Pakistan-Afghanistan Rift and End Game Scenario

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Abstract

Following the fall of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the Afghan Talibans quickly seized power and put in place a government where the majority of the leaders were senior commanders who had been involved in the two decades long fight against U.S. and NATO troops. A major war in Pakistan's backyard has come to an end, which Pakistaners were relieved of, and soon after, it was hoped that Kabul would not only be a partner but a "client" of Pakistan on which it could exert meaningful influence. The actual situation was much more complicated, however. While Pakistan welcomed Taliban's return to power, vowed to provide diplomatic, political, social and economic support to sustain Talibans' newly formed Govt, Kabul desired to create a space of its own in the region, making the geostrategic calculations much different than as perceived by Pakistan. But then the scenario shifted when Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) made its presence felt and adopted terrorists' tactics in the soil of Pakistan, while using Afghan territory as its safe haven. Things started to go sour between the establishment of the relationship as Afghan rulers started to side by the interests of TTP even after the latter crossed the borders several times for provocations. This article attempts to explain the reasons behind the split between the Pakistan and the Taliban and what may be the possible end game that may play out in the current situation. It also found its echo in several other domains such as the reasons for Talibans-TTP bed sharing, border sovereignty, economic interdependence, Afghan diaspora's role of influencing narrative shaping inside Afghanistan and India's increasing involvement in anti-Pak diplomacy. The piece also describes some pragmatic policy options for Pakistan.

1. Introduction

The geography has an impact on the genes of the population that it inhabits, changing their speech style, thinking, and social norms. It influences our thinking process, our cultural beliefs, our imagination, our social, political and economic preferences. This is not only so but history has shown that geographical factors have been a contributing factor in wars, diplomacy and foreign policy goals. In the countries, which are protected by mountains and water bodies, they have been at relative peace as compared to countries situated at the dangerous geo-political crossroads, which change the moods and proclivities. Those who had grown hardened in battle, there was nothing else left for them to do but to survive by 'fittest to survive' rule. As in the case of the vast Russian territory, which never aroused the curiosity or concern of any but the deranged and insane, like Hitler, who discovered that geography isn't quite as easy as it was taken for granted to be. He found it extremely difficult to maintain long line of logistic support. In short geography teaches the inhabitants of a regions to conduct their daily lives in a peculiar way (Marshall, 2015).

But today's Pak-Afghan diplomatic accident lies not just with the understanding of the genetic coding of geographical boundaries. It is a complex situation with several stakeholders and their differing domestic agendas and views. For many foreign and strategic policy experts, the emergence of the view point was startling and disconcerting all of a sudden. Post Kabul-Fall, the

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new regime elected to reverse the policy of co-operation and strategic-political interdependence and started off a path of confrontation with Pakistan, which Islamabad had not considered. This new policy realignment and re-configuration is a relatively difficult one in the light of Pak-Afghan relations in history.

The collapse of the Afghan Republic in 2021 and the swift establishment of the Taliban regime have been observed as one of the biggest events in the world. Strategic equations were significantly changed at the withdrawal of the US & NATO Forces from Afghanistan with new variables put in. This included, China, Pakistan and Iran; all seemed interested in a stable Afghanistan for the promotion of strategic and economic interests in the region; specially China who wants to realize the dream of BRI connectivity to Europe for which stable Afghanistan would be a facilitator and vice-versa (Rehaiem, 2025). However, the stability of Afghanistan relies on full-fledged transition from Warlord-ism or Tribalism or Faction-ism to which Talibans are not willing to give up. In addition, its power vacuum worsened the problems, resulting in unexpected economic and institutional failure and new security vulnerabilities. When there is a war, US TTP was aligned with them and now they want to get their rights. It needed Afghan Regime to assist them in their war efforts against Pakistan with operational and logistical support to regain their lost control over the tribal belt and establish their Sharia. And guess what? They were given what the Taliban Regime wanted; despite all bilateral and international rules. As Pakistan is TTP's enemy, TTP began operating freely against it to take revenge from its humiliating expulsion from Pakistan 2015 in which they left Pakistan with tail between their legs. In contrast, the Pakistanis, much aware of the threats, but with the faith that a cooperative Taliban government, which has become a key part in the regional equation, would see the need for peace. Unfortunately, the Pakistani outreach did not receive the positive response from Taliban Govt as these were not entertained.

Slowly and gradually bilateral relationship transformed into a strategic rift and within two years, the gap widened as never before and trust touching the lowest. A constant demand of Pakistan to the Talibans to stop it from infiltrating into Pakistan at its will and indulging in terrorist activities inside Pakistan and the Talibans' denial of the Pakistani claims led to a major break point in the relationship. However, it was clear to the world that Talibans are giving full support to a terrorist outfit in cold blood killing innocent citizens with unobstructed/permissive operational paraphernalia from Afghanistan, indicating a direct involvement of the Taliban Govt which had crushed the hope of Pakistan for any positive interaction. A sense of the erosion of this trust was not digestible.

In this context, the article tackles three questions. But why does the Afghan Taliban regime continue to accommodate the TTP while it has to bear the diplomatic and economic burden on its relationship with Pakistan? Secondly, how have ideological, intra-regime, territorial and economic issues played together to create a perceived partnership into a strategic schism? Third, what are the potential scenarios toward an endgame and what policy options are beneficial to Pakistan's security interests? The article argues that such a division is more than a diplomatic miscommunication and is a result of ideological and ethical ties between the Taliban and the TTP, the fragility of the political consolidation within the Taliban and the unresolved issue of Durand Line. The literature on the subject is reviewed in the following section, which sets out the theoretical background,

followed by the methodology, analysis, discussion of the results and end-game scenarios, policy recommendations and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been based on the Pakistani pursuit of ‘strategic depth' and the Afghan rejection of the Durand Line.For the last few years the scholarship in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations has been focused on the Pakistani desire of ‘strategic depth' and the Afghan rejection of the Durand Line. Over the decades, outsiders "disrupted the Afghan state and turned neighbouring states into patrons for the different groups," explains Rubin (2002) with Pakistan's support of the mujahideens and more recently the Taliban in the middle. Greare (2006) has argued that the Afghan strategy of Islamabad was not for gaining territorial ambition but for insecurity, fear of encirclement by India as well as fear of Pashtun irredentism and also to get a favourable government on its western side. A little more critical of its use, Rashid (2012) contended that the employment of the militant proxies had the effect of making the difference between the foreign policy instrument and domestic threat less distinguishable, and, ultimately, raising the influence of the jihadist networks which ultimately betrayed the Pakistani state. Together, they reflect the hope that informed Islamabad's response to August 2021 – a Taliban government in Kabul, maybe a client, but at least a reliable one.

A second thread has to do with the border. The Durand Line was established in 1893 and the argument of the line has been fought over by different governments in Afghanistan irrespective of their ideology, as Omrani (2009) shows, it is not about what any government preferred but an issue of Afghan national identity. According to Johnson and Mason (2008), the frontier is an area that has historically been "uncontrolled and porous" because of its tribal laws and kinship ties across boundaries, and its state-proximity. Pakistan has beefed up its border, which is justifiable for security concerns, but the Afghan narrative propagated and adopted by Taliban is contradicting Pakistan's fencing of the border (Hussain, 2025).

A third and more recent group of work focuses on the link between the post-2021 directly. Mir (2022) calls this the ‘twin Taliban problem' since the Pakistan's preferred partner in Kabul is the same one who is the biggest facilitator of Pakistan's most dangerous domestic Taliban. Sayed and Hamming (2023) offer an account of the reorganization of TTP after the takeover, which involved bringing splinter groups under control, setting up a more bureaucratic structure and expanding operations in KPK and Balochistan. These changes are understood by Abbas (2023) in the context of the priorities set by the Taliban themselves, highlighting the movement's internal diversity and its emphasis on unity over accommodation. Both the United Nations (UNSC, 2022, 2025) confirm the presence of TTP fighters and leaders in Afghanistan. In the commentary section, the Pakistani media had already been aware of the big picture: Noor (2021) noted the evolution of ‘Afghan peace' before the fall of Kabul, and Khan (2021) pointed out that this takeover will not address Pakistan's security issues. Further assessments are in the "Expectation to Rupture" sequence (Foreign Affairs magazine, 2023; Khalid, 2024).

The article presents three complementary angles.Theoretically, the article has three complementary angles. First, the dynamics of governments hosting armed groups that are hostile

towards neighbouring governments are discussed in literature on state-sponsorship and state sanctuary.Firstly, the literature on state sponsorship and sanctuary gives reasons for the presence of armed groups within states that are against neighbouring states. Byman (2005) makes a distinction between ‘active' sponsorship and ‘passive' support, where the last is the case when a regime ‘knowsingly allows' the development of militant activity it could otherwise suppress; and Salehyan (2007) demonstrates the ways in which cross-border sanctuaries prolong insurgencies and contribute to interstate tensions. Second, the limits of patronage became apparent in the principal–agent view of the world: Byman and Kreps (2010) have shown that when agents have access to “outside” resources and goals, they frequently end up taking control of their principals. This is the experience of Pakistan with the once-loyal protégé, who is now a sovereign player with an agenda of its own – the Taliban. Third, both realist and regional security views suggest that states have a survival interest and a relative position interest, rather than a sentiment interest, and that security interdependence is a feature of neighboring states whose threats can be easily exchanged over short distances (Waltz, 1979; Buzan & Wæver, 2003). When viewed together, they suggest that the Taliban are not only irrational, or as is sometimes said, “ungrateful,” but that they are engaged in calculations of regime survival which are motivated by ideological and coalitional interests.

Existing studies, however, tend to treat the drivers of the rift in isolation (ideology, the border or counterterrorism) and are largely descriptive. Few link these drivers in a systematic manner and even fewer turn them into structured scenarios that can feed into policy. This article attempts to do just that, bringing together all of the above dimensions of the rift – ideological, intra-regime, territorial, societal and economic – in one and building plausible endgame scenarios out of it.

3. Methodology

Single case of Pakistan–Afghan Taliban relation from August 2021 to late 2025 is used in this study, which is of the qualitative and interpretive research design. A case-study approach is appropriate for explaining a process that is complex, context dependent and identifying the mechanisms that drive it, but not for testing a general law (George & Bennett, 2005).

Qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) was used to collect data. The key sources for the monitoring reports are the United Nations Security Council (UNSC, 2022, 2025) and the statements made by the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan about the TTP, border and bilateral talks. Sources of literature include peer-reviewed articles, think tank reports, academic books, and quotes from reliable press sources and are considered secondary sources. Sources of information were identified, selected and deployed purposively according to their relevance for TTP, Durand Line, trade and transit and regional diplomacy and claims made by only one partisan source were cross checked with independent sources.

Material analysed using thematic analysis. The themes, which serve as the framework for analysis, were grouped into eight themes: Transition of the Taliban to power, a mindset of “battlefield mentality”, the ideological link with TTP, internal power balancing, conflict with the Durand Line, compromising between security and rights, nationalist response to cross-border strikes and the effects on economic interdependence. These ideas were then put into the theoretical perspectives as described above. Lastly, potential end-games are discussed with a scenario analysis.

The scenarios are not predictions of events per se, but instead meticulously developed and supported narratives that consider the key drivers and critical uncertainties as described by Schwartz (1991): Will the TTP be under the Taliban's control, what the pressures will be on Pakistan, the strength of the Afghan economy, and the role of external actors. Four scenarios were developed by varying these drivers. There are a few drawbacks of the study. It relies exclusively on documents that are public and there is no classified intelligence, nor has Taliban leadership thinking been made available, nor has there been any field interviews. In an institutional approach, an institutional perspective has been adopted from Pakistan and an attempt has been made to include Afghan perspectives and independent sources of international perspectives to minimise interpretive bias.

4. Analysis

Critique is always a reward of small-scale analysis of the situation, and discovering the unexplored side of the realities. This allows a free treading in the area never discovered before (Edkins & Zehfuss, 2014). Observing vividly, Taliban's recent policy re-calibrations reveal more than what it appears to be simply a survival effort. Here is the analysis; explaining the critical factors involved in Pak-Afghan present rift.

Victory Was Easy; Governance Is Not. The biggest challenge for Taliban Govt is psychological shift and to expand the visualization on a wider regional level after they took the power over the reins on August 15, 2021. A change of perspective is needed to see the 'bigger picture' through the eyes of foreign policy measures taken to achieve benefit for all parties. The region is a hotspot of conflict, terror and human suffering and the people of this region deserve more peace than anyone else as they live between three Muslim states of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran for the last few decades. However, this presupposes a new mindset, a radical departure from the past primitive life and thinking, a narrow-mindedness that is limited to the benefits of a few families or clans. But the Taliban Govt is not ready to sacrifice its own short-term narrow interest for the long-term interest of State and it is constantly nurturing the outsourcing of violence to neighbouring States through proxy groups like the TTP, unaware that it could further exacerbate the diplomatic isolation of the State and adversely affect the prospect of regional economic benefits.

A State That Never Left the Battlefield. T The first principle of good statecraft is that it should not injure its neighbours through its land. In the German political philosophy, it is made very clear by Max Weber that no actor should have the chance to act kinetically within and outside the state and that in all of its forms and expressions, it is an illegitimate entity (Edkins & Zehfuss, 2014). This in turn lays the responsibility on the state to ensure that such an illegal body is not able to operate from its domain and attack neighbouring countries (Rashid, 2012). But, Taliban has been discovered to be backing proxies from its soil to destroy the area; to fail to fulfill its duties as a state. In fact the regime appears to not want to de-escalate 'fight mode'; a mindset they developed after many years of conflict with United States and NATO forces who could threaten the peace in the region should they be backed by its allies. It was believed that after decades of bloodshed seen on the soil of Afghanistan; Talibans would change course and would return to normalcy. But for Talibans, it is a necessity or sell merchandise on the battlefield. It never wished to return to the

normal way of life, at least in history speaks for itself. The situation at Durand Line is extremely hot; where Pakistani posts have to face unprovoked fire from Afghanistan. Likewise, Pakistani efforts to curb infiltration by the Taliban backed TTP terrorists are thwarted by infiltration efforts of the said terrorist group (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2025).

The Ideological Nexus. The question is raised – why the Taliban are supporting TTP to spread terror in KPK as they are getting awful consequences in the form of international criticism, more isolation, and cutting of economic relations with its most suitable neighbour, Pakistan. It doesn't seem like a good idea at first hearing. This paradox can be explained by the ideology of the two. The TTP is a danger to Pakistan because it can pose a threat to Pakistan's territorial integrity and sovereignty, but it will be an ally to the Taliban because it will assist them in the jihad against the foreigners. Both groups are the followers of rigid, uncompromising and strict Deobandi sect and both groups are even in the desire of establishing Sharia Law in not only Afghanistan but also in the tribal belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). For them, violence and intimidation is “legally” and “religiously” proper when it comes to Sharia Law' (Ali, L. K.). (2025). But, it seems that the Taliban are neither prepared to walk away from the internationally recognised terrorist organisation nor in hurry to distance themselves from it anytime soon, even after being condemned in world fora. This is due to their common ideology assimilation that the attacks on Pakistan's security have been fast and substantial. The total of TTP's fighters is approximately 6,000 (UNSC, 2025) but more important than that is that TTP is not only engaging Afghan regime, but the Afghan regime is also involved in the activities of these cross-border terrorists.

Internal Power Balancing. The Pakistan delegation has had several contacts with the Afghan Taliban, discussing their concerns, giving evidence and in fact attempting to leverage all tools in the diplomatic toolbox that they have learnt to use to get somewhere. However, the reactions from Kabul have been mostly unresponsive, and they seem not to be willing to take any action against the TTP. As a consequence, the government relations between Pakistan and the Taliban deteriorated rapidly and a chasm developed between the two nations leading to frequent incidences of shooting along the Durand Line, in some cases, Pakistani aircraft attacking TTP hideouts in Afghanistan. Despite consistent pressures from Pakistan and common friends Talibans seem reluctantt to withdraw their support from TTP. There would be larger social cohesion if one went deeper. Haqqani network and other eastern provinces have many commanders of the same kinship and ideology as cadres of TTP. Afghanistan’s security is based on infantry soldiers provided by various factions who are controlling the administration of various regions thus aiding in establishing writ. The Taliban, if they are to be contained, must be held back but so could be their unity split. Taliban leaders believe that they need not go too far to crush the TTP, because if they do, they would split and their control over the weak government would be undermined. But when you don't take any action against a banned outfit on the global stage you mean you are accepting them. Moreover, the lack of action taken by Taliban is also considered strategic negligence by Pakistan and, as a result, TTP has emerged as a central focus and more attacks have been reported in KP and Baluchistan.

Durand Line – Not a Closed Case. The Durand Line has been a sensitive issue for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, but more so during the Talibans' reign. In the past, Afghan governments have never recognized the Durand Line as a permanent international boundary; however, they never engaged

in open conflict with the boundary. In contrast, the Taliban are much more aggressive (Hussain, 2025). They breach the fence of Pakistan, obstruct the regular patrolling of the border and insist that the border be abolished since it is an unjustifiable colonial boundary which separates the families and tribes of the Pashtuns. The worldview of the Taliban eventually becomes a weapon – they engage in skirmishes, shootings and again block crossings like Torkham and Chaman. However, the Pakistanian side has only a single perspective, which is of security. Having been the scene of years of incursions by militants from across the border from Afghanistan, Islamabad is convinced that fencing and effective border controls are essential to protect its population. The two distinct world views — Afghan nationalism versus security concerns in Pakistan — continue to pull the two sides into confrontation, rather than reconciliation, with the situation growing worse. Pakistanis feel that Durand Line is an international boundary setting the political, social and administrative distinctions between the two countries but for Afghans this is the symbol of Colonial Legacy which divided their land, their people and their resources. But the failed to factor in the very argument of Pushtoons on this side of the Durand Line which have subscribed to the idea of Pakistan and acknowledged Durand Line as a permeant feature.

Security First, Rights Later. The world has condemned the oppressive policies of Taliban which pretend to be based on Sharia law and the people of Afghanistan have strongly condemned. The hardliners' attitude towards women education is the worst treatment of the Islamic law. Not only that but their governance technique lacks skill and capacity to provide the people education, health and jobs. Today if they were to have free and fair elections, they have no chance of winning. They continue to hold out in the fort, however, the Afghans are more concerned with security than education and health. A country which has gone through worst form of bloodshed would take ‘peace at-least’ the best deal. Give the people a government that can provide the roads, markets and cities that will keep them from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Rallying Point. Afghan authorities have failed to take any action against the group and Pakistan has only been left with a choice of attacking the militants in Afghanistan. It was a brief respite provided by the elimination of some of the key individuals of the primary TTP in these strikes, beyond the border. But, as many had feared, the move also ignited a wave of Afghan nationalism. It was the time, despite the differences in their tribes, factions and political positions, the Angry Afghan people were united in their anger against Pakistan rather than in action in response to terrorism. However, the operation quickly turned into a breeding ground for more resentment, and by extension more mistrust and anti-ISLAMOPINION against Islamabad in the minds of the public in Afghanistan. The strikes had a negative political impact and provided a platform for the domestic nationalistic groups to add fuel to the flames of ethnic sentiment and characterize the state's actions as oppressive towards the Pashtun. For the first time it gave the policy makers a sense of awareness that in the area Pakistan's use of force could turn into a catalyst for the general discontent of the people, which may negatively impact Pakistan's security.

Shattered Commerce and Shifting Loyalties. In recent years, political tensions have exacerbated remarkably and have severely affected this economic reliance. The closure of these borders, the increase of transit requirements and the restriction of the commerce in goods have caused a very strong impact on the economy of Afghanistan. Shops have shut their doors, transport systems have

become paralyzed and the lives of innumerable families who are dependent on cross-border trade have been irrevocably changed within a matter of days. The trade routes via Pakistan continue to be of major importance for the stability of Afghanistan. These developments have certainly left a bad taste in the mouth of the common people of Afghanistan and many Afghans have unfavourable memories of Pakistan's policies. The vacuum has also allowed for the emergence of others from the area (mainly India) to expand in influence. With the Pakistani government shut down on the issue of trade, India and other regional countries are now searching for new opportunities to strengthen their economic and political relations with Afghanistan.

5. Discussion

The analysis shows that the Pakistan-Taliban split is more than just one or two factors driving it; it's a multi-faceted process that becomes more significant when taken together but is lacking in any single grievance. There are three findings that are interesting in comparison to the literature.

First, the findings support the principal-agent theory relating to the reduction in leverage of principals (the patrons) by having agents work autonomously (Byman & Kreps, 2010). It was Pakistan's faith that after the Taliban seized power they would be a client state of Islamabad, but sovereignty gave the Taliban new partners, new resources and a home base, which resulted in a sharp reduction in Islamabad's influence during the insurgency years and in the 1990s. Second, that the Taliban tolerate the TTP is an example of "passive sponsorship" as Byman (2005) describes it, but according to the analysis it is not motivated by strategic considerations against Pakistan but one of the costs to the Taliban leadership of opposing TTP is greater than the costs of doing so when the TTP can be tolerated and even welcomed as a way to survive the regime. This further solidifies the image of the Taliban as only being a threat from the outside and aligns with Abbas's (2023) focus on unity within the country. Third, the results validate Salehyan's (2007) claim that cross-border sanctuaries exacerbate interstate conflict, and also illustrate the limits of coercion: the Pakistani strike actually helped to strengthen the sense of national unity in Afghanistan, and weakened the incentive for the Taliban to accede to the Pakistani government.

The Durand Line dispute and the collapse of cross-border trade are other examples of the fact that the division is not only a policy of the present regime, but also a part of the national identity and the security complex set-up in the region (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). In reality, neither a threat of force nor a clear call to action is likely to be effective. The scenarios below are based on the drivers listed above and depend on how willing the Taliban are to reindeign the TTP, the degree of external pressure on the Taliban and the economic capability of Afghanistan.

End Game Scenarios

Managed Hostility - A Default Trajectory. As you say, neighbours can't be replaced. Therefore, we have no choice but to coexist with Afghanistan on the West and India on the East. Having to steer Pakistan away from security issues will always be a challenging job for policy makers. Giving others first priority, there are hardly any choices. We can't afford to lock our horns on both sides at the same time even on one side for a prolonged time frame. The best that can be hoped for with Afghanistan is that the animosity in the relationship can be settled between Pakistan and the Taliban and both of them can live with each other without the situation going out of control, without going

for a full-scale war. The tussles at the border, fencing conflicts and the occasional shoot-out may continue for an extended period of time as Pakistan is under diplomatic strain and a few security measures to restrict TTP activities.

Coercive Accommodation by the Taliban.

Economic Collapse - Public Turning Against Taliban. Extended border closures, a surge in unemployment and trade disruptions could severely impact Afghanistan's fragile economy, putting everyday Afghans under great strain. Growing frustration among people could lead them to target the Taliban more than Pakistan as businesses close down and supply chains are cut, and people feel their rulers are failing to manage a vital foreign relation that's vital to their livelihoods. At the same time, the Taliban also knows that relations with Pakistan can not stay strained for a prolonged time and need to be put on track as quickly as possible to restore economic activity, crucial for the survival of trade in Afghanistan. To make things more interesting, Pakistan should implement a tight security system and halt any kind of trade with Afghanistan unless they understand the value of stability in the region and the TTP is either eliminated or stopped to function from Afghanistan.

Regime Change. The other, but sensitive, end game is where Pakistan is trying to play politics with those in Kabul who are discontent with the current Taliban regime, in so far as it can at least. Politics was a realm in which soft power was seldom a good idea and always risky: world powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia and China exploited soft power for their own ends. This could include giving them financial, political or material support to disorganized Northern Alliance or even some members of the Taliban that would be willing to work with Pakistan. The logic behind it is that, if they start to gradually phase out the hard-line leadership of the Kandhis and bring in less hostile, more pragmatic, and willing to work on security issues as outlined in Doha Agreement people to run the tribe, it would be good for them. A more balanced and non-hostile government in Kabul may be able to bring some sense back to diplomacy and safeguard Pakistan's interests in theory. But, that's a risky way to go. It can go wrong in all its aspects and it would lead to both the Afghan people and KPK and Baluchistan going nuts. Not only that, the foreign players involved in the peace of Afghanistan could even be working on redrawing the entire strategic blueprint. It's a possibility that still could happen but it would take a lot of care and caution.

6. Recommendations

Dual-Track Approach.

Pakistan shouldn't go for any military pressure or just diplomatic. The benefits of a balanced dual track approach, with calibrated pressure on TTP sanctuaries, and continued political action through a common set of friends, would accrue. In the recent conflict in Qatar and Türkiye, both countries are well aware of what they have to offer. Taliban's can't fool all the people all the time (Khalid, 2024). It is quite evident to the world that Taliban’s have lost the argument and need to realize that a demand for peace from Pakistan is legitimate. In brief, whatever the ideology and socio-political stance TTP has towards the 'Regime', it's not going to be able to change to 'Permissiveness' across the borders. Hence, it should be handled by Talibans but it causes a threat to an internal peace. In

Talibans eyes, it is more important that they have diplomatic and political talks with the TTP than Pakistan.

Build International Consensus on the TTP Threat. Pakistan must take the matter of TTP to international forums, such as the UN bodies, OIC, SCO and regional forums to spread awareness about the cross-border activities of the TTP. However, when the Taliban are being influenced by the multilateral pressure especially by China, Qatar, Iran and Central Asian countries, the cost to tolerate or harbor TTP militants can eat up.

Strengthen Border Management Without Escalation, Pakistan needs to strengthen its fence, video surveillance and established border posts along the Durand Line and be careful of what it projects on the ground in Afghanistan to avoid being provoked by the Afghans' nationalists. Border co-ordinated cells co-ordinated by Qatar or China may be useful to reduce tactical confusion. More than ever, infiltrations need to be prevented to prevent the lure of terrorists hitting here and escaping to Afghanistan. In addition, a joint patrolling is also required. It is a practice seen in many countries around the world in borders states. Unless the stability and peace is the desired outcome for both, and unless both are willing to invest in efforts for peace; it will remain elusive.

Use Economic Levers Responsibly, Not Punitively. Pakistan has massive potential to exert significant influence on Afghanistan through trade corridors, ports and transit access. The tools should be used wisely so they do not isolate Afghan civilians and drive Kabul towards regional actors and not to foster cooperation. Specific anti-terror promises in exchange for incentives may be more successful than sweeping restrictions which could be implemented gradually.

7. Conclusion

Pakistan has come to a harsh truth today; a painful one, even more painful than ever, that is that the two decades-long Afghan Taliban investment was a strategic blunder. But things are very different and it's surprising and shocking at the same time. Realists believe that this is the way international politics works: survival is an integral part of the global system; politics between the states grows in practical areas, not in sentimental feelings of friendship, historical or ideological ties. But what is more disturbing for Pakistan is Taliban's' immediate fall for Indian friendship overtures as of the moves were written in a script. This sharing of a bed is unheard of in any sense, one actor with a religious fundamentalism and the other with secular nationalism, but still this is done with a pinch of salt by Pakistan. In addition, India's capacity to offer any real solution to the political, economic or security issues of Afghanistan is structurally constrained and the relationship has been more symbolic than substantive. The solution to the crisis is in the spirit of meaningful engagement between Kabul and Islamabad. This requires more than ever a better understanding of the issues from a non-emotional perspective of what problems are being encountered by both sides and a general agreement on the need to resolve the issues. Talibans have to realize that Pakistan can not afford to bleed anymore with an Afghan made knife and Pakistan also to see Afghanistan an equal, sovereign country with free will and choices to chose partners not a client state to fulfill its strategic depth needs.

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Conflict of Interest

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Data Availability

No new clinical, experimental, or patient-level datasets were generated or analysed during this study. All information discussed in the review was obtained from the published literature and publicly available sources cited in the manuscript. Additional information relating to the review may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. No patients or other human participants were recruited, and no identifiable personal or clinical information was collected or analysed for this review.

Use of Generative AI

Consistent with the guidance of Egan et al. (2025), we disclose that ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used solely for copyediting and language refinement purposes to improve clarity, readability, grammar, sentence structure, and consistency of expression. All substantive aspects of the study, including the conceptualization of the research idea, theorization, development of the research model, methodology, data analysis, interpretation of findings, and development of conclusions, were independently conducted and reported by the authors.

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