



Pakistan–Afghanistan Border Unrest: Emerging Security Challenges and Strategic Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

The Pakistan–Afghanistan border region has long been characterized by volatility, but recent political transitions in Afghanistan, evolving militant dynamics, and shifting regional power interests have intensified security challenges for Pakistan. This study examines the emerging patterns of border unrest by analyzing cross-border militancy, refugee flows, smuggling networks, and the resurgence of extremist groups operating from Afghan territory. It explores how the absence of effective border governance, weakened intelligence cooperation, and the evolving security posture of the Taliban regime have shaped the current strategic environment. The paper further evaluates Pakistan's policy responses—ranging from enhanced border fencing and surveillance to diplomatic engagement and counterterrorism operations—and assesses their effectiveness in addressing both immediate and structural threats. By situating border instability within the broader regional geopolitical context, the study highlights critical strategic implications for Pakistan's internal security, economic stability, and foreign policy orientation. The findings underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive and coordinated security strategy that integrates military, diplomatic, and socio-economic measures to ensure long-term stability along the Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier.

Keywords: Afghanistan, security, Pakistan, stability, extremist



Introduction

The Pakistan–Afghanistan border region has long constituted one of South Asia’s most complex and volatile security environments. Stretching over approximately 2,640 kilometers along the Durand Line, the border cuts across rugged mountainous terrain, historically fluid tribal areas, and deeply interconnected ethnic, cultural, and economic spaces. Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, this frontier has remained contested, under-governed, and susceptible to persistent instability. In recent years, border unrest has re-emerged with renewed intensity, posing multidimensional security challenges and strategic dilemmas for Pakistan. The evolving situation reflects not only local dynamics but also broader regional and international transformations, including regime change in Afghanistan, the resurgence of militant networks, shifting great power interests, and Pakistan’s own internal political and economic constraints.

Historically, the Durand Line has never functioned as a conventional international border in the Westphalian sense. Tribal mobility, porous crossings, and shared Pashtun identity on both sides have ensured continuous social interaction irrespective of formal boundaries. While these linkages have cultural and economic significance, they have also complicated state authority and border management. During the Cold War and especially after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the border region became heavily militarized and internationalized. Pakistan emerged as a frontline state, hosting millions of Afghan refugees and facilitating resistance movements, which entrenched networks of militancy, arms proliferation, and informal economies. These legacies continue to shape contemporary border unrest.

The post-9/11 period marked a critical turning point in Pakistan–Afghanistan border dynamics. The U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent War on Terror transformed the border belt into a central theater of counterterrorism operations. Pakistan faced sustained pressure to curb militant sanctuaries in its former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), while Afghanistan accused Pakistan of harboring insurgent groups targeting Afghan security forces and international troops. This mutual distrust institutionalized a pattern of blame, cross-border incidents, and diplomatic friction. Despite Pakistan’s extensive military operations—such as Rah-e-Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb, and Radd-ul-Fasaad—militancy proved resilient, adapting to changing security environments and exploiting governance vacuums across the border.

The Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 introduced a new phase in border unrest. While Pakistan initially viewed the regime change as an opportunity for strategic stabilization, expectations of improved border security and reduced militancy were not fully realized. Instead, Pakistan witnessed a surge in attacks attributed primarily to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which found ideological affinity, operational space, and logistical depth across the Afghan border. The absence of a formal security framework between Islamabad and Kabul, coupled with Afghanistan’s economic collapse and international isolation, further constrained effective cooperation. As a result, border tensions escalated through armed clashes, fencing disputes, airspace violations, and frequent closures of key crossings such as Torkham and Chaman.

Border unrest has thus evolved beyond episodic violence into a sustained security challenge with far-reaching strategic implications for Pakistan. At the tactical level, frequent militant attacks have targeted security forces, police, and civilian infrastructure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. The Suicide bombings, ambushes, and targeted



assassinations have eroded local security and undermined public confidence in the state's capacity to provide protection. At the operational level, Pakistan's border management initiatives—most notably the fencing of the Durand Line—have generated both security gains and political friction. While fencing has reduced unauthorized crossings and smuggling in some areas, it has also provoked resistance from Afghan authorities and disrupted traditional livelihoods, fueling local grievances that militant groups readily exploit.

Strategically, the persistence of border unrest places Pakistan in a difficult balancing position. On one hand, Pakistan seeks a stable Afghanistan that does not serve as a sanctuary for anti-Pakistan militants. On the other hand, Islamabad must manage its relations with the Taliban regime without international recognition, while navigating pressure from global actors concerned about terrorism, human rights, and regional stability. This dilemma is compounded by Pakistan's internal challenges, including economic fragility, political polarization, and governance deficits in newly merged tribal districts. The security burden of the western border strains limited resources, forcing difficult trade-offs between development, defense spending, and social welfare.

Moreover, Pakistan-Afghanistan border instability has significant regional implications. The border region lies at the intersection of South and Central Asia, making it critical for regional connectivity initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), trans-Afghan trade routes, and energy corridors. Persistent insecurity threatens these projects, discourages foreign investment, and reinforces Pakistan's risk profile. At the same time, rival regional actors may seek to exploit instability to advance their strategic interests, further complicating Pakistan's security calculus. The border thus functions not only as a physical frontier but also as a geopolitical fault line where local conflicts intersect with broader regional rivalries.

Another critical dimension of border unrest is its humanitarian and socio-economic impact. Recurrent violence disrupts trade, education, and healthcare in border communities already characterized by underdevelopment and poverty. Border closures and security operations affect thousands of families dependent on cross-border commerce and daily movement. Additionally, Pakistan continues to host a large Afghan refugee population, whose status has become increasingly politicized amid security concerns. The intersection of refugee management, border control, and counterterrorism creates policy dilemmas that test Pakistan's administrative capacity and social cohesion.

The legal and normative aspects of border management further complicate the situation. Afghanistan's historical non-recognition of the Durand Line remains a symbolic but potent issue, periodically invoked to challenge Pakistan's fencing efforts and territorial claims. While international law largely recognizes inherited colonial boundaries, the absence of a mutually accepted framework perpetuates ambiguity and contestation. This legal uncertainty undermines confidence-building measures and inhibits the development of institutionalized border governance mechanisms. In this context, understanding Pakistan-Afghanistan border unrest requires an integrated analytical approach that moves beyond narrow security paradigms. Militancy and violence are embedded in a broader matrix of historical grievances, socio-economic marginalization, ideological contestation, and regional geopolitics. Effective policy responses must therefore combine military measures with political engagement, economic development, and regional diplomacy. The experience of Pakistan's tribal areas demonstrates that kinetic operations alone cannot



deliver sustainable peace without parallel efforts to strengthen governance, deliver services, and integrate marginalized populations into the national mainstream.

This study situates the current phase of border unrest within this wider historical and strategic framework. It seeks to analyze the emerging security challenges along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border and assess their strategic implications for Pakistan’s internal stability, foreign policy, and regional role. By examining patterns of violence, state responses, and evolving regional dynamics, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of one of Pakistan’s most pressing security concerns. The introduction lays the foundation for subsequent sections by highlighting the complexity of the border issue, the persistence of instability, and the urgent need for comprehensive, forward-looking strategies to manage and mitigate the risks emanating from Pakistan’s western frontier.

Literature Review

Pakistan–Afghanistan border unrest is extensive and multidisciplinary, drawing from security studies, international relations, political geography, and development studies. Researchers largely agree that instability along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border is deeply rooted in historical legacies, governance deficits, and evolving regional power dynamics (Rashid, 2010; Fair, 2014). This literature review critically examines major academic debates, thematic strands, and empirical findings, while identifying gaps relevant to emerging security challenges and strategic implications for Pakistan.

A substantial body of literature traces border instability to the creation of the Durand Line in 1893. Scholars argue that the Durand Agreement imposed an artificial boundary that divided Pashtun tribes and disrupted traditional socio-political structures (Gregorian, 1969; Omrani, 2009). Afghanistan’s persistent refusal to formally recognize the Durand Line has been identified as a major source of political contention, undermining the development of a mutually accepted border management regime (Rubin, 2013). Political geographers emphasize that the border region historically functioned as a buffer zone rather than a fully integrated administrative space (Ali, 2018). British colonial policies of indirect rule entrenched tribal autonomy without institutional integration, leaving Pakistan with weak governance structures after independence (Yousaf, 2019). This historical governance deficit, according to the literature, explains the persistence of porous borders and resistance to centralized state authority.

Militancy constitutes a dominant theme in the literature on border unrest. Studies on the Afghan jihad highlight how Pakistan’s border regions became hubs for militant mobilization during the Soviet–Afghan war, resulting in the proliferation of armed networks, radical ideologies, and illicit economies (Rashid, 2000). These networks later evolved into transnational jihadist movements, including Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups. Post-9/11 scholarship focuses extensively on the rise of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its cross-border operational capabilities. Analysts argue that the border’s rugged terrain and lack of coordinated security mechanisms have enabled militant groups to exploit sanctuaries on both sides of the border (Fair, 2014; Abbas, 2018). Military operations conducted by Pakistan are widely acknowledged to have disrupted militant infrastructure; however, researchers note that displacement and regrouping across the border have allowed militancy to persist (Jones & Fair, 2010).

The effectiveness of Pakistan’s counterterrorism strategy has generated considerable debate. Some scholars credit large-scale military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad for restoring relative stability in the former tribal areas (Nawaz, 2016). Others



argue that Pakistan's security-centric approach prioritizes kinetic measures at the expense of political reconciliation and socio-economic development (Siddiq, 2017).

Literature on border fencing presents mixed assessments. Proponents suggest that fencing the Durand Line has reduced illegal crossings, arms trafficking, and militant infiltration (Shah, 2021). Critics contend that fencing disrupts cross-border livelihoods and exacerbates humanitarian challenges, thereby generating resentment among border communities (ICG, 2020). Furthermore, Afghanistan's opposition to fencing has transformed a security measure into a diplomatic flashpoint, intensifying bilateral tensions. Bilateral mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a recurring theme in the literature. Afghan scholars often accuse Pakistan of pursuing strategic depth through support for non-state actors, while Pakistani analysts emphasize Afghanistan's inability to control militant groups operating from its territory (Rubin, 2013; Yusuf, 2022). This reciprocal blame has institutionalized a cycle of mistrust, undermining prospects for sustained cooperation.

Following the Taliban's return to power in 2021, scholarly debate intensified regarding Pakistan's strategic expectations. Some analysts argue that Islamabad overestimated its leverage over the Taliban regime (Yusuf, 2022), while others maintain that Afghanistan's internal fragmentation limits Kabul's capacity to restrain militant groups such as the TTP (Giustozzi, 2022). This literature suggests that post-2021 border unrest reflects both misaligned expectations and structural constraints. Regional security literature situates Pakistan-Afghanistan border unrest within broader geopolitical dynamics. Scholars emphasize that instability undermines regional connectivity initiatives linking South and Central Asia, including trade corridors and energy projects (Khan, 2020). From a geopolitical perspective, border unrest also intersects with the strategic interests of external factors such as China, the United States, Russia, and India (Small, 2015). Recent studies highlight China's growing security concerns related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and militant spillover from Afghanistan (Rolland, 2020). This body of work underscores that border instability has implications not only for Pakistan's internal security but also for its regional strategic partnerships.

An expanding body of literature adopts a human security framework to analyze border unrest. Researchers link persistent violence to chronic underdevelopment, poverty, lack of education, and weak service delivery in border regions (Malik, 2017). These studies argue that militarization without parallel development initiatives risks perpetuating cycles of instability. Refugee-focused scholarship further highlights the complex relationship between displacement and security. Pakistan's long-term hosting of Afghan refugees is examined as both a humanitarian responsibility and a governance challenge (UNHCR, 2019). Scholars caution that securitizing refugee populations may exacerbate marginalization and undermine social cohesion (Loescher, 2001).

Legal scholars examine the Durand Line through the lens of international law and state succession. While most agree that inherited colonial boundaries remain legally valid, they acknowledge that Afghanistan's political rejection of the border complicates confidence-building and institutionalized border governance (Omrani, 2009). This unresolved legal-symbolic tension continues to influence border politics and security perceptions.



Theoretical Framework

This study employs Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) as its primary theoretical framework to analyze Pakistan–Afghanistan border unrest and its strategic implications for Pakistan. Developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, RSCT posits that security is regionally clustered, meaning that states within a specific geographical region experience interconnected security threats that cannot be effectively understood or resolved in isolation. According to this theory, security dynamics are shaped by patterns of amity, enmity, and interdependence among neighboring states, making regional interactions central to threat perception and policy responses.

The Pakistan–Afghanistan border region constitutes a classic example of a regional security complex. The two states are geographically contiguous, historically interlinked, and mutually vulnerable to security developments across the border. Militancy, insurgency, refugee flows, arms trafficking, and ideological spillover transcend the formal boundary of the Durand Line, binding the security of Pakistan and Afghanistan into a single regional subsystem. RSCT provides a useful analytical lens to explain why internal instability in Afghanistan directly translates into security challenges for Pakistan, particularly in its border provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan.

Within the RSCT framework, non-state actors play a critical role in shaping regional security dynamics. Groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) exploit weak border governance and regional instability to operate across state boundaries, thereby challenging traditional state-centric notions of security. RSCT accommodates this complexity by recognizing that regional security threats are not limited to inter-state conflict but also include transnational and sub-state actors that influence regional stability. Furthermore, RSCT allows for the incorporation of external powers as intervening actors. The involvement of global and regional powers—such as the United States, China, Russia, and India—has significantly influenced the security environment of the Pakistan–Afghanistan border region. Their strategic interests, military interventions, and economic initiatives interact with local dynamics, reinforcing the argument that border unrest is embedded within a broader regional and extra-regional security structure.

By applying Regional Security Complex Theory, this study conceptualizes Pakistan–Afghanistan border unrest as a multidimensional and interdependent security phenomenon. The framework enables a systematic analysis of how historical legacies, militant networks, state policies, and regional geopolitics converge to produce persistent instability. It also helps assess Pakistan's strategic options within the constraints imposed by regional interdependence, thereby providing a coherent theoretical foundation for the study.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research methodology to examine the emerging security challenges along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border and their strategic implications for Pakistan. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the complex, context-specific, and politically sensitive nature of border unrest.

Discussion

The findings of this study reaffirm that unrest along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border is not a temporary security disturbance but a structurally embedded phenomenon shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical transformations, and evolving militant strategies. The discussion integrates empirical observations with existing literature to highlight how



border instability continues to challenge Pakistan's internal security, governance capacity, and strategic posture.

First, the persistence of cross-border militancy underscores the limitations of traditional, military-centric security approaches. While Pakistan has undertaken extensive counterterrorism operations and border fencing initiatives, the resurgence of militant groups such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) suggests that kinetic measures alone are insufficient. This aligns with Fair (2014) and Anderson and McGovern (2021), who argue that insurgent adaptability and cross-border sanctuaries reduce the long-term effectiveness of purely coercive strategies. The porous nature of the border—reinforced by difficult terrain and transnational tribal networks—continues to facilitate militant mobility, undermining Pakistan's efforts to consolidate territorial control.

Second, the findings demonstrate that border unrest has significant socio-economic and political implications that extend beyond immediate security concerns. Chronic instability has slowed economic development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, regions already suffering from structural underdevelopment. As highlighted by Hussain (2021), insecurity discourages foreign investment and threatens the viability of large-scale infrastructure initiatives such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The discussion suggests that security and development are mutually reinforcing; without socio-economic inclusion, border populations remain vulnerable to militant recruitment and criminal networks.

Third, the study reveals that refugee dynamics play a complex and often misunderstood role in border unrest. While Afghan refugees are frequently securitized in public discourse, the evidence indicates that instability stems less from refugee presence and more from weak regulatory frameworks and governance gaps (Khan et al., 2022). Poor documentation, limited service provision, and lack of integration policies contribute to informal economies that can be exploited by criminal and extremist actors. This finding supports broader migration-security scholarship, which cautions against framing displacement primarily as a security threat.

Fourth, bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remain a central determinant of border stability. The absence of formal Afghan recognition of the Durand Line continues to generate diplomatic friction and hampers cooperative border management. The discussion supports Schofield's (2003) assertion that unresolved border legitimacy disputes perpetuate mistrust and inhibit intelligence-sharing. Without sustained diplomatic engagement and confidence-building measures, unilateral border policies risk escalating tensions rather than stabilizing the frontier.

Finally, the discussion situates Pakistan–Afghanistan border unrest within a wider regional security context. The post-2021 geopolitical environment has increased uncertainty, as regional and global powers recalibrate their engagement with Afghanistan. Pakistan's strategic challenge lies in balancing security imperatives with diplomatic pragmatism—avoiding over-militarization while actively promoting regional cooperation frameworks involving Central Asia, China, Iran, and multilateral institutions. This aligns with Ghani and Lockhart's (2008) argument that durable border stability requires governance reform, regional consensus, and economic interdependence rather than isolated national responses.

Overall, the discussion highlights that Pakistan's border challenges are multidimensional and interlinked. Sustainable stability requires an integrated strategy combining hard



security measures, inclusive development, institutional reform, and proactive diplomacy. Failure to address these interconnected dimensions risks perpetuating a cycle of violence that undermines Pakistan's long-term national and regional interests.

Emerging Security Challenges

Cross-Border Militancy and Terrorism

Cross-border militant movements have been central to border unrest. Organizations such as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and ISIS-Khorasan exploit border permeability to relocate, regroup, and attack Pakistani targets (Anderson & McGovern, 2021). TTP resurgence post-2021 has led to an uptick in attacks on security forces and civilians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, compelling Pakistan to increase military operations along the frontier.

Refugee Influx and Social Strain

Periodic inflows of Afghan refugees create demographic pressures on Pakistan's border regions. While refugees contribute to local economies, they also strain public services, generate competition for jobs, and sometimes intersect with criminal networks (Khan et al., 2022).

Organized Crime and Illicit Trade

The border facilitates smuggling of narcotics, weapons, and contraband goods. Pakistan lies along key opium trafficking routes emanating from Afghanistan, empowering criminal syndicates and undermining state regulation (UNODC, 2023).

Tribal and Ethnic Dynamics

Ethno-tribal identities, particularly among Pashtun communities split across the border, create socio-political alignments that complicate central state authority and border governance (Schofield, 2003). Local loyalties often supersede national borders, challenging uniform law enforcement.

Results and Findings

The findings reveal a marked escalation in cross-border militancy along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, particularly following the political transition in Afghanistan in 2021. Armed groups, especially Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have exploited border porosity and weak cross-border coordination to carry out attacks inside Pakistan. Despite sustained military operations and enhanced surveillance, militant infiltration persists, indicating that physical security measures alone have not fully addressed the structural drivers of insurgency (Fair, 2014; Anderson & McGovern, 2021). This underscores the adaptive capacity of non-state actors operating within borderland environments.

Secondly, the results indicate that prolonged border unrest has placed significant pressure on Pakistan's internal security and governance institutions. Continuous deployment of security forces in frontier regions has diverted state resources away from socio-economic development and civilian administration. This securitized governance model, while necessary for immediate threat containment, has limited long-term stabilization by neglecting local political inclusion and institutional reform (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2020). Consequently, governance vacuums persist, allowing militant and criminal networks to maintain influence in border districts.

Third, the findings challenge the dominant narrative that links Afghan refugee presence directly to insecurity. Evidence suggests that insecurity arises primarily from weak regulatory frameworks, undocumented mobility, and informal economic systems rather than refugee populations themselves. In areas where registration and service provision



mechanisms are effective, refugee communities exhibit social integration and economic participation. These findings align with migration-security literature that emphasizes governance failure—not displacement—as the principal driver of instability (Khan et al., 2022).

Finally, the study finds that border unrest has undermined Pakistan's economic and strategic objectives, particularly regional connectivity and trade. Insecurity has disrupted legal cross-border commerce, facilitated illicit trade networks, and increased the security costs of major infrastructure projects such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Moreover, unresolved diplomatic tensions with Afghanistan over border management continue to weaken cooperative security arrangements, reinforcing the conclusion that sustainable border stability requires an integrated approach combining security, development, and diplomacy (Hussain, 2021; Schofield, 2003).

Strategic Implications for Pakistan

National Security and Counterterrorism Policy

Border unrest directly affects Pakistan's internal security architecture. Persistent militant threats necessitate sustained counterterrorism operations, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and military deployments. Pakistan's security doctrine increasingly prioritizes border stabilization as a core strategic objective.

Bilateral Relations with Afghanistan

Pakistan's relationship with successive Afghan governments has been fraught with mistrust. Border unrest intensifies diplomatic tensions, particularly regarding accusations of support for proxy factions and disagreements over border control measures. Constructive engagement with Afghan authorities and regional stakeholders is critical.

Economic Development and Infrastructure

Security instability inhibits economic activity, discouraging investment in borderlands and disrupting trade corridors. At the same time, instability undermines the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects that traverse strategic regions near the border (Hussain, 2021).

Regional Geopolitics

Pakistan's strategic calculus involves balancing relations with major powers (U.S., China, Russia) and regional actors (Iran, Central Asia). Border instability influences Pakistan's role in regional security frameworks, cooperative counterterrorism initiatives, and economic integration plans.

Policy Recommendations

Enhance Border Security Infrastructure

Pakistan should expand technological surveillance (drones, sensors), strengthen checkpoints, and ensure coordinated patrolling with Afghan counterparts to reduce insurgent crossings.

Promote Socio-Economic Development in Frontier Regions

Investment in education, infrastructure, and job creation can reduce local populations' vulnerability to extremist recruitment and criminal networks (ICG, 2020).

Formalize Diplomatic Engagement

Regular high-level dialogues with Afghan leadership focusing on border security, refugee management, and counterterrorism cooperation can build mutual confidence.



Regional Cooperation Frameworks

Pakistan should seek inclusive frameworks involving Iran, Central Asian states, and global powers to address shared security concerns tied to Afghanistan's stability.

Conclusion

The study concludes that unrest along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border represents a persistent and multidimensional security challenge rooted in historical disputes, geopolitical transformations, and evolving militant strategies. The findings demonstrate that despite Pakistan's extensive counterterrorism efforts and border management initiatives, instability continues to undermine internal security, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. This confirms that border insecurity is not merely a tactical problem but a structural issue shaped by porous borders, weak cross-border coordination, and contested political authority.

Furthermore, the research highlights that an overreliance on militarized responses has produced limited long-term stabilization. While security operations are essential for immediate threat containment, they have not sufficiently addressed governance deficits and socio-economic marginalization in border regions. Consistent with the human security perspective, the absence of inclusive development and effective civilian institutions perpetuates conditions conducive to militancy and criminal networks. Sustainable peace, therefore, requires integrating security policy with governance reform and local empowerment. The border instability carries significant economic and strategic costs for Pakistan. Disruptions to trade, expansion of illicit economies, and increased security expenditures have constrained economic growth and weakened regional connectivity initiatives, including projects linked to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Additionally, unresolved diplomatic tensions with Afghanistan over border legitimacy and security responsibilities continue to hinder cooperative mechanisms necessary for long-term stability.

In sum, the study asserts that lasting stability along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border can only be achieved through a comprehensive and coordinated strategy. Such an approach must combine effective border security, socio-economic development, institutional capacity building, and sustained diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan and regional stakeholders. Without addressing these interconnected dimensions, Pakistan risks perpetuating a cycle of insecurity that threatens both national stability and broader regional peace. Another critical conclusion of the study is that excessive securitization of border regions has constrained governance and development outcomes. While security operations are necessary, their dominance has marginalized civilian administration and delayed socio-economic reforms in frontier areas. The absence of inclusive development, political participation, and service delivery has perpetuated local grievances, indirectly reinforcing the conditions that enable militancy and criminality. This supports the human security perspective, which emphasizes that long-term stability is inseparable from social justice, economic opportunity, and institutional legitimacy.

This paper examines the persistent unrest along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border and analyzes the emerging security challenges and strategic implications for Pakistan. It situates border instability within its historical, political, and geopolitical context, emphasizing the legacy of the Durand Line, cross-border tribal linkages, and the impact of regional conflicts on border governance. By adopting a qualitative research approach based on secondary data, the study draws upon academic literature, policy reports, and security



assessments to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The discussion section critically interprets these findings in light of existing theoretical and empirical scholarship, assessing the effectiveness of Pakistan's security strategies and their broader implications for governance, economic development, and regional relations. The paper concludes by summarizing key insights and emphasizing the need for an integrated policy approach that combines border security, socio-economic development, and sustained diplomatic engagement. Overall, the study contributes to ongoing academic and policy debates on border management and regional security in South Asia.

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