

Scenario 241

TEHRIK-E-TALIBAN PAKISTAN [TTP]

On 13th December 2007; in a secret meeting of senior Taliban commanders hailing from the whole tribal region, called Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA], spread along the Pak-Afghan border and nearby settled districts of the Khyber PK province, a movement was launched named the **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP]**; most of the Pakistani militants were grouped under this umbrella organization – daily *The News Islamabad* dated 15th December 2007 is referred.

To start with, the TTP was formed to pool the resources and manpower of Pakistan's militant individuals and groups to fight in self-defence in case the Pak-Army attacked their areas under the US command AND also to extend help to the Afghan Taliban taking part in '*jihad*', the holy war against America and International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] troops in Afghanistan. However, due to numerous military operations in their areas, the TTP was unable to send many fighters across the border for fighting.

Then the TTP was headed by Baitullah Mahsud, based in South Waziristan; he began fighting as a young man during the Afghan *jihad* against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan and later joined the Afghan Taliban. Nearly a year after, one of his deputies, Hafiz Gul Bahadur, had signed a peace accord with Pakistan government in North Waziristan and thus refused to become involved in TTP's fighting against the Pak-Army. Hafiz Gul Bahadur was later joined by Maulvi Nazeer, the Taliban commander for Wana area in South Waziristan; Pakistani magazine *Newsline [July 2008]* is referred

Previously, in early 2004, the Pak-Army began its military operations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA] and suffered heavy casualties in fierce clashes in *Kalosha* village near Wana at the hands of one Nek Mohammad. The Wana region is inhabited by the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, historically rivals of the neighbouring *Mahsud* tribe to which Baitullah Mahsud belonged though both were *Pashtun* tribes, the ethnic group to which the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban belong. Baitullah Mahsud was a vague Taliban commander then.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE TTP:

Nek Mohammad, only 27 years old commander then, had fought the Pak-Army bravely and ultimately concluded at a peace accord with Pakistan in *Shakai*, near Wana; where the Pak-Army's Corps Commander for Peshawar Lt Gen Safdar Hussain had publicly embraced and garlanded him. However, Commander Nek was killed in April 2004 in a US missile strike on his hideout near Wana; his death led to the collapse of the peace accord he had signed with Pakistan government.

Subsequently, **in February 2005**, a similar peace agreement with Baitullah Mahsud in *Sararogha* [South Waziristan] was signed under signatures of the same Pak-Army General; daily ***The News International*** dated 10th February 2005 is referred.

In 2007, serious differences emerged among the Pakistani Taliban in Wana over the presence of foreign militants belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan [IMU]; Tahir Yuldashev from Shakai headed them. A majority of Taliban and Ahmadzai Wazir tribesmen decided to evict the Uzbek militants. Backed by the Pak-Army with arms and money, they fought the Uzbeks and their tribal supporters and finally succeeded in expelling them from Wana.

No doubt; Baitullah Mahsud was the most powerful and dangerous TTP commander those days. He was accused of involvement in assassination of the former PM Benazir Bhutto on **27th December 2007** through his men but he always denied his involvement. Other Taliban commanders working under him included Waliur Rahman, who could succeed him in case of his death, and Qari Hussain, known for his strong anti-Shia views and also for training suicide bombers and sending them on their fatal missions.

In North Waziristan, the most important TTP commander was Hafiz Gul Bahadur, who was opposed to Baitullah Mahsud and had been trying to build a rival alliance of pro-government Pakistani Taliban without any appreciable success. Two clerics who wielded considerable influence on the Taliban in North Waziristan were Maulana Sadiq Noor and Maulana Abdul Khaliq – then considered affiliated to *Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam* [JUI-F].

The impulse to extremists and fundamentalists in Pakistan would put pressure on conventional governance to follow suit and bring in an Islamic system of Government here as well. That was not a product of

an Afghan Civil War but Pakistan's own ambiguous state of dealing softly with such elements. Mullah Aziz on the loose in Islamabad, killer of Governor Taseer, Mumtaz Qadri becoming a hero, succumbing to TLP etc. etc. were not Afghan Civil War issues but a consequence of tentative and weak law and order enforcement by Pakistani governments.

For Pakistan to weather the storm till Afghanistan stabilizes or settles down to reasonable levels depends on the measures and steps taken which would basically be Pakistan's own internal actions. These include **Madrasa Reforms**, sanitizing Islamabad of dubious elements, border management and enforcing the law.

Referring to an essay of **Pamela Constable** in *Washington Post's Foreign Service* desk dated 27th April 2009:

"....but this season, the forested ridges [of Margalla Hills overlooking capital city of Islamabad] have taken on a new, ominous significance for jittery residents. Suddenly, the hills are being depicted as the last barrier to gangs of Islamist [Taliban] insurgents sweeping south from the Afghan border and as perfect places for suicide bombers to lurk."

A week earlier, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, a religious party leader and the then parliamentarian had warned that:

"If the Taliban continue to move at this pace, they will soon be knocking at the doors of Islamabad. The Margalla Hills seem to be the only hurdle in their march toward the federal capital - he was exaggerating for effect."

Islamabad, a docile, park-filled city of 1.5 million people, was built in 1960s as a symbol of Pakistan's modern and democratic aspirations. Its boulevards are lined with grandiose federal buildings, and its shady side streets are home to an elite class of politicians and professionals. From its first day, this orderly capital seemed immune to the religious violence but since the advent of the new century it remained no more.

In those days, the people suddenly started feeling panic, shocks and jolts by frequent televised images of 'turbaned Taliban fighters' occupying town after town in the northwest districts of Swat, Shangla, Buner and surrounding hilly terrains, only 60 miles from Islamabad – for details see:

Scenario 55 [Pak-Army in Swat] of the book **JUDGES & GENERALS IN PAKISTAN VOL-II** by INAM R SEHRI; [2012 Reprint 2017] pp 694-710; published - GHP Surrey UK

In military history it's called **OPERATION RAH-E-HAQ** [meaning – 1 straight path]; though Pakistan's army suffered big losses including a 2 General's life but the TTP was pushed back into the tribal belt back. 3 However, a series of suicidal bombings and threats started abruptly in 4 Islamabad and other big cities. In the capital, many foreign missions, 5 embassies and agencies sent their families back home; the local World 6 Bank office moved into a heavily guarded multi-storey Serena Hotel. 7 It became almost impossible to enter the Parliament, the diplomatic 8 enclave and courts.

'If a mullah tells a boy of 15 to blow himself up, how do you stop him', the people were asking each other. Just about six months earlier, a truck full of explosives rammed into the luxury Marriott Hotel which killed 52 people and left tens as wounded. It took months to re-open and the hotel occupancy had plunged to 40%.

In March 2009, a young man approached an open camp for off-duty paramilitary guards, located in a nearby small park - the man blew himself up, killing five guards and of course himself too. In Pamela's words again, the fear of a shopkeeper was that:

*"The future looks very bleak. Fear chases us everywhere, from the moment we leave home to the moment we return at night. These blasts and attacks don't hurt the ruling class, but they destroy our business.....
.. The tension is everywhere."*

Until 2007 there was no tension in Islamabad; but that summer, the calm was shattered by a violent face-off between the government and radical chief cleric of the Red Mosque, who had turned their compound in central Islamabad into an armed camp. In confrontation, security forces stormed an allied *madrassa*, killing at least 100 people, and the leaders vowed revenge. Since then, terrorist assaults, bombings and kidnappings became regular feature all over the country. The targets included former PM Benazir Bhutto, UN officials, NATO supply convoys, police checkpoints, video shops, mosques of minority sects, an Italian eatery in Islamabad and the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore – for details see:

Scenario 4S [Red-Mosque: Operation Silence] of the book **JUDGES & GENERALS IN PAKISTAN VOL-II** by INAM R SEHRI; [2012 Reprint 2017] pp 528-539; published - GHP Surrey UK

There was enormous growth in the number of religious *madrassas*, some of which promoted radical visions of Islam. Even the intelligence

1 agencies and Police knew very little about these *madrassas*, and where
2 their funding used to come from remained a mystery. Islamabad is far
3 better known for its top-quality academic schools and colleges, including
4 private institutions tailored for foreign students – in those days these
5 institutions were frequently threatened. The mature female students
6 often commented that the people of the whole world see the TV images
7 and think about Pakistan as a rogue and barbarian society.

8
9 The alternative was to fight against the Coalition on behalf of the
10 Taliban. The fact that the Pakistan Army was the only Army in the
11 world, participating in this conflict, that did not have a single man under
12 US Command and that it operated in its own area speaks volumes
13 for the administration then. They managed to preserve Pakistan's
14 independent stand on not venturing into Afghanistan or Iraq or
15 functioning under US Command.

16
17 The war in FATA, which is now being criticized by so many, was an
18 outcome of a proposal that Pakistan Government had made to all
19 foreign fighters (residue of the Afghan-Soviet War) to disarm and register
20 for citizenship or then be prepared to return to their own countries. They
21 refused both the options and said they wished to exercise the right to
22 conduct *Jihad* within the country and from Pakistan against foreign
23 occupiers in Afghanistan. This obviously led to a conflict in which the
24 Pakistan Government's only objective was to establish its writ.

25
26 The political rulers of Pakistan were once seen bent over backwards to
27 give peace a chance, so much so, that they surrendered the people of
28 Swat to the Constitution of Sufi Muhammed while the Supreme Court,
29 always eager to take *suo-moto* action, remained criminally silent.

30 31 **TTP TERROR ATTACKS ON INCREASE:**

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33 Agreements after agreements were signed and violated from 2001 till
34 2008 till the Mahsuds publicly declared war on Pakistan in January
35 2008 – that is when the shooting war began with **Operation Zalzal**.
36 What was done by the Pak-Army then was need of the time and it was a
37 realistic action. The Western media had gone critical about Pak-Army's
38 treatment but, in fact, there was so much to be done more and the real
39 focus was the peace.

40
41 Immediately after the fall of Kabul on 15th August 2021, Pakistan's PM
42 Imran Khan and all his political opponents, including leaders of Islamist
43 parties, hailed the victory and congratulated the Taliban for its historic

win over American occupation. A half-dozen retired Pak-Army Generals 1 publicly celebrated the occasion; so did the extremist groups. The 2 Taliban's dramatic victory across the border also fired up terrorist groups 3 waging bloody rebellion inside Pakistan; and equally encouraged hard- 4 line religious parties with fundamentalist creed; Army, however, was seen 5 calm and cautious. 6

On the Taliban's return Maulana Fazlur Rehman of JUI-F supported the 8 Taliban but renounced and rejected any chance of violent struggle 9 inside Pakistan. Some clerics preached about the shortcomings of 10 democracy, and agitated for a similar '*hard struggle to have a true* 11 *Islamic system in Pakistan*'. The Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies in 12 Islamabad admitted that: 13

"....the Taliban's takeover in neighbouring Afghanistan is already 15 affecting Pakistan in far-reaching ways. With the Taliban taking over, 16 anti-Pakistan terrorist groups will be emboldened, but it doesn't end 17 there - there could be an emergence of new war of narratives in the 18 country, which will transform ongoing debates about state and society 19 and the role that religion plays." 20

The day the Taliban took over Kabul on 15th August 2021, next day the 22 Pakistani Taliban [TTP] went active, especially in Islamabad under the 23 command of Red Mosque's Maulana Abul Aziz. There was seen a 24 sudden sharp increase in cross border terror attacks from Afghanistan 25

Pakistan had to request the Afghan Taliban's high-ups immediately 27 though the formal government was not announced in Afghanistan or any 28 cabinet had been named or nominated. Taliban Chief Haibatullah 29 Akhundzada immediately set up a 3-member high-powered commission 30 to look into Islamabad's complaints. 31

On 20th August 2021; Pakistani MFA spokesman Zahid Hafeez 33 Chaudhri said in his weekly news conference: 34

"We have been taking up the issue of use of Afghan soil by the TTP for 36 terrorist activities in Pakistan with the previous Afghan government and 37 we will continue raising the issue with the future Afghan government 38 as well to ensure that TTP is not provided any space in Afghanistan to 39 operate against Pakistan." 40

America's **VOA News** and other media pages told on 21st August 2021. 42 said further: 43

1 *"TTP leaders are being warned (by the Afghan Taliban Commission)*
2 *to settle their problems with Pakistan and return to the country along*
3 *with their families in exchange for a possible amnesty by the Pakistani*
4 *government."*

5
6 Pakistan also clarified that there was no possibility of accepting any TTP
7 demands; also that the amnesty would be offered in line with the
8 country's constitution and law of the land, that require the militants to
9 surrender their firearms. The US and the UN had also listed the TTP as
10 a global terrorist organization.

11
12 The February 2020's Doha deal reached between the Taliban and the US,
13 which paved the way for foreign troops to leave Afghanistan, had bound
14 the Taliban to prevent regional as well as trans-national terrorist groups
15 from using Afghan soil to threaten global security. Afghan Taliban govt's
16 spokesman Suhail Shaheen told the foreign media that:

17
18 *"This concern is legitimate, and our policy is clear that we will not*
19 *allow anyone to use the soil of Afghanistan against any neighbouring*
20 *country, including Pakistan. So they should not have any concern. Be it*
21 *TTP or any other terrorist group they will have no place in our country*
22 *and that's a clear message to all."*

23
24 At that moment, the Afghan Taliban govt was in desperate need of
25 support from regional and international countries being in control of
26 Afghanistan to address governance as well as critical economic challenges
27 facing the country. Pakistani media held that:

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29 *"If they (the Afghan Taliban) fail to deliver on their counter-terrorism*
30 *commitments, not only Pakistan but China, Russia, Iran and Central*
31 *Asian countries would all be upset because they also complain that*
32 *fugitive militants sheltering on Afghan soil threaten their national*
33 *interests.*

34
35 *Can they survive if they turn their guns against us and support TTP?*
36 *This is not possible. Our trade routes are a lifeline for them, for*
37 *landlocked Afghanistan."*

38
39 After 2016, Pakistan started erecting a robust fence and hundreds of
40 forts along with its historically open border with Afghanistan; 2670 km
41 long. The massive project effectively blocked militant infiltration in
42 either direction. TTP militants were blamed for killing c47,000 civilians
43 and c5,000 security personnel of Pakistan since their emergence in

2007 in retaliation for Islamabad's decision to cooperate with Washington in the war against terrorism.

The TTP group used strongholds in Pakistan's semi-autonomous federally administered tribal areas, known as FATA, bordering Afghanistan. But sustained Pak-Army operations forced TTP members to flee into volatile Afghan border areas and traditionally lawless FATA areas were merged into mainstream Pakistan, which have significantly reduced terrorism incidents across the whole country. In the last decade, the Pakistani Taliban [TTP] had launched nearly 1,800 attacks on Pakistani state and civilian targets; [see ***Washington Post*** dated 5th September 2021]; thus Pak-Army and the ISI's most immediate concern was their resurgence again. Hailing Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, the TTP claimed to have sent welcome messages to them in routine.

The TTP had 6,000 trained fighters on the Afghan side of the border; a UN Security Council report in July 2021 said; also confirmed that the Afghan Taliban and TTP maintained their relationship as usual – they had released about 5,000 of prisoners; their own Afghan Taliban, militants, miscreants including TTP members, from Afghan prisons on 24th August 2021 after their take over in Kabul.

In the meanwhile, the Chairman of Pakistan's Senate Defence Committee, Mushahid Hussain Syed, said that:

"Pakistan had laid down red lines to the Taliban to warn it against harbouring the TTP. There is caution because of the Taliban track record and their affinity with the sworn foes of Pakistan like the TTP. There is also optimism that this time around, the Afghan Taliban are more chastened."

Pakistan had also, as a good gesture, asked the Taliban to convey their intention to the TTP fighters that if they like to surrender their arms in exchange for amnesty. In fact the TTP leaders wanted 'peace talks' with Government of Pakistan. Lt Gen Faiz Hameed, the head of Pakistan's ISI, also visited Kabul on 4th September 2021 to discuss security and TTP issues with Afghan Taliban leadership.

PAK-ARMY CONTROLLED TTP:

It's also on record that since years the Pak-Army had kept a heavy boot on the TTP's face and set aside them away from their activities but, under the fresh [rogue] directions from the US Command, they were

made to regroup again in 2018. Noor Wali Mehsud was nominated their new leader who was directed to launch an offensive comeback over Pakistan after the Taliban's take over two weeks earlier; **Amira Jadoon's** essay, from the **US Military Academy at West Point** is referred.

Jadoon also said that: *'They [TTP] see the Afghan Taliban as a pathway they can adopt.'* The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan no doubt added a volatile element to the mainstream politics play in Pakistan's streets. **Ayesha Siddiqua**, a researcher at the *University of London's SOAS South Asia Institute*, also held that: *'The government will be under pressure to make the state more Shariah-compliant, if Taliban next door are doing that.'*

Pak-Army's Chief, Gen Bajwa, had once said in his speech [2017] that:

".....there are more than 2 million students in madrassas, or religious schools, and that many were not getting a worldly education. So what will they become: Will they become clerics or they will become terrorists? We need to revisit the concept of madrassas."

The law enforcing agencies including Pak-Army were always seen reluctant to crack down on certain religious leaders or schools out of fear of being outnumbered in a violent showdown. There were *madrassas* they wouldn't go near. The rise of extremism in Pakistan that they sailed on was gradually escalated real threat to them. Gen Talat Massood, however, acknowledged anxieties that a new government in Kabul might lead to ***'Talibanization of Pakistani society'***. But those fears were overblown giving one reason or the other. Nevertheless, the fact remains that it was never two-way traffic in terms of influence.

BUT the question was of how much influence the Pakistani government could retain over Afghan Taliban as rulers of their own country and the group had announced their own interim cabinet on 7th September 2021. In that cabinet there is the Haqqani network, a named militant group in American list – but no one can ask the Taliban about their legitimacy – it's the Taliban's prerogative. Pakistan always denied the charges against Haqqani group and would continue to do so unless the US brings cogent charge sheet or evidence against Haqqani people.

Pakistan insisted that the world should go realistic and engage with the new rulers, otherwise Afghanistan could face a humanitarian crisis and economic collapse that would directly spill across the border into Pakistan.

Referring to the **APP [Article no:2822]** dated 11th September 2021 on media pages:

“India had been using Afghan soil against Pakistan since 2001 by investing about \$3 billion on infrastructure, training of Afghan forces and other projects to establish a network for its permanent foothold and to achieve its overt and covert designs - by sponsoring terrorism against Pakistan from Afghan territory.”

It was India’s move to destabilize Pakistan; the Modi’s government had acted as top spoiler of regional peace.

Pakistan claimed that India had supported and trained **Dai’sh & TTP** elements to use as proxy tools for its nefarious designs against Pakistan, Afghanistan and the region. **Under the garb of training, Afghan forces, around 300 Dai’sh & TTP members were still under training in India on the day the Kabul fell.** For this purpose, Indian consulates, 12 as per Pak-media reports, were established along the Pak-Afghan border line, controlled and used by Indian intelligence agency, RAW, as launching pads for terrorist activities inside Pakistan.

The investigations by various agencies, including the ISI and FIA of Pakistan, pointed out that from these consulates India’s RAW had planned terrorist activities like **Gurdwara attacks, Lahore blast, Gwadar attack** to discredit Pakistan. The major aim was to harm Pak-China relations – especially the CPEC cause; some media-men held that the US was happy over such activities from the said consulates in the backdrop of US-China tense / cold relations – but still wanted **DO MORE** from Pakistan.

During last week of August 2021, Pakistan handed over to the new Afghan Taliban leadership, a list of ‘**most wanted terrorists**’ affiliated with the banned *Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan* [TTP] operating from the war-torn Afghanistan. Afghan Taliban Chief Haibatullah Akhundzada was moved to show his strength as per their consents given in Doha Accord; the Voice of America [VOA] also mentioned it openly.

The necessity arose suddenly; the TTP was driven out of the erstwhile tribal areas by Pakistan when it launched a full scale military offensive in 2014. Most of them found refuge across the border as Pakistan accused Indian spy agency RAW and Afghanistan’s National Directorate of Security [NDS] of funding and backing that terrorist outfit.

When the Afghan Taliban swept Kabul on 15th August 2021, the TTP chief issued a statement congratulating the Afghan Taliban victory and renewed allegiance to its chief Akhundzada. As mentioned earlier, the Afghan Taliban released many TTP terrorists from jail including its former deputy chief Maulvi Faqir Muhammad a week after taking over.

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, after conclusion of his four-nation tour to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran during the last quarter of 2021, had reiterated India's spoiler role in Afghanistan.

On 14th September 2021; during an international donor conference America's Antony Blinken urged Pakistan to ***get in line*** with the rest of the world - but Pakistani PM, just in next day's interview, declined their sermon straightaway. Khan repeated his appeal at a meeting in Tajikistan with regional leaders, saying ***"Afghans should not be left alone."***

The critical issue was ensuring that an immediate crisis should not occur. To withhold aid while testing the regime's behaviour could lead to economic collapse and a dangerous security vacuum. Pakistan's one Advisor, Moeed Yusuf, held that:

"We're putting Pakistan's dilemma more bluntly. It's like we're damned if we do and damned if we don't. India is repressing Muslims in the contested border region of Kashmir and using Afghan territory to potentially infiltrate Pakistan."

Another worry remained about home-grown Islamist rebels; mostly the TTP. Taliban had promised to thwart such terrorist attempts but were not able to deliver. A suicide bombing in Balochistan province on 5th September 2021 was claimed by the rebel group. A security expert opined that:

"Pakistan would be ill-advised to stick its neck out for the Taliban. We need a coherent strategy for dealing with terrorism on both sides of the border."

It remains a fact that in 2011, Adm. Mike Mullen, the then head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a congressional hearing that *the Haqqani network was 'a veritable extension' of the ISI*. New cabinet was a tricky situation for Pakistan because the new Afghan cabinet was comprised of *both pro-Pakistan and anti-Pakistan elements*. The relationship could endure, but this time the Taliban were likely to hold the strings. Western

powers had felt that by placing the *Haqqanis* in key positions, the Taliban in fact signalled about their chosen path of isolation instead of integrating into the modern international system. America threatened **‘this choice may lead to violent instability at a terrible human cost.’**

Pamela Constable’s article on media pages of 18th September 2021 described her recent interview with one Prof Shakoor Khan of a university in Mardan city of Pakistan, where a liberal student named Mashal Khan was brutally killed by conservative religious classmates in 2017; she said:

“.....the Taliban’s return to power next door is already having a deep impact. Our clerics and students are behaving as if they won a battle against mighty powers. Friday sermons are all about Taliban success stories. This can change people’s minds, especially the youth – (a dangerous phenomenon in fact).”

One should remember that there were already such pro-Taliban feelings in Pakistani society, and then the next door country became their exclusive domain in August 2021. Most Pakistanis were found afraid - the hard-liners would only become stronger with the passage of time; if suited to them.

RED MOSQUE ALIVE AGAIN:

As discussed in above lines, the Pakistani Taliban [TTP] went alive again immediately after Afghan Taliban’s take over in Afghanistan. In the capital Islamabad, the volcano of Islamist movement also erupted once more after 14 years deep slumber, snooze and sleep since 2007. For years, the Red Mosque stood as a fortress of religious rebelliousness, a nerve centre of radical Islamist preaching that attracted thousands of worshipers to hear extremely hard sermons by its long-time two pro-Taliban brothers, Maulana Abdul Aziz and [late] Ghazi Abdul Rashid.

In 2007, the mosque, also known as the *Lal Masjid*, and its next-door Islamic *madrassa* for girls [**Jamia Hafsa**] were the site of a bloody siege by Pakistani security forces after a week-long standoff with armed militants inside the compound, which left at least 100 dead. Since then, Aziz has faced numerous criminal charges but never got convicted – for details see the above referred **Scenario 46** of the book **JUDGES & GENERALS IN PAKISTAN VOL-II.**

Then, with the sudden takeover of Afghanistan by Taliban in August 2021, Maulana Aziz started telling his followers that his voice raised in

2007 was justified; it's their time again and that *'The coming of the Taliban was an act of God.'* He no longer preaches at the mosque, under an agreement he made in 2020 with the government of Pakistan. Maulana further said that:

"The whole world has seen that they defeated America and its arrogant power. It will definitely have a positive effect on our struggle to establish Islamic rule in Pakistan, but our success is in the hands of God."

It was the same sloganeered mission which the TTP had been using as its motto since their first day of raising guns. *Madrassas* in Pakistan have long played a major role in fostering militant Islamic groups, mostly funded by the foreign countries aimed to propagate their specific [opposing] sects of Islam. The Afghan Taliban movement was originated and nurtured in radical *madrassas* of Akora Khatak and Quetta; while *Lashkar-e-Taiba* [LeT], a violent part-group of the Taliban, was incubated in Punjab.

Amongst those home-grown groups, there was TTP which waged war against the Pakistani government for years and remained active from Afghanistan. Pakistan government rightly apprehended that the TTP could embolden its extremists to launch a new holy war in Pakistan again.

Since the first day of Afghan Taliban on victory stand, Maulana Aziz and his followers started periodically raising white Taliban flags on Jamia Hafsa's roof, defying government orders. The third time, **on 18th September [2021]**, police cordoned off the area while veiled girls [students] stood on the roof, shouting taunts and vowing for Islamic Rule. Maulana Aziz threatened the police while waiving his gun. He was initially charged with rioting, sedition and other crimes under federal anti-terrorism laws, but the charges were dropped the next day – ***and that is the legal practice in Pakistan; same laws are implemented differently on different people.*** The Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid told the media that:

".....of the more than 500 madrassas and 1,000 mosques in Islamabad, we have issues with only one. Maulana comes up with an issue every day, and every day we try to resolve it."

The fact remains that controversy over the 2007 Red Mosque siege had ignited a national outcry in Pakistan and had sparked a wave of suicide bombings and attacks by the Pakistani Taliban militants that took years to quash. Maulana Aziz was sent to prison but was ultimately ***acquitted by the Supreme Court on charges of murder and other violent crimes, citing a lack of evidence and failure of witnesses to testify.*** Over the

years, he faced 27 legal proceedings and spent several stints in prison, but the charges were never considered substantial – mainly due to cowardice role of the pleaders and judges.

Pamela Constable's report dated 25th September 2021 is available on media pages – describing that:

“.....the government rebuilt the badly damaged mosque, an imposing redbrick compound located near government ministries, embassies and the headquarters of the national intelligence agency. It has remained a hotbed of extremist fervour, with a new library named after Osama bin Laden [OBL], but it has never again violently challenged the government's writ. In return, Pakistani authorities have tolerated its activities, up to a point, in a tacit and strategic peace agreement.

The Red Mosque operation was and still is a sensitive issue. In recent years, Pakistan has been relatively free of terrorist attacks, and the government wants to keep it that way. Whenever a problem arises now, the authorities try to settle it peacefully.”

After Taliban's victory in Afghanistan, Maulana Aziz re-affirmed that they would continue their struggle to establish Islamic rule in Pakistan. In the past, he had openly called for an **Islamic revolution** against the state but this time his strategy might invite some bargaining chips from the government. He praised the new leadership in Kabul but said they should strive to live *'even more simply'* in power - they should not meet people in offices and not to live in palaces, rather should operate from mosques. However, Maulana's rival Islamist factions held that *'....Aziz is exploiting the moment as well as his location in the capital.'* Maulana's daughter *Tayyiba Ghazi*, the vice principal at *Jamia Hafsa*, proudly described her female students as religious warriors for Islamist values.

Jamia Hafsa normally keeps more than 1,500 girl-students, generally between ages 5-20; these students hail from the same ethnic *Pashtun* origin as the Afghan Taliban, and usually come from the bordering area near Afghanistan. No male students are taught at this campus. *Tayyiba Ghazi* held that: ***'the staffs teach our girls to be brave, and they are not scared of anyone, not the police or other forces.'***

AFGHAN TALIBAN AND TTP ARE THE SAME [?]

The TTP, an umbrella group of armed groups originally from across Pakistan's north-western border districts, was formed in 2007, and

waged a war against the Pakistani state for years before the 2014's Operation pushed most of its leadership and fighters into neighbouring Afghanistan.

Referring to the **AFP** [French News Agency] report of 15th November 2021:

"Since the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, Pakistan's offshoot of the hardline Islamist group has ramped up attacks on its side of the border, leaving Islamabad scrambling to reach a peace deal.

Active in the remote tribal areas of Pakistan, experts say the militant group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP] -- a separate movement which shares a common history with the Afghan Taliban -- plunged the country into a period of horrific violence after forming in 2007. Also made up mostly of ethnic Pashtuns, it carried out hundreds of suicide bomb attacks and kidnappings across the country, seizing control of border regions and imposing a radical version of Islamic law in territory where it held sway.

It was a TTP gunman who opened fire on schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai in her native Swat Valley, before she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The group was also linked to the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto."

But it wasn't until a massacre of nearly 150 children at a Peshawar Army School in 2014 that the military finally crushed the movement and forced its fighters to retreat into Afghanistan. With the Afghan Taliban back in control in Kabul, Pakistan was trying to control a TTP comeback. One TTP fighter confided that:

"The [TTP] fighters feel more comfortable after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, they can now move freely in Afghanistan. They have no fear of US drone strikes. And they can meet and communicate easily."

The group has been responsible for some of the deadliest bombings targeting civilians and security forces on Pakistani soil, including a 2014 attack on a Peshawar school in which they brutally slaughtered the women staff and 143 school-children.

In all, at least 25,622 Pakistanis were killed in attacks by the TTP and its allies since 2007, according to SATP data, with civilians accounting for 73 percent of all casualties.

The 2014 operation saw violence drop sharply, with the Pakistani military citing a 75 percent drop in the number of attacks since 2015, with 398 major and 830 minor operations conducted against the TTP and its allies.

Referring to **Asad Hashim's** analysis Published in **AL-JAZEERA** dated 8th December 2021:

"With Afghan Taliban now controlling neighbouring Afghanistan, Waziristan residents fear a return to life under the TTP. The people are spending sleepless nights because of local thieves or criminals or the TTP members. Both the 'good' and 'bad' Taliban are extorting Waziristan residents for money and carrying out targeted killings."

The situation was complex and involved a resurgence of the TTP and its allied local militias, as well as Pakistani government-backed 'surrendered Taliban' fighters, all engaged in targeted killings of civilians, extortion, tribal councils and attacks against security forces.

During January – November 2021, at least 69 people were killed in 37 attacks across South and North Waziristan districts, according to data from the South Asia Terrorism Portal [SATP]. The attacks included targeted killings of anti-Taliban civilians, extortion-related killings, check-post raids and numerous improvised explosive device [IED] attacks targeting security forces. Media gurus attributed the rise in violence to the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

Pak-Army, however, held that *'this scenario was short-lived as Pakistan's security forces remain ready to deal with any internal [or] external threats.'* In the Waziristan districts, talk between the TTP and Pakistan government were being met with both scepticism and fear.

In North Waziristan, the birth place of the TTP, the security situation was even worse. Since Jan-Nov 2021, about 45 people were killed in 25 attacks in the district, according to SATP data, with a mix of armed actors active in the area, including the TTP and local militias led by commanders Hafiz Gul Bahadur, Sadiq Noor, Aleem Khan and others.

Mohsin Dawar, North Waziristan's sole member of Pakistan's Parliament told that:

"After the collapse of Kabul, they have gotten internal strength and confidence, and they have come onto the front foot. They had quite a

1 *large presence before as well, and they were moving around as well,*
2 *but it was done in a certain [hidden] way. Now they have become very*
3 *visible again.*

4
5 *Everything they do; there is extortion, taking money from contractors*
6 *or anyone who has any business there. There are abductions as well*
7 *[and] there are killings also.*

8
9 *In one case in early November, local tribal elder Malik Laik, from the*
10 *Hamzoni area of North Waziristan, was dragged out of his home and*
11 *beheaded by a local Taliban-allied militia.*

12
13 *They kill brutally in order to spread fear."*

14
15 That incident, like many others in the Waziristan districts, was never
16 reported in Pakistan's mainstream press. Statistically, it remains difficult
17 to gauge what is or has been happening there, because the people have
18 only one official source of information - this is ISPR [*the military's press*
19 *wing*]. The fact remains that many attacks are not reported to the
20 authorities '*out of fear*' for reprisals. The TTP's fighters had returned to
21 the district in large numbers.

22
23 Pakistan's PM Khan announced on 2nd October 2021 that the
24 government was in talks with the TTP for the first time since 2014,
25 facilitated by Afghanistan's new leadership. Both sides announced
26 a truce until at least 9th December 2021, while they hammered out an
27 agreement also.

28
29 The Pakistan govt's hand out said: ***'Those people who want to come***
30 ***back and respect our law and constitution, we would like to give them***
31 ***amenesty.***' BUT neither side openly divulged details about the negotiating
32 points. However, the sources told that the release of about 100 TTP
33 fighters was a key demand from the TTP.

34
35 The fighters were also appealing to allow come out of hiding and return
36 to the tribal areas but without the support of elders -- hundreds of whom
37 have been killed over the years. Made up of multiple factions, some of
38 which also swore allegiance to Al-Qaeda, the TTP had gone more
39 dangerous. It had some 4,000 to 6,000 fighters, down from 20,000 at its
40 peak in 2009-10.

41
42 TTP's top leadership was wiped out by military operations backed by US
43 drone strikes after 2014 – thus the TTP in 2021 ***'was not the same group***

as it was eight years ago’. The October negotiations were taking place with young fighters and **TTP’s third tier leaders.**

[The said peace talks between the two sides had angered most Pakistanis, who remembered the brutal attacks on schools, hotels, churches and markets which had killed around 70,000 people.]

The TTP vs Pakistan govt ceasefire did took place but only for a month or so. The militant TTP resumed terrorist attacks after declaring an end to a month long cease-fire on 9th December 2021, accusing the Pak-govt of not fulfilling its promises, including the release of key TTP leaders from jail. The agreement - brokered by the Taliban - had given Islamabad a respite for a month from attacks waged by the TTP.

Analysts monitoring insurgency in the region believe the Taliban’s triumph and the US withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan definitely emboldened the TTP and boosted its morale.

Pakistani officials also approached the Afghan Taliban to ensure Afghan soil is not used by armed groups targeting Pakistan, but it was unlikely the Afghan Taliban would act in any concrete way against the TTP, whose fighters fought alongside Afghan Taliban troops against US-led NATO forces for years.

Furthermore, the Taliban care greatly about maintaining unity in their ranks – action against the TTP would undermine that and threaten to send defectors over to Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), something the Taliban really would never want. ***The past history tells that whenever the TTP was given space and whenever they ‘surrendered’ they exploited it and used it to expand their influence in these areas.***

TTP Chief Noor Wali in his latest audio message of 10th December 2021 announced that *‘the pact doesn’t stand any more’*. Since then, the TTP accepted responsibility for at least 10 attacks, killing and wounding law enforcement personnel in various parts of the country. This also included an attack on 14th Dec instant on a police team in Rawalpindi where Pak-army’s GHQ is based; and the killing of an intelligence official in *Lakki Marwat* District in KPK Province on 16th Dec 2021.

An Islamabad-based security official, also privy to the negotiations, told:

“Islamabad is not in a position to fulfil most of the TTP’s demands. The TTP demands to release hard-core militant leaders, such as

1 *Muslim Khan and Latif Mehsud, hand them over a bordering territory*
2 *and conduct talks in a third country, such as Qatar. **The TTP wants***
3 ***to compare itself with the Afghan Taliban which cannot be treated***
4 ***as such.***

5
6 In December 2016, a Pakistani military court sentenced Muslim
7 Khan, a top TTP leader from the Swat region in the north, to death for
8 his involvement in killing dozens of people in terrorist attacks and
9 kidnapping two Chinese for ransom. The TTP commander Mehsud, was
10 brought to Islamabad in December 2014 after arresting him in
11 Afghanistan during a raid. Pakistan govt was thus ready to fight the TTP
12 again as per provisions of the constitution and law.

13
14 In the past, Islamabad signed several peace deals with the TTP and other
15 Pakistani Taliban groups, but none lasted beyond a few months. Similar
16 to the past agreements, the TTP availed mileage and legitimacy from
17 the cease-fire and portrayed itself as a stakeholder in Pakistan's political
18 system.

19
20 The TTP always tried to introduce, implement and enforce their
21 own brand of Shariah [Islamic law] in the tribal [areas]; if the State
22 will resist, it would trigger another wave of terrorism - the worst-
23 case and more likely scenario. For residents of Waziristan, the omens
24 were not good; they were caught in a conflict between the TTP and
25 raids by the Pakistani security forces at times. For normal people,
26 their lives were completely at a standstill; they were distressed, scared
27 and afraid.

28 29 **TPP'S ATTACKS ON INCREASE:**

30
31 See another analysis by **Dr Asfandiyar Mir** appeared on media pages
32 including **www.usip.org** on 19th January 2022:

33
34 *"In 2021, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan [TTP] insurgency escalated*
35 *its challenge against Pakistan. Operating from bases in Afghanistan,*
36 *and with a growing presence inside Pakistan, the group mounted an*
37 *increasing number of attacks against Pakistani security forces — as well*
38 *as against some critical Chinese interests in Pakistan. The insurgency*
39 *also showed renewed political strength by bringing in splintered*
40 *factions and improving internal cohesion.*

41
42 *With a burgeoning alliance between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP,*
43 *Pakistan faces a major insurgency challenge in 2022."*

On 18th January 2022; after an attack by the TTP on the police in 1 Pakistan's capital city of Islamabad, the government expected more 2 attacks by the group – because the TTP had got a new agenda from its 3 sponsors to disrupt the CPEC program to block Chinese expansion in 4 the region – an American cold-war plan in fact in the back-drop of the 5 US-China economic warfare.

Year 2021's most significant development in this region was the TTP's apparent alliance with the Afghan Taliban BUT in fact was largely a by-product of the US strategy since a decade back. Based in Afghanistan, the TTP was raised and nurtured by the former Afghan government in cahoots with India; the US funding was the main source of their strength. Therefore, Pakistan often implied, the US exit from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban would limit the TTP's threat against Pakistan.

However, the time started blowing in reverse directions for Pakistan. The TTP, on one side got energized with the Taliban's takeover and became stronger than before with the American secret funding. After the Taliban's re-taken over, almost immediately, Taliban leadership released senior TTP leaders and a large number of fighters imprisoned by the President Ghani's government. The Taliban regime also, most probably, provided the TTP's leadership with de-facto political asylum and freedom of movement within Afghanistan — from which the group was directing its campaign of violence in Pakistan.

After the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan, the TTP Chief Noor Wali Mehsud had publicly reiterated his pledge of allegiance to Afghan Taliban leadership and claimed the TTP to be a branch of it in Pakistan. For their part, the Taliban went evasive on the future of the TTP in Afghanistan and remained non-committal on a crackdown despite the group's rising violence against Pakistan.

The Pakistani government sought the intervention of Siraj Haqqani, a top Taliban leader, for talks with the TTP — especially as the TTP's violence mounted after the Taliban took power. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan publicly took the position that a political settlement was the only way to end Pakistan's war with the TTP; **NY Times** dated 2nd October 2021 is referred.

Initial negotiations between the TTP and Pakistan, which took place in Afghanistan, made some headway. A short cease-fire was announced in early November, with reports that Pakistan had committed to the release of over 100 TTP prisoners, including some high-profile leaders, which

1 were in detention in Pakistan. But that cease-fire was suspended by the
2 TTP in early December, as they alleged the Pakistani government didn't
3 keep its commitments. The Pakistani government offered amnesty for
4 the TTP if it laid down arms and agreed to adhere to Pakistan's
5 constitution; the cease-fire was agreed on at the request of the Afghan
6 Taliban government.

7
8 The TTP went vague on the cease-fire; perhaps the group was using this
9 tool to gain release of the imprisoned senior leaders and improve its
10 battlefield position. Additionally, the TTP was asking the Afghan Taliban
11 leadership to help it consolidate power in Afghanistan. There were
12 indications also that some TTP leaders were unhappy with the cease-fire;
13 however, Siraj Haqqani was pressuring the TTP on Pakistan's behest to
14 behave well. There was deep support within the Afghan Taliban for the
15 TTP and its '*jihad*' against Pakistan.

16
17 Thereafter, on 27th January 2022; Pakistan's Security Advisor Moeed
18 Yousaf told the nation in a telecast that Pakistan would think about
19 revisiting its support for the Taliban government due to the safe haven
20 the Afghan Taliban was providing to the TTP. It was unlikely because the
21 renewed threat of the TTP was secondary in the hierarchy of Pakistan's
22 security priorities due to its strong-hold Pak-Army – known for its
23 vigilance.

24
25 Pakistan's preferred destination was a 'pro-Pakistan' regime in
26 Afghanistan. In the aftermath, Pakistan also feared total state collapse in
27 Afghanistan due to the humanitarian disaster unfolding there [*details*
28 *already given in a previous chapter*], as well as the intriguing spill-over
29 into Pakistan. There was another growing friction in the Pak-Taliban
30 relationship over the border fence issue on Durand Line. With the TTP's
31 violence continued to grow in Pakistani cities, Pak-military and
32 intelligence faced mounting domestic political pressure. And if the
33 Afghan Taliban stepped up their opposition to Pakistan's fencing of the
34 border, Pak-Taliban relations could deteriorate.

35
36 While attacking mainly the security forces, the TTP claimed 32 attacks
37 in August, 37 in September and 24 in October [2021] -- the highest
38 monthly totals for at least five years, according to their own published
39 data.

40
41 Across all of 2020, when the US first pledged to start withdrawing its
42 troops from Afghanistan, it claimed 149 assaults -- three times more
43 than in 2019.

The renewed confidence became apparent in October when the group's 1 leader **Noor Wali Mehsud** came out of hiding and was photographed 2 shaking hands with residents and speaking in public -- something 3 unimaginable just a few months ago. More than a dozen Islamist factions 4 have since July 2020 rallied under his leadership.

[In an attempt to improve the TTP's image and distinguish them from the Islamic State's extremism, Mehsud has largely taken the group in a new direction -- sparing civilians and ordering attacks only on security and law enforcement officials.]

On 14th July 2021; the TTP carried out a suicide attack in which at least 13 people, including **nine Chinese nationals**, were killed in an explosion in a bus; the people were working at a hydroelectric project in Pakistan's Kohistan District. The TTP had also carried out 95 attacks in 2020, and 44 attacks in the first six months of 2021, according to statistics compiled by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

The above attack on Chinese engineers clearly demonstrate that on whose agenda the TTP was / is working to sabotage the CPEC programs in Pakistan – India and the US both. The intelligentsia had held that in such situations Pakistan should not have offered or brokered peace talks or deals with the TTP – they should have launched proper planned operations against them like in Swat (2009) and in Waziristan (2014-15).

Though the TPP is fed and financed by the US through Indian hidden links in Iran and Afghanistan but the growing threat of the TTP would have implications for the US counter-terrorism priorities, too because in April 2021, al-Qaeda had publicly reposed confidence in the TTP; **CNN** dated 30th April 2021 is referred. This could be a serious threat nexus — in the past, even short-term deals had backfired by strengthening both the TTP and al-Qaeda.