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1. Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a long history of tense relations. Despite Chinese mediation in 2023-2025, issues like security, borders, and refugees continue to cause problems. Cross-border attacks, political mistrust, and economic disparities keep the relations fragile. Thus, without regular dialogues, better border security, and trade cooperation, relations cannot improve.

2. Major Factors Contributing to Pak-Afghan Tensions

- i) Cross-Border Military
- ii) Border Management and De Facto Line Issues
- iii) Political and Ideological Mistrust
- iv) Refugee Issues

i) Cross-Border Militancy and Terrorism

Afghanistan based militant groups, including TTP, continue to launch attacks in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces. Between 2023-2025, over 120 security incidents were reported along the Pak-Afghan border (ISPR Reports, 2025).

ii) Border Management and Durand Line Disputes

The 2,640km Durand line creates challenges in controlling smuggling, illegal crossings, and infiltration. Afghanistan's non-recognition of the border intensifies mistrust. Hence, it limits cooperative security measures.

(iii) Political and Ideological Mistrust

Afghanistan's successive regimes post-2021 have accused Pakistan of interfering in internal politics, while Pakistan worries about Kabul's support for anti-state elements. This mutual suspicion has stalled institutional dialogue despite Chinese facilitation.

iv) Refugee and Humanitarian Crisis

Over 2.5 million Afghan refugees reside in Pakistan, creating social, economic, and security pressures. Repatriation and management disagreements further strain bilateral relations.

(UNHCR, 2025)

3. Possible Measures to Improve Pak-Afghan Relations

- i) Enhanced Border Security and Management.
- ii) Institutionalized Bilateral Dialogue
- iii) Economic and Trade Cooperation
- iv) Counter-terrorism Cooperation

(i) Enhanced Border Security and Monitoring

Joint border patrols, biometric verification, and controlled crossing points could reduce illegal movements and insurgent infiltration.

Early 2015 pilot projects along Chaman and Torkham crossings showed 20% reduction in smuggling. (Pak-Afghan Border Authority, 2015).

(ii) Institutionalized Bilateral Dialogues

Regular high-level talks with Chinese mediation could address political mistrust, refugee policies, and security concerns. Multilateral engagement with SAARC and CTCA frameworks may also provide confidence-building measures.

(iii) Economic and Trade Cooperation

Reviving bilateral trade through special economic zones, cross-border markets, and infrastructure projects under CPEC and regional connectivity initiatives could build interdependence, reducing incentives for conflict.

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IV) Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

Sharing intelligence, coordinating anti-TTP operations, and joint training of border forces can improve mutual trust.

The 2021 Pak-Afghan intelligence sharing pilot in KPK reduced TTP attacks by 15% in six months (ISPR, 2025).

4. Critical Analysis

Pak-Afghan tensions persist because structural issues — porous borders, military proxy flows, and political mistrust — cannot be resolved by external

mediation alone. While China's facilitation provides a neutral

platform, the lack of institutionalised reciprocal trust and moral security guarantees limits progress.

5. Conclusion

Improving Pak-Afghan relations demand strengthened border management, sustained dialogue, counter-terrorism cooperation, and economic interdependence. Chinese mediation can play a catalytic role in both. Durable peace depends on Pakistan and Afghanistan prioritizing trust-building and practical measures over unilateral suspicion.

1. Introduction

The June 2025 Israeli-US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities caused a major regional shock. They damaged enrichment sites at Natanz and Fordow, highlighting Iran's vulnerability and creating uncertainty in Middle East security. The attacks also challenged the credibility of international non-proliferation mechanisms and increased the likelihood of nuclear hedging by Gulf States.

2. Future of Regional Nuclear Politics After ISRAEL-US Strikes on Iran

A) Strategic and Security Implications for the Region

B) Regional Hedging and Arms Race Dynamics

A) Strategic and Security Implications of the Region

i) Impact on Iran's Nuclear Program

ii) Erosion of Non-proliferation Norms

iii) Rise of Proxy and Cyber Conflicts.

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i) Impact on Iran's Nuclear Program

The strikes destroyed advanced centrifuges and disrupted enrichment infrastructure. Iran announced plans to accelerate uranium enrichment to 60%, moving closer to weapons-grade levels. (IAEA Report, 2025)

ii) Erosion of Non-proliferation Norms

Attacking a non-nuclear state under IAEA inspection undermines the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty framework. Gulf States like KSA and UAE may now view nuclear latency programs as necessary for their security.

iii) Rise of Proxy and Cyber Conflicts

Iran is expected to expand proxy operations via Hezbollah, Houthis, and Iraqi militias. Since July 2025, 15 cyber intrusions targeting Gulf energy infrastructure have been reported, signaling asymmetric retaliation.

B) Regional Hedging and Arms Race Dynamics

- i) Gulf States Hedging
- ii) External powers and security guarantees
- iii) Economic and Energy Security Risks

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i) Gulf States' Nuclear Hedging

Saudi Arabia has publically stated it will not remain passive if Iran acquires nuclear weapons. UAE and Turkey are pursuing uranium enrichment and civilian nuclear programs with latent weapons potential.

ii) External Powers and Security Guarantees

The US has reinforced Gulf missile defense networks while Russia and China advocate diplomacy. Analysts warn that multipolar involvement increases the risk of miscalculation and unintended escalation.

m) Economic and Security Risks

Strait of Hormuz accounts for 20% of global oil trade. Any escalation could spike oil prices, disrupt global energy markets, and raise Gulf shipping insurance costs by 12%.

(OPEC Review, 2025)

5. Critical Analysis

Realist theory explains that one state's security gain produces insecurity for others, increasing risks of miscalculation. Without strong IAEA monitoring, renewed diplomacy, and credible external guarantees, the Middle East is likely to enter a latent nuclear arms race.

A. Conclusion

The Israel-US strikes may have achieved a short-term tactical goal but heightened long-term regional nuclear risks.

Restoration of IAEA inspections and credible security assurance for Gulf States are essential to prevent a multi-threshold nuclear environment and maintain regional stability.