

RESEARCH PRESENTATION

Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations.

Challenges, Security Concerns & Future Prospects

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CENTRAL ARGUMENT

The relationship is trapped in a security-first cycle.

Interdependence

Geography, history, culture, migration and trade bind the two countries together.

Mistrust

The Durand Line, border management and the TTP issue repeatedly convert interdependence into mistrust.

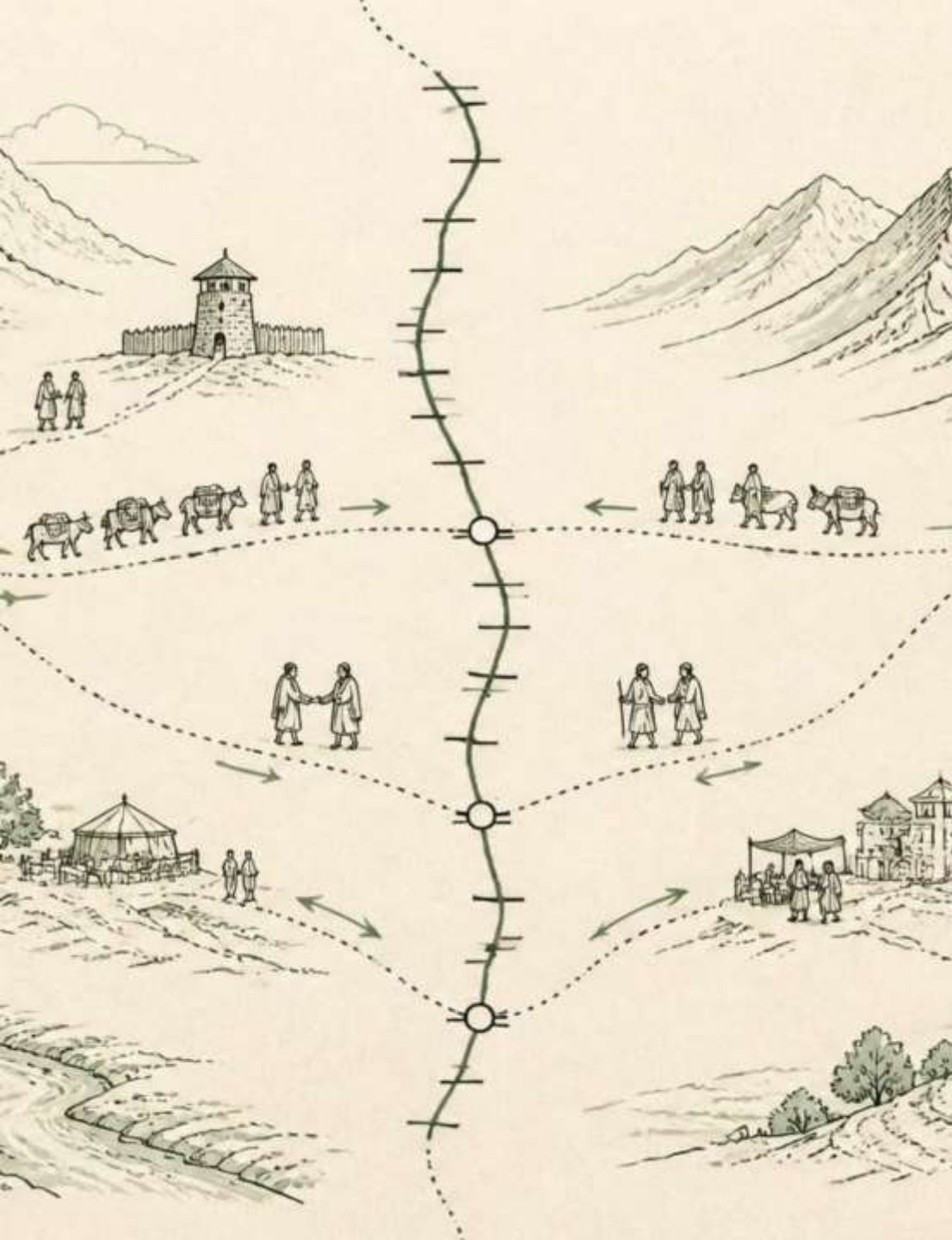
Way forward

Durable stability requires security cooperation plus diplomacy, humanitarian coordination and regional connectivity.

HISTORICAL LAYERS

Five historical layers still shape today's crisis.





GEOGRAPHY

Shared geography creates both leverage and vulnerability.

- **More than 2,600 kilometres:** shared border connect Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan with Afghan provinces.
- Communities share languages, tribal and family ties, religious traditions and trade routes.
- **Pakistan prioritises:** border security, militant containment, refugee management and access to Central Asian markets.
- **Afghanistan prioritises:** sovereignty, movement, trade access and freedom from external pressure.

The Durand Line turns border management into a political test.

01

Inherited border

Pakistan treats the international border as settled; Afghan positions have historically challenged its legitimacy.

02

Controls

Fencing, controlled crossings and closures can reduce illegal movement but also trigger confrontation.

03

Immediate costs

At Torkham and Chaman, security decisions affect traders, families, patients, transporters and refugees.

04

Stabilisers

Documented crossings, biometric systems, coordinated patrols, customs cooperation and a permanent border hotline.

SECURITY DILEMMA

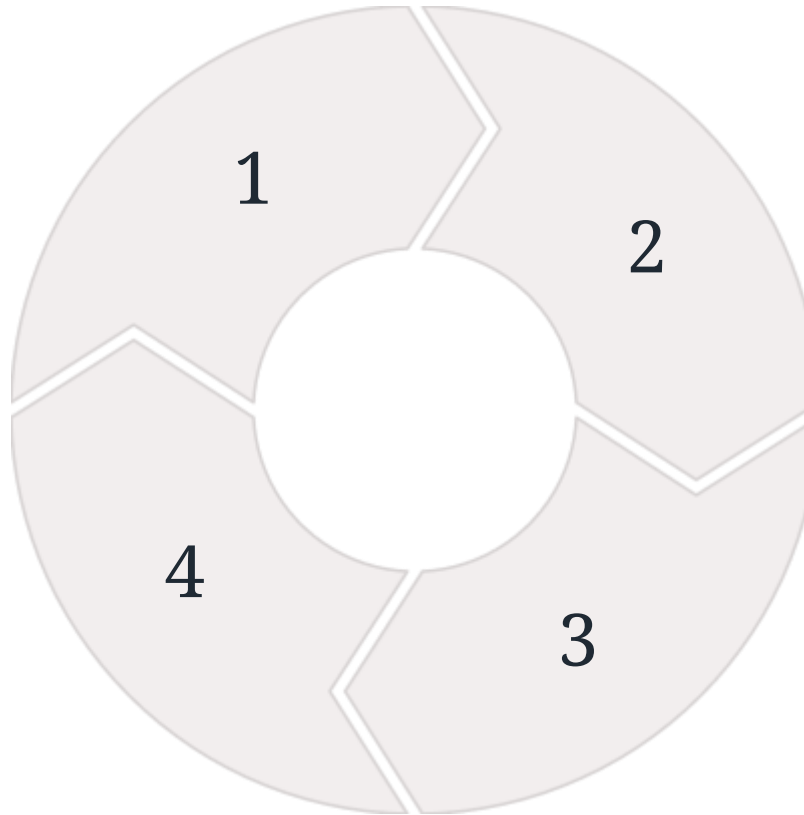
The TTP dispute is a classic security dilemma.

Militant attack

Pakistan says attacks on its territory are enabled from Afghan soil.

Border tension → military response → deeper mistrust

Afghanistan resists Pakistani military action inside Afghanistan. Each side's security measure is read by the other as a threat.



Accusation

Pakistan demands concrete action against the TTP.

Denial

Afghan authorities reject deliberate sanctuary claims.

146

civilian casualties in
Afghanistan

UNAMA · 26 February–2 March 2026

42 deaths were included in the reported total.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

2026 showed how quickly a bilateral dispute can become a humanitarian crisis.

- Pakistan and Afghan forces engaged in some of the most severe fighting between the neighbours since 2021.
- Airstrikes, military responses, border closures and displacement disrupted civilian life and commerce.
- Chinese mediation and subsequent talks showed that both sides still need a diplomatic off-ramp.

RESPONSIBILITY AND PRESSURE

Refugees sit at the intersection of responsibility and pressure.

PAKISTAN'S POSITION

More than four decades of hosting

Pakistan has hosted Afghan refugees for more than four decades. It cites security, administrative and economic constraints.

PROTECTION NEEDS

1.42 million at end-2025

Approximately 1.42 million Afghan refugees and other Afghans needing international protection were in Pakistan at the end of 2025.

Durable framework: documentation, voluntary return, international assistance, resettlement and reintegration.

Humanitarian organisations stress protection, family unity, education and healthcare.

ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

Trade is the clearest unrealised dividend of interdependence.

Arabian Sea

Pakistan offers Afghanistan a route to the Arabian Sea and international maritime markets.

Border friction

Border closures and political friction push trade toward alternative routes, including Iran.

Connectivity

Digital customs, predictable crossings, transit agreements, logistics, energy and Central Asian connectivity could make interdependence stabilising.

19% → 14%

Afghanistan's share of imports from Pakistan fell from 19% in 2023 to 14% in 2024.

REGIONAL STAKES

Regional powers widen the stakes beyond the border.

Actor	Primary stake	Relationship effect
China	Stability, Xinjiang security, economic corridors and mediation.	Creates incentives for de-escalation and regional connectivity.
Iran	Alternative trade and transit routes.	Gains relevance as Pakistan corridors become less reliable.
India	Development and humanitarian engagement.	Viewed in Pakistan through strategic rivalry.
United States	Counterterrorism, humanitarian concerns and preventing transnational militant safe havens.	Keeps the relationship tied to wider security concerns.