

# POLICY FOLLY: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE JANUARY 30, 2023 TERROR ATTACK ON A MOSQUE IN PAKISTAN'S PESHAWAR

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When the [Taliban captured Kabul](#) in August 2021, [Imran Khan, then Prime Minister of Pakistan, said](#) Afghanistan had “broken the shackles of slavery”. [Pakistan, which had harboured the Taliban leadership](#), was largely seen as one of the victors of the Afghan civil war. But the celebratory mood faded as the Taliban’s triumph also emboldened the [Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan](#) (TTP), the Pakistani version of the Sunni Islamist insurgency. Since then, Pakistan has witnessed a rise in terrorist attacks, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bordering Afghanistan. Monday’s [blast in a mosque in Peshawar’s highly fortified Police Line area](#), claiming [at least 100 lives](#), was the deadliest in Pakistan in years and a sharp reminder of how its strategy of backing the “good Taliban” and fighting the “bad Taliban” has backfired. A TTP faction initially claimed responsibility, but a spokesperson denied any role. This demonstrates the divisions within the group rather than raising doubts about its involvement. The blast bears the hallmarks of a TTP attack — it took place in its stronghold and was targeted at security personnel. And no other group has claimed responsibility.

The TTP and the Afghan Taliban may be organisationally different, but they are ideologically brothers. What the TTP wants to do in Pakistan is what the Taliban have managed to do in Afghanistan. After the 2014 Peshawar school bombing, which killed over 150 people, mostly children, the Pakistani Army had cracked down on the group. But the Afghan Taliban’s return to power changed the dynamics of insurgency in the border region. Mr. Khan adopted a policy of engagement towards the TTP. The Afghan Taliban hosted talks between the TTP and Pakistan which led to a ceasefire. But the year-long truce collapsed in November last year. Many believe that the TTP, which used the ceasefire to rearm and reorganise itself, is now spreading terror with greater firepower. The Peshawar blast has come at a time of continuing political instability, with Mr. Khan leading a relentless campaign against the government, Pakistan’s currency tanking, its foreign reserves falling, inflation soaring and the power situation remaining grim. Unable to pay its debts, the government is in talks with the IMF for a bailout package. And now, there is a security challenge. Pakistan should realise that its policy of selectively fighting and selectively harbouring terrorism and extremism has done it more harm than good. It needs a paradigm shift in its approach towards terrorism, while, more urgently, amassing its resources and going after the TTP, which is posing the biggest internal security threat to the Pakistani state.

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