

The Conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan: Colonialist Nationalistic Borders and Unhealed Wounds

(Translated)

[Al-Rayah Newspaper - Issue 594 - 08/04/2026](#)

By: Ustadh Yassin bin Yahya

In a region living amidst the echoes of historical upheavals, Afghanistan and Pakistan remain locked in a struggle over a border, one not drawn by the will of their peoples, but rather imposed by British colonialism at the height of its rivalry with the Russian Tsardom. The Durand Line, delineated in 1893, was never merely a geographical demarcation; it was a fissure carved through the very body of the Pashtun tribes. This line is a cradle for a conflict whose flames have burned unceasingly since the founding of Pakistan in 1947. Today, with the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, this conflict has reached a new turning point. The tension between the two states is no longer a mere border dispute but has evolved into a complex struggle, a confluence of colonialist legacies, regional rivalries, and a contest for influence in the heart of Asia.

The British Legacy: Roots of the Conflict in the Durand Line

It is impossible to comprehend the tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan without tracing its origins back to the Durand Line, a boundary drawn by Britain to delineate the spheres of its influence in British India and Afghanistan. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that this line bisected the cross-border Pashtun tribes, prompting Afghanistan to refuse official recognition of the boundary to this very day, while Pakistan regards it as a fixed international frontier upon which its own sovereignty rests. This persistent refusal by Afghanistan transforms any border skirmish, particularly at crossings such as Torkham into a confrontation over legitimacy itself, instead of a mere dispute over border fencing. Pakistan inherited from Britain the doctrine of state succession, leading it to uphold the Durand Line as an integral part of international law. Afghanistan, conversely, frames its narrative on the premise that the treaty was imposed within the context of a colonialist power imbalance and, consequently, remains non-binding upon the state.

From the Cold War to the Taliban: Decades of Transformation

The 1970s witnessed a pivotal shift when Afghan President Mohammed Daoud Khan embraced the concept of "Pashtunistan" lending support to separatist movements within Pakistan. Islamabad retaliated by backing the Afghan Islamist opposition, thereby initiating a phase in which the "Islamist card" was deployed against Afghanistan. However, the major turning point was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. With American and Saudi backing, Pakistan transformed into a rear base for the Mujahideen, a development that resulted in the emergence of a transnational Jihadist network and the consolidation of Pakistani intelligence influence within Afghanistan.

In the 1990s, the Taliban movement emerged in 1994, supported by Pakistan, which viewed it as a means to achieve stability in Afghanistan and secure strategic depth against India. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the dynamic shifted. The United States invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime. Pakistan subsequently found itself in a complex predicament, officially an ally of the U.S., yet simultaneously accused of harboring the Taliban. Consequently, it adopted a policy of "the double game," outwardly supporting the "War on Terror" while covertly maintaining its influence within the Taliban.

The Return of the Taliban: A New Conflict and a Rejection of Pakistani Hegemony

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan anticipated improved relations. However, the reality proved to be quite the opposite. The Taliban government refused to combat the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a group carrying out attacks within Pakistan, while the contentious debate surrounding the Durand Line resurfaced with renewed intensity, accompanied by recurring border skirmishes. For the first time, the Taliban government itself entered into direct confrontation with Pakistan, leaving Islamabad no longer able to impose its will upon the Afghan leadership, as it had done in the past.

This development reflects a profound strategic shift. Pakistan, which once viewed Afghanistan as a vital component of its strategic depth, now faces a mounting internal security threat from armed groups exploiting the porous border, all while grappling with a stifling economic crisis and increasing military attrition. Afghanistan, for its part, is now focused on consolidating its rule, and securing international recognition, firmly rejecting any form of Pakistani hegemony.

The Afghan-Pakistani Conflict as an Arena for Regional and International Rivalry

What is unfolding along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is no longer merely a bilateral matter. Instead, it has become embedded within the broader framework of rivalry among major global and regional powers. China, for instance, views Pakistan as a strategic ally and considers its stability a paramount priority, essential for safeguarding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project as well as its own interests in East Turkestan. Consequently, Beijing is quietly exerting pressure on the Taliban government to secure the border, though it proceeds with extreme caution. Conversely, India seeks to curtail Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan, a goal it pursued by supporting previous Afghan governments and undertaking development initiatives. Even following the Taliban's return to power, India has opened channels of communication to provide humanitarian aid, in an effort to break the geographic and political encirclement imposed by Pakistan.

As for the United States, despite its military withdrawal, it retains significant intelligence capabilities and continues to monitor the situation closely, utilizing Pakistan as an indirect conduit. Its primary objective is to prevent Afghanistan from reverting to a safe haven for groups deemed extremist, while simultaneously counterbalancing Chinese influence in the region. Russia, for its part, and notwithstanding its historically adversarial relationship with Afghanistan, has established channels of engagement with the Taliban government. Operating within an axis alongside China and Iran, Moscow aims to forge an alternative regional order, free from U.S. hegemony, with a particular focus on preventing the spillover of security threats into the Central Asian region.

Conclusion

At the heart of the Afghan-Pakistani conflict lies not a transient nationalistic border dispute alone. Instead, it is a complex interplay involving a colonialist legacy that remains unresolved, a transnational tribal identity, and a struggle for influence among regional and international powers, vying for dominance in the heart of Asia. Pakistan, which long staked its strategic depth on Afghanistan, now finds itself facing a domestic threat that is draining its resources, while the Taliban strives to consolidate its rule within a regional environment fraught with peril. Amidst this dynamic, China moves quietly to safeguard its investments; India acts patiently to encircle its adversary, and the United States and Russia observe with wary vigilance, engaging in ceaseless intrigue.

What is unfolding today is not merely a series of border skirmishes, but a new chapter in an age-old conflict, one in which the two parties have transitioned from an undeclared alliance to overt security rivalry. This saga will not conclude, nor will it be resolved through battles between these fratricidal foes. Instead, it will persist as a hotbed from which the colonialist continues to thrive; for the colonialist nationalistic borders drawn over a century ago remain a stark testament to a wound that cannot heal, except through the establishment of an ideological state founded upon Islam. Such a state would dismantle colonialism in all its intellectual, political, and legal manifestations, and would institute a system that unifies the Islamic Ummah, severing all ties to sectarianism, tribalism, nationalism, and every other noxious bond of the Jahiliyyah (Age of Ignorance). It would be a Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly Guided Khilafah) on the method of the Prophethood, a state in which the Divine Command of Allah (swt) is fully realized. Allah (swt) said, **﴿وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعاً وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَاناً وَكُنْتُمْ** **﴿And hold firmly together to the rope of Allah and do not be divided. Remember Allah's favour upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you, by His grace, became brothers. And you were at the brink of a fiery pit and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be rightly guided.﴾** [TMQ Surah Aal-e-Imran:103].