

A Shifting Battleground in South Asia: The Afghanistan–Pakistan Standoff

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The Afghanistan–Pakistan conflict has now entered its third consecutive week, with the fighting continuing in a fluctuating pattern. It is unfolding during the holy month of Ramadan, at a time when, elsewhere in the Muslim world, another war is underway – between Iran on one side and the United States and the Zionist regime on the other. This has pushed the Afghanistan-Pakistan crisis to the margins of the news cycle, despite its serious human and security consequences.

Pakistan has described its operation as “Ghazab Lil-Haq,” while the Taliban, in response, have launched an operation they call “Radd ul-Zulm.” Countries such as Qatar, Turkiye, and Saudi Arabia, which previously played a role in securing a ceasefire, are now preoccupied with other crises and priorities. This “attention vacuum” has had a direct effect: Pakistan has exploited it to deliver heavier blows against the Taliban.

Although Pakistan claims the purpose of these operations is to bomb TTP safe havens, what is visible on the ground is that Pakistan is targeting the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan’s operational pattern rests largely on air power: bombing weapons depots, military infrastructure, military facilities, and conducting patrols with unmanned aircraft, an intentional effort to weaken the Taliban’s military capability.

This pattern is, to some extent, similar to the approach the Zionist regime has pursued in recent years in Syria and Lebanon by launching precise and repeated airstrikes aimed at gradually eroding the other side’s infrastructure. In contrast, the Taliban have relied more on ground tactics in defending themselves.

The objectives Pakistan is pursuing through the bombing of Afghanistan:

1. Pressuring the Taliban to change their political and security behavior. Pakistan is dissatisfied with the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan expected that with the Taliban’s return to power, Pakistan’s strategic and political interests in Afghanistan would be naturally secured. But the Taliban not only refused to yield to Pakistan’s demands; in some areas they adopted a more independent course, and their practical and political ties with India became a greater concern from Pakistan’s viewpoint. Pakistan therefore seeks to change the Taliban’s behavior through military pressure. On one hand, it forces the Taliban to apply real pressure on the TTP, and on the other, pushes them to take greater account of Pakistan’s sensitivities and interests in their foreign policy and in shaping regional relationships.

2. Alignment with U.S. goals of wearing down the Taliban. This operation also aligns with the U.S. objectives. The United States wants the Taliban to come under pressure so that they show flexibility on certain issues, while also preventing the Taliban from moving too close to China and Russia. Within this framework, eroding the Taliban’s military strength, and even destroying part of the equipment and

capabilities left behind in Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal, is viewed as a “desirable” outcome for the U.S., especially given that Trump had repeatedly spoken about reclaiming that equipment. From this angle, Pakistan is effectively doing something that is greatly cherished by the U.S. As Trump praised Pakistan’s executive and military leadership on the recent conflict, stating: “Pakistan is doing terrifically well against the Taliban.”

3. Pakistan’s political use of an external crisis. In 2025, Pakistan’s foreign policy succeeded to some extent in repairing relations with the United States and the Arab world and in rebuilding its regional role. Domestically, however, it has faced serious failures. In such circumstances, opening an external front can be useful for those in power to divert public attention away from internal crises toward an “external threat.” In the past, India used to play that role; now Afghanistan is gradually becoming the similar hub for mobilization and distraction.

The conflict between the Afghan mujahideen and the Pakistani army is not merely a border or security dispute; rather, it unfolds within the broader framework of great-power rivalry and regional political dynamics. For decades, South Asia has been defined along the axis of India-Pakistan tension – Kashmir. But now this tension is being replaced by Afghanistan-Pakistan tension – Durand Line. This shift also aligns with the U.S. regional policy that is intended to reduce Pakistan’s rivalry scale with India by redirecting it toward the tribal areas and Afghanistan. Given the mutual distrust and suspicion, Afghanistan-Pakistan tension is unlikely to end soon; it looks like an unending war-of-attrition.

Historically, the month of Ramadan has been a time of victory and remarkable military achievements for the Muslim Ummah against its adversaries. Tragically, today Muslims find themselves shedding one another’s blood in conflicts fueled by the spirit of nationalism—conflicts that ultimately serve the interests of the United States, India, and a narrow circle within Pakistan’s army. The Afghan mujahideen – and those sincere officers within Pakistan’s military – must put an end to this bloodshed and work toward removing borders and establishing the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Caliphate).