

5. Durand Line- International Relation

The Durand Line- Fragile frontier. The collapse of peace talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan has reignited tensions along the Durand Line, the disputed 1893 colonial border which Pakistan recognizes as legitimate but Afghanistan rejects as it divides ethnic Pashtun communities.

Current Situation- Peace talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan have collapsed, shifting focus back to the volatile border region.

Significance- The Durand Line remains one of South Asia's most sensitive and contested frontiers, serving as a flashpoint for bilateral tensions.

Historical Background of the Durand Line

Geographical Extent- It serves as a 2,640-kilometre frontier. **Stretch-** It extends from the Iran border in the west to the China border in the east. **Terrain-** It passes through rugged terrains including the Karakoram mountains, Hindu Kush ranges, and the Registan desert.

Origin and Delineation-

Year- Delineated in 1893.

Signatories- The agreement was signed between Sir Henry Mortimer Durand (Foreign Secretary of British India) and Emir Abdur Rahman Khan (Ruler of Afghanistan).

Consequences of the Agreement- It arbitrarily divided Pashtun tribal lands, splitting ethnic communities across two spheres of influence. It transferred the control of the strategic region of Balochistan to British India.

Post-Partition Conflict & Differing Stances

The legitimacy of the border is the root cause of the conflict.

Aspect	Pakistan's Stance	Afghanistan's Stance (Including Taliban)
Legitimacy	Inherited the Durand Line as a legally binding international border in 1947.	Rejects the legitimacy of the 1893 agreement completely.
Argument	Views the border as a settled international boundary essential for national sovereignty.	Argues the agreement was a result of colonial coercion, was limited in duration, and never accepted by the Afghan people.
The Pash-tun Factor	Views the "Pashtunistan" demand as a threat to its territorial integrity.	Supports the Pashtunistan movement (unification of Pashtuns on both sides) and refuses to recognize the division of tribes.

Recent Drivers of Tension

Unilateral Border Fencing (2017)-

Pakistan's Action- Commenced the construction of a fence along the Durand Line to curb insurgency and illegal cross-border movement.

Afghanistan's Reaction- Strongly opposes the move, viewing it as a unilateral attempt to formalize a disputed border without consent.

Collapse of Diplomatic Talks- The latest rounds of mediation involving Turkey and Qatar between Pakistan and the Taliban have failed.

Consequence- The breakdown in dialogue has led to renewed cross-border firing and military retaliatory operations.

Multidimensional Impact on the Region

Economic Impact (Afghanistan)- Since Afghanistan is landlocked, it relies heavily on transit trade through Pakistan. Border closures or tensions are catastrophic for daily commerce and the movement of relief operations.

Geopolitical Impact (Pakistan)- Persistent instability jeopardizes Pakistan's strategic ambition to function as a **trade corridor** linking South Asia with Central Asia (energy and goods transit).

Strategic Opportunity (India)- The rift pushes Afghanistan to seek alternatives to Pakistan. Afghanistan

may pursue closer economic ties with India, utilizing the Chabahar Port and the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to bypass Pakistan entirely.

Societal Impact (People-to-People)–The "artificial" border divides families and tribes. Markets and border villages suffer the brunt of disruptions, affecting livelihoods and social cohesion.

Security Concerns (Terror Spillovers)–Instability facilitates the flow of arms, drugs, and terror financing.

Risk to India– Terror groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) have historically exploited this instability to regroup, posing significant security risks to the wider region.

Way Ahead

Institutional Dialogue– Both nations must institutionalize regular talks specifically on security and border management to prevent misunderstandings from escalating into conflict.

Border Protocols– Reopening crossings under strictly defined, mutually agreed protocols is essential to stabilize trade and reduce humanitarian distress.

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)– Engagement should not be limited to the state level; involving tribal elders, civil society, and border communities is crucial to managing local tensions effectively.

Source– <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/the-durand-line-fragile-frontier/article70339470.ece>

