

Taliban Rule and Pakistan's Western Security Dilemma: Militancy, Border Fault Lines, and Regional Instability

Introduction: When Regime Change Across The Border Redefines National Security

The return of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has reshaped Pakistan's security environment more profoundly than anticipated. Instead of stability, Pakistan now faces resurgent militancy, border insecurity, economic vulnerability, and regional uncertainty. These challenges are not episodic; they are structural outcomes of Afghanistan's Post-2021 security landscape, turning Pakistan's western frontier into a persistent security dilemma.

Analytical lens: Security Dilemma in a Fragile Regional Order

From a Realist IR perspective, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations under Taliban rule reflect a security dilemma:

- Taliban prioritize regime survival and ideological unity
- Pakistan prioritizes counter-terrorism, sovereignty, and border control

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As Stephen Walt explains, states respond to perceived threats, not intentions.

Simply defined:
what Kabul sees as internal accommodation, Pakistan experiences as externalized insecurity.

(I) Internal Security Implications: Revival of military and ideological spillover.

Re-Energization of TTP: Afghan space as a Strategic Enabler.

The most direct impact of Taliban rule has been the revival of the

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

what changes After 2021:

- TTP leadership gained safe sanctuaries in eastern Afghanistan.
- Reduced pressure on militant networks.
- Increased cross-border attacks on KP and Balochistan.

Dr. Muhammad Amir Rana notes:

"The Taliban takeover removed both physical and psychological constraints on the TTP"

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Militants got space, safety, and confidence.

Ideological Spillover: Taliban victory as a Psychological Boost to Extremism
Taliban success produced a symbolic victory for jihadist groups.

Effects inside Pakistan:

Revival of jihadist propaganda

Glorification of armed struggle

Increased risk of youth radicalization

Ayesha Siddiqi observes:

"Symbolic victories often outlast battlefield gains."

The Taliban win strengthened extremist thinking, not just fighters.

Expansion of ISIS-K: Multiplying the Threat Spectrum.

Alongside TTP, ISIS-K has expanded from Afghan territory.

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Why this matters for Pakistan:

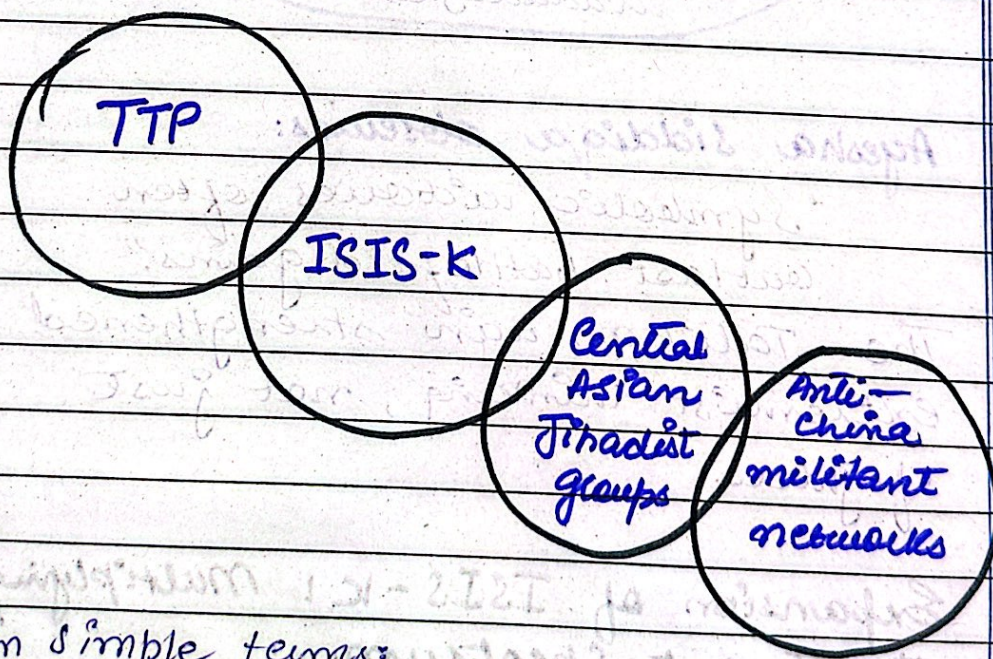
- Draws defectors from militant factions
- Prefers mass-casualty attacks
- Targets Pakistan, China, and regional states.

Riffat Hussain warns:

“ISIS-K internationalizes Pakistan's security challenge?”

Afghanistan as a Hub of Transnational Militancy

Afghanistan today hosts:



In simple terms:

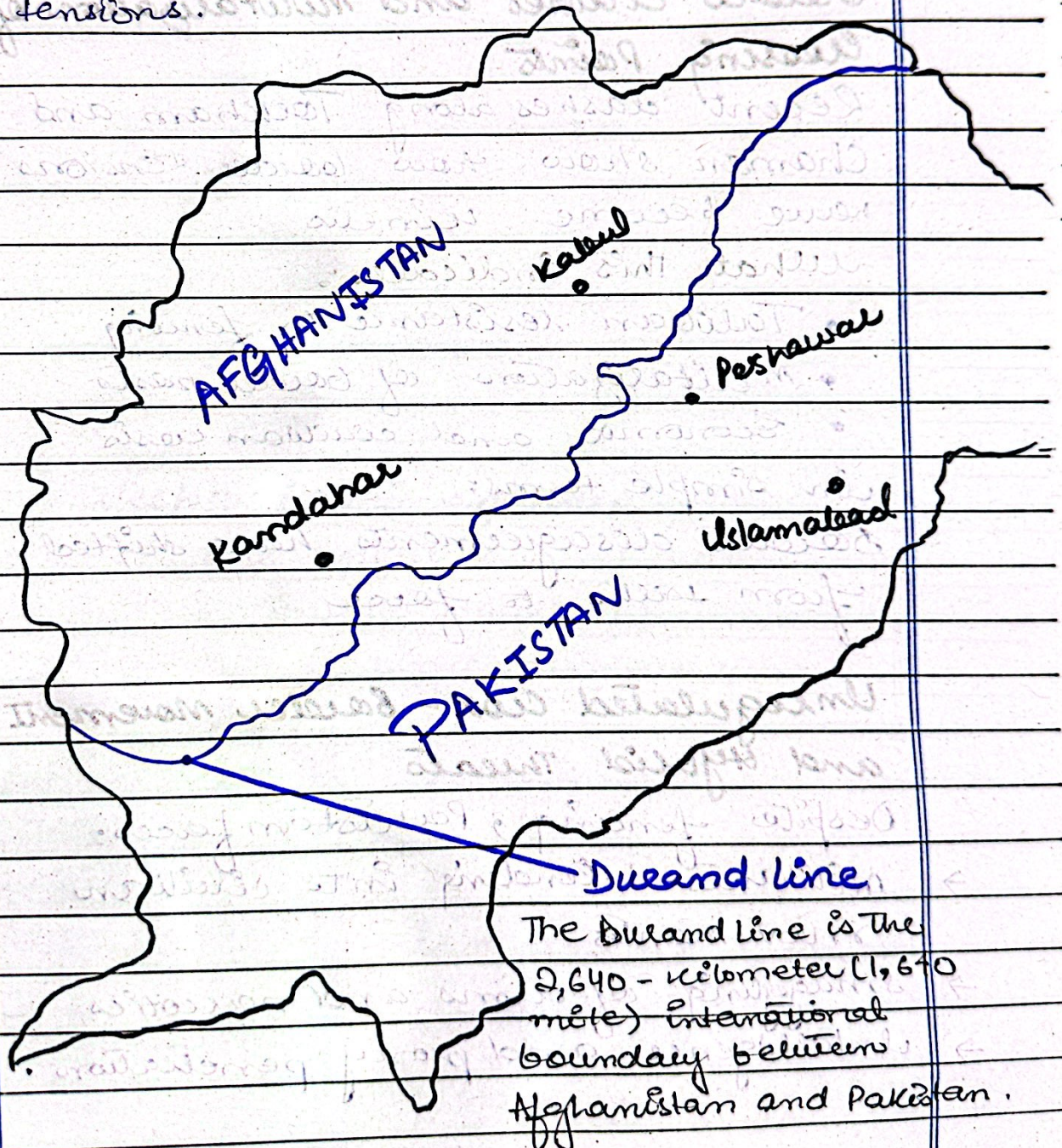
Afghanistan has become a launchpad of regional insecurity.

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(II) Border management Crisis: Structural Fault lines under stress

Duand Line Dispute, an unresolved Border, A Persistent Flash point
Taliban resistance to recognizing the Duand Line has renewed border tensions.



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Consequences:

- Border skirmishes
- Opposition to fencing
- Diplomatic and trade disruptions

A disputed border cannot remain peaceful.

Border clashes and militarization of crossing points

Recent clashes along Torkham and Chaman show how border tensions have become kinetic

What this indicates:

- Taliban resistance to fencing
- Militarization of border posts
- Economic and civilian costs

In simple terms:

Border disagreements have shifted from talks to force

Unregulated cross-border movement and hybrid threats

Despite fencing, Pakistan faces:

- Militants blending into civilian movements
- Smuggling of arms and narcotics
- Intelligence and proxy penetration

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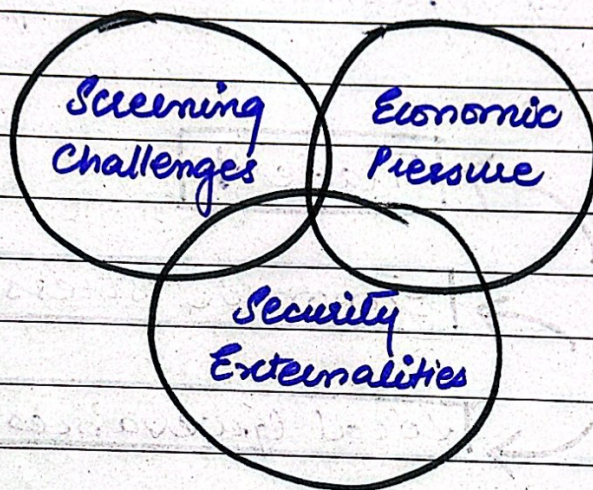
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Hybrid Threat means:

Threats that are hidden, mobile, and non-traditional.

Refugee Presence: From Humanitarian issues to security stress.

Pakistan hosts millions of Afghan refugees, creating:



Maleeha Lodhi explains:

Refugees now sit at the intersection of security, economic, and diplomacy.

(VII) Economic and Strategic Security Linkages

Threats to CPEC and Chinese interests

Militancy has increased risks to:

- Chinese engineers.
- CPEC routes in KP and Balochistan.
- Investor confidence.

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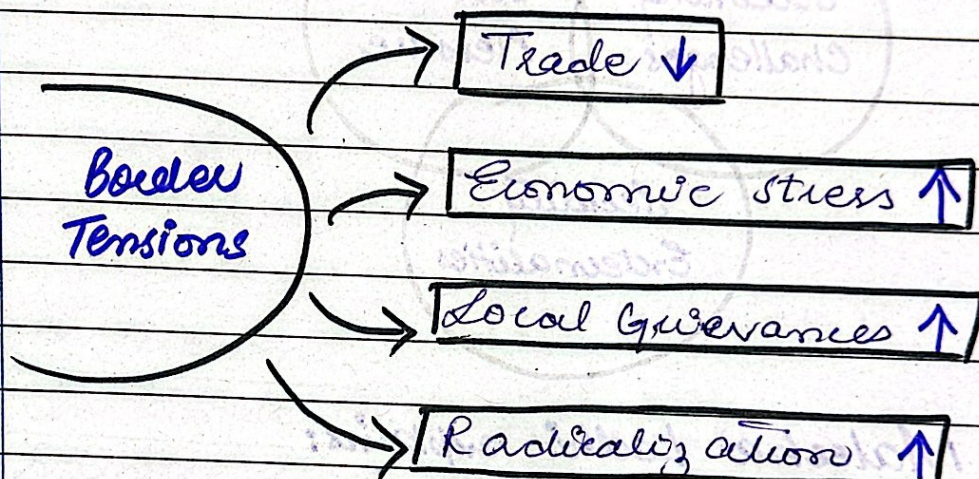
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without security, connectivity
collapses.

Trade Disruptions and Border closures:
Economic costs of insecurity

Impact:

- Suspension of cross-border trade
- Revenue losses
- Expansion of informal and illegal networks.



(IV) Regional stability and Pakistan's
shrinking strategic space.

Afghanistan's Destabilizing Effect on
Regional Peace.

Taliban-ruled Afghanistan has
weakened:

- Regional counter-terror cooperation
- Connectivity projects (TAPI, CPEC extension)

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- Trust among neighbouring states..

Afghanistan's instability spreads outward.

**Pakistan's Strategic Position:
Before and After Taliban Rule.**

Aspect	Pre-2021	Post-2021
→ ITP Threat	Contained	Revived
→ Border Stability	Manageable	Volatile
→ Strategic Leverage	Relatively Higher	Reduced
→ Regional Environment	Fragile	Unstable

Lt. Gen (R) Talat Masood summarizes:

“Strategic optimism has given way to strategic constraint.”

Strategic options for Pakistan:

Managing Risk, Not Expecting Alignment

Pakistan's realistic options include:

→ Conditional engagement with Kabul

→ Firm deterrence against cross-border militancy

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Regional Counter-terror
Coordination



Internal de-
radicalization



Security-economy integration

From hope-based policy to interest-
based realism.

**Conclusion: From Strategic Depth
to Strategic Dilemma.**

The Taliban's return has transformed Pakistan's western frontier from a zone of expected calm into a persistent security dilemma. The revival of TTP, ideological spillover, rise of ISIS-K, border instability, and economic disruption show that Afghanistan under Taliban rule has become a source of internal and regional insecurity. For Pakistan, sustainable security now lies not in ideological proximity but in realist engagement, credible deterrence, and internal resilience.