

Answer to Question

Border Clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan

(Translated)

Question:

Al Arabiya Net published on 13 August 2024, "The Taliban government accused Pakistani forces on Tuesday of killing three civilians, including a woman and two children, during clashes on the border between the two countries. A Pakistani border official in Torkham said that three Pakistani soldiers were injured in the clash..." Prior to this, "the International Monetary Fund signed on Friday an agreement with the Pakistani government to establish a \$7 billion aid program over three years." (Sky News Arabia, 13 July 2024). What is behind these clashes, especially since there have been previous clashes as well? Is there a connection between the aid of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is controlled by the US, and Pakistan being occupied with a conflict with Afghanistan, instead of focusing on India, thus allowing India to concentrate on confronting China, in line with US interests, to pressure China? Or are there other reasons?

Answer:

To address the above questions, we need to examine the following points:

1- In our Question and Answer dated January 28, 2023, regarding the border established by British colonialist rule between Pakistan and Afghanistan, we stated:

"In 1893, an agreement was signed between the then British Foreign Secretary Sir Mortimer Durand and the Afghan ruler, Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, to draw the border line known as the 'Durand Line,' stretching 2,640 kilometers from northeast to southwest, between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This border was established as the official boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It divided the Pashtun tribes into two parts on either side of the line. It is worth noting that the border area is predominantly inhabited by Muslims belonging to the Pashtun ethnic group, which constitutes the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, making up about 40% of the population. Throughout the past two centuries, all Afghan rulers have been from this group. Pashtuns are the second-largest ethnic group in Pakistan after Punjabis..."

...Afghanistan has refused to recognize this border, especially since England at that time did not consider the demographic, ethnic, and tribal structure of the area when drawing the Durand Line, which was artificially drawn, on 12 November, 1893, to serve British colonialist interests. The British, like many before them, struggled to control the border areas. Britain suffered a significant military defeat in Afghanistan during its aggression between 1839 and 1842. It launched another aggression in 1878, but withdrew after two years, although it gained political influence through Afghan rulers who signed the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879, which resulted in Afghanistan losing vast territories to British colonialist rule over the Indian Subcontinent." [End Quote from Question and Answer].

2- The Durand Line border had previously seen its significance diminish during the turbulent periods in Afghanistan, particularly following the major international interventions by the Soviet Union in 1979, and then the US in 2001. However, it has resurfaced as a point of contention, reflecting current US policy interests, following its humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

It should be noted that the border was relatively porous during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which facilitated the movement of mujahideen fighters receiving training in Pakistan to combat the Soviets in Afghanistan. This border permeability was consistent with the demographic realities, and familial ties, among Pashtun families on both sides of the border. Additionally, it aligned with US policy aimed at countering the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

However, with the US occupation of Afghanistan, American policy shifted, leading to demands for Pakistan to tighten border controls, and prevent the movement of anti-American mujahideen

across the border. Consequently, the Pakistani military engaged in fierce battles in the border areas within Pakistan.

3- In May 2018, Pakistan incorporated the tribal border areas adjacent to Afghanistan into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, thereby ending a period of ambiguity and lack of jurisdiction for Pakistani laws, police, and judiciary in those regions. Pakistan considers the border issue with Afghanistan settled, as confirmed recently by interim Prime Minister Anwar ul-Haq Kakar in an interview with the Afghan network Tolo News, where he stated, “The Durand Line is an internationally recognized “border” between Afghanistan and Pakistan... The UN and 206 countries have approved this as an international border, what the Afghan people say about this is their internal discussion, in which I am not interested.” (Tolo News, 6 February 2024).

However, all Afghan governments throughout history, regardless of their political or ideological affiliations, have refused to recognize the Durand Line, as the official international border between the two countries. The most recent statement on this matter came from Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, the Minister for Borders and Tribal Affairs in the Taliban government, who said, “There is no official border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

The dispute over this border, which extends over 2,600 kilometers, has intensified. In our previous Question and Answer dated 28 January, 2023, we mentioned, “Pakistan further tightened controls by imposing a visa requirement on Afghans for the first time in history. This tension was exacerbated by Pakistan constructing a 3-meter high border fence, spending hundreds of millions of dollars on its construction over hundreds of kilometers. All of this was under the pretext of regulating the movement of goods and people and protecting against ‘terrorists.’ The fence became one of the causes of heightened tensions and clashes in the border area between the two countries. The Taliban government prevented Pakistani forces from continuing the construction of the fence along the approximately 2,700-kilometer border after around 90% of it had been completed. The Ashraf Ghani government had agreed to its construction before its fall. The Taliban government confronted Pakistani forces each time they attempted to complete the fence, leading to clashes in various border areas and resulting in casualties on both sides. Thus, tensions between the two countries escalated, especially when Pakistan accused the Taliban government of not preventing the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from attacking the Pakistani army. Pakistan then carried out airstrikes on sites inside Afghanistan, claiming they were targeting TTP fighters...”

4- Thus, skirmishes and clashes between the Pakistani military and Taliban forces have become a new reality in the relationship between the two countries. These conflicts have intensified due to border issues and attacks between the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Pakistani army. Last year, the number of casualties rose to its highest level in six years, with over 1,500 people killed, including civilians, security personnel, and militants, according to the Center for Research and Security Studies (Al Jazeera Net, 17 July 2024).

With the Pakistani military accusing Afghanistan of harboring TTP fighters, Islamabad has increased its pressure on Afghanistan. According to Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, spokesperson for the Taliban's Returnee Assistance and Resettlement Committee, “The neighboring countries - Pakistan and Iran - have forcibly deported over 400,000 refugees since the beginning of 2024, with Pakistan responsible for 75% of these deportations.” (Al Hurra, 11 June 2024).

5- From all this, it becomes clear that the Pakistani government, which is aligned with the US, is actively harassing and provoking the Taliban in Afghanistan. It restricts the free movement of Afghans across the border, demanding visas for visiting relatives, and imposing the border fence as a fait accompli. Moreover, Pakistan is effectively shifting the border line further into Afghan territory, tightening restrictions on Afghan refugees, over 2 million of whom include 600,000 who fled following the US withdrawal in 2021 (Al Hurra, 1 November 2023), and expelling them from Pakistan. In 2022, Pakistan facilitated US aircraft passage to carry out airstrikes within Afghanistan, resulting in the death of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Additionally, Pakistani intelligence is conducting targeted assassinations in Afghan border cities, focusing on prominent figures associated with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

6- All of Pakistan's actions fall within the framework of US policy, aimed at pressuring the Taliban in Afghanistan, until they are fully subdued. This also aligns with Washington's desire to push the Pakistani military into civil war and conflict with Afghanistan, to facilitate India's alignment

with the US against China. Additionally, it reflects America's efforts to prevent China from exploiting Afghanistan's mineral resources. The prolonged animosity between the US and the Taliban, over more than two decades, has heightened China's hopes of utilizing Afghanistan's resources for its industries, after the US withdrawal in 2021. The border dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan obstructs China's ambitions, given the significant investments it has made in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

This is the broader context of Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, where it becomes evident that the US is the main driver of the conflict between them. This context includes fostering hostility, the armed border dispute, escalating tensions in all areas, and conducting airstrikes by Pakistan within Afghanistan. For instance, the Afghan Defense Minister announced that Pakistani Air Force jets attacked populated areas in Khost and Paktika provinces on the border, resulting in the deaths of innocent women and children. The Pakistani military and government have not commented on the matter. These strikes followed attacks that killed six Pakistani soldiers at a military checkpoint along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, and came after seven soldiers were killed in a recent attack in North Waziristan near the Afghan border. (Asharq Al-Awsat, 18 March 2024).

7- The strained relationship between the two countries since 2021 is trending towards escalation, primarily due to the underlying American interests that continue to drive the situation. These interests are persistent and lead towards increasing tensions, regardless of whether Pakistan takes loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or not. Although the IMF's formal conditions and loan agreements, covering issues such as domestic currency, exchange rates, trade, energy, and taxes, do not officially include Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, it is not possible to exclude the influence of America's insidious policies. Such policies entice Pakistani officials with promised loans, pushing them to intensify efforts to serve American interests, including increasing tensions with Afghanistan.

In the summer of 2023, Pakistan received a \$3 billion loan from the IMF, which is dominated by the US, and is now promised additional aid. "The IMF signed an agreement with the Pakistani government on Friday to establish a \$7 billion aid program over three years" (Sky News Arabia, 13 July 2024). This additional funding further fuels Pakistan's commitment to advancing American objectives, including escalating tensions with Afghanistan.

8- Given all of this, the current Pakistani government's statements, aligned with American interests, have heightened tensions between the two countries. This was evident in the incident in mid-July 2024 where Pakistani soldiers were killed:

a- "The Pakistan will continue to launch attacks against Afghanistan as part of a new military operation aimed at countering terrorism, the country's defence minister has told the BBC." (BBC English, 2 July 2024). According to the same source, "The Taliban said the statement was "irresponsible," warning Pakistan that cross-border attacks would have "consequences"."

b- Diplomatic Tensions: "The Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the Deputy Head of the Afghan Taliban government's mission on Wednesday and urged the Taliban to take action against armed groups based in Afghanistan, which Islamabad claims carried out an attack on a military base this week." (Al Jazeera Net, 17 July 2024).

c- "A group of heavily-armed militants stormed the cantonment area in the Bannu district of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in early hours of Monday before a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall of the area, killing eight soldiers... "Pakistan has consistently raised its concerns with interim Afghan Government, asking them to deny persistent use of Afghan soil by the terrorists and take effective action against such elements," the statement said ... The army pointed a finger at the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group of outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), "which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well." (Anadolu Agency, 16 July 2024).

d- Cross-Border Clashes: Al Arabiya Net reported on 13 August 2024, "The Taliban government accused Pakistani forces on Tuesday of killing three civilians, including a woman and two children, during clashes on the border between the two countries. A Pakistani border official in Torkham stated that three Pakistani soldiers were injured in the clash."

9- Summary: The border disputes and tensions over Afghan refugees in Pakistan, along with the continuous stream of accusations from Pakistan against the Afghan government for harboring Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters, and claiming that attacks originate from Afghanistan, all contribute to rising tensions between the two sides. This situation creates grounds for skirmishes, border clashes, and Pakistani airstrikes within Afghan border towns, and rural areas. It is likely that this trend has been on a steady increase since 2021, following the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan. The primary driver of this tension is American interests, as we have outlined. The US is pushing for increased tensions to achieve its goals in the region and counter China's influence.

Although the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) do not explicitly address these issues, the US views these loans as incentives for its allies in Pakistan, to further escalate tensions and conflicts with Afghanistan. Amidst the fierce competition between Democrats and Republicans in the US presidential elections, and with Republican candidate Donald Trump criticizing the Biden administration for the humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the Biden administration might push Pakistan into more intense confrontations with the Taliban, to demonstrate to Americans that Pakistan is handling the Taliban issue on behalf of the US.

Given this context, statements from American agents in Pakistan indicate a clear intent to escalate and threaten, suggesting that intermittent skirmishes could evolve into more significant cross-border battles. However, a full-scale war is unlikely, particularly since the stronger party, Pakistan, does not have territorial demands upon Afghanistan.

10- This is the state of Muslims in the absence of Islamic Shariah rulings that require the dismantling of borders between Muslims, and the unification of their lands under a single Khaleefah. This situation will persist as long as the Ummah, especially its people of power, does not rise in anger for their Lord and their Ummah, and does not work to overthrow these treacherous rulers, who conspire against their people with every setting sun, and carry out these conspiracies with every rising sun, to please the enemies of Allah (swt), such as America amongst others. The affairs of Muslims can only be set right as they were at the beginning: ruling by all that Allah (swt) has revealed under a Khilafah (Caliphate) on the Method of Prophethood, driving away the disbelievers behind them. Allah (swt) says, ﴿فَإِمَّا تَنْفِقْنَهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ فَشَرِّدْ بِهِمْ مَنْ خَلْفَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ﴾ **“If you ever encounter them in battle, make a fearsome example of them, so perhaps those who would follow them may be deterred.”** [TMQ Surah Al-Anfal 8:57]. The Khilafah's constitution must be based on Islam from the Book of Allah (swt) and the Sunnah of His Messenger (saw), and the Unanimous Consensus of the Companions (ra) (Ijmaa' Sahaba) and through Shariah Qiyas, not on man-made constitutions, whether it be the 1964 Constitution from the reign of Mohammad Zahir Shah of Afghanistan, which ended in 1973, and which was taken up by the Taliban, according to the announcement by the Minister of Justice on 28 September 2021 (Al Jazeera and Anadolu 28 September 2021), or any other man-made constitutions in Muslim countries. All of this is contrary to what Allah (swt) has commanded: ﴿وَأَنِ احْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ وَاحْذَرْهُمْ أَنْ يَفْتِنُوكَ عَنْ بَعْضِ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُصِيبَهُمْ بِبَعْضِ ذُنُوبِهِمْ﴾ **“And judge between them by all that Allah has revealed, and do not follow their desires. And beware, so they do not lure you away from some of what Allah has revealed to you. If they turn away, then know that it is Allah's Will to repay them for some of their sins.”** [TMQ Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:49].

Afghanistan and Pakistan must recognize that they are Muslim countries, such that fighting between them is forbidden. They must deepen the bonds of Islamic brotherhood between them, sever any connections with the colonialist disbelievers, primarily America, and grant Nussrah to Hizb ut Tahrir working to establish the Khilafah (Caliphate). By doing so, Muslims will be honored, and disbelievers will be humiliated. Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يُفْرِحُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ * بِنَصْرِ اللَّهِ يَنْصُرُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾ **“And that Day the believers will rejoice * In the victory of Allah. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.”** [TMQ Surah Ar-Rum 30:4-5].

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