now coming back to haunt us.

Thousands of armed militants returned to their home in the former tribal districts as part of the so-called [peace deal](https://www.dawn.com/news/1734886) that the state made under pressure from the Taliban regime in Afghanistan last year. The deal allowed the TTP to regroup and revive their activities in the region from where they had been driven out by military operations in 2016.

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Most of the fighters are now back in their areas but their leadership is still operating from safe havens inside Afghanistan under the protection of the conservative regime. The country is now paying for the shameful surrender to the militants with the blood of its people.

Scores of Pakistani soldiers have been martyred in terrorist attacks in the last one year since the dubious peace deal struck with some factions of the TTP. After a wave of attacks in KP, the militants have now made Balochistan their new battleground.

It is certainly a matter of serious concern for the security agencies already confronting Baloch separatist militant groups in the province. Although TTP activities are largely confined to northern Balochistan areas in the predominantly Pakhtun belt, the group seems to have also made some inroads into Baloch areas.

What is most alarming is the reported tactical alliance between some Baloch separatist groups and the TTP. Some recent militant attacks in predominantly Baloch areas claimed by Islamic groups having close links with the TTP is disturbing. The region has also been the centre of Baloch militancy. The unholy alliance has worsened the predicament of the security agencies in a mostly ungoverned region.

Recent militant attacks showed that both the groups are now equipped with the [most modern weapons left by the American forces in Afghanistan](https://www.dawn.com/news/1745094). The long porous borders with Afghanistan as well as with Iran have allowed militants of both kinds to move freely. The border region has become a safe haven also for transnational militant groups.

Notwithstanding the Afghan Taliban administration’s denial, it is evident that the TTP militants are still being sheltered by the conservative Islamic regime. The easy availability of modern weaponry to these militant groups has made the situation extremely precarious.

Understandably, there has been a tangible toughening in Islamabad’s stance towards the Afghan Taliban administration after the latest wave of militant attacks claimed by the outlawed TTP.

In a strongly worded statement, the military leadership warned the Afghan regime against providing shelter to the terrorist groups involved in attacks on Pakistani security agencies. “It is expected that the interim Afghan government would not allow the use of its soil to perpetrate terror against any country, in the real sense and in line with commitments made in the [Doha agreement](https://www.dawn.com/news/1537384),” the ISPR said in a statement. “Such attacks are intolerable and would elicit an effective response from the security forces of Pakistan,” it asserted.

It is not for the first time that Pakistan has called upon the Afghan Taliban regime to act against militant sanctuaries, but to no avail. Instead, Afghan Taliban officials have strongly reacted to Pakistan’s warning. A Taliban spokesman said that it was mainly Pakistan’s responsibility to deal with the problem at home.

The war of words highlights that the simmering tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan’s Taliban regime are fast spilling over into an open conflict. It is evident that Pakistan is losing its patience with the Afghan Taliban’s inaction. Pakistan now appears to be threatening to take its war against militancy across the border if the Afghan Taliban administration continues to provide sanctuary to the TTP and other outlawed groups that are involved in terrorist activities inside Pakistan.

Last year, Pakistan reportedly carried out some cross-border operations to take out militant leaders based in Afghanistan’s Kunar and Nangarhar provinces. But such actions are quite risky and could have serious consequences for regional peace. It will put to the test Pakistan’s resolve to fight terrorism in all its manifestations.

Indeed, Pakistan needs to act to contain the rising militancy emanating from Afghanistan, but it also requires caution in undertaking any action that could lead to wider conflagration. Retaliatory cross-border raids could also result in the toughening of the Afghan Taliban administration.

The presence of the TTP and other transnational militant groups in Afghanistan has been a cause of serious concern for the international community as well. It is apparent that the Taliban regime has reneged on its pledge that it would not allow Afghan soil to be used by militant groups for action against other countries. The regime’s continued linkages with some of the groups have alarmed the world, particularly regional countries.

In this situation, there is a need to develop a regional consensus in order to force the Taliban administration to abandon its patronage of a group that also presents a serious threat to Afghanistan’s own security.

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