

Pakistan strikes inside Afghanistan

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Accusing certain elements in the Taliban government for patronising the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its affiliates, Pakistan carried out what it termed “intelligence-based anti-terrorist operations” in the border regions inside Afghanistan on Monday, in a significant escalation in tensions between the two neighbours. But a carefully worded statement did not specify the nature of operation or mention the air strikes. Although, Pakistan did carry out air strikes in the past inside Afghanistan, notably in April 2022, this was the first time Islamabad officially acknowledged striking inside the neighbouring country. The strikes were prompted by March 16 terrorist attack in Mir Ali, North Waziristan in which seven Pakistani soldiers including two officers were martyred. The attack seems to be a tipping point in the relationship that has

remained on the edge for months. A statement issued by the foreign office said target of the operation was the terrorists belonging to Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which along with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), was responsible for multiple terrorist attacks inside Pakistan, resulting in deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials.

“The latest attack took place on 16 March 2024 at a security post in Mir Ali in North Waziristan and claimed the lives of seven Pakistani soldiers,” it added. The statement explained as to why Pakistan was compelled to take that extreme step. “Over the past two years, Pakistan has repeatedly conveyed its serious concerns to the Interim Afghan Government over the presence of terror outfits including TTP inside Afghanistan. These terrorists pose a grave threat to Pakistan’s security and have consistently used Afghan territory to launch terror attacks inside Pakistani territory,” said the foreign office. It said Pakistan accords prime importance to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. “It has, therefore, always prioritised dialogue and cooperation to confront the terrorist threat. We have repeatedly urged the Afghan authorities to take concrete and effective action to ensure that the Afghan soil is not used as a staging ground for terrorism against Pakistan. We have also called on them to deny safe havens to TTP and to hand over its leadership to Pakistan.” The statement said while Pakistan has great respect for the people of Afghanistan but alleged that certain elements among those in power in Afghanistan were

actively patronising TTP and using them as a proxy against Pakistan. “Such an approach against a brotherly country, which stood with the people of Afghanistan through thick and thin, manifests shortsightedness. It ignores the support extended by Pakistan to the people of Afghanistan over the last several decades,” it said.

“We urge these elements in power to rethink the policy of siding with Khwarij terrorists shedding the blood of innocent Pakistanis and to make a clear choice to stand with the people of Pakistan,” it demanded. The statement said terrorist groups like TTP are a collective threat to regional peace and security. “We fully realise the challenge Afghan authorities face in combating the threat posed by TTP. Pakistan would therefore continue to work towards finding joint solutions in countering terrorism and to prevent any terrorist organization from sabotaging bilateral relations with Afghanistan,” the statement concluded. The Taliban government confirmed the strikes but rejected Pakistani claims that those attacks killed any militants. Condemning the strikes as a violation of sovereignty, Zabiullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson, claimed attacks killed five women and three children in the eastern border provinces of Khost and Paktika.