

South Asia's New Front: The Strategic Implications of the 2026 Pakistan-Afghanistan Interstate Conflict

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Introduction

When Pakistani munitions obliterated the Omid Drug Rehabilitation Center in Kabul on March 16, 2026, the strike crystallized the fundamental nature of the escalating interstate war. The facility, a 2,000-bed treatment center operating on the grounds of the former NATO Camp Phoenix, was filled with patients breaking their Ramadan fast². The significant casualty figures, over 400 fatalities and at least 250 injuries according to Taliban authorities³, coupled with the civilian classification of the target, indicate that the conflict has expanded beyond Pakistan's stated counter-terrorism parameters. The targeting of this facility functions not as an isolated anomaly, but rather as the logical culmination of Pakistan's post-2001 strategic doctrine, illuminating a systemic rupture.



A drug rehabilitation center bombed in Kabul on Monday, March 16, 2026. © Wakil Kohsar, AFP.

Pakistan's February 27 bombardment of Afghan territory was ostensibly launched in retaliation against Kabul for harboring the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants responsible for attacks on the Pakistani military. Yet, the crisis has clearly transcended a localized border dispute over insurgent sanctuaries. It has mutated into a structural contest over sovereign legitimacy and the unresolved imperial legacy of the Durand Line⁴. The escalation began with the unprecedented October 2025 airstrikes, marking Pakistan's first direct bombardment of the

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² *Pakistan: Airstrike on Afghan Medical Facility Unlawful* | Human Rights Watch, 27 March 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/27/pakistan-airstrike-on-afghan-medical-facility-unlawful>.

³ 'Afghanistan: UN Condemns Deadly Attack on Rehab Centre in Kabul' | UN News, 17 March 2026, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/03/1167148>.

⁴ 'Pakistan-Afghanistan: aux origines d'un basculement dans une guerre ouverte', IRIS, 12 March 2026, <https://www.iris-france.org/pakistan-afghanistan-aux-origines-dun-bascullement-dans-une-guerre-ouverte/>.

Afghan capital. From the ensuing border skirmishes of late 2025 to the theater-level operations of early 2026, this trajectory reveals a deeply fragile regional order⁵.

Evaluating the structural depths of this crisis requires analytical detachment from the discursive framing of both belligerents. Accordingly, this commentary proceeds by excavating the historical roots and structural tensions underpinning the conflict, before tracing the operational escalation dynamics that precipitated open warfare. After distinguishing the stated political rationales from the unstated strategic objectives of both Islamabad and Kabul, the analysis evaluates the conflict's broader implications across three interconnected dimensions: bilateral military and economic fallout, regional strategic disruption, and the systemic paralysis of South Asia's security architecture in the post-American vacuum.

Methodological Note

Analyzing an active, information-contested conflict requires methodological humility. The evidentiary landscape surrounding the March 16 Omid Center strike exemplifies this friction.

Both the physical reality and the human toll of the Omid Center strike remain heavily contested. While Pakistani military authorities classified the site as militant infrastructure, satellite imagery and field verifications revealed no secondary detonations, affirming its documented medical function⁶. Similarly, casualty figures are obscured by competing state narratives. The Taliban claimed over 400 fatalities, whereas independent investigations estimated approximately 200, and UNAMA could only provide partial baseline data⁷. Consequently, targeting justifications and casualty reports must be analyzed as strategic narratives designed to shape international perception, rather than as objective empirical facts.

This epistemological caution must extend to the categorical labels deployed by both Islamabad and Kabul. For example, in 2024, Pakistan has officially designated the TTP as "*Fitna al-Khawarij*", a heavily loaded theological classification that strips the group of any legitimate Islamic resistance credentials and authorizes exceptional state violence. Following the Omid Center strike, Taliban spokespersons condemned the "Pakistani military regime", characterizing the strike as a "crime against humanity". The strategic deployment of these terms demonstrates their function as political instruments, necessitating rigorous methodological detachment.

Similarly, the invocation of "terrorism", utilized by Islamabad to justify its strikes; requires critical scrutiny. The historical absence of precise criteria precluded a consensus on a universal legal definition of terrorism⁸. This conceptual void allows state actors to instrumentalize the

⁵ Fabrizio Foschini et al., 'Breaking Point? The mounting conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan', *Afghanistan Analysts Network - English*, 29 March 2026, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/breaking-point-the-mounting-conflict-between-afghanistan-and-pakistan/>.

⁶ *Pakistan: Airstrike on Afghan Medical Facility Unlawful* | Human Rights Watch.

⁷ Shivam Shekhawat, 'Drifting Further from Resolution: The Escalating Afghanistan-Pakistan Crisis', Observer Research Foundation, 25 March 2026, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/drifting-further-from-resolution-the-escalating-afghanistan-pakistan-crisis>.

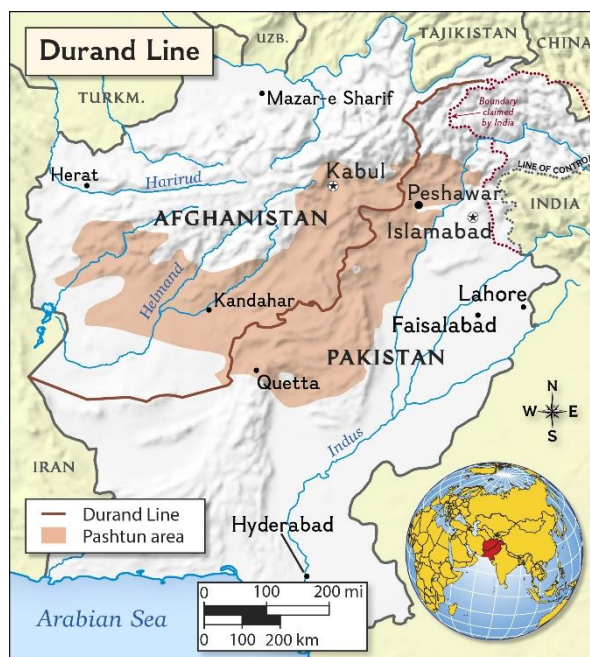
⁸ Alex Schmid, 'The Revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 2 (2012): 158–59.

term to legitimize exceptional violence and circumvent the principles of international humanitarian law⁹. As Richard Jackson observes, “terrorism discourse” operates as a political technology utilized by states to authorize impermissible violence and strip adversaries of political agency¹⁰. Therefore, following Alex P. Schmid’s framework, this commentary treats “terrorism” as an *emic* category: a subjective, politically fluid label utilized by both states to legitimize military escalation, rather than as an objective analytical baseline¹¹.

Historical Roots and Structural Tensions

1. The Durand Line as Constitutive Wound

The contemporary conflict is structurally rooted in the legacy of a 133-year-old imperial boundary dispute. While the 1893 Durand Line is internationally recognized as the *de jure* western border of Pakistan, it remains formally unrecognized by the state of Afghanistan and Pashtun nationalist movements. Upon its independence, Pakistan inherited this colonial demarcation, which originally functioned as a fluid imperial buffer zone, and institutionalized it as a permanent sovereign boundary without Kabul's bilateral consent¹².



The Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Source: National Geographic Education (<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/durand-line/>)

⁹ Agathe Sarfati, ‘International Humanitarian Law and the Criminal Justice Response to Terrorism: From the UN Security Council to the National Courts’, *International Review of the Red Cross* 103, nos 916–917 (2021): 267–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1816383121000631>.

¹⁰ Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester University Press, 2005).

¹¹ Schmid et al., *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature* (North-Holland Amsterdam, 1984), <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/political-terrorism-research-guide-concepts-theories-data-bases-and->.

¹² Samiullah Kakar, ‘The Role of Durand Line Dispute in Shaping Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations’, *Randwick International of Social Science Journal* 6, no. 4 (2025): 409–18, <https://doi.org/10.47175/rissj.v6i4.1238>.

Geographically and demographically, this line bifurcates the Pashtun ethno-linguistic space, placing approximately two-thirds of this population within Pakistan's territory. Historically, Afghan nationalists have perceived this division as an illegitimate territorial annexation, sustaining structural grievances that continually fuel irredentist sentiment. Conversely, for Islamabad, the border dispute presents a profound strategic vulnerability: formally validating Afghan claims over the Pashtun belt risks simultaneously emboldening both Pashtun nationalism and Baloch separatism, thereby threatening the territorial coherence of the Pakistani state.

2. Pakistan's Strategic Depth Doctrine

Historically, Pakistan's cultivation of the Afghan Taliban was anchored in the military doctrine of "strategic depth", an imperative to secure a pliant administration in Kabul that would mitigate Pashtun irredentism and prevent Indian regional encirclement¹³. To this end, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) systematically facilitated the Taliban's capture of Kabul in 1996. Islamabad operated under the strategic calculus that a heavily dependent client regime would finally ratify the Durand Line as a reciprocal diplomatic concession. However, this border formalization never materialized, as the Taliban consistently refused to legitimize the boundary.

Following the 2001 US intervention, Pakistan maintained a bifurcated posture: publicly serving as Washington's counter-terrorism partner while covertly sustaining the Taliban insurgency through sanctuaries¹⁴. Consequently, Islamabad initially perceived the Taliban's 2021 return to power as a successful culmination of its long-term regional strategy. Far from acting as a compliant proxy, the victorious Afghan Taliban has instead provided ideological sanctuary and operational support to the TTP, demonstrating the inherent volatility of instrumentalizing non-state militant networks for statecraft¹⁵.

3. The Origins and Strategic Context of the TTP

Formally established in 2007 in Pakistan's former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerged largely as an unintended consequence of Islamabad's historical proxy cultivation and permissive border policies. While operating as a distinct entity targeting the Pakistani state, the TTP maintains profound ideological and logistical ties with the Afghan Taliban, grounded in a shared Deobandi theology and cross-border tribal affiliations.

These structural bonds were cemented during Pakistan's 2014 Operation Zarb-e-Azb. Displaced TTP militants sought refuge across the Durand Line, frequently co-locating and fighting alongside Afghan Taliban factions against the US-led coalition. This shared insurgency

¹³ Gleb G. Makarevich, 'Pakistan's Military Elites in Search of Strategic Depth: The Concept's Evolution and Prospects', *Vostok. Afro-Aziatskie Obshchestva: Istorii i Sovremennost*, no. 6 (December 2023): 130–40, <https://doi.org/10.31857/S086919080026493-9>.

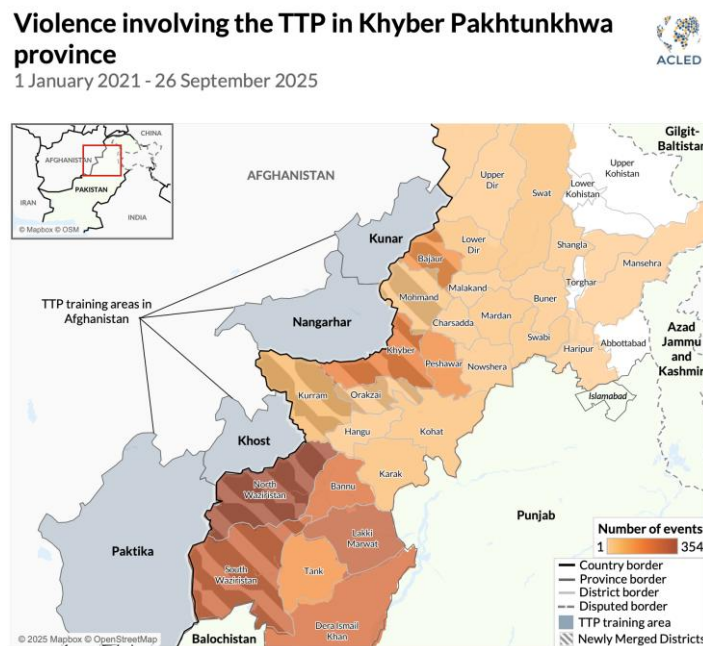
¹⁴ Bruce Riedel, *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012).

¹⁵ Abdul Rehman and Wang Mingjin, 'Pakistan and the Taliban: A Strategic Asset Turned Strategic Predicament', *Asia Policy* 19, no. 3 (2024): 153–71.

institutionalized deep operational alliances between their cadres. Consequently, Kabul's ability to forcefully neutralize the TTP is structurally constrained, as attacking former battlefield allies carries prohibitive political costs and risks triggering severe factional fracturing within the Islamic Emirate.

4. The 2024–2025 Escalation Dynamics

Following the Afghan Taliban's return to power in 2021, the TTP experienced a marked operational resurgence. Benefiting from the victory of its ideological counterpart across the border, the group significantly escalated its campaign of violence against the Pakistani state, most notably across the Waziristan districts.



*Map illustrating violence involving the TTP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.
Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).*

This resurgence laid the material foundation for the 2026 conflict, driven by the subsequent consolidation of militant logistical networks. Field research conducted in 2025 documented the expansion of an informal arms economy in the Afghan provinces of Khost and Nangarhar, regions characterized by a significant TTP operational presence¹⁶. This market expansion was largely fueled by the proliferation of NATO-standard weaponry abandoned following the 2021 United States withdrawal. Elevated weapons prices in these localized markets correlated directly with an increase in cross-border illicit trafficking.

In response to this intensification of cross-border insurgent operations, heavily enabled by these illicit logistical networks, Pakistan launched Operation *Azm-e-Istehkam* in 2024, a domestic counter-terrorism campaign aimed at neutralizing the militant infrastructure. However, the operation failed to sustainably degrade the TTP's asymmetric capabilities; rather than

¹⁶ Manon Blancafort et al., *Open Markets: Documenting Arms Availability in Afghanistan under the Taliban*, Briefing Paper (Small Arms Survey, 2025), <https://repository.graduateinstitute.ch/record/320195>.

dismantling the supply chains, domestic military pressure merely prompted illicit arms dealers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to adapt by concealing their high-grade inventories and shifting trade tactics. Sustained by these robust cross-border supply lines, the TTP significantly intensified its operational tempo within Pakistan¹⁷. This escalation rendered 2024 the deadliest year in a decade for Pakistan's security forces.

The resulting destabilization of the domestic security environment contributed to the military establishment's abandonment of its containment strategy, shifting instead toward direct, cross-border military escalation. This strategic pivot was the culmination of a critical tension phase spanning from October 2025 and February 2026, characterized escalating diplomatic frictions and preliminary military strikes.

From Tension to Open War: The Escalation Dynamics

1. Transition to Interstate Conflict

The transition from asymmetric proxy friction to conventional interstate conflict followed an accelerated escalation trajectory. On February 11, 2026, Pakistani Defense Minister Khawaja Asif announced the possibility an imminent military intervention before Ramadan. The declaration served two simultaneous purposes: issuing a firm warning to pressure Kabul, and projecting strength to reassure the domestic audience.

The security environment deteriorated rapidly following a cascading sequence of events on February 16. A TTP attack on a Bajaur military checkpoint that killed eleven Pakistani soldiers, contributed to prompt immediate Pakistani retaliation via an airstrike on the Omid Centre in Kabul that same day¹⁸. This intense culmination of violence generated acute domestic pressure on the Pakistani military establishment, effectively precluding further diplomatic restraint.

On February 26, Pakistan escalated the crisis by initiating Operation *Ghazab Lil-Haq* with sustained airstrikes across the Afghan provinces of Nangarhar, Paktika, and Khost. The Islamic Emirate immediately retaliated through Operation *Radd al-Zulm*. This reciprocal engagement expanded the crisis into a broader bilateral armed conflict, characterized by artillery exchanges, ground assaults, and drone strikes targeting military infrastructure.

¹⁷ Muhammad Saqib Ibrahim and Dr Muhammad Rashid, 'Pakistan Army's Role Against Terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Post-US Withdrawal (2021–2024)', *Social Science Review Archives* 3, no. 3 (2025): 2148–58, <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i3.1057>.

¹⁸ Foschini et al., 'Breaking Point?'

Fresh clashes erupt between Afghanistan and Pakistan

26-27 February 2026



Map illustrating cross-border attacks between Afghanistan and Pakistan on February 26–27, 2026.

Source: Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), based on ACLED data.

2. Structural Divergence and the Collapse of Diplomacy

The successive collapse of diplomatic initiatives between October 2025 and March 2026 underscores a profound structural divergence between Kabul and Islamabad. During talks brokered by Qatar and Turkey, negotiations deadlocked over irreconcilable preconditions. Pakistan demanded verifiable military action against the TTP, alongside formal religious decrees (*fatwas*) from Taliban leadership explicitly declaring the insurgency in Pakistan to be illegitimate¹⁹. Conversely, the Islamic Emirate framed the TTP as an exclusively internal Pakistani issue, a stance rooted in ideological solidarity and the domestic political risks of targeting allied militants.

Consequently, every diplomatic mechanism fractured under these competing postures. The initial Istanbul ceasefire collapsed by early November amid renewed border skirmishes and an Islamabad bombing, while subsequent Saudi-mediated talks in December yielded no progress. As diplomatic avenues exhausted themselves, the conflict transitioned into an acute escalatory phase by February and March of 2026. This diplomatic attrition culminated in the immediate failure of the March 18 Eid ceasefire. Within 24 hours of its implementation, the Afghan Ministry of Defense accused Islamabad of airspace violations and unprovoked artillery strikes in eastern provinces such as Kunar. The rapid dissolution of these agreements underscores the profound erosion of bilateral trust.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

Stated and Hidden Goals: A Dual-Level Analysis

1. Beyond the Casus Belli: Pakistani Motivations for Conflict

Islamabad's stated objective of neutralizing TTP sanctuaries partially obscures broader institutional and geopolitical imperatives. Operationally, Pakistan's campaign appears calibrated to degrade Kabul's asymmetric capabilities rather than pursue regime change. Furthermore, the conflict offers significant domestic utility for the military establishment. Against the backdrop of protracted political contestation involving the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and deepening ethno-nationalist friction in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, confronting an external threat provides the armed forces a mechanism to consolidate internal cohesion and reassert institutional primacy.

Geopolitically, the escalation functions as a deterrent against Kabul's diversification of its foreign relations. The Islamic Emirate's recent diplomatic overtures toward New Delhi, alongside signals of accelerating alignment with Russia and China, have exacerbated Islamabad's historical concerns regarding regional encirclement²⁰. Consequently, these cross-border strikes serve as a coercive signal, intended to establish firm strategic boundaries and prevent the geopolitical alienation of Pakistan's western flank.

2. The Taliban's Strategic Imperatives

For the Islamic Emirate, the conflict has catalyzed nationalist mobilization. The massive civilian casualties at the Omid Center handed the Taliban a legitimizing narrative. By positioning themselves as the primary sovereign defender a nuclear-armed aggressor, Taliban leaders temporarily divert attention from internal problems, including economic collapse, international isolation and their draconian policies of gender segregation.

Furthermore, this external mobilization intersects with complex internal factional dynamics and recent efforts to centralize military authority. Since 2022, Emir Hibatullah Akhundzada has sought to marginalize rival factions, notably the Kabul-based Haqqani Network, by monopolizing military resources²¹. However, defending against Pakistani incursions requires rapidly deploying these weapons to frontline forces, destabilizing this fragile equilibrium. Distributing materiel inadvertently empowers decentralized field commanders with significant localized autonomy. This dynamic reduces their reliance on Kandahar, complicating internal consolidation, and significantly elevates the risk of regional weapons proliferation as decentralized stockpiles become vulnerable to black-market diversion or transfers to allied militant networks.

²⁰ Amba Wattal, *Delhi's Taliban Pivot: Russia Courts India as Regional Power Dynamics Shift* - CSDR, 31 January 2025, <https://csdronline.com/blind-spot/delhis-taliban-pivot-russia-courts-india-as-regional-power-dynamics-shift/>.

²¹ Blancafort et al., *Open Markets*.

Strategic Implications: Bilateral, Regional, and Systemic

1. Bilateral Implications: Humanitarian Strain and Economic Contraction

The military asymmetry between the two states is vast but paradoxically ineffective. On the one hand, Pakistan possesses advanced airpower, ballistic missile arrays, a nuclear arsenal, and a formalized command structure. On the other hand, the Taliban rely on decentralized guerrilla tactics and captured coalition hardware. Yet, as two decades of American military intervention demonstrated, conventional technological superiority rarely translates into durable political settlements against this specific adversary²². Islamabad's strategy of military coercion is unlikely to compel Kabul's compliance, given the Islamic Emirate's capacity to absorb kinetic strikes, frame the incursions as violations of Afghan sovereignty, and utilize the external threat for domestic political consolidation.

The escalating conflict has precipitated a rapidly deteriorating displacement crisis and severe economic contraction across both nations. Following Pakistan's mass deportation of over one million Afghan nationals throughout 2025, the recent kinetic escalation has triggered a new wave of mass internal displacement²³. According to March 2026 UNHCR estimates, the bilateral border conflict has newly displaced approximately 115,000 civilians in Afghanistan and 3,000 in Pakistan²⁴. This shock places an unsustainable burden on already depleted humanitarian infrastructure and severely exacerbates regional food insecurity.



*Recently returned Afghan families living in tents near the Torkham border crossing with Pakistan.
Source: UNHCR / Oxygen Empire Media Production*

²² Shiraz Shaikh, 'Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan: Characteristics, Actions and Battlefield Operationalization', *Comparative Strategy* 43, no. 3 (2024): 164–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2024.2340947>.

²³ 'UN Experts Sound Alarm on Looming Deportations of Afghans from Pakistan', OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/08/un-experts-sound-alarm-looming-deportations-afghans-pakistan>.

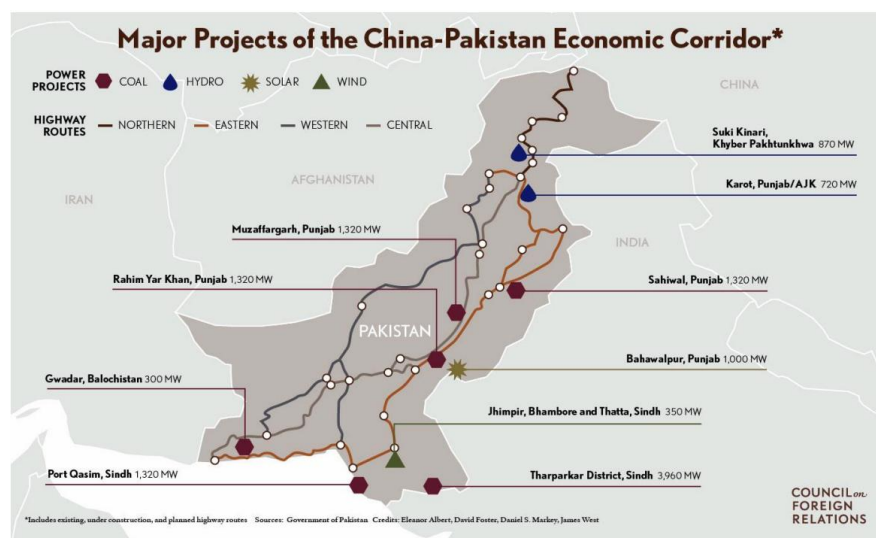
²⁴ UNHCR Director of Emergency et al., 'UNHCR Responds to Rising Displacement in Middle East Emergency', UNHCR, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-responds-rising-displacement-middle-east-emergency>.

Concurrently, bilateral commerce has remained severely constrained since late 2025²⁵. The disruption of key transit routes has precipitated a sharp contraction in trade volumes, localized inflation in food prices, and structural shifts in supply chains, inflicting severe losses on both already-fragile economies. The cessation of legal cross-border commerce is likely to contribute to an illicit war economy, particularly arms trafficking, threatening to turn the borderlands into a fully ungoverned proliferation zone.

2. Geopolitical Spillover and Regional Responses

The escalating conflict has prompted neighbouring powers to shift away from their previous strategic ambiguity. India has formally condemned Pakistan's airstrikes as violations of Afghan sovereignty, signalling a pragmatic recalibration of its traditionally cautious posture toward the Taliban. This alignment aims to safeguard New Delhi's strategic investments in Iran's Chabahar port. While Chabahar anchors the broader International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), India relies specifically on Afghan overland routes, such as the Zaranj-Delaram highway, as a critical eastern artery to bypass Pakistan and project economic influence into Central Asian markets²⁶. However, the corridor currently faces acute operational vulnerabilities stemming from the escalating regional war in the Middle East. Furthermore, engaging Kabul allows India to exploit the widening Taliban-Pakistan rift, effectively denying Islamabad historical 'strategic depth' while leveraging diplomatic engagement to secure actionable commitments from the Taliban to neutralize anti-Indian militant groups within Afghan territory.

Concurrently, China has initiated urgent, albeit thus far unsuccessful, mediation to protect its \$65 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Beijing remains acutely vulnerable to conflict spillover, as vital CPEC infrastructure intersects volatile Pashtun and Baloch territories, prompting ongoing but deadlocked diplomatic interventions.



Source: Daniel S. Markey, "Behind China's Gambit in Pakistan," *Expert Brief*, Council on Foreign Relations, 2016.

²⁵ Dr Muhammad Tariq et al., 'Pak-Afghan Bilateral Trade: Impact on the Economy of Afghanistan', *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies* 4, no. 1 (2026): 1342–48, <https://doi.org/10.59075/css6m991>.

²⁶ Ashkhen Gevorgyan, 'The Crucial Role of the International North-South Transport Corridor in the Indo-Pacific', *CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS* 26 (May 2025): 27–47, <https://doi.org/10.61841/cac.26.1.2025.27-45>.

Iran has similarly engaged in diplomatic outreach, despite simultaneously prosecuting a war against a US-Israeli coalition and managing an acute border crisis involving thousands of daily Afghan returnees.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have utilized financial leverage to broker temporary truces. However, the rapid dissolution of the Eid ceasefire underscores the structural limitations of Gulf diplomatic capital. Finally, Russia remains highly engaged. By leveraging its distinct status as the sole UN member state to formally recognize the Taliban administration, Moscow seeks to position itself as a primary geopolitical arbiter.

3. Systemic Failures in the South Asian Security Architecture

The 2026 escalation exposes profound systemic vulnerabilities within the regional security framework. Primarily, it underscores the functional paralysis of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), highlighting the absence of institutional mechanisms capable of mediating state-on-state warfare. Crucially, the conflict reveals the strategic limitations of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence. While the nuclear shadow effectively prevents total conventional mobilization, it has proven inadequate as a coercive political instrument to compel the Taliban to curtail the TTP. Consequently, the region confronts amplified diplomatic fractures and the persistent threat of transnational militancy operating beyond conventional state control, forcing smaller neighbouring nations into precarious strategic realignments

Conclusion

The 2026 escalation represents the definitive collapse of Islamabad's historical proxy architecture and the violent renegotiation of the Durand Line's imperial legacy. Tracing the trajectory from asymmetric friction to direct airstrikes reveals a profound paradigm shift: conventional military superiority and nuclear deterrence remain functionally impotent against a decentralized, asymmetric state adversary.

Consequently, this rupture transcends localized counter-terrorism. It has dismantled regional strategic ambiguity, prompting pragmatic diplomatic realignments in New Delhi while elevating Moscow's positioning as a geopolitical arbiter. Furthermore, it exposes a complete institutional void within South Asian security frameworks. Ultimately, the pursuit of "strategic depth" through militant networks has generated profound unintended consequences, severely undermining Pakistan's internal security and establishing the Afghan frontier as a durable vector of transnational instability.