

# Unveiling a Misplaced Policy: Forced Deportation of Afghan Refugees by Pakistan

Imran Khan

The Pakistani government's decision to forcibly deport more than a million Afghani refugees raises question of both a legal and humanitarian nature.



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## Introduction

In an enormous repatriation, tens of thousands of Afghans are on their way back to their home country. Some have lived in Pakistan their whole lives. This is all happening because of Pakistan's decision to forcibly deport [1.7 million Afghan refugees](#) on the pretext that it aims to address internal issues and stabilize its situation. Since November 1st, more than [300,000](#)

Afghans have been deported, sparking [international concern](#) and prompting crucial questions about the moral, humanitarian, and legal dimensions of such actions. Despite mounting criticism, the Pakistani government persists in its original plan, implementing an expanded pressure campaign aimed at compelling the Taliban to withdraw support for Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). TTP is a militant organization involved in an insurgency against the state of Pakistan. What the Afghan Taliban have accomplished in Afghanistan is something they desire for themselves. Therefore, they undoubtedly pose a major risk to Pakistan's security.

## Background and Context

Afghanistan and Pakistan are neighbors, and over the decades, there have been several waves of Afghan refugees who have crossed the border to escape instability or war. The historical presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, rooted in the Afghan-Soviet War of the 1980s, has taken a troubling turn since the return of the Taliban in 2021. The recent addition of 600,000 Afghans entering Pakistan brought the total number [to 3.7 million Afghan refugees](#). Recent political shifts and strained diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have escalated tensions, contributing to Pakistan's decision to forcibly repatriate a significant number of Afghan refugees. Consequently, in early October, Pakistan's interior minister announced that all undocumented immigrants had to leave the country by November 1 or be deported by force.

## Motivations Behind Forced Deportations

Several factors contributed to Pakistan's decision to forcefully deport Afghan refugees. One of them is that the refugees are a burden on Pakistan's economy, but whether there is actual evidence for that is up for debate. The government of Pakistan is not providing any subsidies to Afghan nationals, nor is it providing any housing for them. Afghan refugees are responsible for their own livelihoods. However, the root of the issue seems to be Pakistan linking Afghan refugees to the [security threat](#) Pakistan is facing and maintaining that Afghans have been responsible for several attacks in the country this year, though without presenting any evidence.

Pakistan's claim that Kabul supported the extremists behind attacks in Pakistan stems from the fact that the TTP maintains a connection with the Afghan Taliban. These groups are ideologically aligned, and the Afghan Taliban is accused of providing a safe haven for the TTP's, thereby supporting the group's violent operations. Despite Pakistan's initial belief that the Afghan Taliban could influence the TTP to cease attacks, multiple unsuccessful attempts have led Pakistan to view the mass deportation of Afghan refugees as a pressure tactic. The hope is that the already fragile Taliban administration will succumb to this pressure and conform to Pakistan's demands.

The Taliban, however, refuted these claims. Pakistan's efforts to deport Afghan refugees have two goals, according to Amir Muttaqi, the interim foreign minister of the Taliban leadership. First, he highlighted the concern about the TTP's presence in Afghanistan, which he deemed an internal matter for Pakistan predating Taliban rule. The second objective involves Pakistan's desire to recognize the Durand Line as a mutual border, a matter beyond the control of any Afghan government and affecting the entire Afghan population. Muttaqi dismissed the notion that these tactics would force the Taliban, emphasizing the leadership's historical resilience against challenges, including imprisonment and pressure from the United States (U.S.) military.

This policy is fundamentally flawed, as there is no tangible evidence linking any Afghan refugee to increased terrorist activities in Pakistan. Conversely, instances abound where Pakistani citizens have been directly implicated in terrorist acts. The question arises: will these citizens face deportation as well? If not, policymakers must reassess the logic behind this decision. For numerous Afghan refugees, this is not a matter of repatriation but rather one of migration. Many are second- and third-generation refugees who were born in Pakistan, having never set foot in Afghanistan. They were born and educated in Pakistan and have established their lives, friendships, and communities in the country. It is noteworthy that these Afghans were forced to leave their home country by Pakistan's policies and strategic interests. Therefore, deporting them now would mean sending them into a completely alien environment.

## Conclusion

This policy of mass deportation of Afghan refugees is not only erroneous but also carries serious flaws. Without a clear policy for combating terrorism in the country, the mantras of

putting one's own house in order and stabilizing the country are meaningless and counter-productive. This strategy could easily result in misery and disruption for hundreds and thousands of Afghan refugees born in Pakistan. The international community must closely examine the legality of these mass expulsions and hold policymakers accountable for their unethical and inhumane actions, focusing on cooperative measures to address shared concerns for regional peace and stability. Therefore, the policy of forced deportation by the government of Pakistan necessitates an immediate review to protect this vulnerable population and to uphold the integrity of international humanitarian principles.

*Imran Khan is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of International Relations at Corvinus University of Budapest*

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