

# WEEKLY ANALYSIS

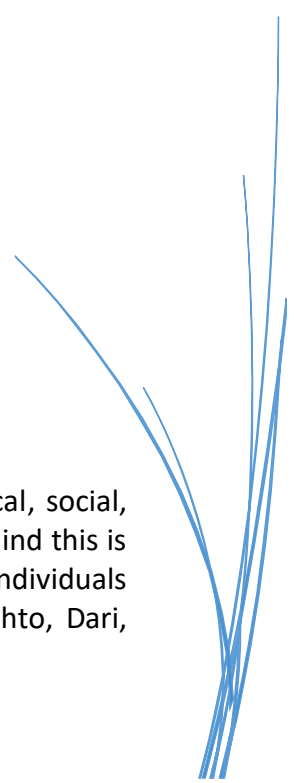
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## TENSIONS BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE AND THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT: THEIR IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS

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Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



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## TENSIONS BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC EMIRATE AND THE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT: THEIR IMPACT ON BILATERAL RELATIONS

### Introduction

During its first rule, the Islamic Emirate had close relations with Pakistan. Along with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan was one of the few countries that recognized the Islamic Emirate. Pakistan also cooperated economically with the Islamic Emirate and provided military training for its fighters.

After the events of September 11, 2001, the United States launched a war under the pretext of self-defense, with Pakistan as its key front-line ally. Pakistan assisted the United States in overthrowing the Islamic Emirate in exchange for the lifting of sanctions and economic aid, providing bases and routes that led to the fall of the Islamic Emirate.

By 2005, the relations between the Islamic Emirate and Pakistan were almost severed, and Pakistan remained loyal to the United States in the Afghanistan war. However, after the United States signed a strategic partnership agreement with India, pledging cooperation in non-military nuclear activities, civilian space programs, and advanced technology trade, Pakistan sought a similar agreement with the United States. The U.S. declined, leading Pakistan to feel betrayed, as it had allowed its territory to be used for attacks in Afghanistan, suffering losses, while the U.S. signed such agreements with India. Consequently, Pakistan reviewed its policy towards the U.S. and began supporting groups opposing the Afghan government, strengthening its ties with the Islamic Emirate once again.

In 2021, Pakistan welcomed the return of the Islamic Emirate to power, primarily because it ended India's influence in Afghanistan, and Pakistan aimed to maintain good relations with the Islamic Emirate. Pakistan handed over the Afghan embassy in Islamabad to the Islamic Emirate and reopened its own embassy in Kabul. High-level representatives from both countries exchanged visits, and it was expected that their relations would have a promising future. However, recently, relations between the two governments have deteriorated due to security and other issues.

On December 24, 2024, Pakistani military forces attacked the Bermal area in Paktika, resulting in the deaths of many Afghans, including women and children. Pakistan claimed it targeted members and



leaders of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, responsible for recent security attacks in Pakistan. In response, on December 28, the Islamic Emirate attacked several Pakistani military posts across the Durand Line, claiming to have inflicted casualties on Pakistani forces.

## REASONS FOR DETERIORATING RELATIONS

When the Islamic Emirate returned to power, it was expected that their relations with Pakistan would be as close as before, especially since the Pakistani government welcomed the Islamic Emirate's return and celebrated the fall of the Republic. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, described the fall of the Republic and the rise of the Islamic Emirate as breaking the chains of slavery. However, after some time, the political relations between the two governments faced challenges. Three main reasons for the deteriorating relations can be highlighted:

**1. The Islamic Emirate's Stance on the Durand Line:** The Defense Minister of the Islamic Emirate, Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob Mujahid, stated in an interview with Tolo News: "The Durand Line is an imaginary line, and if the Afghan people request, we will bring this issue up with Islamabad. However, we must first resolve our internal issues." Additionally, Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the Deputy Foreign Minister, mentioned during a ceremony marking the 35th anniversary of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in Logar: "We will never accept the Durand Line as the official border. Part of Afghanistan's territory still lies beyond this line." He added, "Travel based on passports and visas on this line is never acceptable." These statements from high-ranking officials of the Islamic Emirate regarding the Durand Line have negatively impacted the political relations between the two countries, indicating that the Durand issue is a significant challenge in their political relations.

**2. Forced Expulsion of Afghan Refugees by Pakistan:** According to the Pakistani government, four million Afghan refugees live in Pakistan, with 2.3 million having government-verified documents, while 1.7 million remain undocumented and live illegally. On October 3, 2023, Pakistan announced that all illegal Afghan refugees must return to their country by the end of October. According to a report by the International Organization for Migration in July 2023, over 600,000 Afghans migrated



to Pakistan since the return of the Islamic Emirate in 2021, all without documents. According to Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, from the beginning of October 2023 until November 20 of the same year, 400,000 Afghan refugees returned to their country through Torkham and Spin Boldak. Pakistan often uses the issue of Afghan refugees as a political pressure tool, accusing the Islamic Emirate of supporting Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. To gain cooperation in eliminating Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, Pakistan has used the forced expulsion of refugees as a pressure tactic.

**3. The Issue of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP):** In recent years, the issue of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been one of the main reasons for the worsening relations between the two countries. The foundation of the strained political relations between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and Pakistan is based on security concerns and challenges that affect both sides. Pakistan claims that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan supports TTP, provides them with safe havens in Afghanistan, backs their attacks in Pakistan, and even that Afghan Taliban fighters join TTP ranks to fight against the Pakistani government. On the other hand, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan claims that Pakistan attacks Afghan territory and creates security problems along the Durand Line. These mutual accusations indicate that the core security challenge is TTP, as Pakistan justifies its attacks on Afghan soil by claiming they target TTP bases.

### **IMPACT OF POOR POLITICAL RELATIONS ON ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

As outlined above, when political relations between the Islamic Emirate and Pakistan deteriorated, it had negative impacts on their political, economic, and socio-cultural relations. One of the political impacts was that before the relations soured, Pakistan defended the Islamic Emirate in various international forums, worked with other regional countries to strengthen the government in Afghanistan, and refrained from actions that would damage the Islamic Emirate's reputation or hinder its recognition. However, after the relations deteriorated, Pakistan accused the Islamic Emirate in international forums of supporting TTP and using Afghan territory against Pakistan.



Additionally, in regional meetings about Afghanistan, Pakistan raised issues of inclusive governance and human rights as a political pressure tool against the Islamic Emirate.

Economically, the strained relations also had an impact. Trade between the two countries decreased significantly. Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, Deputy Head of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Chamber of Commerce, mentioned that in 2024, trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan dropped from \$2.5 billion to \$700 million. The main reasons were increased tariffs on Afghan goods, the inclusion of some items in the banned list, and the seizure of nearly 300 containers belonging to Afghan traders. These figures and reasons clearly indicate that the reduction in trade is due to the impact of poor political relations, and the bans on Afghan goods, the seizure of Afghan traders' containers, and increased tariffs are signs of strained political relations, leading to decreased trade between the two sides.

Since the return of the Islamic Emirate to power in August 2021, several issues have arisen at the Torkham and Spin Boldak borders between Pakistan and the Islamic Emirate, resulting in border closures and disruptions to trade and people's movement, causing financial losses to traders on both sides. In February 2023, the Islamic Emirate closed the Torkham gate for all types of transit and trade. The gate remained closed for three days, halting trade between the two countries and negatively impacting their economic relations. Syed Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi, Chairman of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry, stated that due to the closure of the Torkham gate, 6,000 trucks and large vehicles were stranded on both sides of the border, causing millions of dollars in losses. Islamic Emirate officials stated that they closed the gate because the Pakistani side failed to fulfill their promises regarding transit and patient transportation.

In May 2023, Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Emirate, and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, met in Islamabad to address these border and trade issues. They agreed to enhance bilateral trade, cooperate in the fight against terrorism, and resolve border concerns.<sup>1</sup>

In 2024, similar incidents of border closures occurred several times. In summary, whenever political relations between the two countries deteriorated, it sometimes led to border closures, harming trade.



## HOW TO IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS

Healthy relations between the Islamic Emirate and Pakistan benefit both countries. Good relations can strengthen economic exchanges, create an atmosphere of trust, facilitate joint regional economic projects, support each other politically on the global stage, and adopt common stances on important and controversial regional issues.

**Here are some ways to improve relations between the two countries:**

- **Utilize China as a Mediator:** In recent years, China has developed close relations with the Islamic Emirate and has always been a strategic partner of Pakistan. Both countries can use China as a mediator to strengthen and improve their relations.
- **Work on Multilateral and Regional Economic Projects:** This is another way to bring the two countries closer politically. Bilateral economic relations are directly impacted by political issues—when political relations deteriorate, so do economic ties. However, multilateral regional economic projects, such as CASA-1000 or TAPI, are less affected by political relations because other parties involved in these projects push for their continuation. Therefore, by working together on such multilateral economic projects, the Islamic Emirate and Pakistan can create an atmosphere of trust and improve their political relations.
- **Mutual Respect for Sovereignty:** Bilateral relations will improve significantly when Pakistan respects Afghanistan's political sovereignty and views it as an independent state. Once the Islamic Emirate is assured that Pakistan treats them as an independent and sovereign state, they will also be compelled to respect Pakistan's political sovereignty and address its concerns and requests.

## CONCLUSION

The main reason behind the recent conflict between the Islamic Emirate and Pakistan is the issue of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Pakistani government accuses the Islamic Emirate of providing safe havens to TTP and collaborating with them across the Durand Line. Although the Islamic Emirate has consistently denied these allegations, asserting that Afghan soil will not be used



against anyone, Pakistan does not trust these statements. Consequently, Pakistan has continued to conduct airstrikes in Paktika and other regions, claiming to target TTP fighters.

These political tensions between Pakistan and the Islamic Emirate have cast a shadow over the future of their relations. Pakistan, Afghanistan's largest neighboring country with the longest shared border, cannot afford to maintain poor political relations with Afghanistan. Such strained relations negatively impact the economic ties between the two countries and also adversely affect Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.

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**Contact Us:**

Email: [info@csrsaf.org](mailto:info@csrsaf.org)

Website: [www.csrsaf.org](http://www.csrsaf.org)

Phone & WhatsApp: +93780618000

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