

Twitter Thread by Adam N Weinstein



Adam N Weinstein

@AdamNoahWho



1. TLDR: What will it take for Pakistan to pressure the Taliban into a ceasefire? Pressure, concessions, clear priorities, & ultimately cooperation from Pakistan. A very tall order.

2. Many Afghanistan policy proposals require some action by Pakistan. But as usual there is a disconnect where Washington believes it can demand Pakistan "do more" without providing much in return and Islamabad thinks half-measures will suffice. It is a destructive dance.

3. Pakistan helped bring the Taliban to the negotiating table in Doha but stopped there & instead opted to tacitly support the Taliban's bargaining position to enter into a ceasefire only after further concessions from Kabul & US troops leave.

The country's foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, recently [said as much](#) during a Jan. 26 phone call, when he told his Afghan counterpart that pushing talks forward would "facilitate [a] reduction in violence, leading to [a] ceasefire." On Jan. 21, Khan's adviser, Moeed Yusuf, [reiterated](#) that "Pakistan in itself can't get a [Taliban] ceasefire." This statement echoes previous claims that Pakistan could not convince the Taliban to negotiate with Kabul. So long as negotiations continue and U.S. troop levels do not increase, Islamabad may believe it is sitting pretty, regardless of the violence Afghans face.

4. The Taliban are overplaying their hand by delaying talks & escalating violence, while Pakistan is underplaying its hand by refusing to add pressure.

5. Why won't Pakistan further pressure the Taliban?

- What's in it for me? (sensitive to "do more")
- Less influence over current TB leadership.
- Scared of blowback from sectarian groups, TTP (so they say).
- Some sympathy for group.

6. Any policy proposal that prioritizes a political settlement to the war in Afghanistan requires Pakistan's help. Neither "maximum pressure" nor "strategic love and affection" will work. In fact, nothing may work. But the Biden team can start with the FATF.

Of course, changing the status quo is not easy. Replicating the failed "maximum pressure" campaign used on Iran, as some [proposals](#) suggest, would be a grave U.S. error in Pakistan. Too much pressure, such as threats to [designate](#) Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism if the government does not sufficiently attempt to coerce the Taliban to tone down violence, not only would be a policy of questionable proportionality but also would lead Islamabad to dig in its heels. By contrast, a no-strings-attached "[strategic love and affection](#)" would end in free-riding. Instead, the Biden administration must use its leverage carefully. The U.S. should engage in messaging that is firm, results oriented, and clear about the specific consequences that Pakistan will face at various levels of cooperation with the Taliban.

Policy proposals to offer the Afghan peace process breathing room by [negotiating a one-time extension](#) of the U.S. withdrawal deadline admittedly rely on buy-in from Pakistan. These proposals invariably run through Pakistan, making the barriers to success high without significant compromises that Washington may be unwilling to make. These include offering relief from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), drawing red lines for India in Afghanistan, and prioritizing an end to the war over other regional objectives. Pakistan's help in reducing Taliban violence is far from guaranteed, but the following steps offer the greatest likelihood of success.

7. Escaping the FATF "grey list" would be a big political win for PM Imran Khan & the military, which makes it a source of leverage. Its effect is more political than economic.

The FATF was established by the G-7 as an [intergovernmental watchdog](#) to fight money laundering and terrorist financing. In 2018, the watchdog placed Pakistan on its grey list, a move that has incurred political rather than economic costs for the country. Pakistan's economy is undoubtedly [floundering](#)—but this is not due to the listing. Indeed, the FATF designation is not a [significant source of harm](#) to the country's economy. Nonetheless, the 2018 listing has still done political damage by putting Islamabad's isolation on full display, with even Saudi Arabia and China declining to advocate for the country.

The FATF designation also puts the looming threat of the “black list” on the horizon. A blacklisting would [prevent](#) Pakistan from receiving crucial assistance from institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank. Simply stated, the threat of economic harm from the FATF remains very much on the table.

8. Pakistan is on the FATF “grey list” due to support for anti-India terrorists & the Haqqani Network. The US can't fundamentally alter Pakistan's calculation on the anti-India groups using the list. But it may be able to improve the situation in Afghanistan. Time to prioritize.

Washington was behind the 2018 [motion](#) to place Pakistan back on the FATF grey list after its previous removal in 2015. In addition to Pakistan's support for the Haqqani Network, the move was motivated largely by Islamabad's continued tolerance of anti-India terrorists, a tacit support that some experts feared could [spark a nuclear conflict](#) with India. The 2016 terrorist attack on an Indian army base in Uri and the 2017 decision by the Lahore High Court to [release](#) U.N.-designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed set the stage for the U.S. action, and the 2019 terrorist attack on a paramilitary convoy in Pulwama in Indian-administered Kashmir only [solidified](#) Washington's view that Pakistan must be punished. Pakistan has since sentenced Saeed to 15 years in prison and taken [significant steps](#) toward FATF compliance. But when it comes to changing Pakistan's mind about using non-state actors against India, some former U.S. officials [assert](#) that “neither the United States nor India has the tools to fundamentally alter, in the near term, what has been a long-standing attribute of Pakistan's foreign policy.”

9. The U.S. should clearly communicate its willingness to offer support for Pakistan at the FATF, in exchange for specific results-oriented actions to lower violence in Afghanistan. If progress is made, then options like releasing Coalition Support Fund \$\$ may also be considered

In other words, Pakistan might be willing to crank up the pressure on the Taliban to get back in the good graces of the FATF. The greylisting of Pakistan may have generated some actions against figures like Saeed, but the U.S. shouldn't expect FATF leverage to buy a full-scale reversal of Pakistan's implicit support for anti-India groups. For this reason, Washington should instead prioritize using FATF leverage to improve conditions in Afghanistan.

With this incentive, Washington may be able to convince Pakistan to exert more pressure on the Taliban. To coerce another country into [altering its position](#), “a government must generally clearly communicate its objectives[] [and] impose costs that outweigh the benefits the other nation gets from standing firm[.]” Such coercion is not impossible, as was demonstrated by the U.S.-Taliban agreement forged in 2020—all of this to say, the U.S. should clearly communicate its willingness to offer conditional support for Pakistan at the FATF.

10. Next is India. The Biden admin must accept that Pakistan--not India--is key to ending the conflict in Afghanistan. US calls for India to play a bigger role in Afghanistan's peace process, politics, & economy only fuel paranoia in Pakistan, however irrational.

11. If Washington wants Pakistan's cooperation on Afghanistan, then it will have to take its India anxieties seriously, decouple Afghanistan from the broader Indo-Pacific strategy, & provide assurances in exchange for actions.

The Biden administration should decouple Afghanistan from its strategic partnership with India. This means resisting the temptation to fold Afghan policy into Washington's broader concerns over Indo-Pacific security, such as wooing New Delhi in an effort to counter China, which has its own logic for India. New Delhi also prioritizes its own strategic autonomy from Washington, which can be seen from plans to [acquire S-400](#) Russian air defense systems, to its [participation](#) in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Ending the war in Afghanistan is a more exigent priority than looking out for long-term Indian interests, even where overlapping priorities may exist. India will also have greater ability to advocate for its interests, as in January it became a nonpermanent member of the U.N. Security Council, where it will have a seat for two years. For this reason, the United States should offer to refrain from encouraging increased Indian involvement in Afghanistan, so long as Pakistan commits to clear demonstrable steps in pushing the Taliban toward a resolution.

Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad is already trying to negotiate an [agreement](#) between Pakistan and Afghanistan to establish an understanding that neither country's territory would be used to interfere with the other's affairs. The Biden team should also provide private assurances to Pakistan that it will pressure India to refrain from using Afghanistan to engage in significant provocations inside Pakistan. But Washington must make it clear to Pakistan that a political settlement inclusive of some of India's interests is better than a power vacuum on its western border.

12. ACCEPT THEM LIMITS OF WASHINGTON'S OWN INFLUENCE

Any proposal that prioritizes a political settlement to end the war in Afghanistan is both time sensitive and reliant on Pakistan's cooperation. But Pakistan's position may prove impossible to influence, and even if Islamabad achieves a short-term reduction in violence, such a reduction would not guarantee a successful end to intra-Afghan negotiations. So while pushing Pakistan to put pressure on the Taliban is important, Washington should be careful not to wait idly by for a response from Islamabad that may never come. The Biden administration should act quickly to promote a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan while also remaining committed to bringing U.S. troops home within the agreed-upon timeframe.

13. WAKE UP ISLAMABAD: Feigning inability to motivate the Taliban falls on deaf ears when much of the leadership & their families reside in Pakistan. Rising violence in Afghanistan ends one of two ways & neither is good for Pakistan↓

If Pakistan's civilian government—or more likely, its military establishment—refuses to actively pursue a reduction in violence in Afghanistan that can lead to a political settlement, it risks two potential outcomes. First, the United States may withdraw the remainder of its troops from Afghanistan, despite lack of progress toward a settlement. Pakistan's importance will decline and little credit will be awarded to its government for bringing the Taliban to a negotiating table that achieved nothing. Islamabad will find itself alone, with a raging civil war next door. Alternatively, Washington may choose to remain in Afghanistan and treat Pakistan as an intransigent agitator or worse.

14. Pakistan's leadership must face reality: If things implode in Afghanistan & the above scenarios unfold, then Islamabad could face a coordinated campaign in DC to label it a state sponsor of terrorism. This would be a mistake, but one w/ dire consequences for Pakistan.

15. But the Biden admin must walk a tightrope. It should not allow this effort to consume other regional interests such as long-term CT cooperation, nuclear security, or trade & climate change. It must also acknowledge Pakistan's real sacrifices in the GWOT.

16. Every time Pakistan faces a decision on Afghanistan, the Biden admin should offer Pakistan's leadership a clear choice between positive & negative outcomes. But ultimately, the US should not tie a withdrawal to benchmarks that rely on cooperation that may never materialize.

17. Why does the article leave out the "K word"? Simple. Attempts to link the dispute in Kashmir to outcomes in Afghanistan failed in the past. Richard Holbrooke reportedly was threatened with an Indian visa denial over attempts to connect Pakistan-India disputes to Afghanistan.