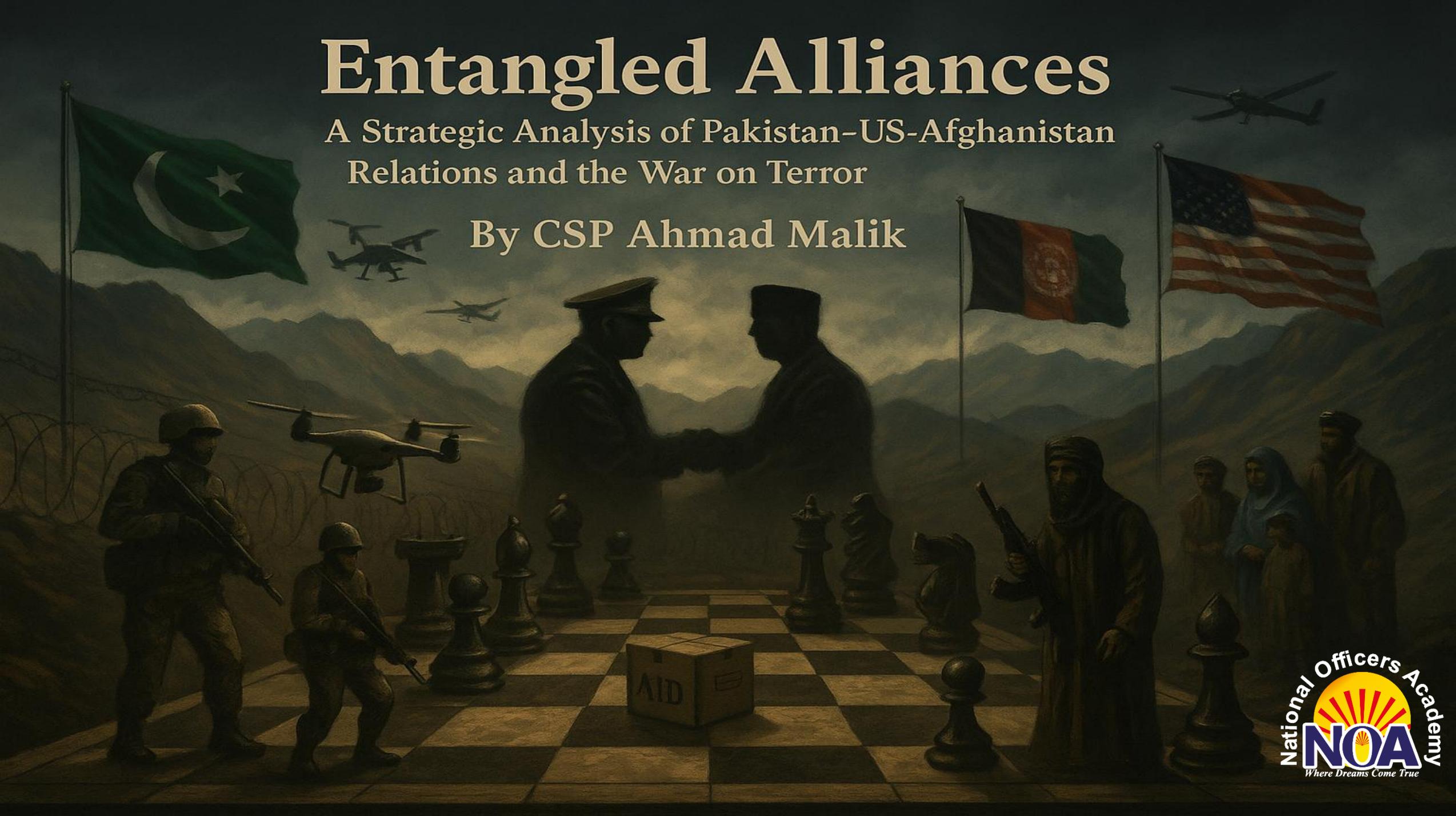


Entangled Alliances

A Strategic Analysis of Pakistan-US-Afghanistan
Relations and the War on Terror

By CSP Ahmad Malik

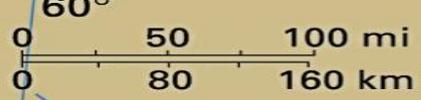


WHEN I RUN AFTER WHAT I THINK I WANT

by RUMI

- When I run after what I think **I want,**
- My days are a **furnace of distress and anxiety,**
- If I sit in my own place of **patience,**
- What I need flows to me, and without any pain
- From this, I understand that
- **what I want also wants me,**
- **And is looking for me and attracting me,**
- There's a **great secret** on this for all **who can grasp it.**





BOUNDARIES
— International
- - - Lines of control



Administered 36°
by Pakistan; claimed
by India

Administered
by India

INDIA

Srinagar

PAKISTAN

Islamabad

Peshawar

Mardan

Asadābād

Mehtar Lām

Mahmūd-e Rāqī

Mandūl

Barg-e Matāl

Banow

Baghlān

Warsaj

Khānābād

Tāloqān

Khōlm

Kondoz

Balkh

Mazār-e Sharīf

Āqchah

Sheberghān

Andkhvoy

Shīr Khān

Hazrat-e Solṭān

Keshنده

Tokzār

Sar-e Pol

Meymaneh

Sayghān

Bāmīān

Khwāzagak

Jawand

Qādes

Qal'eh-ye Now

Golrān

Ghōrmāch

Herāt

Owbī

Shahrak

Shahrak

Dāymīrdād

Nāvor

Barakī

Barak

Ghaznī

Ajrestān

Shahrestān

Pasāband

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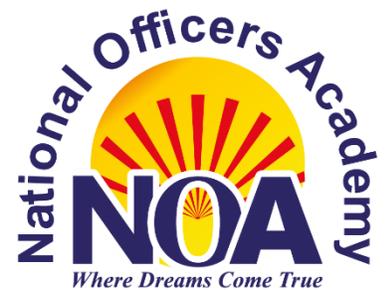
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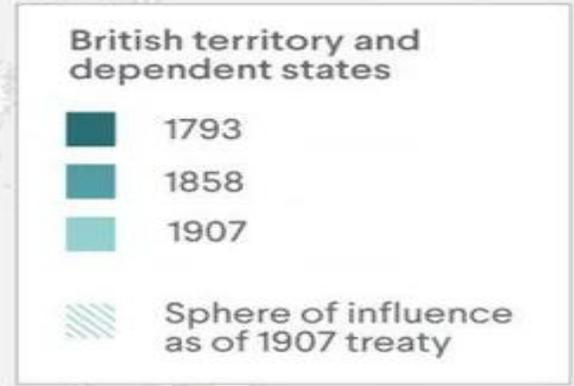
Eslām Qal

THE GREAT GAME



The Great Game, **Rivalry between Britain and Russia in Central Asia in the late 19th century.** The term was used by **Rudyard Kipling in his novel Kim (1901).** British attitudes were influenced by the reports of official, semiofficial, and private adventurers enjoying the thrill of clandestine operations beyond the frontiers of India, reports that frequently embellished (or even invented) accounts of Russian machinations and the vacillating loyalties of local chieftains.





Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907

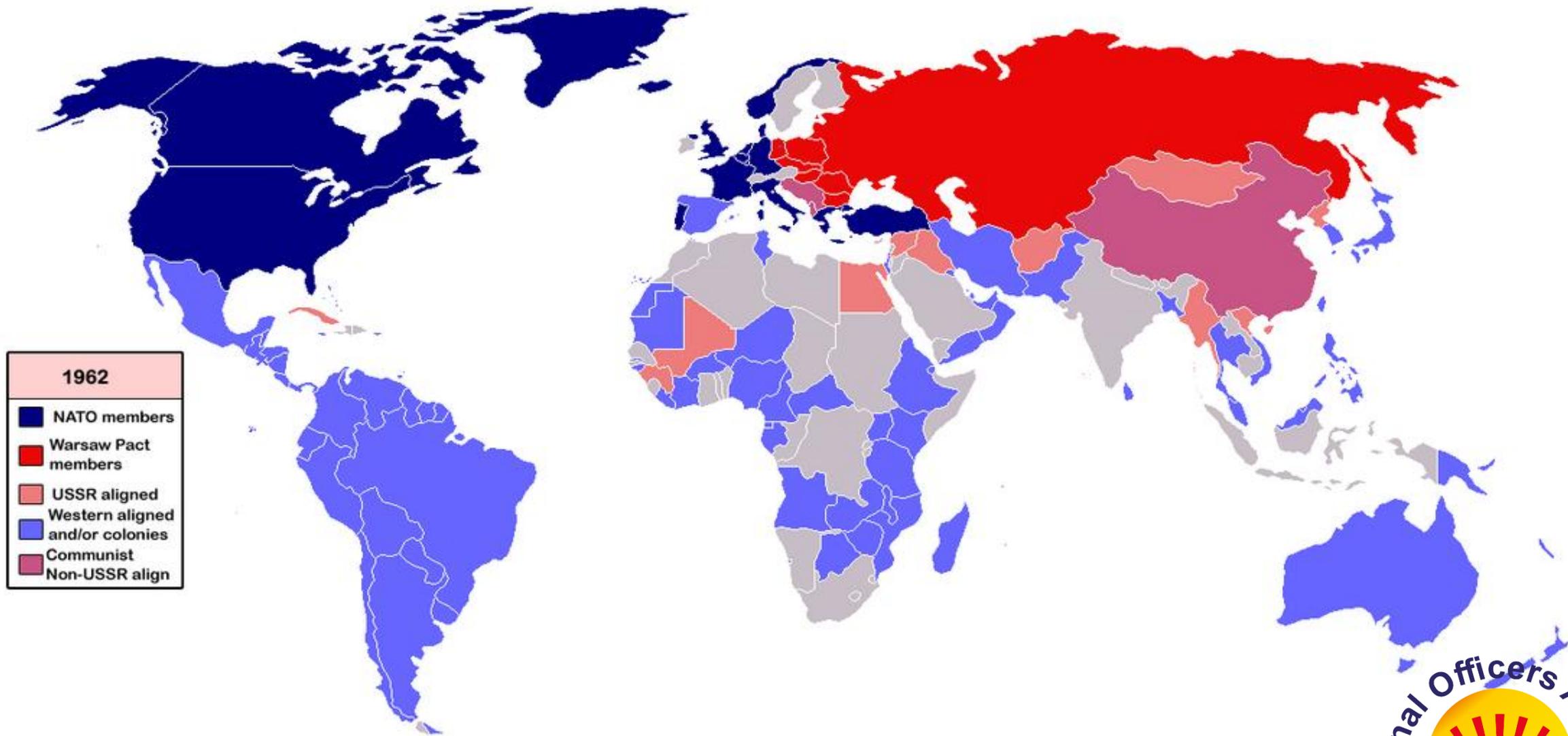
- Ended classic phase of Great Game.
- Russia agreed: Afghanistan under British influence, no direct relations.
- **Persia divided:**
 - South: British zone
 - North: Russian zone
 - Middle: Neutral buffer zone
- In **Tibet**, both empires respected China's suzerainty.











1962	
	NATO members
	Warsaw Pact members
	USSR aligned
	Western aligned and/or colonies
	Communist Non-USSR align



Cold War

- Cold War, **the open yet restricted rivalry that developed after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies.** The Cold War was waged on **political, economic, and propaganda fronts and had only limited recourse to weapons.** The term was first used by the English writer **George Orwell** in an article published in 1945 to refer to what he predicted would be a nuclear stalemate between **“two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds.”** It was first used in the United States by the American financier and presidential adviser Bernard Baruch in a speech at the State House in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1947.

Soviet Invasion (1979–1989):

- The USSR's invasion in 1979 to support the communist regime against the Mujahedeen.
- U.S. and Pakistan's ISI, with Saudi funding, armed and trained Afghan rebels.
- Tariq Ali, in his book, *A forty-year War in Pakistan*, emphasizes that the CIA's Operation Cyclone created a “**Jihadist Frankenstein**”.
 - *“The seeds of al-Qaeda and Taliban were sown in the 1980s.”*
- U.S. funded up to \$630 million annually to Mujahideen in the 1980s.

The Mujahedeen

- Jamiat e islami (Tajik) led by **Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masoud**
- **Hezb e Islami Gulbuddin led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Pashtun group)**
- **Hezb e Islami Khalis: Another Pashtun-dominated faction, led by Yunus Khan**



Civil War and Rise of the Taliban (1989–2001):

- After Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan plunged into civil war among warlords.
- The Taliban, emerging in the early 1990s from madrassas in Pakistan, promised law and order and gained popular support.
- 1996: Taliban captured Kabul and imposed strict Islamic rule.
- **Tariq Ali critiques the West's initial tolerance of the Taliban for regional stability and potential pipeline deals.**



Civil War Groups:

- Mujahedeen
- The Northern Alliance:
 - **United National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan**
 - Coalition of Mujahedeen groups, primarily from Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara ethnic group led **by Burhanuddin Rabbani**
- **The Haqqani Network:**
 - **Found in 1970**
 - **Led by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a fundamentalist of the Zadran tribe, fought for Yunus Khan's Khalis group.**
- **The Taliban**



The Unocal Pipeline Project (Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline – TAPI)

- **Who:** Unocal Corporation (a U.S.-based oil and gas company) led a consortium with Delta Oil (Saudi Arabia) and other partners.
- **What:** Proposed a pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and potentially India, passing through western Afghanistan (Herat–Kandahar).
- **Why:** To transport Turkmen natural gas from the Daulatabad gas fields to warm-water ports on the Arabian Sea, bypassing Iran and Russia.
- **Taliban Role:** U.S. and Saudi interlocutors engaged with Taliban leaders in 1997–1998, even hosting delegations in Texas to discuss security guarantees for the pipeline.
- **Diplomatic Implication:** Tariq Ali argues that as long as the Taliban were seen as capable of providing "order," they were not heavily sanctioned or diplomatically isolated by the West.
- **Tariq Ali's View:** This episode reveals the hypocrisy in Western foreign policy, where energy security and regional access were prioritized over human rights or democratic norms. The Taliban's harsh rule was overlooked as long as commercial infrastructure and anti-Iranian containment could be achieved.

U.S. Invasion (2001–2021):

- Post-9/11, U.S. invades Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom.
- The Taliban are removed, but warlords, corruption, and foreign dependency return.
- The U.S. installed a **“puppet government”** and created a drug-based war economy.
- **Key Data:**
 - 2.3 trillion USD spent by the U.S.
 - Over 240,000 dead, including 47,000+ civilians (Brown University’s Costs of War Project)
 - 85% of heroin worldwide originates from Afghanistan during this era.

Taliban's Return (2021):

- Tariq Ali was among the few who predicted Taliban resurgence, arguing that the U.S. mission had no legitimacy or public support.
- Chaotic withdrawal and abandonment of Afghans.
- The so-called liberal gains for women and civil society were fragile and dependent on foreign forces.



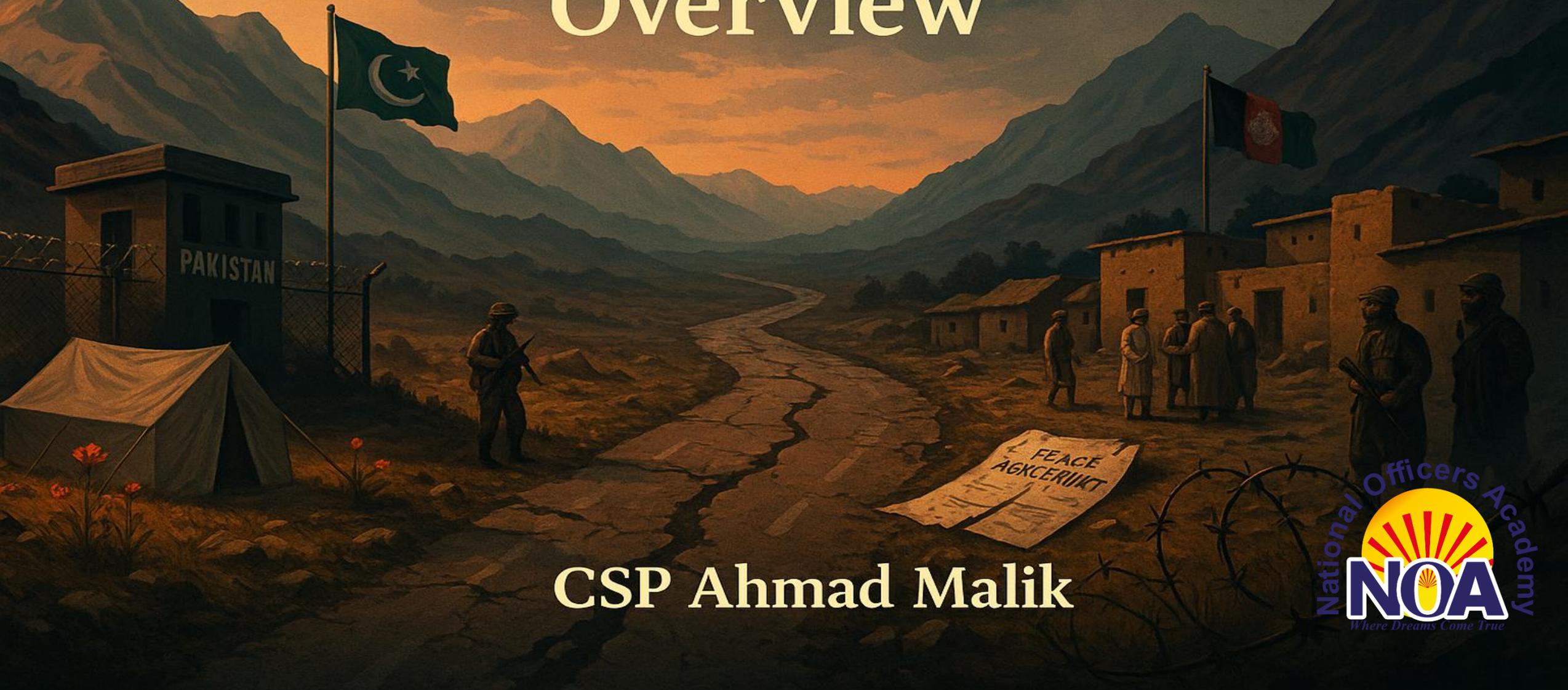


Important Examples & Quotes

- **On Warlords:** "The men the U.S. trusted to fight the Taliban were often as brutal as the Taliban."
- **On Afghan People:** "No foreign invader in history has ever successfully subdued Afghanistan for long."
- **On Empire:** "Empires retreat in confusion. This one is no different."



Pak—Afghan Relations Overview



CSP Ahmad Malik



Birth of the Relationship: 1947 and the Durand Line Problem

- **Afghanistan was the ONLY country to oppose Pakistan's UN membership in 1947 — a fractious start to bilateral relations.**

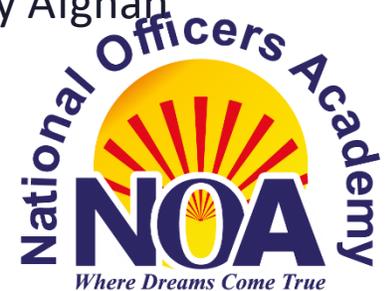
The Durand Line (2,611 km): Demarcated by British India's Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan in 1893. Afghanistan has never formally recognized it as an international border.

Pashtunistan Demand: Afghanistan historically championed a separate Pashtun homeland — directly challenging Pakistan's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Pakistan's Strategic Dilemma: A hostile or unstable Afghanistan in the west compounds its security challenges from India in the east — the classic two-front problem.

Ethnic Fault Line: ~42 million Pashtuns span both sides — the world's largest tribal society without a state, a perennial source of cross-border identity politics.

Early Diplomatic Tensions: Pakistan's formation was seen as breaking Pashtun unity. This fueled early Afghan foreign policy aligned with India.



Key Historical Milestones: 1947–2001

- 
- 1947** Pakistan gains independence. Afghanistan opposes UN membership over Durand Line & Pashtunistan. Cold War begins shaping regional alignments.
 - 1955** Afghanistan's PM Daoud Khan pursues Pashtunistan actively. Pakistan closes the border for 5 months in retaliation — early use of economic coercion.
 - 1965–73** Relations normalize under King Zahir Shah but Pashtunistan issue simmers. Pakistan backed by US/SEATO; Afghanistan non-aligned but Soviet-leaning.
 - 1973** Daoud Khan topples Zahir Shah. Relations deteriorate. Afghan-Indian ties warm. Pakistan begins covert support to Afghan Islamists (Hekmatyar, Rabbani).
 - 1978–79** Saur Revolution installs communist PDPA. Soviet invasion (Dec 1979). Pakistan becomes frontline state in Cold War — CIA/ISI partnership begins.
 - 1980s** Pakistan hosts 3+ million Afghan refugees. ISI channels \$3 billion in CIA aid to Mujahideen. Afghan jihad reshapes Pakistan's society, military, intelligence.
 - 1989** Soviet withdrawal. Pakistan backs Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami for Kabul control. Civil war erupts. Pakistan's 'strategic depth' doctrine takes shape.

1947-1950s: Early Tensions

- **Durand Line Dispute:** Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan's UN membership in 1947, citing the Durand Line issue and concerns over Pashtun areas.
- **Pashtunistan Issue:** Kabul promoted the idea of a separate Pashtun state, undermining Pakistan's territorial integrity.

Durand Line



Legitimacy of the 1893 Agreement

- The Durand Line was established through a formal agreement signed on **November 12, 1893**, between **Sir Mortimer Durand of British India and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan**.
- The agreement delineated the spheres of influence and was intended to serve as a permanent boundary.



Reaffirmation by Successive Afghan Rulers

- **Amir Habibullah Khan (1905) and Amir Amanullah Khan (1919, 1921) reaffirmed the Durand Line in subsequent treaties, including the Treaty of Rawalpindi (1919) and the Treaty of Kabul (1921).**
- These reaffirmations underscore the continuity and acceptance of the boundary by Afghan leadership over time.

Misconceptions and Myths

- Shahid Raja, in his book, 'Durand Line: Myths & Reality', addresses common misconceptions, such as **the belief that the agreement was coerced or that it had a 100-year expiration**, clarifying that **there is no clause indicating a temporal limitation**.
- He emphasizes that the agreement was made voluntarily and with the **full authority of the Afghan Amir, who had the backing of tribal leaders**.
- *State Succession is the replacement of one state by another in the responsibility for the international relations of a territory*

Treaty Basis: The Durand Agreement (1893)

- Signed between two sovereign entities: British India and the Afghan Emirate.
- Supplemented by 1905 and 1919 Anglo-Afghan agreements (notably Treaty of Rawalpindi 1919), where Afghanistan accepted British India's territorial claims, including the Durand Line.
- Ref: Starke – **treaties signed by colonial powers are binding on successors if not invalidated or renounced.**



Pakistan's Legal Position

- Pakistan claims state succession from British India.
- As the successor state, Pakistan maintains the validity of international borders inherited from British India under the principle of *uti possidetis juris*.
- **“International boundaries survive succession unless changed by mutual consent.” — Shaw, International Law**
- Pakistan references the 1905 reaffirmation and international recognition, including UN maps, as supporting legal proof.

Afghanistan's Position

- Afghanistan does not recognize the Durand Line as an international border.
- Claims:
 - The 1893 treaty was imposed under duress.
 - It was not intended to be permanent.
 - Treaty expired with the fall of British colonial rule in 1947.
- However:
 - Afghanistan reaffirmed the boundary in the 1919 Rawalpindi Treaty and 1930s correspondence.
 - No formal denunciation occurred at independence in 1919 or in 1947.
- Starke: ***Under customary law, borders recognized in treaties and confirmed later cannot be unilaterally rejected.***



Legal Arguments Supporting Validity

1. Treaty Continuity under State Succession
2. Pakistan inherits the border obligations of British India.
3. Reaffirmation by Successive Afghan Rulers
4. Multiple Afghan regimes post-1893 upheld the Durand Line.
5. Principle of Uti Possidetis Juris
6. Established borders remain post-decolonization.
7. International Recognition
8. UN, OIC, and most states treat it as Pakistan's border.
9. Customary Law on Boundary Stability
10. Changing it requires mutual agreement, not unilateral rejection.



Counterarguments and Complexity

- Afghanistan argues:
 - The treaty violated **Pashtun self-determination**.
 - Treaty was signed with a **non-democratic ruler under pressure**.
 - The agreement divides ethnic homelands.
- Shaw: ***Ethnicity does not override legal boundaries unless backed by plebiscite or mutual treaty.***



Pashtunistan Issue

- Afghanistan argue that Pashtuns are separate, and consider themselves part of Afghanistan, therefore, the border is invalid.
- **BUT....**
 - **1947: NWFP referendum, approximately 289,244 Pashtun voters (99.02%) chose to join Pakistan**
 - **The referendum was rejected by the Khudai Khidmatgar movement, led by Bacha Khan, who advocated for an independent Pashtunistan.**
- **The largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (65%) => 15 to 19 million**
- **Pakistan: 15.4% Pashtun ethnicity , second largest ethnic group**
 - **More than 30 million**

1979–1989: Soviet Invasion and Strategic Alignment

- Pakistan became a frontline ally of the U.S..
- **Hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees.**
- Channeled **\$630+ million/year in U.S. and Saudi funding to Mujahedeen via the ISI.**
- Afghan warlord politics began spilling into Pakistan.



The Afghan Jihad Legacy (1979–1996): Gains & Blowback

Pakistan's Strategic Gains

- Became a critical US ally — \$3.2 billion in military aid (1980–88)
- ISI emerged as regional power broker with pan-Islamist network
- 'Strategic depth' doctrine: using Afghanistan as defensive buffer vs. India
- Acquired nuclear technology with reduced international scrutiny
- Developed Mujahideen networks (Haqqani, Hekmatyar) as strategic assets
- Pashtun belt leadership relationships strengthened

Long-Term Blowback

- Kalashnikov culture: 3 million weapons flooded into Pakistan (1980s)
- Heroin epidemic: Pakistan's addicts grew from 5,000 (1979) to 1.5 million (1990)
- Sectarianism funded by Gulf money during jihad years
- Madrassas proliferated — over 20,000 by 2001 vs. 900 in 1979
- ISI-militant nexus became embedded — hard to dismantle
- Afghan civil war (1992–96) created Taliban — Pakistan's Frankenstein moment

Taliban Rise & Pakistani Recognition (1994–2001)

- **Taliban Emergence (1994):** Born in Kandahar's madrassas, largely from Pakistani Deobandi seminaries (especially Darul Uloom Haqqania, Akora Khattak — 'University of Jihad').

Pakistani Sponsorship: Pakistan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia were the only three countries to recognize the Taliban government (1996–2001). ISI provided critical logistical and financial support.

Strategic Calculation: Taliban offered 'strategic depth' against India, Pashtun-friendly governance, and access to Central Asian trade routes — the 'pipeline diplomacy' dream.

UNOCAL Pipeline: Pakistan mediated between Taliban and US oil company UNOCAL for a trans-Afghanistan gas pipeline from Turkmenistan — early geo-economics at play.

Al-Qaeda Complication: Bin Laden's presence in Afghanistan and the 1998 US Embassy bombings began straining Pakistan-US relations and the Taliban alliance.

Pre-9/11 Status: Afghanistan was effectively a Pakistani client state — Islamabad's ISI had enormous influence over Taliban leadership, policies, and foreign relations.



1990s: Rise of the Taliban

- Pakistan recognized the Taliban regime (along with Saudi Arabia and UAE) in 1996.
- Sought to install a “friendly” Afghan government to secure **strategic depth**.
- Relations soured with anti-Taliban forces and Iran-backed Northern Alliance.



Who are Taliban?

- Pashtun-educated religious students from Taliban movement
- Mullah Muhammad Omer founded the group with 50 students
- It was founded in Kandahar in 1994
- Afghan Civil War (1992-1996) and the Taliban Rule
- Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001)
- The US Invasion in 2001 after the 9/11 Attacks
- Fall of Kabul 2021 and Takeover of the Taliban

TTP: Tahreek e Taliban Pakistan

- Formed in 2007 by Baitullah Mehsud
- Also known as “Pakistani Taliban”
- The Pakistani Taliban share a common ideology with the Afghan Taliban
- Assisted them in the 2001–2021 war
- It takes guidance from Al-Qaeda
- Aims to overthrow the government in Pakistan
- Terrorist Campaign against Pakistan Army

What Does TTP Want?

- A substantial reduction of Pakistani military forces from the country's former tribal areas
- The Reversal of the 2018 merger of the tribal areas into mainland Pakistan through an amendment to Pakistan's constitution — known as the FATA merger
- Removal of border fences

The Strategic Depth

In military literature, strategic depth encompasses the geographical distance between front lines and crucial areas such as industrial cores, capital cities, and military production centers.

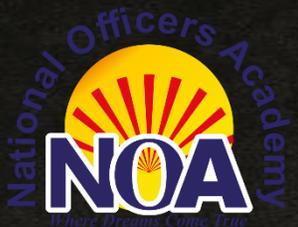
- Pakistan's Context
 - Hostile Eastern Border
 - Favourable Government in Afghanistan
 - Good Relationships with CARs



Post-9/11 (2001–2021):

- Complexity and Double Game
- Pakistan officially joined the U.S.-led War on Terror.
- Allegedly harbored elements of Afghan Taliban, while battling Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) internally.
- U.S. and Afghan governments accused Pakistan of duplicity.

WVAIR ON TERROR





War on Terror

- Pakistan as a frontline ally and a battlefield
- 9/11 and Global Response
 - NATO's invocation of Article 5
 - US invasion of Afghanistan
- *Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is a cornerstone of NATO, establishing the principle of collective defense. It states that an attack against one member is considered an attack against all, obligating each member to assist the attacked nation. This assistance can include the use of armed force, but the specific actions taken are determined by each individual member*

Pakistan's Post-9/11 Strategic Reversal: Musharraf's Fateful Choice

- **9/11 Ultimatum: US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage reportedly told ISI Chief Mahmood Ahmed: 'Be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age' unless Pakistan cooperates.**

Pakistan's Seven Commitments (Sept 2001): Granted US air corridors, logistical support, intelligence sharing, fuel depots — a 180° shift from Taliban patron to anti-Taliban partner.

The Double Game Allegation: Pakistan publicly fought Taliban while elements of ISI allegedly sheltered Afghan Taliban leadership (Quetta Shura) in Balochistan — a fundamental contradiction.

Quetta Shura: Afghan Taliban's senior leadership reportedly operated from Quetta, Pakistan — US intelligence confirmed Taliban commander networks in Peshawar and Quetta.

US Aid (\$33 billion, 2001–2021): Pakistan received massive Coalition Support Funds — became heavily dependent on US financial flows even while maintaining Taliban contacts.

Haqqani Network: Jalaluddin and Sirajuddin Haqqani — ISI's prized assets — operated from North Waziristan, attacking NATO forces in Afghanistan with apparent impunity.



Key Events: Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations 2001–2021



The War on Terror: Human & Material Cost to Pakistan (2001–2021)

83,000+

Pakistani lives lost —
military, police & civilians
combined

\$152B

Total economic cost of the
war to Pakistan (Govt
estimates)

3.5M

People internally displaced
at the peak of military
operations

\$33B

US Coalition Support Funds
received by Pakistan 2001–
2021

70,000+

Terrorist incidents recorded
in Pakistan 2001–2020

480+

US drone strikes inside
Pakistani territory
(FATA/KPK)

Pakistan's Reaction to Taliban Takeover (Aug 2021): Euphoria to Regret

Initial Pakistani Response

- PM Imran Khan: Taliban 'broke chains of slavery' — celebrated withdrawal
- Pakistan lobbied Western countries to engage with Taliban
- Hoped for compliant, friendly government on western border
- Expected Taliban to crack down on TTP in exchange for support
- Envisioned trade routes to Central Asia via Afghanistan opening
- Predicted Afghanistan as strategic depth finally achieved

Harsh Realities That Followed

- TTP attacks in Pakistan SURGED by 50% within 6 months of Taliban takeover
- Taliban refused to take action against TTP — called it Pakistan's 'internal matter'
- Afghanistan-India ties improved — Taliban opened Indian trade routes
- Durand Line tensions escalated — Taliban refused to accept it as border
- Border incidents multiplied — Taliban forces clashed with Pakistani troops
- Pakistan's strategic depth became a strategic nightmare

Why Taliban-Pakistan Relations Soured So Quickly (2021–2023)

- **TTP Sanctuary Issue: The Afghan Taliban refused to expel or act against TTP commanders sheltering in Afghanistan — a fundamental red line for Pakistan.**

Ideological Brotherhood: Afghan Taliban and TTP share ideology, ethnicity (Pashtun), and social networks — Afghan Taliban cannot fully alienate TTP without internal fractures.

Durand Line Defiance: Taliban forces began demolishing Pakistani fences along the border — a direct challenge to Pakistan's territorial control. Hundreds of incidents recorded.

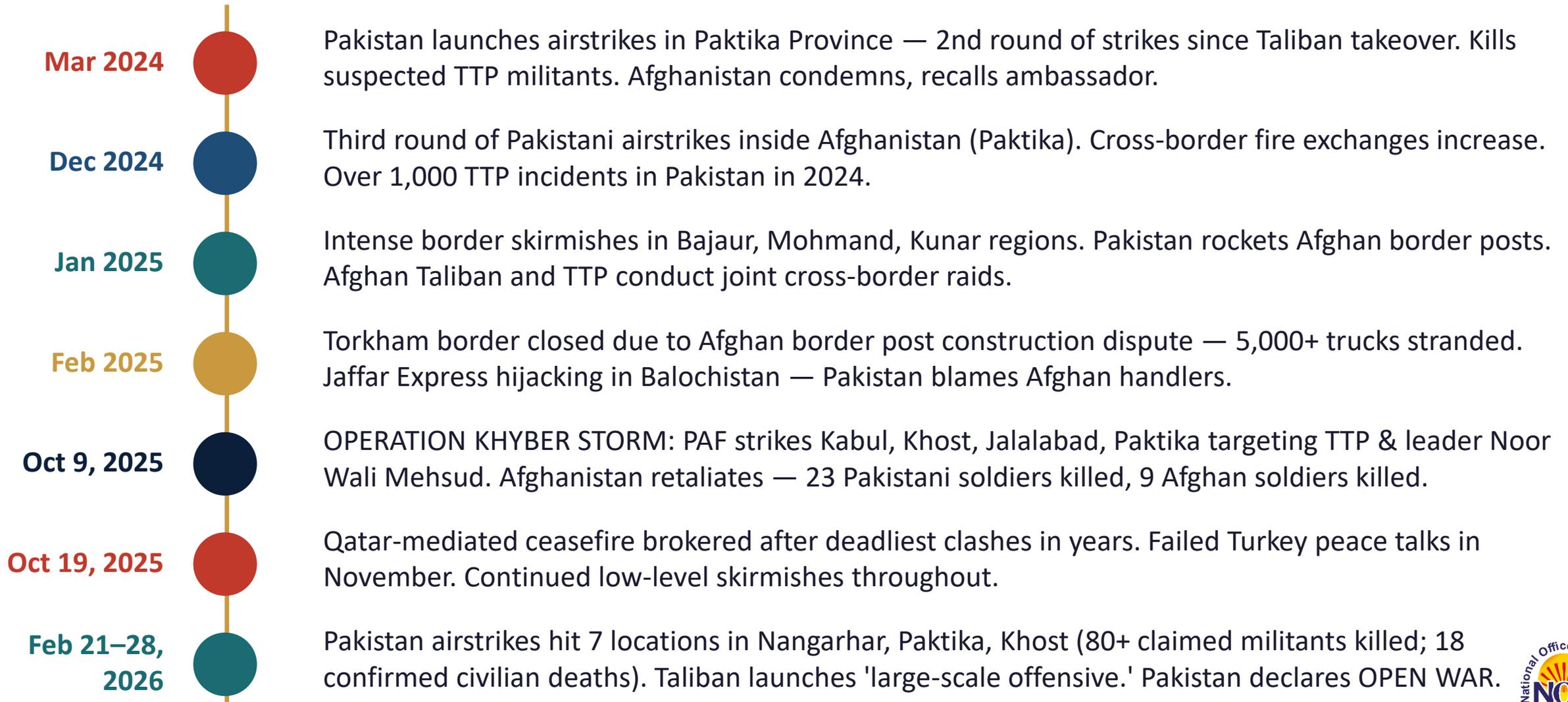
India Card: Taliban welcomed Indian consulates, trade, and investment — directly undermining Pakistan's goal of excluding India from Afghanistan.

ISKP Complication: Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) — enemy of both Taliban and Pakistan — carried out attacks on both sides, complicating the security matrix.

No International Recognition: Taliban's global isolation increased its dependence on Pakistan, but paradoxically also reduced incentives to appease Islamabad.

Afghan Refugees: Pakistan began expelling Afghan refugees as leverage — a tactic that infuriated Kabul but yielded no concessions on TTP.

Escalation Timeline: 2024–February 2026



The 2025–2026 Armed Conflict: Key Statistics

23

Pakistani soldiers killed in Oct 2025 border clashes

80+

Claimed TTP/Taliban killed in Feb 2026 PAF airstrikes

18

Confirmed Afghan civilian deaths (Feb 22, 2026 — UNAMA)

70+

UNAMA-confirmed Afghan civilian deaths (Oct–Dec 2025)

133

Afghan Taliban claimed killed in Feb 26–27, 2026 exchanges

1,200+

Pakistanis killed in militant attacks in 2025 alone (double 2021)

February 2026: 'Open War' — What Happened?

- **Trigger Chain: Series of attacks in Pakistan — BLA attacks in Balochistan (Jan 29–Feb 5, 2026); ISIS-P mosque bombing in Islamabad killing 36 (Feb 6); TTP attack in Bajaur killing 11 soldiers & a child (Feb 16).**

Feb 21, 2026 Airstrikes: PAF struck 7 locations in Nangarhar, Paktika & Khost targeting TTP and ISKP camps. Pakistan reported 80 militant deaths. UNAMA confirmed civilian casualties.

Feb 26, 2026 — Afghan Retaliation: Taliban launched 'large-scale offensive operations' against Pakistani posts along the Durand Line. PAF struck Kabul, Kandahar, Paktia.

'Open War' Declaration: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif stated: 'Our cup of patience has overflowed. Now it is open war.'
— **First time Pakistan formally declared war on a neighbor since 1971.**

Scale of Feb 26 Fighting: Pakistan claimed 133 Afghan Taliban killed, 200+ wounded, 27 posts destroyed, 9 captured. Afghanistan claimed 55 Pakistani soldiers killed, 19 posts destroyed.

International Response: Qatar mediating; UN appealing; China, Iran, Russia, Turkey urging restraint. Neither side independently verified by neutral parties.

Current Status (March 2026): Fragile de-escalation underway. Borders remain largely closed. Trade collapsed. Diplomatic missions reduced. Qatar and Saudi Arabia mediating.



Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP): Origins & Evolution

- **Formation (2007):** TTP created as umbrella organization of 13 militant groups under Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan — directly responding to Pakistan Army's FATA operations.

Ideological Stance: TTP seeks to overthrow Pakistani state, impose Sharia, and avenge military operations in tribal areas — distinct from Afghan Taliban's focus on Afghanistan.

Afghan Taliban Relationship: Both share Deobandi ideology, Pashtun ethnicity, and social networks. Afghan Taliban served as ideological inspiration. Post-2021, TTP moved cadres into Afghanistan.

Leadership: Noor Wali Mehsud (current). Survived Oct 2025 Pakistani airstrike in Kabul. UNSC-designated terrorist. Leads from Afghan soil.

TTP Strength (2025): ACLED recorded 1,000+ violent TTP incidents in Pakistan in 2025 — most violent year in over a decade. Operating in KPK, Balochistan, Sindh.

Sanctuary in Afghanistan: Pakistan's core allegation — TTP command structures, training camps, and logistics based in Nangarhar, Kunar, Khost, Paktika provinces.

US Weapons Factor: Many attacks used weapons abandoned by US forces during 2021 withdrawal — Humvees, night vision gear, M16s, even helicopters.



Pakistan's Terrorism Crisis: By the Numbers (2024–2025)

1,000+

TTP violent incidents in Pakistan in 2025 (ACLED data)

#2

Pakistan's rank in Global Terrorism Index 2024 — 2nd most affected country

2×

Terrorist fatalities in 2025 vs. 2021 — doubled since Taliban takeover

36

Deaths in ISIS-P Islamabad mosque bombing, Feb 6, 2026

480+

US drone strikes in FATA/KPK 2004–2018 — created anti-Pakistan radicalism

60%

TTP attacks attributed to Afghan-based cells (Pakistani military estimates)

The TTP Impasse: Why Can't It Be Resolved?

Pakistan's Position

- Taliban must expel or neutralize TTP from Afghan soil
- Written, verifiable guarantees required before border reopening
- TTP is an internationally designated terrorist organization
- Afghan soil cannot be used for cross-border terrorism
- Will use military, economic, and diplomatic pressure
- Cites right to self-defense under UN Charter Article 51

Taliban/Afghanistan's Position

- TTP is Pakistan's internal matter — not Afghanistan's problem
- Cannot act against TTP without fracturing internal unity
- Fear TTP fighters defecting to ISKP (Islamic State) if pressed
- Denies operational links with TTP command structures
- Pakistani airstrikes are violation of sovereignty/international law
- Demands Pakistan stop fencing the Durand Line as precondition

Trade Structure, Transit & Key Challenges

- **Pakistan's Top Exports to Afghanistan: Cereals & wheat flour, cement (\$10M/month), pharmaceuticals, edible vegetables, textiles, motorcycles, sugar, malt extracts.**

Afghanistan's Top Exports to Pakistan: Fresh & dried fruits (grapes, pomegranates, apples), vegetables, minerals, marble, cotton.

Transit Trade (APTTA): Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement — allows landlocked Afghanistan to import goods via Karachi/Gwadar. Critical for Afghan economy.

July 2025 PTA: Pakistan-Afghanistan Preferential Trade Agreement signed — limited to 8 agricultural products. Pakistan exports mangoes/oranges/bananas/potatoes; Afghanistan exports grapes/pomegranates/apples/tomatoes.

Structural Bottlenecks: No formal banking links (hawala-dependent), 2% IDC tax by KPK, cold chain infrastructure absent at Torkham, multi-agency customs delays.

Border Closures 2025: Pakistan closed 8 border crossings after Oct 2025 clashes — FY 2025–26 H1 trade fell 53% from \$1.26B to \$594M. Afghan traders lost \$2.5M/day.

FTA Potential: Pakistan Business Council estimates FTA could boost bilateral trade from \$1.7B to \$5B+ annually — currently constrained by political tensions.



Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: The Staggering Numbers

4.4M

Afghan nationals
(documented +
undocumented) in Pakistan
as of 2023

1.3M

Registered refugees with
UNHCR Proof of
Registration (PoR) cards

800K

Afghan Citizen Card (ACC)
holders — govt-issued
temporary status

1.7M

Estimated undocumented
Afghans in Pakistan

2.9M

Afghans returned to
Afghanistan in 2025
(combined forced &
voluntary)

2.6M

Expelled from Pakistan AND
Iran combined in 2025 (UN
data)

Pakistan's Afghan Refugee Policy: From Hospitality to Expulsion

1979–89



Soviet invasion → 3.3 million Afghans flood Pakistan. World's largest refugee population. Pakistan accepted without formal agreements. Islamic solidarity narrative dominant.

1990–2001



Civil war & Taliban era — refugees remain. Pakistan hosts despite economic strain. UNHCR issues PoR cards from 2006. At peak, 5 million Afghans in Pakistan.

2001–2021



Post-9/11: Some repatriation. But steady inflow continues. Pakistan becomes permanent host. Refugees integrate into economy — KPK, Balochistan, Karachi.

2021



Taliban takeover: 200,000+ new arrivals. Pakistan initially closes border, then allows transit. Strategic decision not to absorb more refugees publicly announced.

Oct 2023



PHASE 1 Deportation: Pakistan announces Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan. 468,000 Afghans leave Oct–Dec 2023 amid widespread harassment and arrests.

Apr 2025



PHASE 2: 800,000 ACC holders ordered to leave. 60,000 cross border in first 2 weeks of April 2025 alone. UNHCR raises alarm.

Jul–Dec 2025



PHASE 3: 1.4 million PoR card holders ordered out. Cards expired Jun 30, 2025. Amnesty, UNHCR, UN experts condemn violations of non-refoulement principle.

Refugee Dimension: Humanitarian Crisis vs. Pakistan's Security Argument

Pakistan's Justification

- Rising terrorism linked to Afghan nationals (government claims)
- Not signatory to 1951 Refugee Convention — no binding legal obligation
- Hosted 5 million Afghans for 40+ years without adequate international support
- UNHCR only received \$116M of \$478M requested in 2025
- Economic strain on KPK and Balochistan border communities
- Using refugee card as diplomatic leverage over Taliban on TTP
- PM Shehbaz: 'Int'l community must share the burden'

International Community's Concerns

- Non-refoulement: Customary intl law — cannot return people to persecution
- 60% of deportees are women and children (UN data)
- Taliban intensifying oppression — girls banned from education above Grade 6
- Many deportees have never lived in Afghanistan — born in Pakistan
- UNHCR documented 45x increase in Afghans arrested in Jan-Feb 2025 vs. 2024
- Arbitrary arrest, night raids, detention without documentation
- Funding gap: UN appeals for \$2.42B for Afghanistan; only \$663M received (2025)

China, USA & Iran: External Powers' Stakes in Pak-Afghan Relations

China's Position

- CPEC: Pakistan is China's most important BRI partner — Afghan stability vital for CPEC extension to Central Asia
- China-Taliban relations: Engagement for mineral extraction (\$1T+ estimated reserves) and counter-ISKP cooperation
- Concerned about ISKP attacks on Chinese workers & projects in Afghanistan
- Broker role: Hosted Pakistan-Afghan talks; wants both sides stable
- Wakhan Corridor: Alternative route to Central Asia — ISI allegedly targeting Chinese projects there (Afghan analyst claim)
- China formally recognizes Taliban ambassador in Beijing (2024)

USA & Iran

- USA: Trump 2.0 wants US weapons back from Taliban. Post India-Pak ceasefire (2025), emboldened Pakistan militarily
- Bagram Airbase: Trump expressed interest — monitoring Chinese nuclear facilities
- US designated TTP as Foreign Terrorist Organization — sanctions in place
- Iran: Shares 936 km border with Afghanistan; deported 2M+ Afghans in 2025
- Iran-Taliban: Complex — sectarian (Shia vs. Sunni) but shares anti-US interest
- Russia: Only country to formally recognize Taliban govt — strategic counter to NATO

Water Dimension: The Kabul River & Helmand Basin

- **Kabul River: Originates in Afghanistan, flows into Indus via Khyber — critical for KPK's water supply. Kunar/Chitral tributaries shared. No formal water sharing treaty exists.**

Afghan Dams on Kabul River: Afghanistan has built/planned dams on upper Kabul River — Pakistani farmers in Peshawar valley fear reduced flows. A future flashpoint.

Helmand Treaty (1973): Pakistan not a party, but Afghan water governance broadly affects Pakistan's Balochistan. Iran-Afghanistan Helmand dispute has Pakistani spillover effects.

Climate Change Multiplier: Glacial retreat in Hindu Kush-Himalayan range affects both countries. Unpredictable monsoon and snowmelt patterns will intensify water conflicts.

Shared Aquifers: Cross-border groundwater in FATA/KPK-Kunar-Nangarhar region — no agreed management framework. Over-extraction on both sides unsustainable.

Policy Gap: Despite decades of relations, no formal Pakistan-Afghanistan Water Treaty exists — a significant gap in bilateral institutional architecture requiring attention.



Pakistan's Role

- **Military operations (Zarb-e-Azb, Rah-e-Nijat)**
- **Civilian losses: over 80,000 lives**
- **Economic cost: \$150+ billion**

Internal Impacts

- Rise of TTP
- Lal Masjid, APS attack
- Security vs democracy dilemma

US Withdrawal

- Doha Agreement (2020) & US Exit (2021)
- Pakistan's facilitation role
- Taliban takeover & regional implications

War on Terror: Pakistan's Role, Impact & Aftermath

Pakistan's Role



Musharraf's U-turn
post-9/11

Provided logistic bases
arrested top AQ/Taliban figures

Domestic Blowback

Rashid: Rise of TTP, Lal Masjid crisis,
APS attack, Swat takeover

Over 80,000 civilian and military deaths
\$150B+ economic losses

US Drone Campaign

Markey: Effective in killing top terrorists

Controversial—created anti-American
sentiment and fed extremism

Sources: Haqqani, Ahmed Rashid, Daniel Markey

Doha Talks & Withdrawal (2021)

Pakistan's
facilitation role

US exit left
power vacuum;

US exit left power
vacuum; Taliban
returned without
inclusive peace



Case Discussion:

‘Was the War on Terror
Pakistan’s war or America’s war
imposed on Pakistan?’

Pakistan–Afghanistan

Conflict & Its Consequences

An analytical overview of the ongoing cross-border tensions, TTP insurgency, border closures, and cascading impacts on Pakistan's economy, society, regional standing, and global image.

Security & TTP

Economy

Culture & Society

Region & World

Security Crisis

TTP Attacks (2023–24):

~780+ terrorist incidents inside Pakistan

Casualties:

2,300+ security personnel & civilians killed

Border Closures:

Torkham & Chaman shut 40+ times since 2021

Afghan Refugees:

3.7 million registered; millions undocumented

Military Operations:

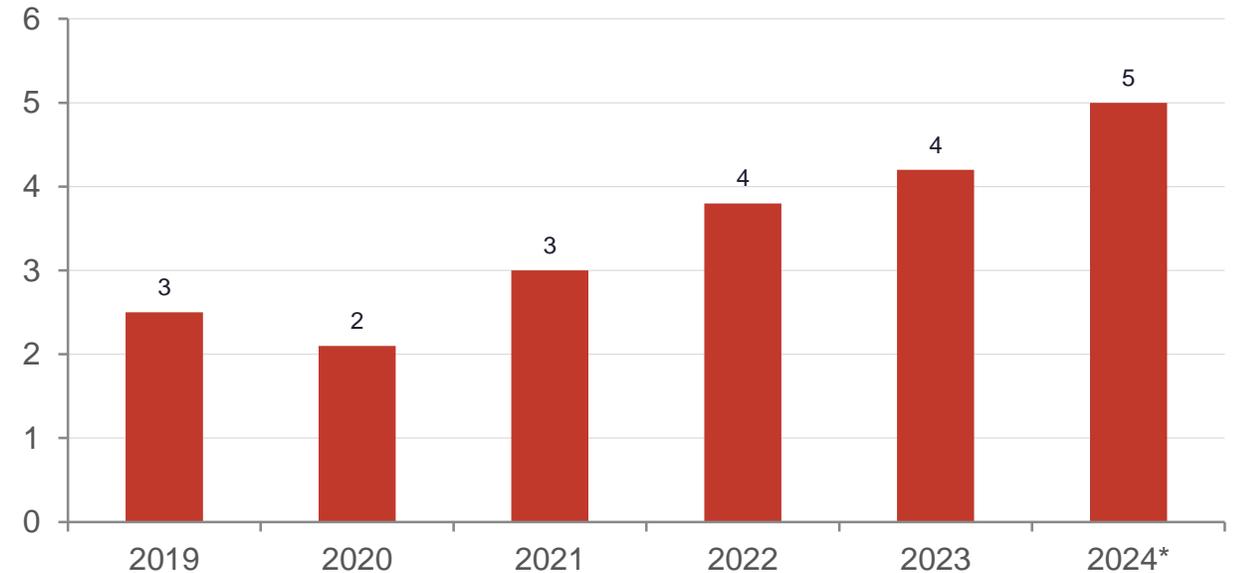
Op Azm-e-Istehkam launched 2024

TTP Sanctuaries:

Confirmed use of Afghan soil by TTP (ISPR)

Economic Toll — Key Indicators

Annual Cost of Terrorism to Pakistan (USD Billion)



\$152B+

Cumulative cost since 2001 (Govt est.)

6.3%

GDP contraction link to border trade loss

FATF

Grey-listed 2018–22; impact on FDI

Refugee Crisis

- 3.7M+ registered Afghan refugees in Pakistan (UNHCR 2024)
- KP & Balochistan host 80% of refugees
- Massive strain on health, schools & housing
- 2023 deportation drive — 1.7M Afghans deported
- Displacement creates identity & border tensions

Education & Society

- 37% of KP schools damaged or closed due to militancy
- FATA/merged districts: literacy rate fell to 29% (2023)
- Youth radicalization risk increases in conflict zones
- Women & girls: mobility restricted in border areas
- PTSD rates high in conflict-affected communities

Cultural Disruption

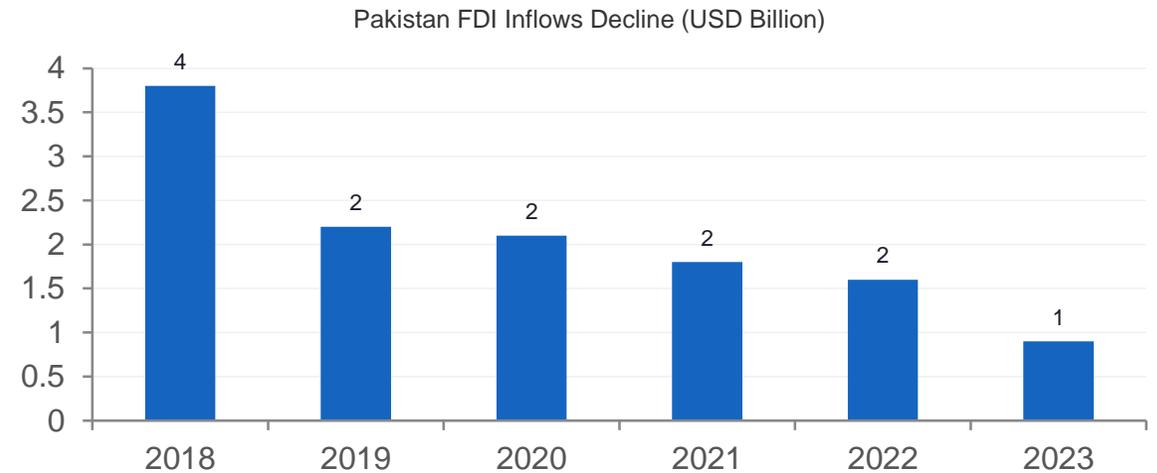
- Pashtun cultural ties disrupted by closed border (Durand Line)
- Rise of extremist narratives in media & madrasas
- Music, arts, civil society suppressed in FATA areas
- Afghan drug trade fuels addiction crisis in Pakistan
- PTM movement emerges — Pashtun rights under spotlight

Pakistan in the World: Spillover Effects

Regional Consequences

Country/Actor	Consequence
China (CPEC)	Security threats to BRI projects; delay in CPEC Phase II
India	Exploits instability; proxy accusations; spy tensions
Iran	Drug & refugee spillover; cross-border militia risks
Central Asia	SCO credibility tested; TAPI pipeline stalled
Taliban (Afghanistan)	Safe haven for TTP; Pakistan-Taliban tensions rising
USA	Pakistan's role questioned; F-16 deal conditional

Global Standing — Key Metrics



UN Credibility

Pakistan repeatedly calls on UNSC to hold Taliban accountable; little action taken

Nuclear Risk

Instability near nuclear state raises international alarm; strategic ambiguity grows

Peace Talks

Multiple rounds of Pakistan-Afghanistan talks failed; SCO platform ineffective so far

Global Image

Pakistan labeled 'most dangerous country'; impacts diaspora, tourism, soft power

Pakistan's Security Crisis

Post-2021 Taliban Takeover

+56%

Increase in
Terrorist Attacks

+45%

Terror Deaths
in 2024

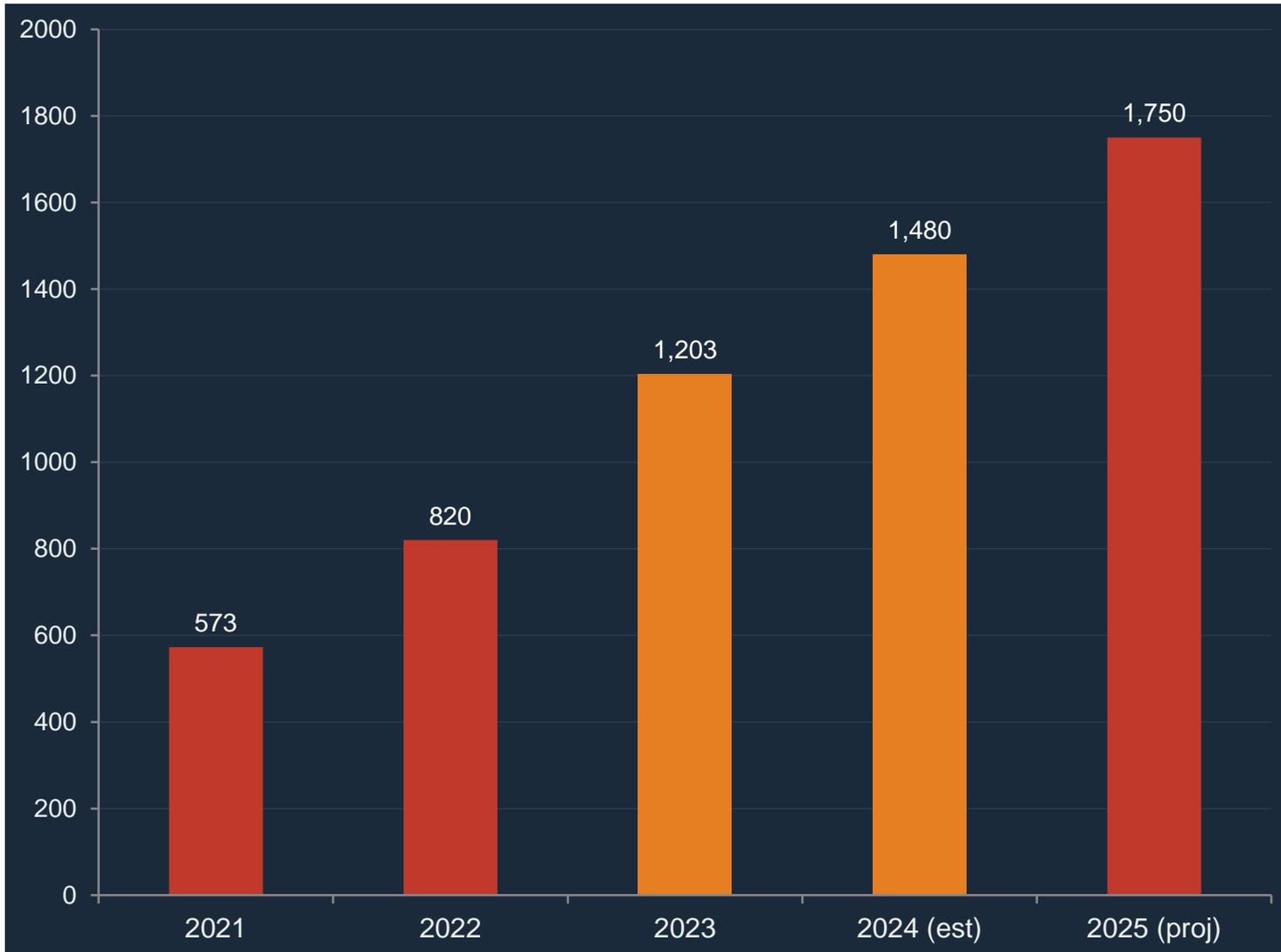
1,203

TTP Attacks
in 2023

60+

Militant Factions
Absorbed by TTP

TTP ATTACK SURGE | 2021 – 2025



2× tripling

Attacks more than doubled between 2021 and 2023 alone

60 factions

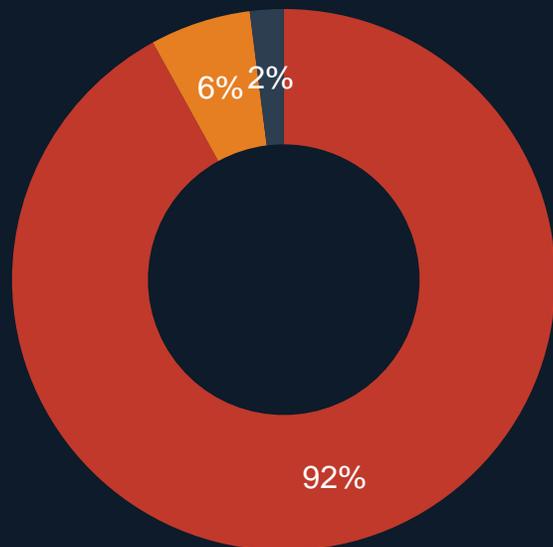
TTP absorbed ~60 allied militant groups post-takeover

Safe havens

UN confirms 3 dedicated TTP guest houses in Afghan territory

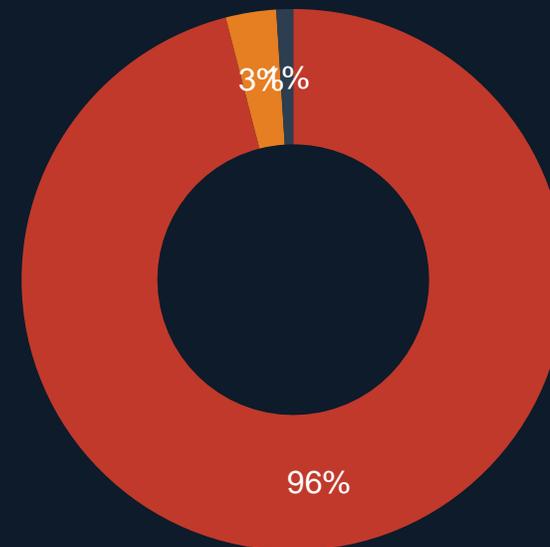
GEOGRAPHIC CONCENTRATION OF VIOLENCE | 2025

% of Violent Incidents



■ KP (92%) ■ Balochistan (6%) ■ Other (2%)

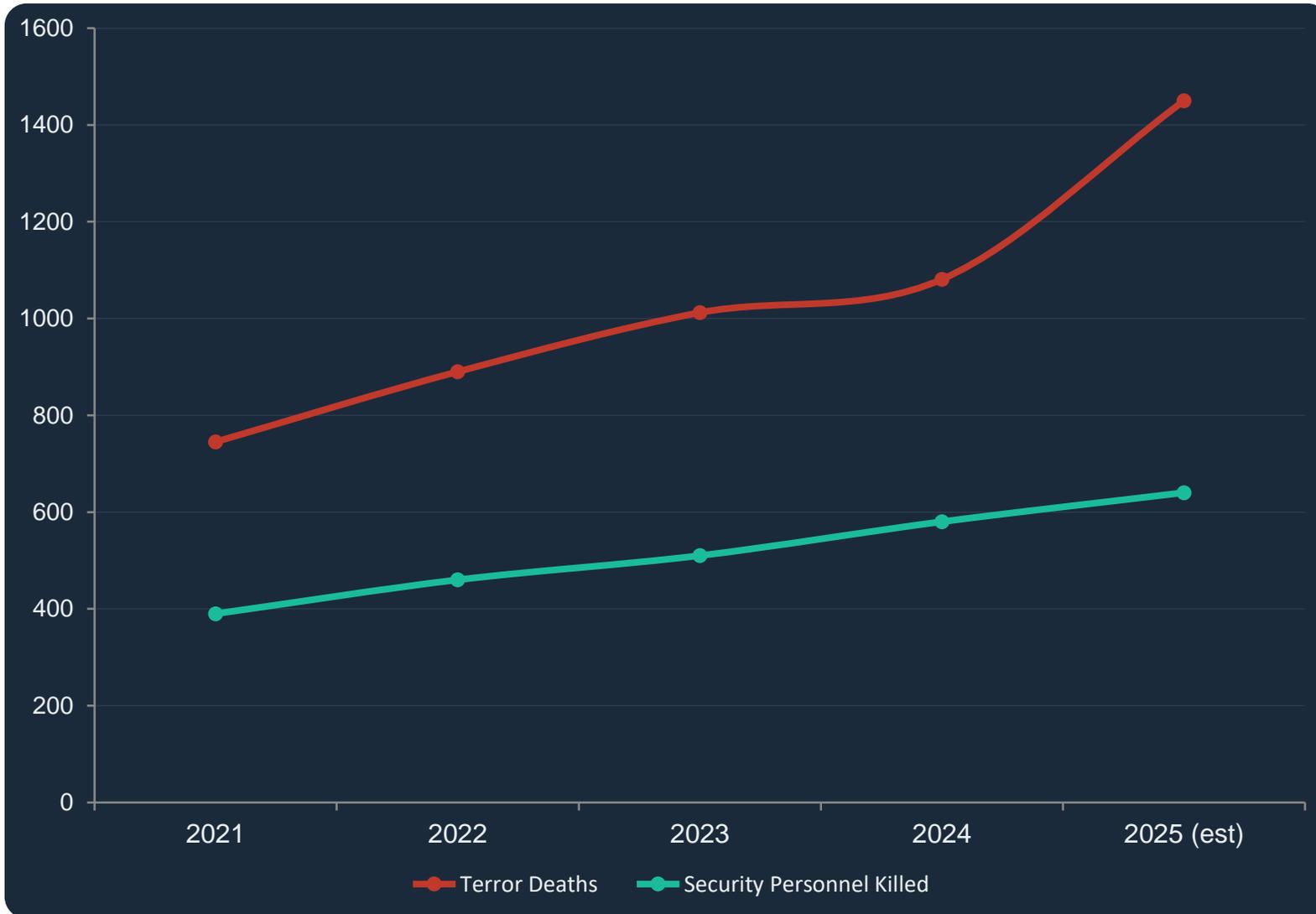
% of Fatalities



■ KP (96%) ■ Balochistan (3%) ■ Other (1%)

500 attacks in KP alone by Aug 2025 | **Aug 2024** was deadliest month in 6 years | **2025** on track to be most violent year since Taliban's return

CASUALTIES & ESCALATION TRENDS | 2021–2025



+45% Rise in terror deaths in 2024 alone

1,081 Terror-related deaths in 2024

73% Overall attack increase vs. pre-2021 baseline

34% Violence surge in 2025 vs. 2024

STRATEGIC OUTLOOK & CONCLUSIONS

KEY FAILURES

Afghan safe havens remain — Taliban actively supports TTP

2021–22 amnesty talks failed; TTP used ceasefire to rearm

Durand Line non-recognition creates diplomatic deadlock

Low conviction rates undermine the National Action Plan

Political divisions obstruct civilian CT leadership

ACTIONS NEEDED

Sustained diplomatic pressure on Kabul to deny TTP safe havens

Balance kinetic ops with civilian development in KP & Balochistan

Close remaining 2% of Durand Line fencing gaps urgently

Strengthen judiciary for higher terrorism conviction rates

Build regional intelligence-sharing frameworks

Verdict: Tactical CT wins are offset by structural failures — Afghan safe havens, diplomatic deadlock, and governance gaps continue to fuel the TTP resurgence.

US Weapons Now Fuel Regional Militancy

- **Taliban security strengthened by abandoned US equipment**
 - \$7.1bn worth left behind in 2021
 - Includes thousands of vehicles, 160+ aircraft
- **TTP gains superior American-origin weapons post-withdrawal**
 - 63 seized weapons match US-supplied serial numbers
- **Afghan Taliban providing consistent support to TTP fighters**
 - UN notes logistical and operational assistance
- **Shared training creating stronger militant capabilities**
 - TTP force estimated at 6,000 fighters
- **US monitoring loss enabled equipment diversion**
 - SIGAR lost visibility after August 2021 takeover

Collapse of US Reconstruction Deepened Security Crisis

- **Two-decade US project failed to deliver stability**
 - \$144.7bn spent on reconstruction (2002–2021)
- **Enormous waste and corruption hollowed Afghan institutions**
 - SIGAR estimates \$26–29.2bn lost to fraud/waste
- **Afghan security sector collapse transferred assets to Taliban**
 - ANDSF received 96,000 vehicles, 427,000 weapons
- **US-built infrastructure now under Taliban control**
 - 131 operational aircraft taken from Afghan Air Force
- **Failed governance choices fueled insurgent recruitment**
 - Backing “corrupt, rights-abusing powerbrokers” worsened collapse

Pakistan Faces Direct Spillover and Intensifying Threats

- **TTP using Taliban-provided sanctuaries for attacks**
 - Cross-border attack killed 16 personnel in Waziristan
- **Superior US weapons increasing lethality of TTP operations**
 - Rifles “significantly superior” to pre-2021 arsenal
- **UN confirms Taliban-issued authorizations to TTP leadership**
 - Guesthouses, weapons permits, movement immunity provided
- **Militants entrenched across key Afghan provinces**
 - Presence in Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar, Kunar, Zabul
- **Weapons diversion reshaping Pakistan’s security landscape**
 - UN and SIGAR warn of regional destabilisation

UN Report (2025)

- **UNSC monitoring report rejects Taliban “no footprint”**
 - Sixteenth report of Analytical Support Team
- **Taliban claim termed “not credible” by UN**
 - Quote: *“That claim is not credible”*
- **Afghanistan viewed as growing regional insecurity source**
 - Neighbors increasingly see spillover risks
- **Taliban pledged Doha commitment, performance questioned**
 - 2020 Doha Agreement
- **Taliban fights ISIL-K, differs on others**
 - UN notes stance “markedly different”

Terrorist Organizations Present in Afghanistan

- **UN lists multiple groups operating in Afghanistan**
 - ISIL-K, TTP, Al Qaeda, ETIM/TIP
- **Additional militant entities also reported present**
 - Jamaat Ansarullah, Ittehadul Mujahideen Pakistan
- **Groups use Afghanistan for external attack planning**
 - “Plan and prepare external attacks”
- **Al Qaeda maintains presence in several provinces**
 - Benefits from “permissive environment”
- **ISIL-K degraded but remains resilient internationally**
 - Attacks “inside Afghanistan and abroad”

Proof of Taliban Harboring TTP

- **UN describes TTP enjoying Taliban elements' support**
 - “Strong support from elements within Taliban”
- **Taliban denies and deflects restraining responsibility**
 - UN: denial and deflection continues
- **Taliban internally divided: liability versus loyalty**
 - Some seniors view TTP “a liability”
- **Taliban unlikely to act against TTP**
 - “Unlikely to confront or act”
- **Even willing Taliban may lack capability**
 - “May lack the ability”

Economic Risks of an Open Durand Line

- **Open border increases large-scale smuggling opportunities**
 - Illicit trade losses: **PKR 3.4 trillion yearly**
- **Government revenue declines from customs evasion**
 - ATT misuse: **PKR 1 trillion annual loss**
- **Foreign currency outflows worsen fiscal instability**
 - **\$5 million smuggled daily; \$2B annually**
- **Organized crime networks expand across borderlands**
 - Narcotics trade: **\$102B Afghan opium economy**
- **Security instability disrupts formal business activities**
 - **Seizures 2018–23: PKR 484M narcotics, 145M arms**

Macroeconomic Impact of Unregulated Cross-Border Movement

- **Smuggled goods undermine domestic market competition**
 - Tea smuggling: **30% market share, PKR 10B loss**
- **Fuel smuggling damages petroleum revenue collection**
 - Diesel smuggling: **one-third national demand**
- **Automotive smuggling hurts manufacturing and imports**
 - Vehicles: **12% market share, parts 57% smuggled**
- **Currency flight deepens foreign reserves crisis**
 - Annual loss: **\$2 billion foreign currency**
- **Illicit economy strengthens insurgent financing networks**
 - **Narcotics transit directly funds militant groups**

Benefits of Formalized and Managed Border Controls

- **Regulated movement supports stable bilateral trade flows**
 - Potential trade: **over \$5 billion annually**
- **Formal systems reduce rampant smuggling activities**
 - Customs revenue recovery: hundreds of billions possible
- **Improved border security attracts foreign investment**
 - Stability reduces money-laundering risk rating
- **Formal transit increases government customs revenues**
 - Transit fee potential: **\$150 million yearly**
- **Structured border enhances infrastructure development planning**
 - **Example: pipelines, corridors, cross-border rail links**

Strategic Necessity of a Secure Durand Line

- **Porous borders fuel terrorism and insurgency risks**
 - War on Terror cost: **\$118 billion cumulative**
- **Smuggling reduces Pakistan's competitiveness regionally**
 - Lost Afghan market share: **65% to Iran, India**
- **Enhanced controls strengthen national economic governance**
 - Reduced tax evasion and shadow economy size
- **Border fencing improves intelligence and surveillance capability**
 - IBMS deployment enhances monitoring effectiveness
- **Stability encourages legal trade and investment confidence**
 - Directly impacts exports and foreign currency inflows

Current Situation (2024–2025)

Major Tensions

- **TTP Resurgence:** Taliban's inaction against the TTP is a major irritant for Pakistan
- **Border Clashes:** Frequent skirmishes at Torkham and Chaman
- **Refugee Expulsions:** Pakistan began deporting undocumented Afghan nationals (-1.7 million hosted)
- **Trade Drop:** Formal trade has decreased; informal smuggling persists

Diplomatic Channels

- Limited official dialogue
- China and Russia occasionally act as mediators

Diplomatic Channels

- Limited official dialogue
- China and Russia occasionally act as mediators
- Pakistan provides humanitarian aid, but demands security cooperation



Future Outlook

Opportunities

- **Border Management:** Establishing a jointly monitored border regime
- **Transit Trade:** Reviving the Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA)
- **Energy Corridors:** Completing TAPI and CASA–1000 projects
- **Counterterrorism:** Shared intelligence to neutralize TTP and ISIS-K

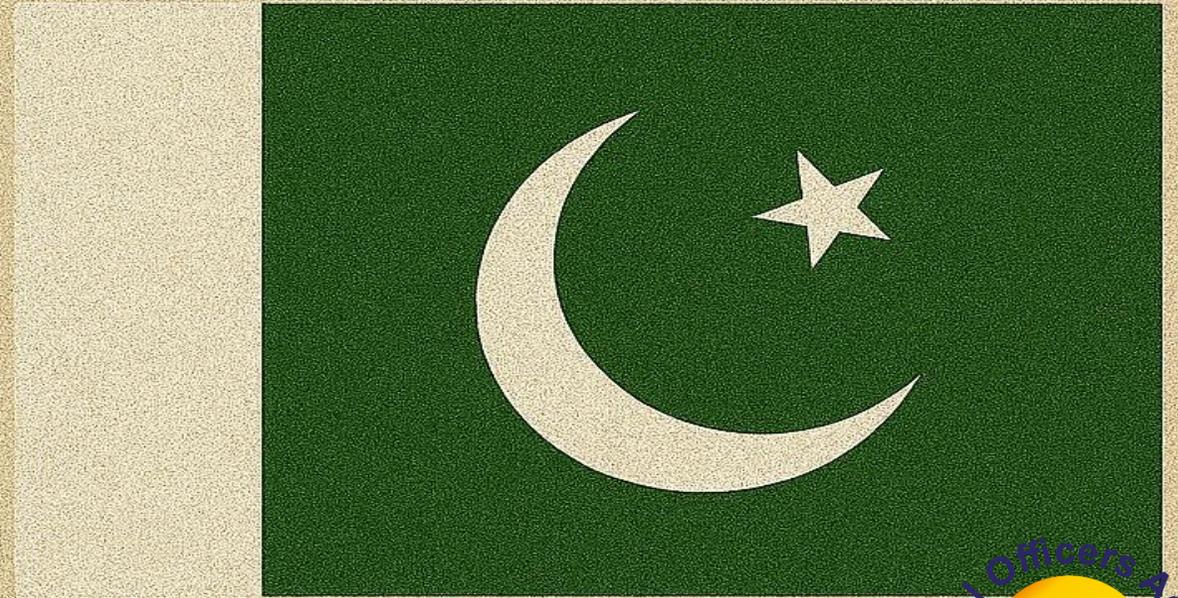
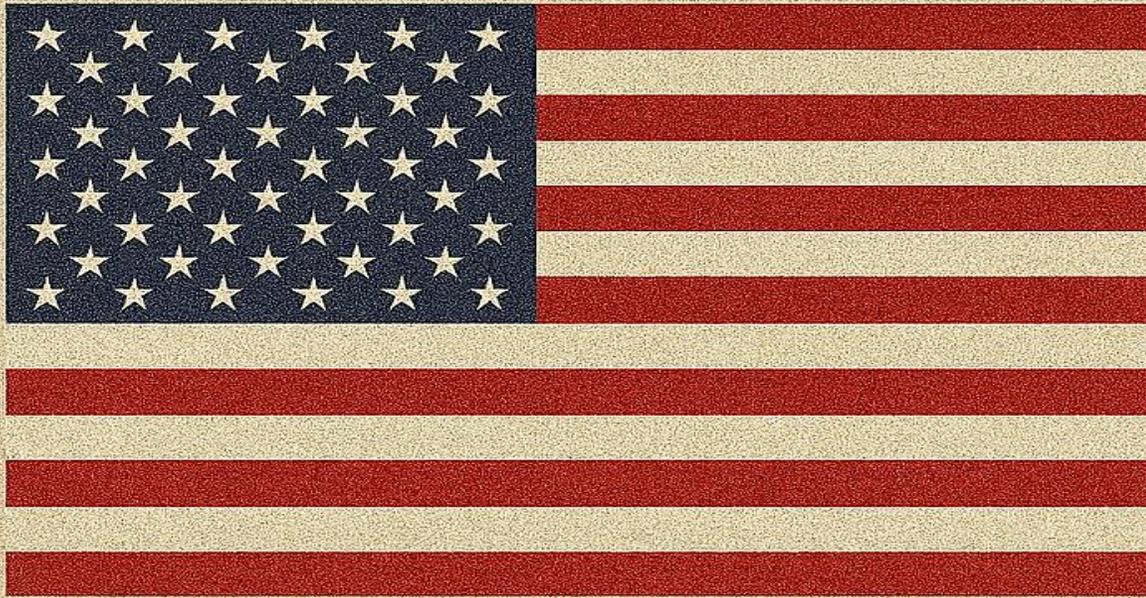
Challenges

- Taliban's ideological rigidity
- Afghan refusal to recognize Durand Line
- Competing regional players (India, Iran)

Recommendations

- Hybrid Approach to deal with TTP
 - Temporary military operations to uproot terrorism from the country
 - Socio-economic uplifting of marginalized areas as long term policy
- Diplomacy and talks with the Taliban Government to solve border Issues
- Trade MOUs with Afghanistan
- Optimization of CPEC: Engage Afghanistan
- Pakistan needs to put its house in order: Political and Economic Stability
- National Consensus on Zero Terrorism Policy
- Capacity Building of CTD and Regular Audit and Performance Review

USA-PAK TIES: An Overview



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1947–1953: The Foundational Years

Aug 1947

Pakistan gains independence; US among first nations to recognize Pakistan (Oct 1947).

1948

Pakistan requests US military & economic aid; Washington cautiously responsive amid South Asia policy formulation.

1950

PM Liaquat Ali Khan visits Washington; chooses US over Soviet Union — a defining strategic tilt.

1951

Pakistan receives first US economic aid package (\$10 million). Foundation for future dependency laid.

1953

Eisenhower administration views Pakistan as key Cold War frontline state due to its geographic proximity to USSR.

WHY USA MATTERED TO PAKISTAN

- Security umbrella against India post-partition wars
- Economic reconstruction of a nascent state
- Access to military hardware & modernisation
- Diplomatic backing in UN on Kashmir dispute
- Counter-balance to Afghan–Soviet threat from north **KEY INSIGHT**

Pakistan's early pro-US tilt was strategic, not ideological — driven by survival imperatives.

Early Dependence & Strategic Alignment (1947–1971)

Based on Abdul Sattar Pakistan's Foreign Policy



Joined US-led alliances (SEATO/CENTO) for security against India



Received \$2.5B+ US aid in 1950s–60s, boosting military but creating dependency



Allowed U-2 spy flights from Peshawar, showing Cold War value to US



US neutrality in 1965 & 1971 wars caused strategic disappointment

Analysis: Pakistan was loyal, but US was transactional and India-focused

By Ahmad Malik

SEATO

Southeast Asia Treaty
Organization

Formed: 1954
Headquarters:
Bangkok, Thailand



- **Purpose:** Created as a collective defense alliance to contain the spread of communism in South-East Asia during the Cold War.
- **Founding Members:** USA, UK, France, Australia, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines.
- **Pakistan's Role:** Joined to gain Western military and economic support and secure allies against India.
- **Key Limitation:** SEATO lacked a standing military force and had no binding mutual defense clause, making it weaker than NATO.
- **Dissolution:** Due to internal divisions and limited relevance, SEATO was disbanded in 1977.

By Ahmad Malik





CENTO

Central Treaty Organization

Formed: 1954 **Headquarters:** Bangkok, Thailand

Dissolved: 1979

Purpose: To defense alliance against Soviet expansion in the Middle East and South-Central Asia during the Cold War—a part of a containment strategy

Founding Members: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom (USA supported CENTO but was not an official member)

Original Name: Initially called the *Baghdad Pact* (1955) before Iraq withdrew in 1959, and renamed CENTO

Pakistan's Role: Sought security guarantees and Western military aid to counterbalance India and gain strategic leverage

Key Weaknesses: • No collective military force • Lack of US membership
• Dissolution after Iran's 1979 revolution

By Ahmad Malik

COLD WAR ALLIANCE ERA

1954–1989: Strategic Partnership

SEATO 1954

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Pakistan joined as a frontline non-SE Asian ally. Guaranteed US military support against communist aggression. Pakistan gained \$500M+ in military aid.

\$500M+

Military Aid

CENTO 1955

Central Treaty Organization (Baghdad Pact). Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, UK. US backed but not formally a member. Key instrument of 'Northern Tier' containment against USSR.

Northern Tier

Strategy

Bilateral Pacts 1959

US–Pakistan Bilateral Defence Agreement (5 March 1959). US committed to take 'appropriate action' against communist aggression on Pakistan — Islamabad's coveted security guarantee.

1959

Defence Pact

1965 & 1971 WARS:

US imposed arms embargo on both India & Pakistan during 1965 war — deeply disappointing Islamabad. In 1971, Nixon's 'tilt toward Pakistan' was diplomatic but failed to prevent dismemberment. US sent USS Enterprise task force as show of support, but East Pakistan became Bangladesh. Massive trust erosion followed.

COLD WAR ALLIANCE ERA

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WAR ON TERROR PARTNERSHIP

2001–2011: Front-Line State Revival

\$33B

Total US Aid
2001–2011

~3,500

Pakistani
Soldiers Killed

80,000

Pakistani Civilian
Casualties (Indirect)

350+

Drone Strikes
on Pakistani Soil

Sep 2001

Colin Powell calls Gen. Musharraf. Pakistan granted 72 hrs to decide. Musharraf agrees to 7 US demands — airbases, intelligence sharing, cutting Taliban supplies.

2002

Pakistan designated 'Major Non-NATO Ally' (MNNA). CSF (Coalition Support Fund) reimbursements begin — critical foreign exchange for Pakistan.

2004

Waziristan Accord failure. US begins pressure for expanded military ops in FATA. Pakistani Army launches Operation Al-Mizan — thousands of troops deployed.

2009

Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act: \$7.5B over 5 years for civilian development. Conditions on bill spark civil-military crisis in Pakistan over 'sovereignty clauses'.

2007

Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) operation. Suicide attacks inside Pakistan spike dramatically. Pakistan paradox: fighting terrorism while hosting Afghan Taliban leadership in Quetta Shura.

2010

Floods: US provides \$750M relief — largest ever humanitarian response. Goodwill brief. Raymond Davis affair in 2011 severely damages ties.

May 2011

Operation Neptune Spear — OBL found in Abbottabad. US conducts raid without informing Pakistan. Seismic damage to bilateral trust. ISI credibility internationally devastated.

2011

Salala Check-post attack: NATO kills 24 Pakistani soldiers. Pakistan shuts NATO supply lines for 7 months; demands drone halt. Relations in freefall.

STRAINED RELATIONS ERA

2011–2022: Trust Deficit & Recalibration

2011 WATERSHED: THREE CRISES IN ONE YEAR — Raymond Davis affair | OBL Abbottabad raid | Salala check-post massacre

2012

Pakistan re-opens NATO supply routes after 7 months following US apology for Salala. Haqqani Network tensions escalate — US calls it 'veritable arm of ISI'.

2018

US suspends \$1.3B in security assistance. Imran Khan elected; initially anti-US rhetoric. Pakistan placed on FATF Grey List (June 2018) — massive financial pressure.

2013

Nawaz Sharif elected; focuses on economy over geopolitics. US drone program continues despite parliamentary resolutions demanding cessation.

2021

US withdraws from Afghanistan (Aug). Pakistan accused of facilitating Taliban return. Strains over Kabul airport attack. Biden does not call PM Imran Khan for 7+ months.

2015

Obama visits India, not Pakistan. CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) announced — \$46B. US alarm grows over China's expanding footprint.

2022

Imran Khan alleges US-backed 'regime change' (cipher controversy). Pakistan exits FATF Grey List (Oct 2022). Shehbaz Sharif government adopts more cooperative stance.

2017

Trump tweets: 'Pakistan has given us nothing but lies and deceit.' Afghan policy review blames Pakistan for safe havens. CSF payments halted: \$800M suspended.



CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Structural Contradictions in Pakistan–USA Relations

Transactional vs. Strategic

Relations have been consistently transactional — US values Pakistan as a tool, not a partner. Aid spikes during crises (Afghan jihad, WoT), then collapses. Pakistan's strategic depth narrative conflicts with US regional interests.

The Afghan Paradox

Pakistan simultaneously presented as key counter-terrorism partner AND accused of harbouring Taliban/Haqqani Network. 'Strategic ambiguity' doctrine — Pakistan used Afghanistan as 'strategic depth' insurance, creating fundamental conflict with US goals.

China Factor

CPEC (\$62B) has fundamentally altered the equation. US views growing China-Pakistan nexus as threatening. Pakistan argues it is exercising sovereign foreign policy. Strategic competition between US and China now plays out through Pakistan.

Nuclear Ambiguity

US turned a blind eye to Pakistan's nuclear programme during Afghan jihad (1980s). Post-Chagai tests, punitive sanctions applied. US now seeks non-proliferation commitments while Pakistan demands India's programme be addressed equally.

Aid Dependency & Leverage

Decades of US aid created dependency but also resentment. Pakistan's civilian governments often weakened by IMF/US conditions; military remains dominant partner for US. Democratic consolidation undermined by security-first engagement model.

Trust Deficit

OBL raid (2011) epitomised mutual distrust. US never fully trusted ISI; Pakistan never trusted US commitment to stability. Each party hedged, creating self-fulfilling prophecy of unreliable alliance — the core structural failure.

US–Pakistan Alignment Post-1979:

- After Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, General Zia-ul-Haq emerged as a key US ally, facilitating the Afghan jihad through Pakistan's territory.
- Massive US & Saudi Funding:
 - **Over \$3.2 billion in US military and economic aid flowed to Pakistan (1981–1987).**
 - CIA and ISI coordinated arms and funds for Afghan Mujahedeen.
- Rise of Jihadist Infrastructure:
 - Thousands of madrassas, training camps, and religious networks emerged — laying the foundation for future militant groups like Taliban and Al-Qaeda.
- Strategic Abandonment Post-1989:
 - After Soviet withdrawal, the US abruptly disengaged, cutting aid and leaving Pakistan with a militarized, radicalized region and millions of Afghan refugees.
- **Analysis: Zia maximized Pakistan's strategic utility for short-term gains, but the unregulated jihadist ecosystem created during this era triggered long-term security blowback.**

Sanctions & Mistrust (1990s)

- *Source: Husain Haqqani*
- Pressler Amendment halted US military aid completely
- Nuclear program triggered global sanctions on Pakistan
- No strategic engagement after Soviet withdrawal ended
- Aid cuts deepened Pakistan's sense of betrayal
- Narrative of abandonment fueled long-term mistrust

Post-9/11 Partnership: Cooperation & Confusion

- *Sources: Daniel Markey, Ahmed Rashid*
- US–Pakistan alliance peaked after 9/11 attacks
- Ties remained transactional, focused on counterterrorism
- Pakistan pursued strategic depth in Afghanistan
- Supported US operations but sheltered Taliban factions
- Trust deficit worsened due to “double game” perception



Recent Trends (2014–2025)

- *Source: Javid Husain*
- US tilt toward India in Indo-Pacific strategy
- China–Pakistan axis strengthened through CPEC cooperation
- US exit from Afghanistan changed regional dynamics
- Pakistan's dependency on US influence declined gradually
- Policy must shift from dependency to diversification
- Policy under Trump 2.0.

Diplomatic Realignment and High-Level Engagement

- **Presidential Meeting:**
- **Army Chief visits in 2025 for high-level meetings and CENTCOM change-of-command ceremony**
- **U.S. Mediation Success**
- **USAID resumption in July**
- **Shifting Regional Favor**
 - The U.S. imposition of new tariffs on India in 2025, linked to India's continued Russian oil trade, has implicitly positioned Pakistan as a more favored regional partner.

Economic Cooperation and Trade Growth

- Trade Deal reducing tariff on textiles
- Record Trade volume
 - **Total trade volume reached \$7.6 b in FY 2024-25,**
 - **A 16% increase, with a 9% increase in Pakistan's export to the U.S. in the first quarter of FY 2025-26**
- **Major U.S. Investment:**
 - **U.S. Strategic Metals announced a \$500 m investment in Pak's critical mineral sector**
- **U.S-Funded Port Exploration: Port Pasni**

The Triangular Nexus – Interconnected Relations

Geopolitical ties shaping Pakistan–US–Afghanistan relations



Pakistan–USA Trade Relations (FY 2024–25)

- United States remains Pakistan’s largest export market
 - Total trade volume: **\$7.6 billion**
- Pakistan enjoys strong trade surplus with USA
 - Exports: **\$6.028 billion**
- Imports from USA remain comparatively moderate
 - Imports: **\$2.588 billion**
- Bilateral trade showed strong year-on-year growth
 - Trade volume growth: **16% increase**
- Economic ties remain resilient despite political shifts
 - USA remains key destination for textiles, goods

Pakistan–Afghanistan Trade Trends (CY 2025)

- Pakistan-Afghanistan trade shows post-instability recovery
 - Total trade volume: **\$2.41 billion**
- Pakistan exports dominate bilateral trade structure
 - Exports (CY 2025): **\$1.39 billion (annualized)**
- Afghan imports into Pakistan increased significantly
 - Imports (CY 2025): **\$612.5 million**
- Earlier fiscal year showed limited Afghan imports
 - Imports (FY 2024–25): **\$25.898 million**
- Trade growth despite political and border challenges
 - Recovery from earlier security disruptions

India's Trade Comparison with USA and Afghanistan

- India–USA trade volume dwarfs Pakistan–USA trade
 - Total trade: **\$132.2 billion**
- Indian exports to USA reached record levels
 - Exports: **\$86.51 billion (FY 2024–25)**
- US tariff hikes disrupted Indian export momentum
 - Tariffs raised from **10% to 50%**
- India expanded Afghanistan trade amid Pak-Afghan rift
 - Total trade: **\$1.0087 billion**
- Alternative routes sustained India–Afghan trade flows
 - Chabahar Port, Kabul–Delhi air corridor

People-to-People & Cultural Linkages (2025–26)

- **Pak–US cultural relations show pragmatic maturity**
 - TechGirls, CEE, Global UGRAD active
- **Educational cooperation expanding beyond security domain**
 - Focus on STEM, IT, tourism, hospitality
- **Pakistani-American diaspora acts as cultural bridge**
 - Officials urge translating links into strategy
- **Pak–Afghan people-to-people ties severely disrupted**
 - Torkham, Chaman closures separate families
- **Refugee repatriation reshaping border social fabric**
 - 99,000 Afghans returned in Oct 2025



Core Themes: Trust Deficit & Strategic Confusion

- *Source: Daniel Markey*
- Deep mistrust shaped US–Pakistan interactions
- Both sides pursued conflicting strategic goals
- **“Double game”** accusations damaged cooperation
- US accused Pakistan of backing Taliban
- Pakistan believed US abandoned it again

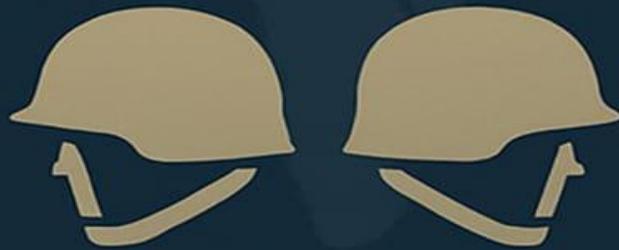
India Factor in Afghanistan–Pakistan Dynamics

- Afghan–India strategic alliance raised Pakistan’s threat perception
- India invested \$3B+ in Afghan infrastructure & projects (roads, Parliament building, dams)
- Shahtoot Dam in Kabul to store 146M m³ water – may reduce flow to Pakistan via Kabul River
- India’s presence in Afghan security & development sectors boosts influence (training Afghan forces, soft power diplomacy)
- **Javid Husain: Advocates engagement-based diplomacy to offset Indian influence**

Safe Havens & Cross-Border Attacks / Aid, Dependency & Narrative War

- *Sources: Ahmed Rashid & Husain Haqqani*
- TTP conducts attacks from Afghan territory (*Rashid*)
- Taliban denial or silent complicity fuels tensions
- US aid tied to counterterrorism & Afghan stability
- Civil–military divide sends mixed signals to US (*Haqqani*)
- Narrative war deepens mistrust between both sides

Contemporary Challenges & Strategic Shifts



BY AHMAD MALIK

China–Pakistan–US Triangle

- US sees CPEC as a strategic challenge, raising concerns over regional influence
- Pakistan benefits from CPEC's infrastructure investments, but faces rising scrutiny over dependency
- China invested **\$540M (2023-26)** in Afghan oil extraction at Amu Darya, signaling growing economic ties with the Taliban regime
- Tariff-free trade incentives and mining contracts further embed China in Afghanistan's post-2021 economy
- **Javid Husain recommends balanced diplomacy, engaging both the US and China to safeguard Pakistan's strategic autonomy**

ACADEMIC & EXPERT PERSPECTIVES

Scholarly Views & CSS Relevant Analysis

"Pakistan-US relations have been characterised by a recurring cycle of engagement and estrangement, driven by America's short-term tactical needs rather than long-term strategic investment."

Realist School

— Bruce Riedel, Brookings Institution

"The fundamental problem is that the two countries have never shared the same threat perception — what Pakistan sees as an existential India threat, Washington sees as a manageable regional rivalry."

Structural View

— Hussain Haqqani, Former Pak Ambassador

"US-Pakistan relations are best understood through the lens of asymmetric dependence — Pakistan is far more dependent on US goodwill than vice versa, yet exercises outsized strategic leverage due to its geographic position."

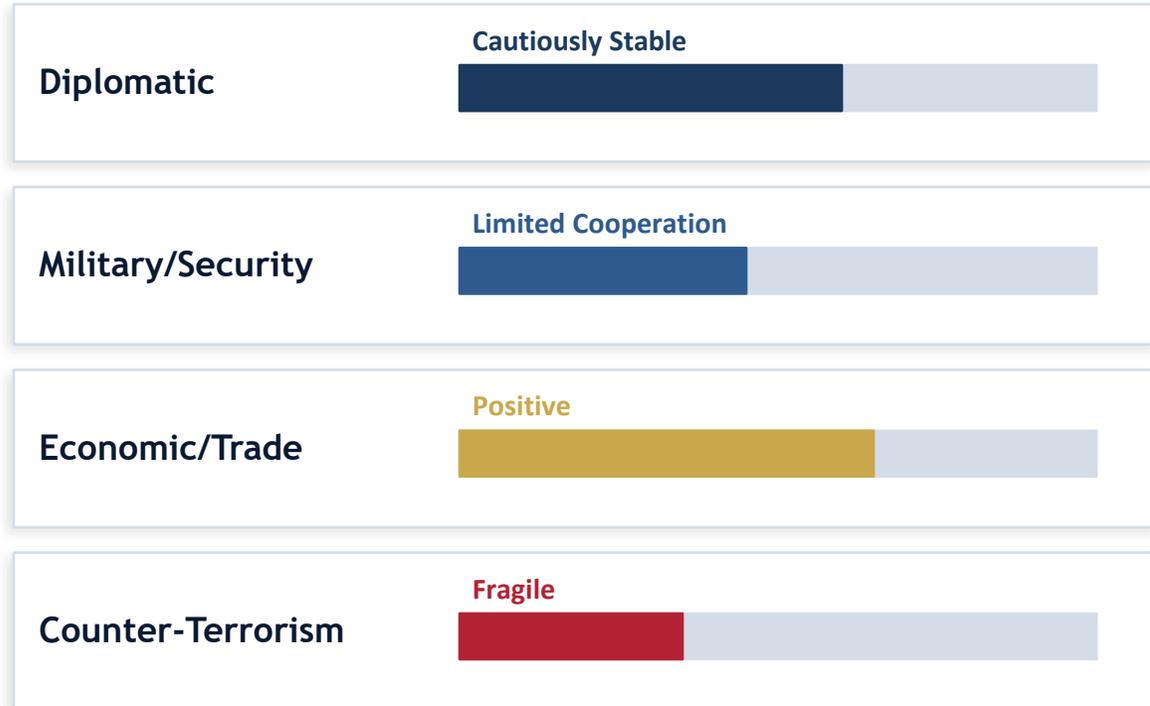
Dependency Theory

— Stephen P. Cohen, Foreign Policy Analyst



CURRENT SITUATION: 2025-2026

State of Pakistan–USA Relations Today



OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Relations remain functional but sub-optimal. Neither estranged nor truly aligned. Pakistan navigates a multi-vector foreign policy — balancing US, China, Gulf and domestic pressures simultaneously.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS 2024-2026

- IMF bailout (\$7B, Sept 2024) facilitated with tacit US support — signalling stabilisation interest
- Pakistan-US Defence Consultative Group meetings resumed after 2-year hiatus (2024)
- Trump 2.0 administration (Jan 2025): transactional approach; focus on trade reciprocity
- Pakistan imposes counter-tariffs in response to US tariff hike (April 2025 trade tensions)
- Visits by US Sec. of State to Islamabad (2025) — Afghanistan & regional security focus
- FATF: Pakistan maintains 'White List' status; US acknowledges NACTA improvements
- TTP cross-border operations remain key US concern; Pakistan demands Afghan soil clearance



FUTURE OUTLOOK & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Pathways Forward for Pakistan–USA Relations

Scenario A: Renewed Strategic Partnership

Probability: Moderate

- US re-engages Pakistan as counterweight to China's BRI expansion
- Minerals diplomacy: Pakistan's lithium/copper reserves attract US investment
- Afghan stability requires Pakistan — forcing re-engagement
- IMF-backed economic stabilisation creates favourable climate

Scenario B: Managed Transactionalism

Probability: Most Likely

- Issue-specific cooperation without broad strategic partnership
- Trade relations expand but security cooperation stays limited
- China factor prevents deep realignment toward US orbit
- Pakistan maintains balancing act; US accepts limitations

Scenario C: Continued Drift

Probability: Possible

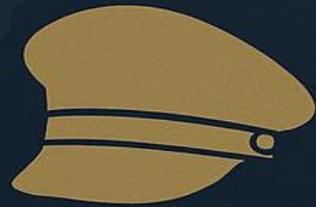
- Pakistan's internal instability reduces US appetite for engagement
- CPEC deepening widens strategic divergence
- Another security incident triggers sanctions or CSF suspension
- Pakistan pivots more toward Gulf/China; US marginalised

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAKISTAN:

Diversify economic partnerships • Reduce aid dependency • People-to-people diplomacy • Civilian leadership in foreign policy • Consistent CT commitment

The Way Forward – Policy Options & Debate

📍 Pakistan's Strategic Choices

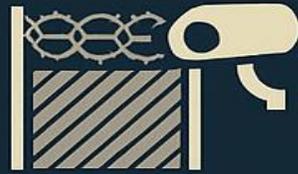


The Way Forward – Core Policy Priorities



National Interest

End 'client-state' mindset; pursue strategic autonomy



Border Management

Smart surveillance
Durand Line clarity



TTP Strategy

Military + ideological response; engage elders



Foreign Policy

End civil-military duality; institutionalize decisions



Security Architecture

Link security to economic resilience

DEBATE:

Was Pakistan a Victim, Facilitator, or Survivor in the War on Terror?



VICTIM



FACILITATOR



SURVIVOR

Thank You
Any Questions?

