

The Fractured Frontiers: Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Creation of a Permanent Crisis

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Introduction

The conflict between Pakistan and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in Nov 2025 marked a shift in the security situation in South Asia. The peace talks between the two nations fell through and the terrorist attacks made things even worse. In these circumstances, Islamabad declared 'A State of War'¹, which its focus shifting from fighting insurgents to stopping them from crossing the border. This article asserts that structural contradictions, such as the ideological parallels between the Afghan Taliban and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the militarisation of Pakistan's territory, and the diminishing economic influence of Pakistan over Kabul, are responsible for the crisis. The article looks at these changes considering the long-running Durand Line dispute, the use of force, including its decline, and the shift in alliances in the region. It suggests that both countries are now in charge of the strategic deadlock, which will have a long-term effect on stability in the region.

The Unyielding Border

The borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan are significant because of their geography and history. The Durand Line² is an imperial relic from 1893 that continues to separate people, groups, and loyalties till today. Pakistan sees it as a matter of national sovereignty, even though it would be politically deadly for the Taliban-led Afghan government. This unresolved border is the biggest problem with South-Central Asia's entire security system. Nov witness fights at the Wana Cadet College and the Islamabad district courts. The TTP says³ that these attacks happened right after the Istanbul Peace Talks, which were sponsored by Turkey and Qatar. Khawaja Asif, Pakistan's Defence minister, mentioned that 'A state of war' has been declared. He also stressed that the focus is now on the harsh actions taking place across the Afghan border.

From Dissonance to Strategic Depth

The paradox of the current situation is what makes it tragic. Pakistan's 'Strategic Depth'⁴ was meant to help set up a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul and stop Indian dominance in the West. Instead, it has led to a hostile neighbour and a wider insurgency. At first, the Pakistani government saw the Taliban's return to power in 2021 as a strategic win.⁵ However, things went contrary when the TTP got more power, money, and weapons. The Taliban's refusal⁶ to denounce the TTP and their objection to the religious fatwa (a religious and legal opinion on Islamic Sharia law) that delegitimised the TTP's violence against religious people indicates not an inability to act, but a continued ideological alignment. The Afghan Taliban and TTP are connected by their religious beliefs in Deobandi Islamism and Pashtun nationalism.⁷ They are separated by geography, not ideology. This ideological proximity shapes the Taliban's strategic calculus and limits Pakistan's ability to pressure Kabul, ultimately providing the TTP with greater operational space.

Crisis as an Opportunity: The State as Tool for Militarisation

While the western border and the power centre were on fire, the course of politics changed to some extent. The Senate passed⁸ the 27th Amendment to the Pakistani Constitution on 11 Nov 2025—the same day when the attack in Islamabad took place. The amendment established the position of Chief of Defence Forces, unified the command structures of the individual service branches, and conferred lifetime immunity on senior military officers. The terrorist attack and the change in the Constitution happened simultaneously on purpose. Pakistan has a history of using the fear against other countries to make itself hold stronger at home. The military has overseen civilian officials as the de facto has become institutionalised.⁹ The story of this ongoing conflict still serves to gain legitimacy.

The Durand Line and Pashtun Dilemma

The Durand Line shows the most important point of tension in the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Rawalpindi Treaties of 1919 and 1921 recognised the Durand Line as an international law¹⁰, but no Afghan government, including the Taliban, has ever done so. By rejecting the Line, the Taliban can keep their nationalist credentials. This also lets the Pashtun¹¹, who live on both sides of the border, make political connections with their communities. This denial makes it harder for Pakistan to fight terrorism. It is often hard to control the border because it lets high-tech Hezbollah fighters easily get to safety after they attack Pakistan. Islamabad's occasional border closures and movement restrictions have not worked well because the tribal forces prefer to show their loyalty along ethnic lines rather than the geographically imposed divide. The problems at the border have only made the cycle of mistrust worse, and the Durand Line is once again being seen as an area of worry.

Leverage Getting Worse, Economy Changing

Economic leverage, which is Islamabad's most powerful weapon, is slowly losing its power.¹² The Taliban wants to make Afghanistan less dependent on Pakistani ports and transit routes by building a permanent trade route north through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This change in policy has greatly improved Kabul's chances of economic growth at the expense of Islamabad, thanks to Russian and Chinese business interests. The Taliban's promises of 'Mutual Respect and Equality' suggest that they want to change Afghanistan's economy. The country wants to be the main transportation hub in Europe, connecting South and Central Asia and beyond. This project's insulation will throw off the whole economy in the area and weaken Pakistan's power just as much as any diplomatic censure.

Reactions in the Region: Limits of Mediation

The United States has spoken out against the rise of cross-border terrorism, but it has stayed out of the fight for a long time as it is afraid of being get caught up in the chaos in Afghanistan again¹³. China has, in a way, kept the region stable by backing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor¹⁴ project and reaffirming its support for Pakistan's right to defend itself. The reason is simple—rising tensions threaten trade, not ideas. India has dismissed Pakistan's allegations of its involvement in the violence as 'Baseless', arguing that such claims reflect Islamabad's own internal security challenges. The government of New Delhi¹⁵ sees the situation as both a threat and an opportunity. It thinks that a stable Pakistan could help reduce the effects of radicalisation in the region. Even though Qatar and Turkey have carefully planned their roles

as the middlemen, they cannot close the gap. Political usefulness and ideological loyalties are now what decide Afghan-Pakistani relations, not mediation.

The Trap of Revenge

Pakistan's response is likely to include a mix of high-profile, but short-range, imprecise strikes and public statements to show that it is serious to stop a full-scale war. Limited air or drone strikes¹⁶ against the TTP strongholds in eastern Afghanistan will lead to more anti-Pakistan sentiment along the border and lower the morale among the insurgents. The more Islamabad responds to that, the more likely it is to fall into the retaliation trap, which states that every deterrent measure makes the insurgency stronger by creating new grievances. Both sides give reasons for a low-level, never-ending war—the Taliban as anti-colonialists and the military as the main force.

Strategic Viewpoint: Impending Stalemate

Unless the Taliban changes its beliefs or Pakistan amends its view on security, there will be no improvement in the situation. The Taliban will act in a way that makes it possible for them to deny their actions, the TTP will continue to be a straggler, and Pakistan will get what it wants through negotiation and force. Because Kabul is cut off from the rest of the world, Islamabad will have trouble getting help from other countries, which will drain its economic resources. This will slow down the growth of both economies and make them more militarised. This is precisely the point along the border where localised insecurity escalates into a broader crisis—one that eventually evolves into a self-sustaining system.

Conclusion

Due to their shared history and mirrored insecurities, the crisis between Pakistan and Afghanistan is not unusual. With the rigid ideology of Taliban and growing militarisation in Pakistan, there can be no help without putting either at risk. Colonial cartographers built the wall that separates them, and modern soldiers protect it. It is a stark reminder of identity issues that have not been resolved. It is a place where the past empires still affect current policy and traditional ways of doing things still affect contemporary conflicts. As long as the two sides of the Durand Line have different beliefs and claims to sovereignty, the boundary will remain more than just an abstract line in a cartographer's notebook. It will be a line of destiny.

Endnotes

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