2. Regional context

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: October 2026

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Pakistan’s regional context is marked by persistent instability on its frontiers. Relations with Afghanistan are increasingly conflictual, driven by border disputes, militancy, deportations and cross-border strikes. Relations with India remain adversarial, centred on Kashmir and renewed military escalation in 2025. By contrast, ties with Iran are comparatively stable, despite episodic security tensions, and are sustained through diplomatic and economic cooperation.

☐ Relations with Afghanistan

Pakistan’s expectation that its support for the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 would produce a government aligned with Islamabad did not materialise. Relations between the two countries had deteriorated markedly by 2024–2026. The principal bilateral dispute remains the Durand Line, the border drawn during the colonial period between Afghanistan and British India, which Afghanistan has historically not recognised. This issue intersects with disputes over border management, cross-border movement, and the status of Pashtun populations across the frontier.

Pakistan accuses the Afghan Taliban of allowing Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) to operate from Afghan territory, alleging that such groups are responsible for attacks inside Pakistan. Afghan authorities deny these allegations and, in turn, accuse Pakistan of supporting Islamic State-linked militants. Bilateral relations are further strained by Pakistani trade restrictions, tighter border controls, and the large-scale deportation of Afghan nationals, including undocumented

persons and categories of formerly protected residents. Tensions also increased in connection with Pakistan’s plans for, and subsequent implementation of, cross-border military operations.

The situation escalated into direct military confrontation. From October 2025 onwards, Afghan Taliban forces and Pakistani troops reportedly engaged in repeated border clashes, while Pakistani airstrikes targeted locations inside Afghanistan, including Kabul. These developments reportedly caused military and civilian casualties. Border closures further disrupted trade and wider economic relations. Although temporary ceasefires were reported following heavy fighting along the border in October 2025 and in March 2026 following airstrikes especially by Pakistan, tensions along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border persist.

□ Relations with India

Relations between Pakistan and India remain adversarial and primarily security-driven, centred on the unresolved dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. Long-standing tensions derive from the 1947 partition of British India, subsequent wars and military confrontations over Kashmir, and reciprocal allegations regarding support for militant actors. India accuses Pakistan of supporting jihadist groups operating in Indian-administered Kashmir, while Pakistan accuses India of supporting insurgent and separatist violence, including in Balochistan.

Bilateral relations had already deteriorated following the 2019 Kashmir crisis, which followed the Pulwama attack, and India’s subsequent airstrikes in Pakistan. A 2021 ceasefire contributed to a reduction in cross-border firing and to a relative improvement in the security situation. However, the relationship remained fragile, and political normalisation did not follow.

A further major crisis emerged in April 2025 after an attack on tourists in Pahalgam, in Indian-administered Kashmir. India responded by suspending a key water-sharing treaty, halting trade, suspending most visas, and deporting Pakistani nationals. Pakistan adopted reciprocal measures, including visa restrictions, closure of its airspace to Indian aircraft, and a trade ban. Four days of shelling and aerial military operations followed before a ceasefire was reached, reportedly restoring the previous military status quo. Despite that ceasefire, bilateral tensions remain high, with continued military exercises, missile tests, and mutual accusations regarding nuclear security and regional stability.

☐ Relations with Iran

Compared with its relations with Afghanistan and India, Pakistan’s relations with Iran remain more stable, notwithstanding recurring security tensions. The bilateral relationship continues to be underpinned by cultural and religious links, economic cooperation, and pilgrimage routes used by Pakistani Shia Muslims. At the same time, both countries continue to face shared challenges linked to cross-border militant activity, Baloch insurgent presence on both sides of the border, and insecurity in frontier areas.

In January 2024, tensions briefly escalated when Iran launched missile strikes inside Pakistan against the Baloch militant group Jaish al-Adl, after which Pakistan retaliated by striking targets associated with the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Balochistan Liberation Front inside Iran. Diplomatic relations were subsequently restored, ambassadors returned to their posts, and bilateral engagement resumed. Cooperation reportedly deepened further in 2025, including the signing of 12 agreements covering trade, transport, science and technology, agriculture, and tourism, alongside a stated objective of increasing annual bilateral trade to USD 10 billion. Following the 2026 Iran–US/Israel conflict, Pakistan has adopted a cautious but broadly supportive position toward Iran while also seeking to present itself as a possible intermediary between Tehran and Washington.

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