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Discuss the contours of Pakistan's strategic relations with India and Afghanistan in detail. Do you foresee any serious challenges from these neighbours in near ~~future~~ future? Explain your answer with scholarly evidence. CA-25

1. Introduction

Pakistan's strategic relation with India and Afghanistan are defined by asymmetries of power, unresolved disputes and cross-border security concerns. These dynamics are likely to generate a serious issue for Pakistan. Nuclear deterrence has reduced the war with India, but border skirmishes, hybrid warfare, terrorism from Afghan soil and hydro politics has kept Pakistan under significant pressure.

2. Contours of Pakistan's Strategic Relations with India

A. Conventional and Nuclear Imbalance

India's armed forces (personnel, air force, navy, armour) significantly outnumber Pakistan's, creating continuous conventional imbalance. Additionally, India is the world's third largest military spender, while Pakistan's spending is around \$10-11 billion almost 8-9 times smaller than that of India.

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SIPRI estimates India ~172 and Pakistan ~170 nuclear warheads in 2024, making South Asia one of the most nuclear-dense regions."

SIPRI Yearbook, 2024-25

B. Targeting Indus Basin Hydropolitics

Pakistan has accused India of water weaponization through projects like Ratto, Kishanganga and Baglihar dams on western rivers that are allocated for Pakistan. Pakistan blames violation of Indus Waters Treaty.

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Pakistan's agriculture is heavily dependent on the Indus Basin system with around 80-90% of its food production."

World Bank

C. Competition for Regional Influence

India wants to be regional hegemon and key partner of the US. While Pakistan is establishing good relations with China through development projects like CPEC and BRI. It is creating a US-India rivalry and China-Pakistan rivalry and alignment.

Pakistan	CPEC, BRI
India	QUAD

Source: Reuters

3. Contents of Pakistan's Strategic Relations with Afghanistan

A. Dispute over the Durand line Border

Afghanistan has historically refused to recognise the Durand line as an international border. There has been multiple dispute over border porcity, border post and crossing rules that usedly led to chacher between two muslim Neighbourly countries

B. Historical, Cultural and Ethnic linkages

Pakistan has hosted 3-5 million Afghan refugees at different times, making it one of the world's largest refugee-hosting states. Moreover, Pakistan's both the both side of borders share ethnic culture, language, religion and trade across the Durand line.

"3 million Afghans in total refugees in Pakistan."

UNHCR, 2024

C. Afghanistan's Dependence on Trade and Connectivity via Pakistan

Afghanistan is landlocked and historically dependent on Pakistan for its trade under the Afghan^{transit} Trade Agreement.

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for sea access.

"Month-long Torkham border closure
inflicts \$45 million trade losses."
Financial Times

4. Security Challenges From India

A. Tensions Beyond the Disputed Region

While India-administered Kashmir remains the core dispute, crises have embroiled beyond the Line of Control (LoC). After Pulwama attack 2019, India suspended diplomatic channels and hardened its posture across the entire frontier.

B. Threat of Conventional War under the Nuclear Shadow

India's much larger conventional forces, combined with surgical strike doctrine and proactive doctrine, create pressure on Pakistan to rely more heavily on nuclear deterrence that has increased crisis instability.

Three Nuclear-era Crises	
Kargil	1999
Kargil 2001	2001
Balakot	2019
Pulwama	2019

The Guardian

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C. Support to separatist groups

Pakistan accuses Indian Intelligence ~~Body~~ of supporting Baloch separatist outfit such as BIA and using Afghan territory to destabilize Pakistan. However, Pakistan has presented evidence at the UN and Blamed India for attacks like the 2016 Kulbhushan Tildhari

D. Threats to Pakistan's Water Security

After Palkhyam incident 2025, India minister linked India water security with plans to divert flow towards Pakistan.

E. Rise of Hybrid Warfare

Think-tank and Pakistani official describe this as "fifth-generation warfare" where Pakistan is targeted via Fake News, lobby network and cyber squatting of domains to undermine its global image.

"15-year operation with hundreds of fake media outlets and NGOs across 90+ countries, amplifying anti-Pakistan narratives through ANI."

EU DisinfoLab 2020

5. Security Challenges from Afghanistan

A. Rising Terrorist Activities from Afghan Soil

UN and Pakistani statements to UNSC reportedly warn that TTP, Al-Qaeda, IS-K and Baluch group operate from soil of Afghanistan and pose the gravest threat to Pakistan.

"More than 20 terrorist organisations are present in Afghanistan and TTP is becoming an 'umbrella organisation' for regional groups."

UNSC Briefing

B. Persistent Cross-border Skirmishes

Frequent attacks and clashes at Farkhor, Chaman and other border points, including artillery duels and air strikes have caused dozens of casualties on both sides and closure of crossings.

C. Disruptions to trade and transit

Border closures and political tensions have repeatedly disrupted Afghan transit trade and media showing that stranded trucks and serious economic losses for both sides.

"10-day border closure caused \$45 billion economic losses to Afghanistan."

Reuters, 2025

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D. Afghanistan as a space for Anti-Pakistan Intelligence Operation

Pakistan fears the existence of hostile intelligence agencies exploit Afghanistan's weak governance to support Baloch insurgents and TTP faction.

"Presence of 20+ terror outfits in Afghanistan."

UNSC Briefing

E. Increasing Drug Trafficking and Crime Spillover

Drug pollutes fuel organized ~~crime~~ ^{crime}, corruption and terror financing inside Pakistan adding another layer to security challenges.

"Afghanistan has produced up to 80% of the world's opium."

UNODC, 2024

6. Conclusion

Pakistan will keep facing low-level tension from India through border fights, nuclear posture and arms build-up, with risk of nuclear weapons. While, from Afghanistan side, Pakistan will face threat of cross-border terrorism,

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border clashes, refugee issues and drug
trafficking. Thus, Afghanistan is Pakistan's
short-term security danger, while
Taliban remains its long term strategic
rival.