

Sam Cowan | Mass Deportation of Afghans in Pakistan

Pakistan has doubled down on its October 3rd order to deport 1.7 million undocumented Afghans, even after its November 1st deadline passed. On November 3rd, Pakistan's caretaker government (a result of multiple delayed elections) ordered an expansion in processing facilities at the Afghan border, which could double the daily count of Afghans crossing the border, from 20,000 to 40,000. On the same day, 5 Pakistani police officers were killed in a bombing and 14 Pakistani soldiers were killed in an ambush. Pakistani officials consider this mass deportation a necessity, and blame it on security threats caused by Afghan militant groups who they claim are seeking to destabilize Pakistan. 56 people were killed in 3 suicide bombings near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border on September 29th, sparking Pakistan's sudden change in policy. 40 people were killed in a separate bomb attack in July, and Pakistan claims that 14 of 24 suicide bombings in the last year have been committed by Afghans. As of November 5th, over 200,000 Afghans had left Pakistan, with thousands more waiting at border facilities. Many of these people have lived in Pakistan for their whole lives, and have no connections in Afghanistan. Some Afghans with proper documentation have been deported anyway. They will return to an economy decimated by sanctions against the Taliban, and largely lacking resources to support them. Afghan girls returning to the country will no longer be able to go to school as a result of Taliban policies. 600,000 Afghans fled for Pakistan after the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. Taliban leaders have warned Pakistan to adhere to Islamic principles, and called on the Afghan private sector to help temper the humanitarian crisis. Pakistani leaders have countered that the Taliban has been lax in their treatment of the militant groups attacking Pakistan, taking little action to prevent them growing in strength.

Pakistan's delayed elections, now scheduled for February 8th, could spark a wave of violence in the country, increasing the need for action against internal terrorism. However, because the vast majority of those being deported are innocent civilians, Afghan public opinion of Pakistan is likely to get far worse regardless of their opinion on the Taliban. Additionally, the mass deportation order could be found to violate international human rights law, given its harsh time frame and targeted nature.