

PAK-AFGHAN RECENT IMBROGLIO: QUEST FOR PEACE AND STABILITY

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Abstract

The recent Pak-Afghan skirmishes has created tension in the two states as both have a very long history of common religion, culture, traditions, and tied through blood relations. Islamabad always wants to maintain friendly and brotherly relations with the neighboring countries and is in look out for the resolution of disputes through diplomacy and negotiations. The regional powers have made efforts to bring peace and normalcy in the region through different forums but no substantial result has come out. The farming and business class of the two states, who remain dependent on border trade, have suffered a lot on account of the border closure. Research question of the study is recent Pak-Afghan imbroglio and quest for peace and stability. Main findings of the study emphasize that both the states need to focus on the resolution of border disputes and building an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Conclusion testifies that proper border management, trust building initiatives and avoiding the blame-game would help in the normalization of relations.

INTRODUCTION

Pak-Afghan relations are passing through an ordeal due to direct confrontations of the two countries. Situation intensified between the two states in October 2025 when the law enforcement agencies of the two states stood in open confrontations while attacking each other's forces. The regional and international organizations have been trying to de-escalate the tension between the two countries and with this end in view, the regional stakeholders through the 'Tehran Format' devised strategies to carve out a viable solution to the problem (Tariq, Sarwar, & Ali, The Tehran Format on Afghanistan and Resolution of Pak-Afghan Stalemate, 2025). The logic behind these efforts is to avoid confrontation at both the regional and the international level on the security dynamics of Afghanistan. Recently

relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan has worsened due to many factors particularly the Indo-Pak escalation of tension during May 2025 that was considered to be the most decisive confrontation in the history of Pakistan where the country made a victory over India (Siddiqui, 2025). The tension escalated between Pakistan and India after India bombed nine sites cross six cities in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Siddiqui, 2025). Thus, the escalation of tension between Pakistan and India and recent skirmishes between Pakistan and Afghanistan may have close nexus aiming to destabilize Pakistan in the region but the timely retaliation of Pakistani law enforcement agencies turns the situation in the latter favor.

Efforts are under way to normalize the situation between the two countries since peace and stability of the region depends upon the cordial relations of the two states. Mr. Sirajuddin Haqqani, the interim Taliban's interior minister, extended his gratitude to all the organizations and other actors extending goodwill and intensions to the normalization of relations between the two neighboring and brethren countries (Dawn, 2025). The regional stakeholders are urging the two states to resolve the issue since the conflict is not in the interest of either country and will only benefit the anti-Islamic forces (Dawn, 2025). Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Ishaq Dar has also expressed his willingness for peace and stability in region as saying that, "if goodwill, good interaction and positive relations are established between countries, and nations are established between countries and nations are brought closer to each other, then we welcome it" (Dawn, 2025). Keeping in view the stance of the two counterparts, strengthening of cardinal relations is in the interest of both the states. For the survival and future prospects of good relations, the two states need to bury the hatchet and keep in view the changing dynamics of security and meeting with the needs and requirements of modern world as war cannot bring happiness and prosperity in any case.

Bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan faced strained situation in October 2025 when the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) remained the focal point of contention between the two neighboring countries (Dawn, 2025). The former demands strict action from the latter to be taken against the insurgents for cross-border terrorism. The border clashes of October 11, 2025 were followed by a temporary ceasefire on October 15, 2025 through dialogue in Doha after the two sides came to the table talks. Following the Doha talks, a temporary ceasefire continued preventing the border skirmishes between the two states while showing willingness to work for lasting peace and stability in the region. The first round of talks was followed by the second round of talks on October 25, 2025 in the capital of Turkey leading to another round of talks between the two states during a principal-level

meeting in Istanbul on November 6, 2025 (Dawn, 2025). On November 7, 2025, after the 3rd round of talks addressing the cross-border terrorism was announced to have failed. Following the failure of talks, the Afghan Taliban suspended trade ties with Pakistan (Dawn, 2025) though Pakistan had already closed its border for trade soon after the clashes. Since the border is mostly inhabited by the Pashtun community on both sides, it is pertinent to include the Pashtun community in negotiations as a stakeholder for the de-escalation of tension. They share common culture, tradition, customs and common heritage besides sharing common religion, language, race and blood relations (Tariq, The Pashtun Tribal System and Issues of Security, 2018).

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan need to make a renewed and cautious push on overcoming their differences over the banned TTP, and enhance effort to bring about peace and stability in the region (Yousuf, 2025). Visible stalemate persists between the two states on matters of security, particularly Islamabad's demand urging that Afghan soil must not be used for cross-border attacks, but diplomacy lays emphasis on dialogue over confrontation (Yousuf, 2025). Both sides want to create a positive atmosphere for talks and develop consensus among the various stakeholders for resolving the outstanding issues of security and areas of concern. Only strong diplomatic ties and cordial relations can lead towards the establishment of lasting peace and stability in the region. The blame-game and counter blame-game by the two states over security measures and concerns need to be done away with and be addressed on priority basis. Confidence building measures on key issues of security and non-interference in the affairs of each other's state would reduce the tension to a greater extent.

Afghanistan's interior minister, Mr. Sirarjuddin Haqqani reassured Pakistan publically stressing that Afghan soil cannot be used against any other state or country (Yousuf, 2025). His remarks were highly appreciated by Pakistani officials as a part of a broader attempt to de-escalate tensions between the two states and move towards friendly relations by creating mutual trust and understanding. Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Ishaq Dar

has welcomed the statement of Haqqani, praising his efforts on resolving the core issues through negotiations and table talks rather than confrontations. Mr. Haqqani also welcomed the remarks of Mr. Ishaq Dar who had urged both the governments to resolve their differences through dialogue. The truth is that peace and stability in the region can only be achieved provided the two states agree on the core issues of security and contentions.

Pak-India May Scenario

Pakistan's win over India in May 2025 during a four day war proved to be a major milestone catering for the current setup in Islamabad with much-needed breathing room (Khattak, 2025). Since then Pakistan's foreign policy pivoted in two different ways; firstly, it has capitalized on the victory and secured diplomatic ties with the United States and signed a Mutual Defense Pact with Saudi Arabia. Secondly, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan entered a new phase of direct confrontation leading towards increased tension in the region (Khattak, 2025). Thus the policy of negligence got developed between the two states leading to open confrontation for the first time making the Afghan Taliban regime face the Pakistani government. It is important to mention here that the first three quarters of 2025 have been more deadly in terms of terrorism for Pakistan than the entire year of 2024 (Khattak, 2025). Tension got more escalated when the TTP was allegedly referred to have perpetrated these activities from Afghanistan (Khattak, 2025). During 2025, Pakistan had to face issues of security from both the eastern and the western borders causing much trouble and tension for the country but the timely retaliation by the law enforcement agencies of the state changed the scenario in her own favor.

Taliban's retake of Afghanistan in August 2021 was considered as a sign of good omen for the relations of the two countries and resultant regional peace and stability. Normally it is believed that a friendly government in Kabul would provide more security on the western border of Pakistan allowing Pakistan to focus on Eastern border but things entered a worst scenario when situation got

worsened on the western border too despite the fact that Afghanistan is governed by Taliban. Thus a condition leading to kinetic escalations got emerged whereby Pakistan had to keep in mind its national interest and security as top most priority, launching intelligence-based anti-terrorism operations in the areas where outlaws used to have their presence (Khattak, 2025). Sanctuaries of the militants and the terrorists were made target of military operations so as to clear the areas of terrorism and hideouts. Security situation further deteriorated in October 2025 with heavy cross-border fire exchanges leaving soldiers dead on both sides of the Durand line (Khattak, 2025).

Every state's national interest and objectives differ from other states interest; often the national interest of a state may or may not coincide with the interest and objectives of other states. A state facing an external threat has two broader options; it may either balance internally by arming itself, particularly in terms of air forces. This may result in balancing externally by allying with a third state or making alliances with regional powers (Khattak, 2025). Afghanistan may not be in a position to establish an Air Force having capability of countering Pakistan while the only option may be to move closer towards India. One of the reasons for the close proximity of both the countries may be the long, windy and treacherous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. India's reopening of its embassy in Kabul in October 2025 is a testimony to the fact of India-Afghan friendly relations in the region and may prove to be much against the national interest of Pakistan. Due to the security concerns of Afghanistan in the region, India has been considered as a 'significant regional partner' (Khattak, 2025). Afghanistan's engagement with India may be strengthening the two contracting states against Pakistan thus sandwiching Pakistan on both the eastern and the western borders. This would make Pakistan face not one but two hostile borders causing more difficulties and problems leading to border infiltrations and security threats from the two quarters.

After the collapse of Istanbul dialogue and two terror attacks on its soil originating from Afghanistan, Pakistan's option on blocking the

border, human and trade movement and flexible security muscles can build pressure on the Taliban regime for the normalization of relations between the two neighboring countries (Rana, 2025). But Pakistan presents a good market mechanism to Afghanistan in terms of its imports and exports and using Pakistan's routes for the supply of goods and services to Afghanistan. Three different border crossing points have been used by Afghanistan from its southeastern, south and eastern sides for selling its goods to Pakistan (Rana, 2025). Thus Afghanistan sells fresh fruits, vegetables and dry fruits to Pakistan which is evident from the fiscal year of 2024-25 where Afghanistan sold Rs170 billion worth of goods to Pakistan through border crossings. During the stated period, over 70% of the goods were sent through Torkham Border, followed by 1/5th from Ghulam Khan and the rest through Kharlachi point (Rana, 2025).

Border Closure

People have suffered a lot on account of the closure of Pak-Afghan border. The farming class of Afghanistan has faced financial crises since they have to depend on the business and imports and exports of the border (Rana, 2025). Perishable products of Afghanistan such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and dry fruits require shortest distance, low cost transport charges, and easy access to Pakistani market which can only be provided through routes of Durand line (Rana, 2025). Supply of goods and services through either substitute routes or through other countries may cause huge burden and financial loss to the business enterprises. Moreover, use of substitute routes may make exports less competitive due to longer transit and higher risks of perishable goods being rotten. Lack of proper temperature or cold storage facilities to transport perishable goods to long-distance sea port is another area of concern for the farmers and business enterprises. The border is of much importance for both the states since it is one of the longest borders in the border catering for the socio-economic and good relations (Tariq, Khan, & Khan, 2020).

Despite the closure of the Pak-Afghan border and the hurdles in the way of supply of goods and

services, the people across the border have to make desperate attempts in reaching Pakistani market (Rana, 2025). The blocking of Afghan onion goods to Pakistan on November 8, 2025 led to the use of the Iranian routes by misusing the early harvest program (Rana, 2025). Denying the entry of the Afghan consignment into Pakistan on the grounds that the early harvest program focused on providing mutual benefits to the farmers of both the countries on bilateral and reciprocal basis but no trade took place as the border remained closed (Rana, 2025). Afghan-onion into Pakistan's was also denied on the ground that the early harvest facility may cater for the potential risk of misuse. So, for Pakistan and Afghanistan the routes of Iran can better be utilized by both the countries for the purpose of imports and exports besides the flow of human beings. The alternative routes of Iran through which supply of goods can be made, include Chabahar port, Hairatan-Termez and Torghundi-Serhetabat in Central Asia (Rana, 2025).

Use of Alternative Routes

The closure of Pak-Afghan border would delimit the trade facilities of the two countries but the former would not suffer to the extent to which the latter is supposed to suffer. In order to minimize dependence on the trade across the border, Afghanistan showed her desire to seek for alternate routes and venues to carry on trade facilities but it would not be able to provide those opportunities to its exporters in the short-to-medium term trade facilities (Rana, 2025). The Iranian routes are longer in distances and more expensive, resulting in higher transaction and fuel costs as compared to Pakistani routes. For example, the areas of Kandahar and Helmand are about 150-300 Kilometer from the Pakistani Chaman-Spin Boldak border but 1,200-1,300 Kilometer to Iran's Zaranj or Delaram borders (Rana, 2025). Similarly, Balkh and Baghlan are roughly 500-700 Kilometer from Pakistan's Torkham-Jalalabad borders and 900-1,000 Kilometer from Iran's Islam Qala (Rana, 2025). The use of alternative routes would result in the increased transport charges, ranging from 30-50%. In all cases, whether the closure of the border or

the use of alternate routes would result in creating problems for the farmers and business communities of the two countries.

The closure of Pak-Afghan border resulted in the growing number of Afghanistan-bound cargo stuck up in Pakistan. Afghanistan remains dependent on Pakistan for the trade and import-exports due to the landlocked nature of the country. Pakistani customs are of the view that Afghanistan-bound over 5,500 containers have been stuck either on roads or at port in Karachi. According to a report of the customs, about 4,650 containers go stuck at the sea and land ports in Pakistan after Pakistani Customs stopped their processing due to the closure of the border. It is also a matter of concern that Pakistan neither suspended the Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement nor announced to stop trade with Afghanistan but still was unable to process the clearance of goods due to the closure of borders to avoid congestion at the borders of Chaman and Torkham. About 729 containers were reported to be stuck up at Chaman border while about 142 were reported to be stuck up at Torkham border.

Efforts for Improving Relations

Relations between the two states need to be improved for the sake of the two states in particular and regional stability in general. Mr. Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan, is of the view that Pakistan is closely monitoring the developments in recent weeks and months and any improvement in relations depends upon the Taliban's adherence to their commitments of peace and stability (Subh, 2025). Pakistan has been stressing on the Afghan government that cooperation in curbing terrorism and extremism would have a very significant impact on the normalization of relations and fostering of trade and economic enterprises. Moreover, the government of Pakistan has also welcomed the move of Afghan Interior Minister, asserting that Afghan soil, can in no case, be sued against any country. This has given more confidence to the neighboring country Pakistan because stability and cooperation on the Afghan soil would mean peace and stability in the region. In an effort of bringing normalcy in the Pak-Afghan relations, Qatar,

Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have played their active roles but still no improvement has come in relations. For the regional stability normalcy in Pak-Afghan relations and Pak-India relations are *sine qua non* (Desk, 2025).

Discussion and Conclusion

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been passing through an ordeal due to the border skirmishes. Efforts are underway by the various actors for the normalization of relations but still no substantial result has come out. Tension escalated between Pakistan and Afghanistan due to many factors; the Pak-India escalation of tension in May 2025, evacuation of Afghan refugees and direct confrontation of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's dilemma lies in the fact that the country is faced with the issues of security on both its eastern and western borders that has further exacerbated the internal dynamics of the country's security. Situation has worsened more in the post-9/11 scenario when Pakistan found itself involved in the war on terror resulting in the worsened law and order situation in the country, followed by many peace deals with the non-state actors and resultant military operations for curbing terrorism and insurgency.

The two sides have shown willingness to move towards de-escalation of tension and normalize relations. Pakistan deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Ishaq Dar and interim Taliban Interior Minister, Mr. Siaraj uddin Haqqani have expressed their concern to resolve the issues of security and improve law and order situation on the border areas. For the smooth functioning of the two states, normalization of relations are the *sine qua non* and the proper border management; that can lead towards the resolution of the dispute between the two countries, coupled with the evacuation of the refugees. Only a properly managed border can best serve her purpose of security and people living across both sides of it can face no problems in meeting their relatives. October 2025 proved to be more detrimental for the relations of the two states since the law enforcement agencies of the two states stood against each other in open confrontations with episodes of firing and cross-firing. The regional powers made efforts to

normalize the situation through different forums but willingness by both the states can only bring peace and stability in the region.

The long and treacherous Pak-Afghan border drew the attention of the regional and the international community due to its use by the insurgents and the terrorists. The law enforcement agencies through military operations took all possible steps to clear the border area of outlaws and terrorists. The number of check posts was increased on both sides of the border, more deployment of law enforcement personnel, fencing of the key areas, installation of heavy metallic gates and proper monitoring of the sensitive areas. Proper border management coupled with visa system, biometric identification of the people crossing the border would additional measures for the strengthening of peace building measures between the two states. The farming and business community who remain dependent on trade of the border area should be issued proper visa and permission cards by the embassy of the two states for the smooth transaction of business and import-export. Since Afghanistan is a landlocked country and most of its trade its trade is easily possible through the routes of Pakistan, it is imperative that Afghanistan should try more efforts for the normalization of relations between the two neighboring states. Only a peaceful Afghanistan can guarantee regional peace and stability besides catering for the prosperity of the people of both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan needs to take all possible steps for smoothening and harmonizing the relations. A joint force comprising the two states with equal number of military personnel coupled with proper monitoring alongside the border area can address the issues of security and bring in peace and stability in the region. Another option would be establishment of a join force under the direct patronage of a third party for dealing with the issues of blame game and counter-blame game and point out areas where the outlaws and insurgents may have safe havens. This would mitigate the issues of cross-border terrorism and insurgency and would help in building an atmosphere of trust and confidence. Moreover, the role of regional and international actors

should be given more impetus for the restoration of trade routes and business enterprises. Both the states needs to strengthen the atmosphere of trust and confidence by doing away the blame game and ban all the non-state actors involved in terrorism and exacerbating security situation between the states.

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