



## Iran's Violation of Pakistan's Airspace: Unnecessary Setback in Brotherly Relations



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Finally, in a welcoming move, on 22nd January 2024 Pakistan and Iran agreed in a joint statement to return their ambassadors at respective posts on 26th January, 2024.

The statement issued by the Foreign Office of Pakistan also confirmed that the Foreign Minister of Iran will undertake an official visit to Pakistan on 29th January 2024 as Pakistan and Iran agree to de-escalate the tense situation.

The statement also highlighted how this understanding was reached between Pakistan's Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani and the Foreign Minister of Iran, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a telephone conversation.



On 22nd January 2024, Pakistan's Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar with all military chiefs in attendance, also chaired the meeting of the National Security Council to review the security situation.

National security review concluded that “the two countries would mutually be able to overcome minor irritants through dialogue and diplomacy and pave the way to further deepen their historic relations”, according to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office.

**“ How did we get to this point though? On the evening of 16th January 2024, Iran carried out an airstrike inside Pakistani territory of Sabza Koh, a remote mountainous area of the southwestern border province of Baluchistan.**

Iran claimed that it had targeted two bases of the Jaish al-Adl armed group in



Pakistan by using drones and missiles. Iran accused Jaish al-Adl and

considered it responsible for attacks on Iranian soil.

In the past Iranian officials have been warning Pakistan regarding the action against Jaish al-Adl as last month the group stormed a police station in Sistan and Balouchestan, southeast of Iran, which killed 11 Iranian Police forces.



Pakistan strongly condemned the unprovoked violation of its airspace that resulted in the killing of two children and injured three girls.

*Pakistan's Foreign Office  
said in a statement,  
“violation of Pakistan's  
sovereignty is completely  
unacceptable and can have  
serious consequences.*

It is even more concerning that this illegal act has taken place despite the existence of several channels of communication between Pakistan and Iran." Pakistan has also made it clear to Iran that "Pakistan reserves the right to respond to this illegal act. The responsibility for the consequences will lie squarely with Iran."

In retaliation, therefore, Pakistan also carried out "precision strikes" inside the Iran province of Sistan-o-Baluchistan to target terrorist hideouts in an Intelligence-based operation codenamed "**Marg Bar Sarmachar**".

According to a statement issued by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Pakistan has used killer drones, rockets, loitering munitions, and stand-off weapons to conduct the operation.

Pakistan justified the airstrikes as targeting "hideouts used by terrorist organizations" in Iran. Expectedly, the claim was strongly rejected by Tehran. "Iran condemns Pakistan's unbalanced and unacceptable drone attack on non-Iranian villagers on the border of the two countries," stated the Foreign Ministry of Iran.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in a statement urged the two countries to "exercise maximum restraint to avoid a further escalation of tensions." The US has also shown its concern over the rising situation between Pakistan and Iran.



“We don't want to see an escalation of any armed conflict in the region, certainly between those two countries,” an official from the State Department told the media.

China, which had last year mediated between Iran and Saudi Arabia to normalize their relations, also urged both sides to de-escalate the situation. **“If there is a need from the two sides, we would like to play a constructive role in cooling down the situation,”** a spokesperson for China’s foreign ministry stated to the media.

It must be noted that despite the tense few weeks, Pakistan Foreign Office has called “Iran as a brotherly country and the people of Pakistan have great respect and affection for the Iranian people”.

Similarly, the Iranian Foreign Minister stated that the “Islamic Republic of Iran respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring Pakistan, which he described as a friend of Iran and a brotherly nation.”

Therefore, it is rather unfortunate that Iran's airstrikes in Pakistan were carried out when there were multiple channels of communication opened.

Ironically, hours before the strikes, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar had met Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos in Switzerland.



Likewise, earlier that week, Iran's Special Representative for Afghanistan Affairs, Hassan Kazmi Qomi also visited Pakistan and held meetings with Pakistan's officials in Islamabad.

Moreover, on 16th January 2024, the two countries also participated in a one-day naval exercise in the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.



To understand this rather unfortunate series of events, it is perhaps also important to have a look at possible rationale behind the Iranian strikes. First is the geographical nature of the region. The topographical tri-border area between Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan not only is a rugged terrain but one that features different populations and groups belonging to different backgrounds and adhering to different ideals.

It is therefore not fair to blame Pakistan for actions of groups that are not even inside the territory of Pakistan.



Secondly, the border between Iran and Pakistan features a ditch on Iran's side which is fenced more than third of the entire length on Pakistan's side with three times as many border posts and troops of Pakistan. However, border protection against non-state actors is only effective if complete measures are taken on both sides of the border.



So that there is complete and continuous observation of the entire border. The third aspect is rather a more realist one.

In the onset of domestic and regional challenges, countries at times adopt a more realist security policy in order to compensate for power challenges in other areas.

By conducting airstrikes in violation of another country's airspace can be perceived as a power move that can be used to offset domestic or other regional insecurities.

It is perhaps disappointing that historical cooperation between Iran and Pakistan, such as support in the IAEA, Human Rights Council, as well as mediation efforts with Gulf Countries, was completely ignored while making such an imprudent decision.

*It must be realized that Pakistan is not remotely a weak or dysfunctional state. The response from Pakistan towards its violation of sovereignty is a testament to this.*

It is also perhaps a message to other regional state and non-state actors that Pakistan's sovereignty is not questionable, nor it is something to be taken lightly.

These tensions between two very important countries of the Islamic world are not in the interest of both, or the region and the Muslim world at large.

At this critical juncture, the innocent people of Gaza and Palestine are facing Israeli brutalities. Since October 2023, in more than 100 days, at least 26,083 Palestinians including 10 thousand innocent children have been killed and 64,487 injured in Israeli strikes on Gaza.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres termed the deaths of Palestinian civilians in Gaza as "heartbreaking" and called it unacceptable to resist statehood for the Palestinian people.

"Israel's military operations have spread mass destruction and killed civilians on a scale unprecedented during my time as secretary-general," Guterres said at the opening of a summit of the G77+China.

**“This is heartbreaking and utterly unacceptable. The Middle East is a tinder box; we must do all we can to prevent conflict from igniting across the region.”**

South Africa has filed an application in the International Court of Justice for the people of Palestine and termed Israeli atrocities as “Genocide.” Such measures are need of the hour.

Pakistan and Iran are two Islamic countries that have maintained cordial and historical relations.

Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan on 14th August 1947. Iran is also the country that hosted the first Embassy of Pakistan abroad.



With such deep-rooted history, Pakistan and Iran have also faced common challenges such as shared threats of terrorism. Pakistan has been, and continues to be, a victim of terrorism. Similarly, on multiple occasions, Pakistan has provided support and unwavering dedication to collaborating with Iran against the threat of terrorism, which Pakistan always considers a significant obstacle to regional peace and stability.



It is therefore very refreshing to see the wise step taken by both countries to de-escalate the tensions. In a statement on Friday, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the relations between the two countries are "friendly" and "brotherly."



Likewise, a similar statement by Pakistan's Foreign Office on Thursday said Islamabad "fully respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran." The recent tensions between the two sides may have had far-reaching negative effects not only on the two countries but also on the region.



The two countries should make sure to solve mutual problems through dialogue and diplomatic means only. They should expand cooperation with each other so that unity between the two countries is strengthened even more and peace is established in the region.

Today, the Islamic world is facing numerous challenges, especially when we look at Gaza burning every day. Pakistan and Iran must have a strong voice against the atrocities of Israeli forces in Palestine.



They should also resolve security issues with full dedication and by respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each other.



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