



Durand Line; A Contending Security Dilemma Between Pakistan and Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

The Durand Line is a shared border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and is considered one of the major conflict zones in the 21st century. Post 9/11, developments in the region attracted the world's attention. This article uses a realist model and empirical approach to examine literature review evidence about the main issues surrounding the border disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Three thematic findings from the review have been discussed: (i) The lack of consensus between Afghanistan and Pakistan, (ii) Inadequate border management and criminal activities on the border, and (iii) Vulnerabilities faced by the ethnic groups living across the border. The study concludes that the Durand Line threatens regional and international peace and security. It is recommended that both countries should take decisive steps toward sustainable peace by holding negotiations and working together to eliminate the border issues and resolve issues faced by ethnic groups across the border.

Keywords: Durand Line, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Security dilemma, Bilateral relations

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INTRODUCTION

A permanent boundary line or national border is an integral part of development for the neighboring countries. However, in some situations, it can cause tension and conflict (Sojasi, et al., 2018). Since its independence, Pakistan has never truly enjoyed amicable relations with Afghanistan. This is primarily due to Afghanistan's irredentist claims on some Pakhtun areas inside Pakistan, which have resulted in border conflicts and caused ongoing tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, leading to strained relations. The border between the two nations is also referred to as the Durand Line, which had been drawn by the British a century ago (Kizilay, 2022).

The basic purpose of this paper is to summarize what the literature says about the border-related tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. For this purpose, academic articles have been reviewed and the following search terms have been used: Pakistan-Afghanistan border, the Durand Line, border fencing, and Pashtun/ Pakhtuns. The academic search engines Google Scholar and Web of Science were used, and a total of twenty articles were reviewed, with no search date applied.

Theoretical Models

This research study uses the realist security dilemma theoretical model given by Charles L. Glaser (1997). The model argues that there are certain grounds for one state to prioritize its security at the cost of lowering stability in another state. Robert Jervis (1978) further explains a security dilemma as a situation when a state is more concerned about its security and tries to increase its defense, which ultimately creates concerns for the neighboring countries. The security dilemma is considered a fundamental principle proposed by advocates of defensive realism. Defensive realists emphasize the significance of the security problem, which enables

meaningful collaboration between different countries, spreading outside provisional alliances designed to reciprocate a communal adversary (Elman & Jensen, 2014). Offensive realists firmly believe that the security dilemma inevitably leads to war and view this as a rational and crucial aspect of state safety. The security dilemma model is applied to address security concerns and policies in international politics and to address the management and balance of arms rivalry among states (Tang, 2009).

Theories of borders and nations have progressed from recognizing that there are physical boundaries separating nations to the realization that borders are flexible in the modern world (Newman, 2003). Modern studies of borders consider that regions on either side of national boundaries may have common ethnicities, cultures, and religious identities, which can develop affiliations and networks. Modern technologies and globalization of trade have removed the barriers created by physical boundaries and united population groups for common interests and identities. For this study, the institutional-statist theory has also been used, which argues that the role of the state is integral in maintaining peace at the border (Blanchard, 2005). The state's efforts and involvement in border management and resolving conflicts may include multiple management strategies such as defining immigration and entry laws, exercising human rights and internationally approved trade laws, and issuing permits, visas, and levy fees. One example of a lack of state management for peaceful dialogue and agreements at the border is the India-Pakistan border disputes, which resulted in escalation to the level of two wars being fought between the countries.

The institutional-statist theory also highlights the role of individual leaders and state actors in the role of managing border controversies and effectively resolving them. Some powerful leaders may have vested interests or not have the power or skills to manage international relations, which can sustain or even fuel conflict. Finally, the theory also

comments on state capabilities in managing boundary disputes versus state failure in not being able to develop border management strategies. The progressive state would work and invest in developing diplomatic efforts to resolve conflict, with the primary aim being to avoid war at all costs. In light of these theories, this review will attempt to assess the role of the state and key state actors in managing the Durand Line and relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The significance of the review would be to advise policy for better border management to reduce the risk of conflict in the region.

FINDINGS

The review revealed three thematic areas, which have been discussed in detail below: (i) The lack of consensus between Afghanistan and Pakistan, (ii) Inadequate border management and criminal activities on the border, and (iii) Vulnerabilities faced by the ethnic groups living across the border.

Lack of Consensus Between Afghanistan and Pakistan

Historically, Pakistan and Afghanistan's bilateral relations have been influenced by the hundred-year-old establishment of the Durand Line on November 12, 1893 (Mazhar, & Goraya, 2020). This was an agreement between the British Government in India and Amir Abdul Rehman. Spanning almost 500 miles, the Durand Line traverses the Pamir Mountain range in the North and reaches the Arabian Sea in the South. It passes through steep terrain in the northern and central sections, effectively separating tribal territories. Multiple pieces of evidence indicate that the Durand Line was officially acknowledged by consecutive Afghan state regimes in 1905, 1919, 1921, and 1923.

Nevertheless, certain factions of the Afghan leadership and the public have misunderstood the concept of border between the British and Afghan governments. They

mistakenly believe that the treaty was intended to last for only 100 years due to the absence of documented evidence specifying its expiration date (Mazhar & Goraya, 2020). With the inception of Pakistan in August 1947, the Afghan government refused to accept the Durand Line as a national boundary.

As there was no clear agreement about the Durand Line, resulting in conflict escalating multiple times before 1976, Pakistan considered border closure as the sole viable solution. However, under the leadership of Mohammad Daud Khan, the then President of Afghanistan, this tension was temporarily alleviated by his two official trips to Pakistan in 1976 and 1978. Similarly, Pakistani counterparts also visited Kabul to explore further diplomatic options for resolving this problem. However, in 1979, the Daud Khan regime was overthrown due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, leading to a renewed security issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Cheema, 1983).

There are three main phases of dispute over the border (Khan & Wagner, 2013). In the first phase, from 1947 to the 1970s, the Afghan regimes supported a 'Greater Pashtunistan' that included Pakistan's Pakhtun regions. In the second phase, till the 1990s, Pakistan linked Afghanistan to its Kashmir dispute with India, adding to hostilities and resentment and in the third phase, post 9/11, ex-FATA became a haven for militant groups that opposed the US and West, the Kabul government, and the Pakistani state. This last phase is known to be the most contentious and received much global attention during the War on Terror.

The War on Terror phase and the overall security situation in Afghanistan are usually linked to Pakistan-Afghanistan relationships, and many speculate that the eradication of terrorism in Afghanistan is not possible without taking Pakistan on board (Hassan, 2023). Afghanistan never accepted the Durand Line as a permanent boundary and denied the

previously signed agreement regarding the demarcation as a legitimate border between Afghanistan and British India (Qassem & Durand, 2008). Post-colonial rule, Afghanistan has not changed its stance and often dismisses the Durand Line as the recognized boundary with Pakistan. Some years ago, the Afghan government was lobbying to raise the issue of so-called 'Pakhtunistan' by recalling the early era of Ahmed Shah Abadali in the 1940s. Abadali had sway over the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area and demanded an independent state for the Pakhtuns (Durani & Khan, 2002). The regime changes in Afghanistan and the present Taliban's takeover was expected to further worsen the diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Expectantly, as soon as the Taliban took over, they raised the border issue with the argument that the agreement signed in 1893 with the British Government was over as the stipulated hundred-year period had passed in 1993. Besides, the Taliban contend that the Durand Line interrupts the movement of the Pakhtun community across the border, affects their trade, and is a major cause of separating the people of the same ethnicity living across the border (Khunte, 2022).

Javaid (2020) stated that the establishment of Pakistan was not well-received within the influential circles of Afghanistan. The Pakhtunistan incident in 1947, during which the Afghan government asserted its claim over the entire Northwest Frontier (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province), compelled the Afghan government to cast a dissident vote in the United Nations, making it the sole opposing vote against Pakistan. The Afghan government argued that the demarcation of the international border should prioritize their ethnic identity, specifically the Pakhtun ethnicity, rather than the provincial status of Pakistan. The so-called 'Pakhtunistan', as shown in historical representations of the Pakhtun people, is that it was a shared ancestral country that was unjustly partitioned in 1893 to fulfill the malicious intentions of the British administration (Javaid, 2020).

Recently Mir and Olson (2022) revealed that Afghan-Taliban forces attempted to impede the current Pakistani initiative to install mesh fencing on its shared border with Afghanistan. This project, initiated by Pakistan in December 2017, was scheduled to continue until January 2022. However, the past Afghan governments and the current Taliban leadership have not allowed this to happen, creating more uncertainty at the border.

Inadequate Border Management and Criminal Activities on the Border

Besides Pakistan, Afghanistan shares borders with five other countries- China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. From the Pakistan side, the Durand Line borders two provinces of the country- Baluchistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The latter has recently amalgamated its seven tribal districts, formerly referred to as Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). From the Afghan side, the same border ranges from the Nuristan province in the northeast up to Nimruz in the Southwest. The Kabul government consistently rejects the recognition of the Durand Line as a globally accepted border by claiming that FATA, and some parts of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province near the border, historically belong to Afghanistan (Bajoria, 2009). It is because of this that the Durand Line is largely acknowledged as the most hazardous border by all the neighbors mainly due to unsatisfactory state management of dialogue to resolve the border dispute.

After two years of independence, in 1949, Pakistan launched military operations against tribal settlements in Afghanistan to suppress the Pakhtunistan resistance (Bhattacharjee, 2016). Consequently, there were border disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan from 1949 to 1950, and diplomatic ties were cut off in 1955. In 1961, there was a conflict between the military forces of Pakistan and Afghanistan along their border. The prevailing insecurity in the tribal areas of Pakistan, which are located adjacent to Afghanistan

on the border, also poses a significant challenge for both states, due to extremist activities. The primary catalyst for the spread of terrorism in this region is the Pakistani-Taliban or Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) which has its hideouts in Afghanistan (Baqai & Wasi, 2021). The Taliban's rise in Afghanistan has increased attacks from the other side of the border on Pakistani security forces, exacerbating security conditions in the bordering areas of Pakistan (Kaura, 2022). However, Pakistan's defensive response in the form of airstrikes on the militants' hideouts in Afghanistan also affected the civilian population inside Afghanistan (Kaura, 2022).

The Pakistani Air Force has been periodically launching attacks on Afghanistan, claiming to target insurgents (Bhattacharjee, 2016). In 2007, Pakistan erected fences and posts in Afghanistan at Angoor Ada in South Waziristan (Akins, 2019). However, the Afghan National Army soon demolished them. In May 2007, Afghan rebels launched an attack on Pakistani military installations that they thought were illegally erected on Afghan territory, resulting in one Pakistani soldier sustaining injuries. More than nine border skirmishes took place in 2011 between the two states, and they persist even today (Akins, 2019). Pakistan is currently confronted with a security predicament on its eastern and western borders with India and Afghanistan, respectively, as a result of shifting global strategic forces (Tariq et al., 2019). Instability and insecurity in Pakistan are mainly believed to be due to both the eastern and western borders of Pakistan with India and Afghanistan, where anti-Pakistan groups and organizations are facilitated by the bordering neighbors (Tariq et al., 2019).

The Eastern border has resulted in three conflicts with the neighboring and adversarial India— and the Western frontier has caused significant security concerns for Pakistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan's security challenge manifests in two distinct ways: internal dangers and external threats. The foremost spring of outward threat originates from the current developments in Afghanistan post-9/11 changes, and the subsequent efforts the

Pakistan state must make to maintain security and deter threats from external forces (Miklaucic & Brewer, 2013). The contentious nature of security concerns and prevailing disorder in modern global politics, following the 9/11 incident has put many challenges to the state's response to counterterrorism across the board. After the United States launched an invasion of Afghanistan, which resulted in a significant increase in terrorist and extremist activities across the border in Pakistan, playing a frontline role in the war against terrorism, Pakistan is faced with major security concerns (Malik et al., 2020).

Pakistan has declared the establishment of multiple border checkpoints at the Afghanistan border, resulting in the apprehension and neutralization of a substantial number of Al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents, as well as the prevention of a major inflow of narcotics (International Crisis Group, 2022). This is also why the Durand Line remains highly disputed, necessitating immediate military and political actions to improve the situation. A persuasive case can be made for temporarily setting aside the border conflict to prioritize more urgent matters related to narcotics and health (Grawert et al., 2017). Since gaining independence, Pakistan has been involved in territorial disputes not just on the western border with Afghanistan, but also on the eastern border with India over tensions of Jammu & Kashmir as well. Security concerns with India, further intensify the problems and challenges for Pakistan, leaving the latter fighting the battle to maintain security on two sides.

The Afghan act of defiance and opposing the disarmament of the Taliban poses a security threat to Pakistan. The extremist groups could exploit any political void and indeed cause heightened security risks and increased border expenses for Pakistan. Pakistani army personnel and citizens faced significant threats due to America's "post-9/11" policies towards the Taliban, which included efforts to stop terrorism, the spread of Taliban influence, insurgency, and the presence of transnational criminal networks originating from there. Armed

non-state actors and rebel groups have been utilizing Afghanistan as a base to undermine Pakistan's security and stability (Hussain, 2021).

Siddiqi (2016) noted that Pakistan's position on Afghan immigrants is also shaped by security apprehensions over criminal activities, terrorism, and infiltration by those with malicious intentions. In 2014, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police attributed the increase in criminal activity in Peshawar and 25 other districts to Afghan refugees. In December 2014, Pakistan saw a severe terrorist attack at the Army Public School in Peshawar, which added to the worries regarding the Afghan refugees. The assault that resulted in the death of 130 students triggered a comprehensive enforcement action by the Pakistan government, with efforts to send Afghan refugees back to their country.

The capability to "merge in" enables criminal groups to operate openly in the presence of security interventions with a reduced likelihood of being identified and intercepted (Manjarrez, 2021). The basic objective of border security and management is to minimize the threat to national and public security by maximizing the trend of detecting unlawful activities and preventing unauthorized entry. Efficient supervision by border management authorities is expected to detect threats and identify illegal entry and criminal activities (Manjarrez, 2021). Unfortunately, border management at the Durand Line has not been satisfactory, leading to low security, criminal activities, unauthorized trade, and illegal entries (Parveen et al., 2020).

Collett (2011) argued that the asymmetrical migration patterns have become more varied in recent decades. This has garnered increased public attention towards illicit border crossings, wherein illegal migrants may employ forged documents, present misleading information on authentic documents, tamper with real documents, or utilize counterfeit documents to prolong their visa or residence permit beyond the authorized duration. Gathering

information on tourists crossing borders might be correspondingly vital as stopping illegal immigrants at or near in the border areas. Similarly, the implementation of counterterrorism measures has altered the purpose and emphasis of border controls. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, there is a growing imperative to monitor potential dangers and to detect/evaluate specific visitors at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Collett, 2011). Pakistan's border policing at the Afghanistan border has been unable to keep unwanted individuals and goods out (Caparini & Marenin, 2006).

Andreas (2003) noted that, throughout history, international politics has mostly focused on implementing border control measures to restrict territorial access. Entry barriers at the state level are consistently in place to deter military invasions, regulate taxation on trade, safeguard local industries, and mitigate potential threats to individuals or assets. In this way, the state exercises authority over the individuals and goods permitted to enter its borders. However, in Pakistan, the government has not been able to prioritize border control, regulation, or security to the extent it should have.

Vulnerabilities Faced by the Ethnic Groups Living Across the Border

The terms "ethnic groups" or "ethnicities" are used interchangeably to describe individuals who share a previous citizenship and may or may not have a shared ancestry and cultural history (Blokland, 2003). Every ethnic or religious group seeks power to enhance its security, which adversary groups consider a threatening challenge to their positions. As Pakistan comprises a host of ethnic groups, some larger than the others, there have been signs of internal conflict and the insecurity from time to time, especially at the Durand Line (Burnashev, 2015). The Pakhtun ethnic community has been described as combative forces on both sides of the border, and at times, external political bodies have intervened to destabilize the Pakhtun community

and contribute to their image as militant ethnic groups (Siddique, 2014).

Some scholars argue that the primary factor contributing to hostile border relations is not the actual border itself, but the cultural and ethnic intersection of the identity of Pakhtuns (Shah & Azam, 2021). The ethnic Pakhtuns live on both sides of the border and share the same ethnic identity, language, and unifying religious belief. It is commonly assumed that restrictions on mobility across the border endanger the 'Pakhtunwali' identity, causing resentment and fueling hostility (Javaid, 2020). In March 2017, Pakistan initiated the construction of a fence along its border with Afghanistan. The primary objective of this project is to deter cross-border militant attacks and curb the smuggling of narcotics and other illicit products. The border fence has emerged as a significant source of disagreement with Afghanistan. The recent severe rains in Baluchistan caused severe damage to the fence in multiple locations. When Pakistani forces endeavored to carry out essential repairs in those regions, the Afghan Taliban forces fired at them (Khan, 2022).

Mohmand (2023) argued that since Pakhtuns have blood lineage to Afghanistan, there was no solid reason to recognize the Durand Line as an international boundary that divides Pakhtun inhabitants. However, it showed little understanding for state formations in the contemporary world. Sahil (2021) reported that residing near the Durand Line now entails a huge burden for the Pakhtun ethnic community. Many Afghans who belong to different clans are formally recognized as Afghan nationals, even though they possess Pakistani identity cards. Fifty percent of these families reside in Pakistan, while the remaining have become integrated into Afghanistan. These tribes have become fragmented, making movement between them quite challenging.

The disputed Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan symbolizes state and

national identity issues and conflict between ethnic and religious groups (Khan & Wagner, 2013). Ethnic communities on both sides of the border encounter comparable challenges, with numerous families having their Afghan citizenship revoked due to the fence incorporating their hamlet into Pakistan. Currently, these communities residing on the border are experiencing a condition of statelessness, as they are not officially recognized in any location (Sahil, 2021). The recent fortification of the border by the Pakistani military compelled 200 families from a North Waziristan border village to resettle in alternative locations, resulting in surrounding villages becoming uninhabited and devoid of residents (International Organization for Migration, 2014). These individuals lack homes or land in this area and must depend on previous residents for shelter and support (Kothari et al, 2006).

Some scholars refer to the identity-based grievance of the ethnic communities residing on the Durand Line (Mishali-Ram, 2011), describing that they have formed an alliance based on ethnic traits that influence their motivation to challenge unity with the nation they belong to and to accept state authority. Pakhtuns living on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border have been involved in insurgencies, fueled by their grievance of not being able to unite with their own ethnic or religious community, which also prevents them from integrating into state politics which can allow them a voice to gain citizenship rights. In many ways, this contributes to their inability to unite for their ethnic community and gain state privileges for equality and inclusion.

Other scholars have discussed the role of ethno-tribalism in sustaining conflict and violent insurgencies between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Schetter, 2005). Communities on either side of the Durand Line have been described as having strong ethnic and religious ideologies and in the case of cross-border separation with their own community members, they have been known to be aggressive in pursuit of unity. In other words, group unity has

taken precedence over national unity and ethnic communities across the Durand Line have had a long history of challenging the legitimacy of the state. This has resulted in civil conflict, which has undermined security and peace for the region, and led to further deterioration in the well-being of these ethnic communities.

CONCLUSION

The Durand Line has been the main reason for the confrontation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947 the Durand Line dispute has created a line of separation between the Pakhtun population on both sides of the border and has been a core concern of geopolitical tensions between the two neighbors. Both countries have not been able to resolve the issue, which has contributed to mistrust and escalating conflict. Pakistan holds the Durand Line as a permanent border with Afghanistan, however every regime in Afghanistan has disputed this. The result is inadequate border management and indeed a vacuum for Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other insurgent groups to instill their presence alongside the border and operate armed resistance in the form of organized attacks against Pakistan and ethnic communities living along the border. To counter these threats from non-state actors and restrict illegal infiltration into the country, Pakistan has opted for border fencing and other border management initiatives. However, border management has remained ineffective, contributing to illegal entry, jeopardized safety of ethnic groups living along the border, and trade of narcotics. Finally, the major concern is the splitting of the ethnic Pakhtun population, and the loss of identity and community for the group. This study recommends the critical need for both countries to resolve the Durand Line dispute through dialogue and negotiations, which is the main obstacle to progressive and sustainable bilateral relations. This will not only strengthen the diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and bring stability to the region, but will also help the citizens of both countries to work together for trade

and development.

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Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Ethics and permission

Ethical approval is not applicable here, as this is a study based on academic literature review.

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