

3. Pakistan & Afghanistan War- International Relation

Risk of Regional Spiral. The 2026 Pakistan-Afghanistan "Open War" marks a major escalation over the contested Durand Line, fuelled by Pakistan's allegations of TTP sanctuaries and the Taliban's capture of numerous border posts. For India, this conflict shifts Pakistan's military focus westward but poses significant regional security risks, potentially impacting humanitarian stability and strategic connectivity projects like the Chabahar Port.

1. The 2026 "Open War" Escalation

On February 27, 2026, Pakistan's Défense Minister officially declared a state of "open war" following a week of intense retaliatory strikes.

The Trigger- The escalation began after Pakistani airstrikes on February 22 targeted alleged militant camps in Afghanistan's Nangarhar and Paktika provinces.

Afghan Counter-Offensive- On the night of February 26, Taliban forces launched a massive offensive, claiming to have captured 15 to 19 Pakistani border posts along the Durand Line.

Pakistani "Operation Ghazab Lil-Haqq"- In response, Pakistan launched a large-scale operation involving coordinated air and ground strikes on military installations in Kabul, Kandahar, and other key cities.

Humanitarian Toll- As of early March, reports indicate over 400 Afghan soldiers and dozens of Pakistani personnel have been killed, with significant civilian casualties in border towns like Asadabad.

2. The Durand Line- The Root of Contention

The Durand Line remains the central structural fault line between the two nations.

Historical Context- A 2,640-km boundary drawn in 1893 by Sir Mortimer Durand to define spheres of influence between British India and Afghanistan.

Recognition Gap- While Pakistan considers it a settled international border, no Afghan government (including the current Taliban administration) has ever formally recognized it.

The "Pashtunistan" Issue- The line bisects the Pashtun tribal heartland. Afghanistan argues the border was a colonial imposition that unfairly divided ethnic Pashtuns, leading to periodic calls for a unified "Pashtunistan."

Fencing Friction- Pakistan's project to fence the entire border (started in 2017) is viewed by Kabul as an illegal attempt to turn a "temporary line" into a permanent frontier.

3. The TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) Factor

The TTP is the primary driver of the current security crisis.

Definition- Formed in 2007, the TTP is a coalition of Islamist militant groups aiming to overthrow the Pakistani state and establish Sharia law.

Sanctuary Allegations- Pakistan claims the TTP leadership operates with total impunity from Afghan soil. Conversely, the Taliban describes the TTP as an "internal Pakistani problem."

Surge in Violence- Since 2021, TTP attacks in Pakistan have spiked, with over 3,500 personnel killed. A major suicide attack on a Shia mosque in Islamabad (Feb 2026) was the immediate pretext for Pakistan's recent "open war" declaration.

Ideological Link- While organizationally separate, the TTP and Afghan Taliban share deep ethnic (Pashtun), cultural, and ideological ties.

4. Comparative Perspectives- Pakistan vs. Afghanistan

Feature	Pakistan's Position	Afghanistan's (Taliban) Position
Durand Line	A legal, internationally recognized border.	A colonial-era artifact; not a valid border.
Militancy	Kabul provides safe haven to the TTP.	TTP is a "homegrown" Pakistani issue.

Trade/Transit	Uses border closures as a security measure.	Views closures as "economic coercion" against a landlocked state.
Strategic Goal	Seeking "Strategic Depth" and a compliant Kabul.	Asserting "Strategic Autonomy" and sovereignty.

5. India's Strategic Perspective

India views the conflict through the lens of regional stability and its own "Connect Central Asia" policy.

De-hyphenation & Outreach- In 2025–26, India deepened its diplomatic engagement with Kabul, focusing on humanitarian aid and technical assistance.

Strategic Leverage- Tension on Pakistan's western border forces Islamabad to divert military resources away from the Line of Control (LoC) with India.

The "India Colony" Charge- Islamabad has accused Kabul of becoming an "India colony," citing Afghan Foreign Minister Muttuqi's 2025 visit to New Delhi as evidence of strategic encirclement.

Connectivity Goals- India's investment in the Chabahar Port (Iran) depends on a stable, independent Afghanistan that is not a proxy for any single power.

Terrorism Spillover- New Delhi remains cautious that a "failed state" scenario or the rise of groups like IS-KP (Islamic State-Khorasan Province) could eventually target Indian interests.

Conclusion

The 2026 Pakistan–Afghanistan War marks a qualitative shift from "proxy maneuvering" to direct state-to-state hostility. While regional powers like Qatar, Iran, and the EU are urging an immediate ceasefire, the breakdown of the "strategic depth" narrative suggests that the two neighbours are trapped in a cycle of insecurity. For India, a distracted Pakistan may ease immediate pressure, but the long-term risk of regional instability and extremist mobilization remains a paramount concern.

Source- <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/defence/news/across-the-durand-line-afghanistan-pakistan-retaliation-and-the-risk-of-a-regional-spiral/articleshow/128849481.cms>