

# With Trump's backing, Pakistan wages "open war" on Afghanistan

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Military clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan continued for a fifth day Tuesday, in a conflict with potentially major implications for South Asian and world geopolitics.

Pakistan has carried out waves of air and missile strikes, including on Kabul and other targets deep inside Afghanistan, since it announced last Friday, February 27, that it was launching "open war" on its smaller, northwestern neighbour. Pakistani forces have also attacked numerous Afghan positions along the 2,640-kilometer (1,640 miles) Durand Line, a British Empire-imposed border that Kabul has never recognized.

Afghanistan's Taliban regime has countered with drone strikes and cross-border assaults. Both sides are boasting that they have killed hundreds of rival soldiers. Kabul is alleging Pakistan's aerial war has resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties.

Most foreign governments, including those of China, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have appealed to the two sides to immediately cease hostilities and negotiate a settlement.

The United States led by the would-be fascist dictator Donald Trump administration is not among them. Endorsing Islamabad's war narrative, the US State Department has declared Washington's "support for Pakistan's right to defend itself against incursions from the Taliban, which is designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist organization."

Trump lavished praise Friday on Pakistan's leadership—including Field Marshall Asim Munir, the head of its armed forces, the real power behind Pakistan's government, and the architect of its war on Afghanistan. When asked by reporters if he would intervene to try to bring the Pakistan-Afghan conflict to an end, Trump replied, "Well, I would, but I get along with Pakistan, as you know, very well. ... They have a great prime minister, a great general there—two of the people I really respect a lot." He then added, "I think that Pakistan is doing terrifically well."

Trump made these remarks knowing full well that within hours American and Israeli warplanes would be raining bombs and missiles on Iran, initiating a criminal war of aggression.

Frictions and animosity between Pakistan and Afghanistan's Taliban-led government have been mounting since at least 2023. Last October, Pakistan carried out air strikes deep inside Afghanistan on what it claimed were bases of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an insurgent Islamist Pakistan militia, triggering almost two weeks of fighting between Pakistani and Afghan forces. Qatar, with the assistance of other powers, brokered a

truce, but it began to unravel almost as soon as it had been concluded.

Pakistan blames Kabul for a recent spike in terrorist attacks by the TTP, but also the Islamic State-Khorasan Province and Baluchi separatists.

Even in the first days of last fall's shaky truce, Islamabad refused to reopen its border with Afghanistan, preventing the cross-border movement of goods and people. Now in its fifth month, the trade and travel embargo is having a hugely damaging impact on people and commerce on both sides of the Durand Line. This is especially true in Afghanistan, whose economy was already reeling under drought and the continued refusal of the US and other western powers to allow Kabul access to the billions in Afghan Central Bank assets they seized when the Taliban came to power in August 2021.

Pakistan's government has also sought to divert mass social anger over its imposition of brutal IMF (International Monetary Fund) austerity measures, growing poverty and ever-widening social inequality by moving to deport millions of Afghan refugees, many of whom have lived in Pakistan for decades or were born there.

That said, it was surely no happenstance that Islamabad launched its "open war" on Taliban-led Afghanistan just as US imperialism and its Israeli attack-dog were poised to attack Iran.

Pakistan's military and Muslim League (Nawaz) government knew that the Trump administration would be all the more eager to endorse and encourage Pakistan's own aggression under conditions where the Taliban had publicly declared that it would support Iran should it be attacked and do what it could to support Tehran.

Relations between Islamabad and Washington became increasingly fractious during the two-decade-long, Pakistan-enabled, US neo-colonial occupation of Afghanistan. Successive US administrations made increasingly shrill complaints that Pakistan was not doing enough to suppress the Taliban, which they claimed were finding sanctuary in Pakistan's traditional tribal areas. In fact, the TTP arose in response to the ruthless methods—from carpet-bombing to collective punishments and forced disappearances—the Pakistani military employed in suppressing the Taliban insurgency. However, with a view to retaining influence in a negotiated settlement to end the Afghan war, Islamabad did keep back channels open with the Taliban, which it had helped found in the early 1990s, after serving as the

Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) partner and conduit in organizing Islamist opposition to the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan for more than a decade.

Since Trump's return to power in January 2025, US-Pakistan relations have improved markedly. Under Munir, Pakistan has signaled that it is anxious to reinvigorate the US-Pakistani military-strategic partnership, the traditional bulwark of Islamabad's foreign policy, and reduce its economic and military dependence on China.

Toward this end, Pakistan has strongly supported Trump's Gaza "peace plan," which aims to place the enclave under perpetual imperialist bondage, and pledged to deploy possibly thousands of troops to impose it on the Palestinian people.

Islamabad has publicly condemned both the US-Israeli attack on Iran and their assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who in addition to being Iran's head of state was revered by tens of millions as a spiritual Shia leader.

These statements will not have ruffled any feathers in Washington. The domestic and international compulsions under which Islamabad operates are well understood in Washington.

There is deep-rooted popular animosity toward US imperialism, and the brutal drone war it mounted for years in Pakistan's tribal areas during the George W. Bush and Obama presidencies. This was a major factor in the rise to power of the now defrocked and jailed ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan and his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice).

Pakistan also shares longstanding cultural-civilizational ties to its western neighbour Iran. While the exact figure is unknown, Shia Muslims are estimated to account for between 15 and 20 percent of Pakistan's population, that is, some 40 million or more people.

Recent days have seen large protests against the US-Israeli attack on Iran and the assassination of Ayatollah Khamenei in major cities across the country, including Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. Pakistani security forces killed ten protesters and injured scores more Sunday, when they allegedly tried to storm the US consulate in Karachi. According to press reports at least 11 more people were killed last weekend during protests in Gilgit and Skardu, the principal cities in Pakistan's remote, northerly Gilgit-Baltistan administrative territory.

A major factor in the Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict is Islamabad's fears over the increasingly close ties its arch-rival India has developed with the Taliban regime. All the more so, given that India-Pakistan relations have been on a knife's edge since last May, when India mounted illegal air strikes deep inside Pakistan, triggering four days of cross-border clashes that brought South Asia's twin nuclear powers to the brink of all-out war. Not only have there have been no negotiations since Islamabad and New Delhi announced a truce May 10. India has withdrawn from the Indus Water Treaty, threatening a key economic lifeline of Pakistan, and both sides have continued to exchange bellicose threats and ratcheted up their weapons and ammunition purchases.

Pakistan's unprecedented October 2025 attack on Afghanistan took place during a week-long visit by Taliban Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi to New Delhi. During his stay, he concluded a series of agreements with India's Narendra Modi-led Hindu supremacist government, including for economic assistance

and support for health care. Even more concerning for Islamabad, Foreign Minister Muttaqi called India a "close friend" and said Kabul recognizes and aligns with New Delhi's security concerns.

Islamabad charges that India is using Afghanistan to provide material support to both the TTP and the ethno-nationalist separatist insurgency in Baluchistan. There is compelling evidence to support this, especially in the case of the Baluchi insurgency. But this is also very much a case of the pot calling the kettle black, as Islamabad has long supported Islamist insurgents in Indian-held Kashmir, as well as the Khalistan movement for a separate Sikh state.

The Taliban regime, for its part, charges that Pakistan is acting as the cat's paw for Washington. It says Trump turned aggressively against it after it refused to cede to his demand that it give back to the Pentagon the massive US-built Bagram military base on Kabul's outskirts. In making this demand, Trump noted the base's proximity to key elements of China's strategic nuclear program.

On Sunday, Pakistan's air force attacked the Bagram base.

India is far and away Washington's closest ally in South Asia. Under Modi, it has become a frontline state in American imperialism's military-strategic offensive against China, and has entered into an ever-expanding web of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral military-security ties with Washington and its principal Asia-Pacific allies, Japan and Australia.

Yet New Delhi's position on Pakistan's "open war" on Taliban-led Afghanistan is radically different from Washington, underscoring the complex and explosive mesh of conflicting geostrategic interests that now traverse South and Central Asia. Soon after the clashes began, India's Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement that "strongly condemns Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghan territory that have resulted in civilian casualties, including women and children, during the holy month of Ramadan." It termed the attacks a violation of Afghan sovereignty and "another attempt by Pakistan to externalise its internal failures."

The Pakistan-Afghan conflict, like the Indo-Pakistani conflict with which it is increasingly enmeshed, is rooted in colonialism, imperialist oppression and the venal character of the rival bourgeois regimes.

US imperialism in its reckless drive for world hegemony is enflaming and exacerbating these conflicts. Even as Washington has set the Middle East ablaze with its criminal war of aggression on Iran, it is encouraging Islamabad to wage war on Afghanistan, stoking conflicts across South and Central Asia.



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