

By its own account, Pakistan has claimed to be the indispensable voice of Muslim solidarity, tirelessly championing causes from Palestine to anything under the sun, with fervent declarations and impassioned diplomacy. Yet beneath this self-proclaimed guardianship of the Ummah lies a reality fraught with contradictions and human tragedy, starkly illuminated by its ongoing treatment of Afghan refugees. Pakistan's brutal expulsion of more than 800,000 Afghans since November 2023 lays bare a crisis decades in the making—one born not simply of refugee influx, but of a duplicitous foreign policy whose consequences now echo with harrowing intensity.

□ Afghan nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers in Pakistan, are being harassed, detained, and forced out of their homes.

Since 2023, over 840,000 Afghan refugees have been pushed to leave. As part of the deportation drive, authorities are now ramping up efforts to...

pic.twitter.com/eTJqSJQp91

— Amnesty International South Asia, Regional Office (@amnestysasia)

March 27, 2025

As of April 2025, Pakistan has forcibly expelled more than 11,371 Afghan refugees through the Torkham border in just a few days, marking an escalation in an already ruthless policy known as the Illegal Foreigners Return Program (IFRP). One staggering day alone saw the deportation of 3,600 refugees—women and children among them—casting thousands into the chaos of Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, stripped of dignity, security, and hope. These are not mere statistics but lives dismantled overnight, thrust back into a homeland many of them have never known.

The narrative spun by Islamabad—portraying Afghan refugees primarily as security threats—is a cynical misrepresentation. Many deportees, including journalists, activists, and former Afghan government employees, face certain persecution or death upon return. Yet Pakistani authorities continue to detain individuals without warning, ripping families apart, erasing livelihoods, and throwing them into crowded, harsh detention centers before pushing them across the border with little more than the clothes they wear.

Take note of the journey of this Afghan girl refugee, who fled the Taliban's Pakistan-backed regime in 2021. In the years since, relations between the Taliban and their former sponsor have deteriorated.

In a troubling turn, Pakistan is now using Afghan refugees as leverage,...

<https://t.co/eTa8GHAvNH> [pic.twitter.com/6UbimicVG3](https://t.co/6UbimicVG3)

— Displaced International (@displacedint) April 13, 2025

To grasp the magnitude of this tragedy, we must look back to its origin—the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan eagerly became a frontline state, backed generously by U.S. and Saudi money through Operation Cyclone. Billions of dollars flowed through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), arming and training mujahideen fighters who eventually morphed into groups such as the Taliban and Haqqani network. General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military ruler at the time, manipulated these resources to bolster his regime's domestic legitimacy and gain strategic depth against arch-rival India.

Thus, Pakistan became ground zero for radicalization, hosting militant leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani. Refugee camps sprouted across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan, housing millions of displaced Afghans whose lives became enmeshed in the violent geopolitics of the Cold War. Unwittingly, Pakistan cultivated an environment where extremism flourished—a Frankenstein's monster whose creation would ultimately turn against its maker.

"Pakistan is very cruel to Afghan refugees."

Up to one million Afghan refugees are being deported from Pakistan, which cites national security concerns. Many have lived in Pakistan since fleeing Afghanistan's civil war in the 1990s. pic.twitter.com/ZVE4S0dDsX

— DW News (@dwnews) April 10, 2025

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 did little to ease the crisis. Instead, the chaos metastasized. The Taliban emerged from Pakistan's madrassas and refugee camps, guided by the ISI's covert patronage. What Islamabad saw as a strategic asset soon transformed into a lethal liability. Groups once nurtured by Pakistan began directing their militancy inward. The rise of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) epitomizes this painful blowback. Formed in 2007, the TTP's violence peaked tragically in 2014 when it slaughtered 149 people, mostly children, in the horrific Peshawar school massacre. Pakistan's reckless gamble had turned into a nightmare.

Today, Pakistan attempts to manage this blowback by scapegoating the Afghan refugees themselves, linking them unjustly to terrorism. The irony is glaring. The very terrorism Islamabad claims to be fighting domestically mirrors its decades-old strategy against India. For years, Pakistan's ISI sponsored proxy wars against India, training groups like Lashkar-e-

Pakistan's Afghan Refugee Crisis: Reckoning with the Ghosts of Duplicity

Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, responsible for devastating attacks such as the 2008 Mumbai massacre and the 2001 Parliament assault in New Delhi. Yet now, when faced with terrorism at home, Pakistan uses Afghan refugees as pawns in a cynical game of deflection, expelling hundreds of thousands while conveniently ignoring the bitter harvest of its own making.

The hypocrisy extends far beyond India and Afghanistan. Pakistan has, at present, positioned itself as a stalwart defender of Palestine, tirelessly vocalizing solidarity with oppressed Muslims. Yet, when confronted with the plight of Uyghur Muslims in China's Xinjiang province—millions detained in internment camps and subjected to forced labor and cultural erasure—Islamabad remains conspicuously silent. Principles, it seems, are negotiable commodities, readily sacrificed at the altar of geopolitical convenience, especially when Chinese economic interests loom large.

A refugee woman in Pakistan was beaten by police for filming their abuse. Her only “crime” was documenting violence.

Refugees face daily threats, yet countries like the U.S., Australia & others stay silent on their applicants. Where is UNHCR? Where are the human rights orgs? pic.twitter.com/b1NVUs3RIJ

— Voice of Afghan Refugees (@AustraliaAFG) April 6, 2025

Amid these contradictions, the mass deportation of Afghan refugees emerges not just as a humanitarian crisis but as a searing indictment of Pakistan's duplicitous foreign policy. By treating Afghan refugees—victims of the Taliban's brutal rule—as expendable collateral in its quest for security, Pakistan reveals the hollowness of its proclaimed Ummah-centric ethos.

These expulsions, carried out under the pretense of security concerns, risk perpetuating cycles of radicalization and resentment. A generation displaced, stigmatized, and brutalized is fertile ground for future extremism. Pakistan's current actions, ostensibly to protect itself from terrorism, ironically breed conditions ripe for radicalization, repeating the catastrophic mistakes of the past.

It is imperative that the international community unequivocally condemns these actions and demands accountability. Humanitarian aid, diplomatic pressure, and global media scrutiny must converge to prevent further abuses. The United Nations, already burdened with global crises, must act decisively to halt the forced returns and advocate for the rights of Afghan refugees to safe, voluntary, and dignified repatriation.

Yet, beyond immediate intervention lies a deeper reckoning for Pakistan—a nation ensnared by its own legacy of duplicity. The country faces a moment of profound moral introspection. Can Islamabad acknowledge its role in perpetuating decades of instability, radicalization, and suffering? Or will it continue to oscillate between self-serving righteousness abroad and ruthless pragmatism at home?

The Afghan refugee crisis, tragic and ongoing, is a stark mirror reflecting back at Pakistan's leadership—a reflection marred by hypocrisy and contradiction. It is a reminder that the monster once nurtured in the shadow of Cold War politics continues to haunt Pakistan today. Unless Islamabad confronts its past honestly and alters its policies fundamentally, the cycle of violence, displacement, and suffering will persist, leaving generations to grapple with the consequences of its duplicitous decisions.