



## Pakistan-Afghanistan Border, Security Challenges, and Implication of a Porous Frontier: A Historical Analysis

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### Abstract

*The Pakistan, Afghanistan border, popularly known as the Durand Line, is one of the most, geopolitically sensitive as well as historically controversial frontiers in South Asia. Its porous character that had been formed due to a convergence of rough geography, ethnic survival, and political rivalry had been a factor that contributed to the complicated security environment in Pakistan. Over 40 years, Afghanistan had experienced decades of unrest, since the Soviet, the Afghan War, until the Taliban, the U.S.-led occupation and the 2021 political upheaval created continuous cross-border issues. The challenges take the form of uncontrolled mobility, international militancy, cross-border trafficking, refugee migrations, and operational fluidity of nonstate armed forces. The mountainous topography and low-density populated areas especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baluchistan region have allowed insurgent groups to utilize the loopholes in state surveillance to form sanctuaries that render counterterrorism goals hard to achieve in Pakistan. The existence and movement of militant groups, such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and other factional networks engaged in terrorism, extortion, and asymmetric warfare in the area is one of the most critical security issues. These groups often use the permeability of the border to avoid military operations by the Pakistani military, regroup in Afghanistan and infiltrate Pakistan again. The question of safe havens is a key element of the strategic concerns of Pakistan, especially when it comes to the situation of Afghanistan with its disjointed governance systems and unpredictable state authority over peripheral regions. The subsequent resurgence of the Afghan Taliban in 2021 further complicated the situation, and Pakistan initially anticipated better security cooperation, increasing TTP actions and the inability or unwillingness of Kabul to counteract anti-Pakistan militants worsened bilateral relations. In addition to militancy, other destabilizing activities, including narcotics trafficking, arms smuggling, illegal migration, human trafficking, and unrestricted trade are taking place in the border region. These criminal*

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*economies sustain local patronage networks and insurgent funding, and strengthen the cycles of war. The fact that long-standing communities of Afghan refugees in Pakistan have been present provides a humanitarian and political dimension to the security environment since the movement of refugees can often be intertwined with unchecked transit networks. In addition, the fact that Afghanistan does not recognize the Durand Line as an international border still poses a problem in bilateral negotiations and the collective management of borders. Pakistan has gone a long way in order to overcome these challenges. These are massive border fencing, biometrics controls, increased deployment of Frontier Corps, creation of new border management facilities and intelligence-based counterterrorism operations with the National Action Plan (NAP). In spite of such efforts, structural limitations, including rugged landscape, political distrust, and domestic insecurity in Afghanistan restrain the effectiveness of unilateral action. Cooperative mechanisms are however necessary to ensure sustainable border security but the threat-perception differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan are still impeded by past bitterness. In general, the porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border is an important security fault line that has far-reaching consequences in terms of national stability, counter-terrorism policy, regional connectivity, and economic integration. To overcome these issues, it is necessary to pursue a strategy that would integrate military action, diplomacy, socioeconomic development, and cooperation at a regional level.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Afghanistan, Security, Border, Challenges, Porus, Frontier, Implications.

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## 1. Introduction

The Durand Line, also known as the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, is one of the most politically charged, socially convoluted, and strategically challenging borders in South Asia. The boundary, which spans approximately 2,640km<sup>1</sup> of rough mountain ranges, deep valleys and historic tribal regions, had traditionally served as a cultural, economic, and military free zone of movement rather than a well-defined boundary. It had existed since 1893, when Amir Abdur Rahman Khan agreed with the British Indian government. Afghanistan has constantly denied legal acknowledgment of the border, which has resulted in a protracted diplomatic conflict that still defines bilateral relations.<sup>2</sup> This historical ambiguity, coupled with geographic, and tribal conditions, has contributed to endowing the frontier with its popular scholarly designation: a porous border. Pakistan internal security has far-reaching implications for the porosity of the frontier. Following 2001, militancy has soared across the border, with such groups as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Haqqani Network, and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) taking advantage of lax rule,

safe havens, and tribal loyalties.<sup>3</sup> Time and again, Pakistani security forces have claimed that uncontrolled movement across the border facilitates attacks by militants into Pakistan and out of Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> Equally, trafficking of narcotics, smuggling of arms, unauthorized movements of refugees, and unrestricted trade networks have further undermined the capacity of the Pakistan state to exercise the state writ in the border areas.<sup>5</sup> This has been aggravated by the Taliban seizing control of Afghanistan in 2021, which emboldened the TTP and led to the cross-border attacks surging significantly.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the policy actions that have been tried by Pakistan in order to make the frontier less unstable include massive border fencing, biometric control systems at the key points of crossing, counterterrorism activities, including Rah e Haq, Rah e Rast, Rah e Nijat, Zarb-e-Azb, Radd-ul-Fasaad, Sarbakaf, and Fitna tul Khawarij. Nevertheless, irrespective of the government in charge, Afghanistan has always been against fencing and usually challenges any attempts by Pakistan to formalize its borders.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, confrontations between security forces, and trade disruptions, and diplomatic tensions are common. Therefore, the problem is not only a security challenge but also a political and socio-economic dilemma for both states. The concept of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border being a porous frontier, necessitates an interdisciplinary approach to viewing it, based on historical, geopolitical, tribal sociology, and counter-terrorism policy.

## II: The Principles of Cross-Border Militancy

<sup>1</sup> CIA world Fact Book. Archived from the original on 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans: 550 B.C.–A.D. 1957* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 345–350

<sup>3</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (New York: Viking, 2008), 267–290

<sup>4</sup> C. Christine Fair, “Pakistan’s Counterterrorism Strategy: Reactions to Pakistan’s Military Operations in Waziristan,” *Asia Policy* 11 (January 2011): 111–144

<sup>5</sup> Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and al Qaeda* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2009), 80–115

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group, “Pakistan’s Militant Resurgence,” *Asia Report* No. 333 (2023), 1–28

<sup>7</sup> Imtiaz Gul, *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan’s Lawless Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2010), 223–238



The Durand line was not recognized as valid, and this mistrust led to a structural space where the non-state actors thrived, following the independence of Pakistan in 1947, and Afghanistan denied the validity of the Durand Line. The decades of Kabul not acknowledging the border have been a barrier to collaboration in security, surveillance, and law enforcement. This border was turned into a hub of jihadists around the world when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The tribal belt in Pakistan was the backbone of the Afghan mujahideen, which was strongly financed by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and other countries. Millions fled into Pakistan, and the border was turned into a weapons, fighters and intelligence conduit. This period institutionalized the transnational militancy culture, entrenched cross-border movement, and instilled networks of jihadist logistics that still persist today, long after the Soviet retreat in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

The Taliban appeared in the Afghan refugee camps and in the madrassas in Pakistan and quickly seized Kabul in the year 1996. Their ideological similarity with some elements of the conservative religious structures in Pakistan established a parallel system of cross boundary sympathy. The tribal areas in Pakistan were relatively independent at this time, and this facilitated the movement of militants across the border.

Taliban rule was a haven of transnational jihadism as the al-Qaeda group and a number of local organizations found shelter in Afghanistan. Following 9/11, the Taliban was overthrown by the intervention of the U.S-led forces, but this action unintentionally resulted in the emergence of a new stage of militancy.

When NATO troops attacked Al-Qaeda and Taliban networks, a large number of them ran to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. Since 2004, Pakistan mounted operations, which had forced militants back into Afghanistan. This pressure swing resulted in a continuous two-way movement of fighters and the establishment of two revolving safe havens contingent on which side of the border was being attacked at a given time.<sup>9</sup>

The TTP initiated a full-fledged insurgency in 2007-2014, and their leadership moved across the provinces of Afghanistan, including Kunar, Nuristan, Paktika, Paktia, Khost and Nangarhar several times. The Afghan governments led by Karzai and Ghani never had the capacity or political will to destroy TTP bases despite numerous Pakistani appeals.<sup>10</sup>

The conquest of the Taliban in August 2021 was a turning point. Pakistan had anticipated that the Taliban would control the activities of the TTP with the help of a friendly government. Rather, TTP militants, who had been sentenced to imprisonment or had been living under the carpet, were free, moved, or re-engaged. In 2022, there has been a sharp increase in the number of attacks being launched from Afghan soil in Pakistan, which points to the relevance of these safe havens.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden*. New York: Penguin Press, 2004

<sup>9</sup> Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2009.

Christine Fair, "Militants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015).

<sup>10</sup> Asfandyar Mir, "The Return of the Taliban and Regional Security," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010 Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 114– 120.



### III: Geography Porous and Difficult.

The mountainous and expansive frontier possesses hundreds of unmanned passes, ravines and shadow valleys which enable the passage of militants without their being detected. The terrain can never be completely closed despite the fencing and the increase in the number of checkpoints. On both sides of this border, there is the habitation of tribal communities like the Mohmand, Wazir, Afridi, Mehsud and Shinwari. Hospitality, loyalty, and revenge are paramount to the tribal codes, and can make counterterrorism challenging. Local networks are used by militant groups as a shelter and logistical base.<sup>12</sup>

Over the decades, much of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area has existed under tribal institutions, informal institutions, or completely ungoverned areas. The state, weak institutions, and low levels of law enforcement are good environments where militants flourish. Both countries have religious seminaries that have Deobandi networks, which help in ideological convergence and recruitment. The militant propaganda tends to exploit the stories of jihad, nationalism, and opposition to foreign powers. The history of the political elites in Afghanistan has involved taking advantage of militant proxies to leverage Pakistan, whereas the policy of Afghanistan has been influenced by the fear of strategic depth in Pakistan. The outcome is a lack of confidence in the long term, which makes future collaboration difficult. The militant movements are financed through smuggling, narcotics trafficking, the sale of weapons, and informal markets at the borders. These networks are defended and taxed by militant groups, and have transformed the borderlands into economic support areas.

### IV: Patterns of Cross-Border Militancy

In Pakistan, militants frequently attack military posts and then quickly withdraw into Afghanistan since the Pakistani military is legally not allowed to cross the international border without risking an escalation. The phenomenon of cross-border militancy along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has transformed into an advanced and long-lasting security issue that has been informed by geography, tribal affiliations, and the changing political environments. The most noticeable tendency is the use of the so-called hit-and-retreat tactics, when militant groups (mainly Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), and other jihadist organizations) strike in Pakistan and withdraw right after the attack into the territory of Afghanistan. The strategies take advantage of the fact that Pakistan respects the international borders and the Afghan state has a weak capability of interdicting the militant movements or is unwilling to do so. Since armies are not able to chase the attackers across the Durand Line without the danger of escalation, the border becomes a safe line of defense of the rebels.<sup>13</sup>

The second very important trend is the seasonal migration pattern. The rough, mountainous topography of the region's frontier benefits militants. High-altitude passes in Kunar, Nuristan, Paktika, and North Waziristan are available during the summer, allowing fighters to enter, as well as weapons and logistical aid. During winter, militants move back to the lower valley and villages usually in Afghan provinces where the writ of the state is

<sup>12</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, *The Taliban at War 2001–2021* (London: Hurst, 2022), 245–250

<sup>13</sup>Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Afghan Borderlands and Illicit Economies," Brookings Institution Report (2018), 4–9,



low and the protection of tribes is possible. These political cycles of violence in Pakistan are cyclical, and are linked to climatic conditions, and not necessarily political developments as such.<sup>14</sup>

The third trend is the widespread use of informal modes of transit, such as rah Dari routes centuries old, shepherd trails, smugglers' routes, and forest routes. These paths avoid official border crossings and are mostly beyond the ability of the state surveillance, therefore, allowing the militants to go undetected. Several decades of fuel, livestock, narcotics and weapons smuggling have established strong illicit networks where militants can be transported, sheltered and even gather intelligence. Such supply chains enable the insurgents to transport men and supplies even when security activities are on the increase in the region.<sup>15</sup>

The other general trend is the exploitation of tribal institutions and refugee communities. The high number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan offers militants the chance to hide their identities, enlist disenfranchised youths, and construct logistical cells. Equally, Pashtun tribes along the Durand Line continue to have strong family ties where militants can count on tribal hospitality (*melmastia*) or threats to obtain a temporary refuge. The vulnerability that is created by tribal codes, local grievances and economic marginalization is mostly used to the advantage of insurgents.<sup>16</sup>

Last but not least militant groups are relying on cross-border command and control systems. Leadership organizations are founded within the Afghan safe havens, especially in Kunar, Nuristan, and some areas of eastern Afghanistan, where they are not subject to much state pressure. Meanwhile, the cells operating within Pakistan make attacks according to the order passed electronically or by courier. This distinction between leadership redoubts and front lines makes counterterrorism operations in Pakistan more difficult since destroying the warriors within Pakistan is not the same as destroying the strategic heart of the groups. These scattered command and control structures provide militants with durability and regeneration of their networks despite significant military actions.<sup>17</sup>

Collectively, these trends show that cross-border militancy is not just an outcome of bad border management but a complex adaptive system that has been instilled in geography, tribal relationships, political mistrust, and turmoil in the region. Consequently, any useful policy response should be based on dealing with not only short-term security dangers, but also the structural realities that perpetuate cross-border militancy.

## V. Security Implications for Pakistan

Pakistan has significant security repercussions due to the continuation of cross-border militancy and safe havens. These issues include domestic stability, counterterrorism architecture, economic development, and regional diplomacy. In the last ten years,

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 287–295.

<sup>15</sup> Amira Jadoon and Andrew Mines, *The Islamic State Khorasan Province* (West Point, NY: CTC Press, 2020) 90–105.

<sup>16</sup> Hassan Abbas, *The Taliban Revival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 192–197.

<sup>17</sup> Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan*, 134–141.



counterterrorism activities in Pakistan have greatly diminished militant power. However, the TTP's continued presence in Afghanistan undermines these achievements. In the KP and Baluchistan, militants attack security forces, police, polio teams, tribal leaders, and religious minorities and destabilize the region.<sup>18</sup>

The recent resurgence of TTP since 2021 has undone years of victory and forced Pakistan to reallocate military efforts to cleared zones, thus undermining the success of Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad. The presence of the ISKP in Afghanistan is another source of threat. It has ideological appeal, international propaganda, and the ability to lure defections to other militant organizations to its cause, putting threats to the internal environment and security of Pakistan. According to Giuseppe Tozzi, the ISKP transnational vision involves targeting the religious minorities and the urban centers in Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

Unchecked, the group might increase its recruitment networks within the borders of Pakistan. The existence of porous borders facilitates considerable trafficking of weapons, explosives, narcotics and other illegal commodities. These streams fund militant operations, and reinforce criminal ecosystems existing alongside state regimes.<sup>20</sup>

The narcotics business which has been a long-term alliance in the war economy of Afghanistan, finances extremist factions, and disrupts the domestic markets in Pakistan. Pakistan has greatly militarized the border, enclosing more than 98 percent of it, constructing new forts, and augmenting troop strength. Nevertheless, due to the nature of the terrain, it is close to impossible to have absolute control.<sup>21</sup>

The necessity to have a continuous military presence puts a strain on resources and takes away focus on other priorities. The tensions between the two countries are further aggravated by structural tensions between Islamabad and Kabul, as the former level allegations against the Afghan government of sheltering the militants. These tensions are harmful to intelligence collaboration, impede refugee management and block joint security mechanisms.<sup>22</sup>

Mistrust is also aggravated by the fact that the Taliban government is not willing to contain the TTP. The feeling of insecurity frightens foreign and local investments, particularly in KP, and Baluchistan. The inability to achieve regional connectivity projects, including the Western Route of CPEC, is partly due to border instability.<sup>23</sup>

Border insecurity also hinders Pakistan's dream of becoming a trade corridor between Central Asia, and South Asia. The frequent attacks instill fear, displacement, and instability in the border communities. Schools, bazaars, and local governance systems are disorganized. This lack of security delegitimizes the state, and undermines civilian

<sup>18</sup> Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 43–57.

<sup>19</sup> "Pakistan–Afghanistan Border Management," *ISPR Briefing*, 2020

<sup>20</sup> Moeed Yusuf, *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 204-209

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Small, *The China–Pakistan Axis* (London: Hurst, 2015), 145–148

<sup>22</sup> International Crisis Group, "Pakistan's Frontier Crimes Regulation Reform," *Asia Briefing* 119 (Brussels, 2016), 3–6.

<sup>23</sup> Hassan Abbas, *The Taliban Revival* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 192–195



institutions.<sup>24</sup> Socioeconomic development becomes more challenging as insurgencies continue.

## VI: Pakistan Response Policies.

The Pakistani reaction to the security issues of cross-border militancy and militant safe havens has changed significantly in the last 20 years. These are multidimensional, military, administrative, diplomatic, legal, and socioeconomic responses. Despite the major gains Pakistan has made in counterterrorism with major operations and the reforms of the border management, the structural barriers still restrict the effectiveness of the counterterrorism actions in the long run. The biggest policy reaction was the initiation of massive kinetic military operations to eliminate militant networks in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Since the military started the limited offensives in South Waziristan in 2004, it steadily increased its presence, reaching the Operation Zarb-e-Azb (2014) that was aimed at destroying the militant sanctuaries in North Waziristan.<sup>25</sup>

These operations not only caused TTP to lose its infrastructure but also killed many safe havens, and only reinstated the writ of the state to places that it could not easily control. The second operation, Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017), was extended to other parts of the country to destroy the residual terrorist threats, not just in the tribal areas.<sup>26</sup> It was a countrywide operation that focused on intelligence-based raids, counter-radicalization, and eliminating sleeper cells. Analysts believe that such operations considerably lowered the terrorist attacks but failed to eradicate cross-border infiltration as there were Afghan-based strongholds.<sup>27</sup>

In this way, although the kinetic response of Pakistan managed to undermine the domestic militant organizations, it was not effective in dealing with those groups that were based beyond the border. In the realization of the constraints of kinetic operations, pure, Pakistan implemented an integrated border management approach, such as fencing the Pakistan–Afghanistan border, starting in 2017. As of 2021, over 98% of the fence, spanning 2600 kilometers, was finished.<sup>28</sup>

Besides fencing, Pakistan has built hundreds of border forts and surveillance towers and installed the latest surveillance systems, including thermal sensors and night-vision devices. This strategy was developed to reduce the historical convenience with which passes the cross mountain of militants and informal paths. Military briefings indicate that fencing has significantly curtailed unauthorized movement, though militants still take advantage of rough topography and loopholes in the surveillance.<sup>29</sup> Border management is one of the most ambitious security-policy reforms in Pakistan, which will ultimately require the cooperation of Afghan authorities, at least in the form of neutrality.

## VII: Diplomatic Engagement and Security Dialogue with Kabul.

<sup>24</sup> ISPR, "Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad: Overview and Achievements," 2017

<sup>25</sup> International Crisis Group, "Pakistan's Militant Challenge," *Asia Report* No. 271 (Brussels: ICG, 2017), 8-11

<sup>26</sup> Pakistan–Afghanistan Border Management," *ISPR Briefing*, 2021

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Moeed Yusuf, *Brokering Peace in Nuclear Environments* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 205–208

<sup>29</sup> Antonio Giustozzi, *The Islamic State in Khorasan* (London: Hurst, 2018), 140–145



The mistrust towards the successive Afghan governments has not eroded the diplomacy as a core pillar of the policy of Pakistan. Pakistan has repeatedly insisted that Kabul must refuse to offer refuge to the TTP, hand over the wanted militants, and stop cross-border attacks.<sup>30</sup> In spite of the Taliban takeover in 2021, Pakistan has maintained its diplomatic efforts, holding numerous diplomatic rounds, in an attempt to convince the Taliban to suppress TTP operations. Nevertheless, the Afghan Taliban have consistently been hesitant to fight the TTP directly due to ideological sympathy, tribalism and fear of internal unity.<sup>31</sup>

As a result, the diplomatic activity has yielded minimal results, and Pakistan still underlines the necessity of joint intelligence-sharing systems and cross-border security systems. One of the most dramatic governance changes in the history of Pakistan was the merger of the FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in 2018. This change replaced the colonial era Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) and made the former tribal areas subject to the constitutional rights, provincial policing, and judicial systems.<sup>32</sup>

This was done to substitute informal tribal rule with modern administrative systems that could guard against militant recruitment, institute the rule of law, and provide viable development avenues. The merger is symbolically transformative; however, there are still challenges to face, such as slow administrative integration, policing gaps, resource shortages and opposition to change by traditional power structures.<sup>33</sup> However, the merger is a long-term plan to avoid the reappearance of uncontrollable spaces.

There are millions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and though most of them are non-militant, the settlement of refugees has sometimes been used to infiltrate militant activities. Thus, Pakistan has overhauled its policies on refugee documentation such as biometric registration, repatriation talks with the UNHCR, and increased surveillance of illegal migrants.<sup>34</sup>

These are to strike a balance between humanitarian requirements and security requirements. Opponents caution that securitizing the management of refugees will raise the chances of turning their backs on communities, and make relations with Kabul hard. But Pakistan claims that the unregulated mobility is a significant threat. Another important initiative that Pakistan has undertaken to contain extremist propaganda has been the expansion of its soft security policy, which encompasses education reform, deradicalization efforts (Sabaoon and Mishal centers), and media policing.<sup>35</sup>

Deradicalization centers offer psychological counseling, job training and reintegration assistance to ex-militants particularly the juveniles. These programs, though under-funded, emphasize the realization by Pakistan that militancy is not a purely military solution, but a social and ideological one as well. To stabilize the border region, there should be livelihoods, infrastructure and service delivery. Pakistan has initiated efforts to reconstruct markets, schools and health facilities in the former tribal district. But budget constraints,

<sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group, "Pakistan's Frontier Crimes Regulation Reform," *Asia Briefing* No. 119 (2016): 3–7

<sup>31</sup> International Crisis Group, "A New Dawn for Pakistan's Tribal Areas?" *Asia Report* No. 306 (Islamabad, 2019), 11–17

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, "Pakistan: Afghan Refugee Registration Update," 2022

<sup>33</sup> C. Christine Fair, "Militant Recruitment in Pakistan," *Asia Policy* 11 (2011): 112–115

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> UNHCR, "Pakistan: Afghan Refugee Registration Update," 2022



governance loopholes, and security cases have slowed development spending. According to analysts, the only way out is to develop socioeconomic grievances in the long term to ensure that they do not become exploited by the militant groups.

### VIII: Assessment of Policy Responses by Pakistan.

The response policies of Pakistan show a change in reactive security policies to more structural reforms. The integrated approach of military action, fortification of the border, and administrative unification, and counter-radicalization is an important development in the policy of the state. But there are still a number of limitations:<sup>36</sup>

- Sanctuaries in Afghanistan are the most daunting and are out of the control of Pakistan itself.
- Local government reforms take years to come to fruition, hence restricting their immediate efficacy.
- Militant groups are fast in adjusting to new security conditions due to their ability to use the terrain and technology.
- The diplomatic leverage of Pakistan over the Afghan authorities, especially on Taliban regime, is low.

Thus, although Pakistan has so far been successful in its actions to curb a number of internal threats, a viable success will be achieved after bilateral cooperation and regional diplomacy, as well as the long-term socioeconomic change of the communities at the border.

### IX. Conclusion

The Pakistan-Afghanistan border has been one of the most shifting and complicated borders in modern geopolitics. Cross-border militancy and the continued presence of a safe haven in Afghanistan have continued to destabilize the internal security of Pakistan, counterterrorism success and regional strategic aspirations. Although Pakistan has strengthened the border, undertaken numerous military operations and improved diplomatic relations, structural limitations, topography, tribal relationships, and political instability in Afghanistan and militant nimbleness have hampered stability in the long term. After all, the security of Pakistan cannot be separated from the processes on its borders. Sustainable peace means that there are coordinated counterterrorism efforts, good governance of the borders, economic growth in the borderlands, and an integration of security structure with Afghanistan. In the absence of these measures, cross-border militancy will remain a threat to the stability and strategic orientation of Pakistan.

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