

Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Dynamics and Its Impact on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Security in the post US withdrawal scenario

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Abstract: *This study analyzes the effects of events at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), an area badly damaged by instability from the border. Violence, illegal immigration and organized crime have arisen in the region ever since the Taliban came into power in Afghanistan in 2021. In addition, these issues are made more challenging by old grudges, undefined borders and drifting international standards. Using various sources and data from the field, this paper examines the background of this border situation. The study concludes that the problems caused by border militancy, refugees and weak government have greatly increased instability in KP. Because the Durand Line is disputed, the TTP carries out attacks and there are weaknesses in the region's border infrastructure, insecurity is still high. The research points out that answers should involve improving borders, regional alliances, support for growth programs and stronger civil society engagement. The results provide useful information for both policymakers and leading analysts working on South Asian security and peacebuilding.*

Keywords: Pak-Afghan Border, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, porous border, Regional security

Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan have struggled over the years with moments of tension, doubts about one another and occasional breaks in cooperation. Close to the boundaries of Central Asia and South Asia, both nations have a 2,640-kilometer long border that mostly follows rocky and mountainous land. The Durand Line which designates this border, is not only an accurate geographical mark but also causes tensions in diplomatic, ethnic and security areas. At the root of the problem is that successive Afghan governments, including the Taliban, have not acknowledged the Durand Line as the international boundary. Because of this neglect, Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province now faces diverse security challenges related to militants, the arrival of refugees and political disturbances (Jan, 2022).

A knowledge of the history between both countries helps explain what is going on now. Afghanistan was the only country that voted against Pakistan's admission to the United Nations when it began in 1947, since it argued over the Durand Line dispute. For many years, Pakistan has emphasized Afghanistan to add depth to its defense strategy against India and shape events in Kabul. During the Cold War, Pakistan, with the United States and Saudi Arabia supporting it, helped the Afghan Mujahideen fight the Soviet invasion. This phase saw the start of many decades in which Pakistan's security establishment linked up with Afghan militant groups, including the Taliban that took over Afghanistan in the 1990s (Ansary, 2020).

After 9/11 and the U.S. entry into Afghanistan, Pakistan had to juggle different priorities. As a result, the country played an important role in the War on Terror and received major help from the United States. In a different sense, Pakistan kept connections with the Taliban, considering them necessary friends in a post-U.S. Afghanistan. The separate approach of the United States and Pakistan caused suspicion and the repeating accusations from Afghan governments claimed that Pakistan was giving shelter to Taliban and Haqqani network individuals. The accusations grew stronger as Afghanistan's civil war continued and more and more clashes spilled over into Pakistan's tribal sectors (Herbert, 2024).

The Taliban's takeover in Kabul in August 2021 shifted the regional security situation. In the beginning, Pakistan looked forward to a government in Kabul that would be more cooperative. Yet, the rise of the Taliban has had opposite outcomes. A militant group known as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan which aims to harm Pakistan, now enjoys new strength and security in Afghanistan. While the Taliban government often assures everyone, the TTP has still attacked areas across the border, primarily in KP which is causing many to fear the Taliban rule may change for the worse (Mir, 2022).

Because of its near proximity to Afghanistan and common ethnic ties with the Pashtuns, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is especially at risk from these issues. Over the years, the province has endured most of the effects of instability from Afghanistan. It has sheltered large numbers of Afghan refugees, allowed militants and weapons to pass through and was the scene of the 2014 mass killing of students in the Army Public School in Peshawar. Even though the government launched Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad to fight militancy, things are still far from stable in the region (Alamgir, 2019).

As a result of its porosity, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan helps drug trafficking, illegal weapons trade and smuggling of people. Such lack of law allows warlords, traffickers and insurgent groups to thrive and control a different economy. Building the border, adding surveillance and regulating border crossings by Pakistan are good changes, but these moves are opposed by the Afghans and local tribes who believe they will upset border communities financially and fragment the societies (Makki, 2022).

Moreover, there is no coordinated effort among regional countries which makes things worse. Both China and Russia have expressed worries about terrorism coming from Afghanistan, but they have mainly acted in economic and diplomatic ways. Considering India's involvement as encirclement by Pakistan adds difficulties to their relationship and leads to mutual feelings of distrust. Because there is no shared system for conflict management and monitoring boundaries, it is commonly non-state actors who step in (Malouta, 2019).

Certain internal features within KP give rise to major problems. In this province, there is high poverty, not enough schools and hospitals and weak government. For these reasons, young people are at high risk of being radicalized and recruited by militant organizations. Using the military too often by the state not only risks human rights but also causes the local people to become even more estranged from the government (Idris, 2019).

Because of all these challenges, this paper focuses on outlining the effects of Pakistan-Afghanistan border dynamics on the security of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This area of study examines past events, current trends, regional games of power and the influence on border communities' society and economy. In addition to studying the problems, the study also gathers solutions and proposes policies that can promote sustainability in the region. For this purpose, I used qualitative analysis to read academic literature, programs initiated by policy makers and also interviewed security and community leaders (CIVICUS, 2024).

The security of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa depends in large part on those between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Stabilizing the province can be achieved only by diplomacy with the Taliban, working with nearby countries, boosting government development and introducing community-based methods for solving

conflicts. To secure its western border and give Pakistani citizens long-lasting peace and wealth, the country must use a multi-layered approach.

Research Question

How have the evolving geopolitical, socio-economic, and security dynamics along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border particularly following the Taliban's return to power in 2021 affected the internal stability and security of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and what multidimensional policy strategies can effectively address these impacts?

Problem Statement

This border area has, throughout history, caused tension due to unsettled border problems, complicated ethnic issues and the continued presence of militants. The Taliban coming to power again in 2021 has quickly shifted how things are along the Pak-Afghan border, making Pakistan's internal security increasingly at risk, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Spiraling insecurity in KP is caused by terrorism across the border, increasing crime and uncontrolled refugee migration, despite the Pakistani government's efforts to stop them. Because of this lasting instability, the province's governance is disrupted, development is interrupted and tensions between different groups are intensified.

A greater need exists to examine how issues at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border affect the stability of KP. There isn't much research that looks at how political issues at the border connect with security in the province. This study is designed to address that issue by looking at the province's border experiences in terms of history, politics and socio-economics. Solving this issue is vital to make sure policies help promote both national security and peace among regional countries.

Research Methodology

The influence of Pakistan-Afghanistan border dynamics on the security of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is studied using a qualitative approach. Because of how the issue involves numerous political, historical, social and security elements, an interpretive approach was deemed necessary.

The data was collected by examining peer-reviewed research, policy briefs, government records, papers from think tanks and published books. The information mainly came from materials written within the last five years to make sure recent events like the Taliban's return to Afghanistan are included. I rely primarily on the GSDRC, the NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability and the Chinese Journal of International Review.

To find out what the data indicate, issues such as border security, cross-border militancy, refugee problems and socio-economic impacts were repeatedly evaluated. I based this analysis on theories from border studies, regional security and conflict transformation. The purpose was to understand how both worldwide and local pressures on KP affect its stability.

By bringing together expert views and research results, the research helps people understand regional security problems and advises on what policy steps to take.

Discussion and Analysis

Reviewing Pakistan-Afghanistan border issues brings up different challenges such as their past, geopolitical impacts, tribe-related tensions and social and economic challenges in KP. Here, the author critically explores the main factors facing the region, including where militants shelter, issues of governance, the arrival of refugees, politics and how Pakistan's government responds (Hopkins, 2015).

An especially pressing matter for KP is the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militants using Afghanistan as a safe base. Ever since the Taliban took over in Afghanistan two years ago, Pakistan has regularly accused their neighbor of being complacent towards these groups. The reason the Taliban is hesitant to tackle the TTP is that their ideas and tribes are similar. Some TTP members share family

and tribal relations across the border, hurting efforts made only by the military to drive them out. Therefore, there are regular attacks on security forces, politicians and citizens in the region. These actions harm the security of the province, cause tension between the military and the government and lower the public's trust in important state agencies (Bahiss, 2021).

Things are made even more difficult by how easy it is to cross between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although Pakistan has put up fences and carried out many surveillance activities, the border is still hard to watch thanks to its rough land and lack of help from the Afghanistan side. Experts say that people engaging in unlawful activities, including militants and smugglers, often choose unregulated crossing points between the two nations. Because the border lets people and goods move freely, weapons and drugs are smuggled in, more insurgents can be trained and support is offered to those fighting in KP. Since society cannot provide a strong security, criminal gangs and ideological groups work together more closely and hide behind common names (Jan, 2022).

The presence of refugees affects KP's security greatly. Because there are more than one million Afghan refugees living in KP, pressure on the region's services and infrastructure is very high. Despite most refugees following the law, not being able to monitor and identify them makes it easier for militants to join the population. The Pakistani government's work to repatriate refugees without official documents has been talked about negatively by various nations. The state is still struggling to deal with refugee communities, leaving a hidden security danger (Clayton, 2022).

Since countries like India, China, Iran and Russia participate, the problem becomes more complicated. Pakistan regards India's role in Afghanistan including its intelligence exchange as dangerous to its security interests (Ahmad, 2022). At the same time, China seeks to prevent Islamist militancy coming into its Xinjiang province. Because of their old bonds with the Afghan factions, Iran and Russia usually act against what Pakistan wants in the region. Because individual interests differ, forming a regional plan for peace and stability in KP and the surrounding area is especially hard (Cheema, 2022).

Poor development and weak governance within Pakistani society increase KP's problems. Because Ontario doesn't have enough education, healthcare and infrastructure, a significant number of its people are open to messages from extremists. Operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have destroyed many militants, but have not solved what leads to radicalization. When government or private efforts to rehabilitate individuals are inadequate and unemployment persists, then extremist ideologies can quickly re-appear (BTI, 2022).

The resistance from civil society and local people gives us some hope. Ulasi Pashoon as well as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) are working to protect human rights, promote justice and call for less military involvement in the tribal belt. Yet, the state usually works to limit their impact on policy and public sentiment. Even so, their existence proves that the public is paying greater attention to governance which could lead to KP adopting more inclusive systems (Bezhan, 2021).

The nation is confronting these challenges with a variety of strategies. Work is mostly finished on the border, meaning it now helps restrict access and block militants from infiltrating. US forces continue their efforts against the Afghan insurgents' hideouts, but the US also remains open to talking with the Afghan Taliban leaders. However, the impact of these steps is limited by uneven policy enforcement, not enough partnership in the region and insufficient support for educational and community activities (Basit, 2021).

Pakistan needs to develop a plan that simultaneously addresses questions of security and progress in economic and social areas. Among other things, this means upgrading the way borders are controlled, spending on local development, partnering with similar nations and strengthening civil groups. To improve security, it is important to tackle the problems that are all connected (Bano, 2021).

It is important to view borders with a more detailed sense of their dynamics after considering the issues above. Policymakers should stop treating the Pakistan-Afghanistan border only as a rule for control and notice how it is formed by the past, cultural identity and political goals. It takes more than border walls and military patrols; a lasting answer counts on talks, advancement and negotiation.

Conclusion

The way Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is protected is linked to developments at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. This paper shows that disputes from the past, instability in politics, violent groups and economic weakness play a big role in today's problems in KP. Following the Taliban's return to Afghanistan last year, there have been more issues in Pakistan from cross-border threats, mainly due to TTP's resurgence, looser border measures and increased smuggling and organized crime.

Reinforcing security on its western border, Pakistan has built fencing, carried out military activities and had talks with its neighbors. Even so such efforts haven't always worked well due to the absence of lasting regional teamwork and challenges in internal KP leadership. The arrival of antisha war refugees, high demand on limited resources and the region's low development greatly harm the province's weak safety measures.

Military action alone is not enough to manage such difficult problems. What is necessary is an approach that links border security with lifting the economy, including everyone in society and supporting development. Improved cooperation among regional states, mainly with Afghanistan and increased support for civil groups help ensure lasting peace. Helping to build local organizations, fund youth education and assist community groups can greatly help secure KP.

The border between Pakistan and Afghanistan should be viewed as a way to integrate the region, support economic projects and help build lasting peace. To defeat instability and create a stable and prosperous Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan must use a strategy that includes many approaches and supports all parts of the community.

Recommendations

The findings and analysis in this research have led to the following recommendations which are expected to address security threats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and bring stability to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area.

Work to improve resources managing borders.

Complete the fencing project by including improved surveillance equipment as you go. Expand ties with local police and open extra secure border crossing points to oversee movement better and prevent illegal acts.

Support and strengthen diplomatic efforts between countries in a region.

Keep talking to the Taliban government to achieve promises that they will not accommodate TTP forces. Encourage discussions among China, Iran and Central Asian republics to design a security arrangement that involves everyone.

Helping People via Education and Work Activities:

Introduce projects for learning and employment opportunities in KP that are based on community needs. Work hand in hand with NGOs to develop strategies that handle the basic reasons for extremism.

Back the Process of Integrating Refugees and Giving Them Documented Status

Create processes to correctly register, watch over and integrate Afghan refugees. Join efforts with those agencies to assist people displaced by conflict and try to stop radicalization in these groups.

Support the Strength of Local Councils and People's Organizations.

Improve how local government works and have civil society participate in both peacebuilding and development. Efforts should be made for people in tribal districts to take part in making decisions and resources should be shared in an open way.

Break up the groups that commit transnational crimes:

Better cooperation and the exchange of intelligence among agencies should focus on stopping drug, arms and human trafficking from happening in border areas.

Improve the basic infrastructure required for society's economic activities.

Improve healthcare, schools and roads in border regions to help communities grow strong and find alternative ways to earn money.

Develop and Use Structures That Last for Conflict Resolution:

Support research on peacebuilding and solutions to conflicts in both schools and government agencies. Let tribal elders, members of civil society and government workers speak with each other to overcome problems and work toward peace.

Carrying out these ideas takes political commitment, active community involvement and long-term efforts with partners globally. A sincere and well-planned effort is required to maintain peace and reach security in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

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