
Border Tensions and Strategic Rivalry: The Pakistan–Afghanistan Conflict in Regional and Global Perspective

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.1806>

Abstract

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been complex and often tense since the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Political disputes, border disagreements, security concerns, and militant activities have shaped the dynamics between the two neighboring states. The most prominent issue is the disagreement over the Durand Line border and the presence of militant groups operating across the border. These tensions have periodically escalated into diplomatic crises, military clashes, and economic disruptions. This research paper examines the historical background of the Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict, the key causes behind the tensions, and the consequences for regional and global politics.

1. Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a long border of about 2,640 kilometers and maintain deep historical, cultural, and ethnic connections. Despite these links, relations between the two countries have often been strained due to political disagreements, security concerns, and border disputes. (Barfield, 2010).

Since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, Afghanistan has questioned the legitimacy of the Durand Line, the international border drawn between British India and Afghanistan in 1893. Pakistan considers the Durand Line a recognized international boundary, while successive Afghan governments have expressed reservations about its legitimacy. (Saikal, 2012).

2. Historical Background

The Durand Line was established in 1893 through an agreement between the British colonial administration and the Afghan ruler Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. The border divided Pashtun tribal areas between what later became Pakistan and Afghanistan. (Barfield, 2010).

During the Cold War, Afghanistan developed close relations with the Soviet Union, while Pakistan aligned itself with the United States. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 further complicated relations as Pakistan supported Afghan resistance groups fighting against Soviet forces. (Rubin, 2013).

3. Causes of the Conflict

The Durand Line dispute remains the most significant issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan considers it an internationally recognized border while many Afghan political groups historically rejected it. (Saikal, 2012). Security concerns are another major factor. Both countries have accused each other of allowing militant groups to operate across the border. Refugee movements from Afghanistan into Pakistan have also created economic and social pressures. (Yusuf, 2017).

4. Major Developments

Pakistan has constructed fencing along much of the Durand Line to improve border security and control illegal crossings. While Pakistan views this as a security measure, some Afghan authorities oppose it. (Yusuf, 2017). Diplomatic tensions periodically arise due to border incidents and security concerns. At times border crossings have been closed, disrupting trade and movement between the two countries. (Shah, 2014).

5. Impact on Regional and Global Politics

Instability between Pakistan and Afghanistan has important implications for regional security. The border region has long been associated with militant activity, making it a focus of international counterterrorism efforts. (Rashid, 2010).

Political tensions also affect trade routes connecting South Asia with Central Asia. Border closures and insecurity can reduce economic cooperation and delay development projects in the region. (Shah, 2014).

6. Impact on South Asia

Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan contribute to broader instability in South Asia. Cross-border militancy, illegal trafficking, and smuggling remain major security concerns. (Rashid, 2010).

Regional economic projects such as energy pipelines and trade corridors depend heavily on stability in Afghanistan and cooperation with Pakistan. (Yusuf, 2017).

7. Role of Global Powers

The United States has historically played a significant role in Afghanistan's security environment and has encouraged cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. (Rubin, 2013).

China has increased its diplomatic and economic involvement in the region, supporting stability because of its regional trade and infrastructure interests. Russia also remains interested in security developments in Afghanistan due to its concerns about Central Asian stability. (Shah, 2014).

8. Future Scenarios

Improved diplomatic cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan could help address common challenges such as terrorism and economic development. (Yusuf, 2017). However, political mistrust and border disputes may continue to create tensions. If stability improves, both countries could benefit from greater regional trade and economic integration. (Saikal, 2012).

9. Conclusion

The Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict is rooted in historical disputes, political mistrust, and security concerns. Issues such as the Durand Line dispute, militant activities, refugee crises, and political instability have contributed to strained relations.

Resolving these challenges requires diplomatic engagement, cooperation on border security, and regional economic collaboration. Improved relations would benefit both countries and contribute to broader regional stability.

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