

# EVENTS IN FOCUS

## IRAN ATTACKS JAISH AL-ALDI MILITANT BASES IN PAKISTAN PAKISTAN STRIKES BACK

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**Source: CNBC**

Iran Revolutionary Guards launched an unprecedented assault with missiles and drones on Jaish al-Aldi, a Sunni militant group's two bases in Pakistan's Balochistan on January 16, 2024. The incident killed two children and injured three others in the process as collateral damage. Pakistan termed it as an "unprovoked violation" of its sovereignty and bilateral trust. The attack is believed to be the retaliation to an attack on an Iranian police station in Sistan-Baluchistan province carried out last month, killing at least 11 police officers. Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi attributed the attack to Jaish al-Aldi launching the attack from the Pakistani side near Panjgur.

Pakistan responded similarly a day after the Iranian strike. Pakistan confirmed launching the attacks on Baloch separatist camps deep inside the Sistan-Baluchestan province of Iran.

## ANALYSIS

The geopolitical tension in the Middle East has been on the rise with the Iran-backed Houthis being bombed by the USA and the UK in the Red Sea; the recent move from Iran is contributing to the escalation of regional tensions and can be considered as the spillover of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, now towards the South Asian region. An unpredicted move by Iran has thrown the Pakistani side completely off guard with the “unprovoked violation of airspace.” Iran has carried out similar attacks on Iraq and Syria. The attack also came on the same day that Pakistan’s caretaker Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar, met the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian. Following the attack, the Pakistani delegation left in protest.

Pakistan retaliated in a similar fashion, launching airstrikes deep inside the Iranian province of Sistan-Baluchestan. Pakistan launched operations codenamed ‘Marg Bar Sarmachar’, striking the alleged Baloch separatist’s camps in Saravan and Jalq areas 30 miles inside the Iranian territory.

The Iranian attack inside Pakistan followed a day after India’s Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, met Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to discuss the conflicts and strengthen relations with the pacing of the Chabahar Port Development Plan. It is to be noted that Jaish al-Aldi, the terror outfit attacked by Iran, had reportedly abducted Indian businessman Kulbhushan Jadhav in March 2016 and allegedly traded him with Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence. After the Iranian attack, India confirmed its position to be neutral as it is the issue between the two nations but maintained its stance on zero tolerance towards terrorism.

China, an important ally to both countries, has cautioned Iran and Pakistan to exercise restraint. Pakistan, being backed by China, and India, being an ally and trade partner to Iran, can significantly alter the course of hostilities between the two countries. The actions taken by Iran and Pakistan may create a new epicentre of a conflict that may implicate a global reaction. China imports a considerable amount of oil from Iran, which may be hampered significantly if a bigger conflict breaks out after Pakistan’s response. China holds a considerable influence on Iran and claimed diplomatic success by bringing the arch-rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia together. The two countries restored the diplomatic ties that had been severed in 2016. On the other hand, Pakistan is China’s all-weather ally; where China has strategic interests in Pakistan and has made considerable economic investments.

Given the cordiality of India-Iran relations, India can exercise its influence. India is Iran’s trade partner, and the development of Chabahar port is crucial and strategically vital for India, given the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), which will connect the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran, further connecting to

St. Petersburg in the Russian Federation. Escalation may delay the already delayed project.

The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict, the situation in the Red Sea and now the outbreak of conflict between Iran and Pakistan has the capability to escalate the hostilities in the region. Moreover, the Biden administration's decision to redesignate the Houthis as global terrorists has already involved Britain and the United States in countering the Houthis directly. Due to the current circumstances, trade may take a significant hit with rising costs and the economic imbalance, which hasn't been recovered since COVID-19, followed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and so on. The Red Sea diversion is already causing significant trade issues and escalating tensions. Iran and Pakistan have been historically wary of each other, and the spillover of such conflicts has a global impact. The issue will definitely impact Iran, already using its proxies in the Israel-Hamas conflict and opening several fronts - Iraq, Syria and now, Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan needs to exercise restraint, given its economic standing and dwindling resources.

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