

Question 12

Pakistan-Afghanistan relation has shifted from managed cooperation to tense strategic friction. Islamabad pursues a coercive policy toward Kabul, pressuring it to abandon its support for terrorist and separatist factions. While, Afghanistan seeks independence in its political and economic affairs. The recent attack on Afghanistan border checkpoints by Pakistan was the kinetic response displayed in ~~retal~~ which may have shifted strategic apparatus of the region.

Context and Background:

The relationship between Kabul and Islamabad is shaped by frontier geopolitics, ethnic cross border linkage, and decades of proxy politics. Since the return of Taliban government in Kabul, Pakistan has experienced a resurgence in terrorist attacks along its western border. Pakistan accusing the its northwestern neighbour, launched strikes on Afghanistan. Although the attacks in October were not the first Pakistani operation in 2025, the recent conflict was the deadliest episode yet.

Mediation by China:

China being the major geopolitical stakeholder in the region, called for immediate ceasefire between the two neighbours. Although China does share a

92 kilometer border with Afghanistan through the Wakhan Corridor, its primary concern is the threat to Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Through CPEC, China has invested 25 billion dollars into Pakistan. The conflict also threatens the Middle East to China route which is of great importance to Chinese strategic calculus. Alongside CPEC, China has long term plans to build infrastructure and invest in Afghanistan for its mineral wealth and geostrategic location. The conflict undermines all the projects, investments, and potential strategic leverage for China.

Major Factors Leading to Conflict

Breakdown of Mutual dependencies:

Afghanistan	Afghanistan
depends on Pakistani ports, supply lines and market access to survive economically.	
Pakistan depends on Afghanistan for blocking sanctuaries for militant groups, such as Taliban and Baluch Liberation Army. It also depends on Afghanistan to manage refugee flow. Bilateral trade between the countries prior to the conflict, was worth over 1.6 billion US dollars. The breakdown of these major mutual dependencies allowed for a broader conflict between the neighbouring countries.	

Safe Haven for Terrorists:

Afghanistan, since the Taliban takeover in 2021 has continuously ignored pressure from international community to not support and protect Taliban militant groups. Taliban, on the other hand, rely on these militant groups to fight its rivals, such as Islamic State of Khorasan. They also rely on these groups to garner domestic and military support. Taking action against their former allies could spark instability within their ranks. Due to recent terrorist attacks in Pakistan, Islamabad has accused the Afghan government of permitting or failing to prevent sanctuaries for Thake e-Taliban Pakistan or other anti state actors. Pakistan has seen 25% surge in terrorism this year, according to the report by Center for Research and Security Studies.

Humanitarian Dimension of the Conflict:

In Early 2025, Pakistan hosted between 1.6 Million - 2.8 Million Afghan refugee with various registration status. Pakistan increased the process of expelling illegal Afghan migrants in 2025, which has led to deterioration of already damaged economy Afghan economy. This has further resulted in breakdown of relations between Kabul and Islamabad. As of yet, Pakistan has

not extended residence documentation for most Afghans.

Trade disruption due to the rising tensions:

According to recent estimates, bilateral trade previously worth 1.6 billion dollars has seen 54% decline due to border closure. This further fuels the tensions between the closely aligned neighbours. As Afghanistan may seek alternative routes via Iran and Central Asia, the isolation of economies may prove to be a strategic threat to Pakistan.

Policy Prescriptions to Improve the Situation:

Resumption of Diplomatic Channels:

The use of religious channels to build diplomatic ties may be helpful to avert the border tensions.

Refugees Solution:

Developing a border hotline with Afghanistan and also slowing down the process of refugee expulsion may result in resumption of normalcy between the two countries.

Trade Resumption:

Resumption of trade and opening of border for commerce may prove helpful

Question #4

After a brief pause in hostilities, the insurgency has returned to KPK and Balochistan. Pakistan is facing military conflict on both its eastern front and its western front.

India accusing Pakistan of using proxies in Kashmir may have launched its own proxy network in the western provinces of Pakistan. Afghanistan has also been providing safe haven for its former allies, such as Tharik-e-Taliban Pakistan. Alongside religious fundamentalism, the new wave of terrorism has also witnessed a sharp return of separatist sentiments.

New Wave of Militancy in KPK and Balochistan:
Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is the main driver of violence in KPK, while the Baluch Liberation Army has conducted attacks on in Balochistan. For instance, the attack on Jafar Express resulted in taking over 400 hostages. Over 3000 fatalities have been reported in 2025 in both western provinces according to recent reports by Centre of Research and Security Studies (CRSS). Pakistan has seen deaths of civilians, security personnel, and officials in these attacks.

Reasons behind the terrorist resurgence

Afghanistan providing a safe haven for terrorists.

Since the action of Taliban government in Kabul, KPK province has experienced a return toward insurgency. Tehreek-Taliban Pakistan has found a safe place in Afghanistan to launch attacks in Pakistan. They primarily target security personnel and government officials. Pakistan has seen 25% surge in terrorism in 2025, due to attacks launched from its northwestern neighbour.

Indian proxy network

India has been wary of the growing Chinese and Pakistani influence in the region. It blamed Pakistan for the attacks of terrorists in Kashmir. In response, India ^{may have} increased support for the Baluchistan Liberation Army, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, and Majid Brigade. Thus, exacerbating the worsening situation of militancy in Pakistan. Indian support for terrorist groups in Pakistan potentially threatens Chinese interests in the country as well. Although the current support for separatism and militancy is generally limited, the growing ties between Kabul and Delhi may prove otherwise.

Economic

Lack of economic opportunities:

The western provinces of Pakistan, KPK and Balochistan have often felt neglected by the State. The NFC Award system has proven inefficient for the underdeveloped regions of Balochistan and KPK. For instance, Balochistan despite being the largest province, has the lowest number of universities, hospitals, infrastructure projects in the country. There is also a growing perception among the youth of Balochistan and KPK that the resources of the provinces are not gaining any returns to them. The lack of economic opportunity has been a major factor in increased militancy and separatism in the provinces.

Recommendations to mitigate the Chaos

Diplomatic and economic ties with Afghanistan:

Use of religious channels to build diplomatic ties, resumption of trade may prove to pave a way toward prolonged peace between the two countries. Thus, resulting in decrease of hostilities.

Question #6:

The war is unlikely to end in the near term by a clean, mutually acceptable peace because the positions of both countries are polar opposite. Russia insists on territorial recognition, while Ukraine insists on sovereignty and security guarantees. Changing battlefield dynamics, external actors role (such as USA, EU, and NATO), and domestic politics of Russia and Ukraine hold significant leverage in any mediation talks.

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Demands of Russia and Ukraine:

Ukraine and NATO demand restoration of pre-war territory. Russia demands recognition of its annexed territories. It also wants to stop Ukraine from joining European Union or NATO. Russia rejects western mediation, especially by N. European countries.

The Chances of Peace Deal:

Scenario 1: Negotiated Compromise

This scenario has low likelihood because it points to a deal where Ukraine concedes its Donetsk and Luhansk territories in order to gain security guarantees from Russia. The only reason for a such a deal

could be increased pressure from USA and Trump Administration.

Scenario 2: De facto ceasefire / Line of Control:
Much like Indian and Pakistani conflicts, this scenario could see a frozen conflict along the line of Control. This could happen if both sides experience war fatigue due to depleting resources.

Scenario 3: Ukrainian Military Reversal:

If Russia finds a new breakthrough in the war due to technological advancement in drone technology, it may force Kyiv to surrender and accept harsh terms. This scenario is also unlikely to happen.

Scenario 4: Continued War for long term
This is the most likely scenario, where neither side can win decisively. This would result from constantly shifting battlefield alterations. This scenario may result in a prolonged war for years to come.

Question #8

On 17 September 2025, Pakistani Prime Minister Shebaz Sharif and Muhammad Bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince signed a "Strategic Mutual Defense Deal". This agreement committed both countries to consider the attack on one country to be an attack against both.

Causes of the Agreement

Saudi overreliance on USA:

Saudi Arabia has traditionally relied on United States for security. The recent attacks in Qatar by Israel has made Saudi Arabia uncomfortable about its overreliance on American goodwill.

Pakistan's balancing act:

Pakistan has also overrelied on Chinese economic guarantees and projects. Formalizing ties with Saudi Arabia ensures that the and opens gate for investment opportunities.

Regional Instability

Middle East has foreseen conflicts and crisis involving Israel, Qatar, Iran, Houthis, Hamas, and Syria.

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Pakistan faces rising tensions with its neighbour India. Both countries view this pact as deterrence against any future aggression.

Symbolic Partnership on Religious lines:

Pakistan and Saudi leadership view this pact as a show of Islamic unity. The formal alliance between two major Muslim states signal an independent framework.

Implications for the regional players

Enhanced Deterrence

The pact gives Islamabad greater diplomatic and economic leverage while Riyadh also gaining a strategic edge over its adversaries.

Nuclear Ambiguity:

Neither side has publicly committed to nuclear sharing, but the vague ambiguity raise proliferation concerns among Iran and Israel.

Saudi Regional conflicts:

Pakistan may have paved a way to draw hostility from Iran if it involves itself in a middle eastern conflict, such as Yemen, Syria^{and} Iraq.