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Amina Khan
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Introduction

The twelfth edition of the Afghanistan Monitor covers developments in Afghanistan from August to November 2025, carrying information about the country's political situation, on-going infrastructure projects, humanitarian situation, situation of women and human rights, economic, foreign, and security situations. This edition offers a collection of in-depth facts about the mentioned variables for the said period.

Even though the Taliban have established their rule in Afghanistan for more than four years, the group is struggling to deliver on various governance, societal, economic, humanitarian, and foreign issues. In light of this, the Taliban are struggling to keep the country's economy afloat that has been facing challenges recently due to closure of border or trade routes with Pakistan. To circumvent their way around, the Taliban are reaching out to India in a search of finding alternative trade routes for Afghanistan.

Though the country's economy has shown modest gains due to lower inflation and better revenues, the return of Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan continues to put stress on the country's income growth. Similarly, despite showing a modest gain in its annual exports, during the first seven months of the current FY25, the country's trade deficit has remained significant.

Moreover, the Taliban are reiterating their desire to have "good relations" with the international community, but the data shows that the group is falling short of behaving as a responsible state, as there is still a continued presence of international terrorist groups, such as ISKP and TTP.

Political Situation

Since coming into power, the Taliban government has been making decisions to implement Shariah law as the basis of the country's new Constitution, as the Constitution of 2004 was replaced. Subsequently, the Taliban have replicated the governance structure of the 1990s, as the group continues to have a supreme leader, a prime minister, and various relevant ministries. Under the current dispensation, the legitimacy of any future constitution arises from the decrees of the Supreme Leader, Mullah Haibatullah.¹

In August 2025, the Taliban announced that there is no legal vacuum in Afghanistan, as the current priority of the group is to draft laws for ministries and other relevant departments. As part of this, between August 18 and September 28, 2025, the Taliban Ministry of Justice published new laws in the Official Gazette, such as: Law on Financial Accounting, Law on Pilgrims' Teachers, Law on Regulation of Poetry Gatherings, Law on Contracts of Ministries and Emirati Administrations, Law on the Prevention of Smuggling of Foodstuffs, Medicine, and Health Products, and Law on the Tariff Board. Moreover, the Ministry's website, which carries the collection of Afghan laws approved since 1964, considers all legal texts approved prior to August 2021 as "annulled", and all legal texts issued by the Taliban since post-August 2021 as "in effect".²

The Taliban are showing commitment in their public statements about exercising general amnesty. For instance, in July 2025, a list of 19,000 Afghans, who were previously associated with British forces in Afghanistan, was leaked, prompting a response from Taliban's deputy

spokesperson, Hamidullah Fitrat. He stated that the principle of general amnesty provides "immunity to everyone", as "No one has been arrested or killed for their past actions." He further noted: "The intelligence apparatus has no need to pursue individuals who were previously granted amnesty. All documents and information related to them are available in the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Intelligence; we have no need to use documents disclosed by the British." However, the UNAMA Human Rights noted between July 1 and September 30, 2025, at least 21 instances of arrests and detentions, 3 instances of torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and ex-ANDSF (Afghan National Defence and Security Force) members, and 14 cases of killings of ex-ANDSF members.³

Regarding the religious rights, it has been noted by the UNAMA, between July and September 2025, the Afghan Taliban took actions against alleged violations of religion in the country. In July 2025, an individual was sentenced to death by the Taliban's Primary Court for alleged blasphemy, as he had promoted modern education over religious studies. Similarly, in early September 2025, the Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice stated the arrest of a prominent Sufi (a spiritual figure in Islam) in Kabul for allegedly "misusing the name of Sufism, performing un-Islamic practices and superstitions under the name of Sufism and religion." The ministry noted that "Afghanistan is an Islamic country, all its citizens are Muslims and they follow the Hanafi school of jurisprudence". However, the religious figure was released on September 6, 2025.⁴

Regarding prison regulations, the Taliban's Supreme Court instructed on September 13, 2025, that all delegations that intend to visit prisons in a bid to identify prisoners for release or reduction of sentence must be led by the Head of the Court of Appeal or the Head of the Criminal Division, who should be accompanied with a judge from the relevant court and representatives from the Provincial Governor's office, policy, and the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI).⁵ Moreover, at governance level, the Taliban are struggling to meet the demands of some sections of the society. For example, in November 2025, multiple retirees voiced their concerns over delays in document processing and payments of pension. The affected have urged the Taliban to accelerate the process of payments, as the further delay amid the winter season can deepen the economic challenges for the common citizens, most of whom are elders.⁶

Although the Taliban face little organized military opposition within the country, Ahmad Massoud of the National Resistance Front (NRF) argues that the regime will ultimately fall due to its own dysfunction and internal fractures. At the same time, NRF fighters have carried out operations against Taliban forces in more than 20 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The Taliban government is also under pressure from the international community and from progressive Afghans, both of whom call for broader inclusion of minority and ethnic groups such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras. According to the UN Security Council's 2023 report, the Taliban's governing structure is "highly exclusionary, Pashtun-centred, and repressive toward all forms of opposition."⁷ In terms of institutional continuity, the Taliban has kept more than half a million officials from the former administration, who now hold mid- and lower-level roles.⁸

Ongoing Infrastructure Projects

After assuming power in August 2025, the Taliban directed their focus to restore the war-ridden country. In light of this, the group has been taking a multitude of measures by initiating new development projects across the country. In November 2025, the group's procurement commission, led by Deputy Minister for Economy, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, approved six infrastructure projects worth almost \$37 million - funded by domestic revenues. These projects include: the construction of a water reservoir in Badghis province's Qadis Khordak district, the construction of a road connecting Koh Safi in Parwan province with Bagram district, and the extension of electricity facility to districts of Qush Tepa and Darzab in Jawzjan province.⁹ Similarly, in December 2025, the Taliban's procurement commission approved 11 developmental projects worth \$23.2 million. The commission had originally examined 30 proposals, of which 11 were approved, 15 were suggested amendments, 1 was rejected, 1 was reinstated, and 2 were ordered further examinations by relevant committees. The approved projects range from reinforcement works in Yateem Tepa in Takhar province Darqad district to construction of a 17-kilometre road in Baghlan province's Dahana-e-Ghori district.¹⁰

The Taliban have been making efforts to construct dams across the country for water storage and irrigation purposes. In Takhar province, the Taliban Ministry of Energy and Water has started construction of a diversion dam, having two irrigation canals. As noted by Hekmatullah, Director General of the Panj-Amu River Basin, the hydroelectric dam holds the capacity of 43 megawatts (MW) with two irrigation canals, each having a length ranging

between 50 to 220 kilometers. He further asserted that once the dam becomes operational, it will irrigate almost 132,000 hectares of land in Takhar and Kunduz provinces. Moreover, the dam will also supply water to Dasht-e-Qala, Baharak, and parts of Yangi Qala districts.¹¹

In the health sector, the Taliban are also trying to provide health facilities by constructing new hospitals, ensuring polio vaccination or signing of medical-related cooperation agreements with foreign countries. In November 2025, a 50-bed cancer hospital was built in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province as the country's first such hospital. After inauguration, the officials of the province urged increased medical facilities, as the province's residents have to go to Pakistan to get better treatment, which due to border closure with Pakistan, has become challenging.¹² Apart from this, the Taliban had undertaken a 4-days anti-polio vaccination campaign in 17 provinces of the country - starting from November 24, 2025. As per the officials, the campaign aimed to target 7.4 million children under the the age of five on door-to-door, mosque-to-mosque and village-to-village bases. Sharafat Zaman Amarakhail, spokesperson for the Ministry of Public Health, said: "The Ministry of Public Health is working to prevent polio and other infectious diseases by implementing health measures". Likewise, Dr. Aminullah Sharif, head of public health in Nangarhar, said: "In Nangarhar, the campaign will cover 950,000 children, and teams will reach even the most remote districts." Whereas, Muzaffar Mukhlis, head of public health in Kunar, said: "In Kunar, our target is approximately 210,000 children. The staff involved in the campaign have completed their training programs."¹³ Other than anti-polio

efforts, the Taliban are raising awareness about other diseases as well, including AIDS. On the World AIDS Day, i.e. December 1, 2025, the Taliban Deputy Minister for Finance and Administration, Abdul Wali Siddiqi, said “We must continue public awareness and ensure proper treatment, as ... this will lead to the eradication of AIDS from Afghanistan.” As per the Taliban Ministry of Education, the number of AIDS cases is increasing in Afghanistan since 1989 - in 2024, hundred cases were reported.¹⁴

In the cultural sector, the Taliban are taking measures to preserve the country’s civilizational history. As part of this, in August 2025, Babaji Mosque in Ghazni’s¹⁵ old city was restored by a cultural foundation at the cost of \$150,000. At the time of inauguration, Atiqullah Azizi, Deputy Minister of Culture and Arts of the Ministry of Information and Culture, revealed that almost everyday foreign mafia groups attempt to smuggle the country’s historical artifacts. Therefore, to thwart such attempts, the Taliban have established special committees at exit areas - borders as well as airports.¹⁶ Moreover, locals and cultural enthusiasts in Ghazni are requesting the Taliban authorities to take necessary steps to restore the tomb of a renowned Muslim philosopher, Aby Rayhan Muhammad al-Biruni. Even though a significant restoration project was launched in 2013 to restore the tomb and its related structures, it has been stalled since then. Recently, however, Hamidullah Nisar, Director of Information and Culture of Ghazni, said an agreement has been signed with a local company to restore the tomb of the renowned scholar, starting from the next solar year.¹⁷

Utilizing the cultural significance of Ghazi province of Afghanistan, the Taliban are discovering new historical sites across the province. As per the Department of Information and Culture in Ghazni, almost 40 new historical sites have been discovered by the authorities in the provincial capital and its districts. In September, 2025, the province’s Department of Information and Culture noted that apart from thousands of domestic tourists, more than 250

foreign tourists visited the province’s historical sites. Most of these tourists came from Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Finland, Turkiye, the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Russia. Nevertheless, most of the tourists raised their concerns over the lack of basic necessities, such as lack of basic necessities and standard roads to access the historical landmarks.¹⁸

Humanitarian Situation

According to UNICEF, in 2025 almost 23 million people will need humanitarian assistance across Afghanistan, as the country is facing “overlapping humanitarian pressures”.¹⁹ It noted that vulnerabilities of children and their families are deepening due to increased economic crisis, constant natural hazards, and curtailment of women rights. In October 2025, people in the provinces of Kunar, Nangarhar and Laghman were still struggling to recover from recurrent earthquakes that struck these eastern regions during August and September. The struggles of these communities have increased due to the extreme winter season, causing thousands of families to face lack of adequate shelter. UNICEF’s situation report’s joint assessment noted that almost 56,000 people in Afghanistan were directly affected by the earthquakes, whereas nearly 2,000 people died and 3,600 experienced injuries. Moreover, due to damaged roads and infrastructure, access to various worst-hit areas remains limited. Even though efforts are being made to fast-pace the repairing work, the reconstruction remains slow, forcing earthquake-hit people to leave and seek temporary settlements in Kunar province.²⁰

The situation report also highlighted widespread acute food insecurity in Afghanistan. It noted that from May to October 2025, a period which coincided with Afghanistan’s harvest season, almost 9.52 million people (21 percent of the total Afghan population) were classified in IPC Phase 3, i.e., crisis situation. Apart from food insecurity, the country is also facing epidemic-prone diseases. Since January 2025, across 350 districts, 145,907 cases of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) were reported along with 72 associated deaths. Of these total cases, 83,134 (57 percent) were

under-five children and 72,272 (49.5 percent) were females. During this time, the highest total cases of AWD - dehydration per 10,000 people - were reported in Kabul, followed by Paktya, Farah, Paktika, and Nimroz.²¹

In October 2025, Afghanistan experienced a constant return of Afghan refugees from regional countries, mainly from Pakistan and Iran. By the end of October, nearly 2.3 million Afghans had been repatriated, including 1.5 million from Iran only. This large return of refugees is mainly associated with a shift in policy of Pakistan and Iran, both of which took steps to repatriate Afghans among other illegal foreigners. The mass return of Afghans has placed stress on the country’s already overstretched resources, due to which UNHCR has expressed concerns about displacement or re-migration.²² Moreover, on August 22, the Taliban’s police killed a man and dragged his body in the Darb-e-Kandahar area of Herat city, subsequently publicly displaying it by hanging it on an old military tank (the reason behind the man’s killing is unknown).

During August 2025, the Taliban’s Ministry of Higher Education banned 679 books in universities. The books cover a diverse category of subjects, ranging from insurance and banking to democracy and Iranian history. Similarly, in September 2025, the Taliban Deputy Minister of Higher Education for Academic Affairs conducted a meeting with university chancellors and deans in Kabul in a bid to discuss reforms to the university curriculum. Given the changes, universities in Kabul were instructed to refrain from teaching and recommending books authored by women, regardless of content or author’s nationality.

Women Rights and Human Rights

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), on September 7, 2025, the Taliban security forces barred Afghan women, including UN-related staff, from entering United Nations (UN) facilities across the country. The action came in accordance with the April 5, 2023 notification by the Taliban to the UN, as per which no female would be allowed to work for the organization in the country. To enforce the notification, the Taliban security forces have been deployed at the entrances of UN facilities in Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. Given this, the women in Afghanistan are working from home for the United Nations (UN).²³

In addition to barring women from working, the Taliban have also banned education of girls beyond grade six in schools and universities. However, madrassas are open for girls to have religious education - even beyond grade six across Afghanistan - with strict guidelines. Nevertheless, in late August, the Taliban closed madrassas in Kabul for girls beyond grade six due to alleged violations of hijab rules and teaching of “modern secular courses”. Likewise, in July and September, inspectors from the Taliban ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice conducted enforcement campaigns in Kabul and Herat to ensure the practical implementation of the hijab decree. As part of this, between 16 and 19 July 2025, the inspectors in Kabul arrested over 60 women and girls over violation of the hijab decree. The accused were later released after receiving written guarantees from their male relatives. Likewise, women in Afghanistan are not allowed to access services, such as shops, markets and transportation, in the absence of a male

mahram. To ensure the company of a male mahram, the Taliban ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice barred several women from shopping during July and August in Farah, Uruzgan and Kandahar. It was also noted that due to these decrees, the women are unable to even access healthcare services properly. Several NGOs highlighted that enforcement inspectors from the ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice regularly visit healthcare facilities to ensure the implementation of rules: gender segregation facilities in hospitals, implementation of hijab decree, and company of a male mahram along with a female patient.²⁴

Apart from barring freedom to Afghan girls and women, policies of the Taliban’s ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice are also impacting lives of boys and men. From July to September 2025, almost 456 arbitrary arrests and detentions of Afghan women and men were carried out by the Taliban. The charges included trimmed beards or western haircuts, violations of hijab decree, and playing of or listening to music. In Kandahar, from July 1 to July 12, hundreds of men were arrested by the Taliban over accusations of trimmed or shaved beards. Similarly, on September 12, three barber shops’ owners were subjected to a trial over charges of providing grooming services. Of the three, two owners were subjected to imprisonment of three months, whereas the remaining was sentenced to five months of imprisonment.²⁵

It needs to be noted that the Afghan private media is shrinking due to financial limitations and restrictions imposed by the Taliban. As per UNAMA, since May 2025, the Taliban have

conducted arbitrary arrests and detentions of various individuals over charges of posting social media content. As part of such restrictions, women in Afghanistan are subject to more limitations, as a few female journalists who are working are facing significant challenges. It was reported that in late August, a female journalist tried asking a question during a media briefing in August, but her microphone was turned off. Similarly, in late July three male staff members of the Afghanistan Media Organization were ill-treated and accused of promoting women education, spreading immorality, and spying, over which they were detained by the General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI).²⁶

Economic Situation

Since August 2021, the Taliban have been making efforts to improve the economic situation in Afghanistan through revenue generation, stabilization of the Afghani (AFN), foreign investments, and trade with regional countries. However, as per the World Bank, the economic situation in Afghanistan remains under a significant threat, causing it to experience “multiple simultaneous”²⁷ jolts due to various reasons: large return of Afghans refugees and migrants, extreme drought, devastation caused in eastern and northern provinces due to earthquakes, and changing regional priorities. Though the country’s economy has shown modest gains due to lower inflation and better

revenues, the return of Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries of Iran and Pakistan continues to put stress on the country’s income growth.

Afghani

According to the World Bank, in October 2025, the Afghan currency - the Afghani (AFN) - appreciated by 1.8 percent on a month-on-month (MoM) basis against the US dollar. Resultantly, the Afghan currency traded at AFN 67.7 in September as compared to 66.5 percent in August of this year.

Average Monthly Afghani Exchange Rate with the US Dollar

Figure 1



Source: The World Bank²⁸

Similarly, the Nominal Effective Exchange Rate (NEER) also increased by 1 percent on a MoM basis, as the AFN strengthened against the US dollar, the Pakistani Rupee, the Indian Rupee,

the Chinese Yuan, the UAE Dirham, and the Iranian Rial. On the contrary, the Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) depreciated by 1.1 percent, as Afghanistan’s domestic inflation remained

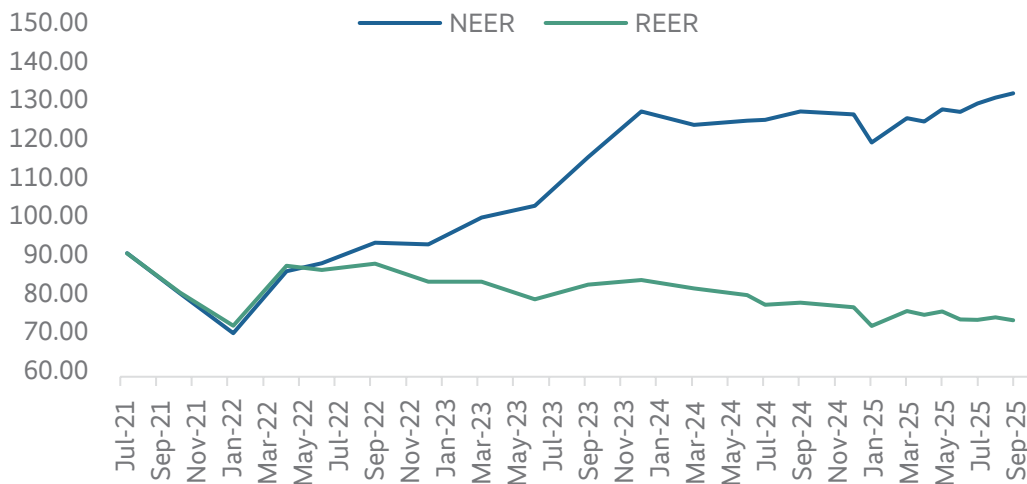
below the inflation of these partner countries. Resultantly, this difference in inflation offset the effects of the AFN's nominal appreciation, maintaining the relative price competitiveness of

Afghan goods. Overall, in September, on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the NEER strengthened by 4 percent, whereas the REER declined by 6 percent.

Figure 2

NEER and REER - Index (July 2021 - September 2025)

(Higher = Appreciation)



Source: The World Bank²⁹

Trade

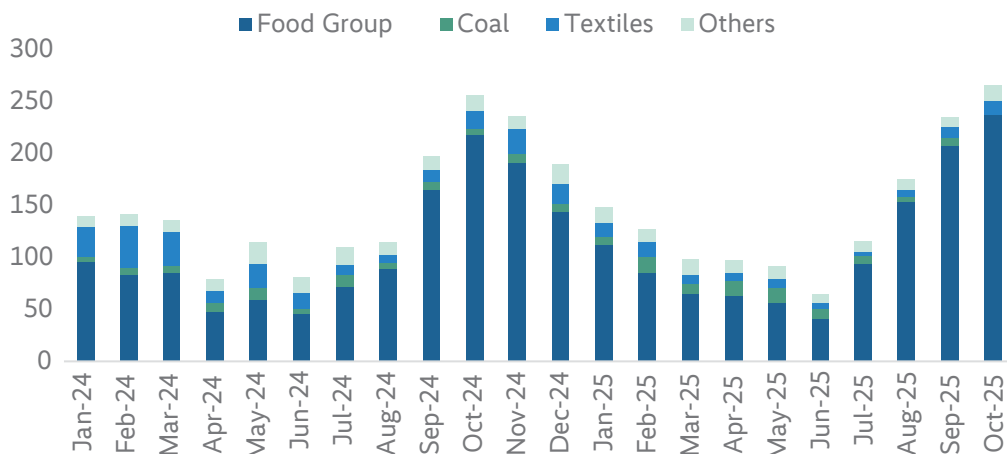
During the first seven months of the Afghan Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), the country's total exports reached \$1.1 billion as compared to \$0.96 billion during the same period of the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24). During the period of FY25, India emerged as the largest export destination for Afghan products, as in October the former received 50 percent of Afghan products, resulting in receiving 38.3 percent of Afghanistan's cumulative exports. During these seven months, Uzbekistan also managed to increase its share to 6 percent. However, Pakistan - traditionally the top export destination for Afghan products - experienced a decrease in its share to 35.8 percent due to mid-October closure of its border routes with Pakistan.

Despite the border closure with Pakistan in mid-October, Afghanistan's exports managed to rebound, rising by 13 percent on MoM basis and

3.7 percent on YoY basis to \$267 million. This was mainly due to increased demand for Afghan agricultural products after devastating floods in neighbouring countries and diversion of Afghan exports to India and Uzbekistan from Pakistani markets. Additionally, the peak harvest season and lower domestic inflation also contributed to the country's exports products' competitiveness. In light of this, the Afghan food exports contributed significantly to its overall exports, contributing 82 percent to the total Afghan exports during the first seven months of FY25 as compared to 73 percent during the same period in FY24. On a YoY basis their value reached \$238.4 million in October 2025, culminatingly increasing it by 22.4 percent during the first seven months of FY25. Other than food exports, Afghan coal and textile exports experienced a decline on a YoY basis mainly due to the country's border closure with Pakistan, reaching \$0.3 million and \$13.9 million in October 2025, respectively.

Afghanistan's Exports (\$Millions)

Figure 3



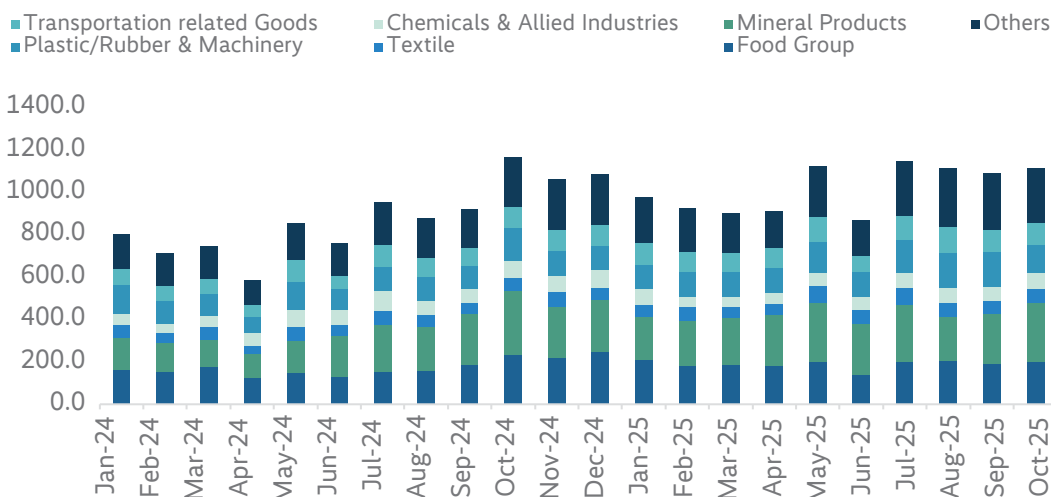
Source: The World Bank³⁰

Regarding imports in Afghanistan, during the first seven months of FY25, the country's overall imports increased 21 percent, reaching \$7.6 billion from \$6.3 billion during the same period of FY24. This increase is mainly associated with an increase in imports of different materials: imports of raw materials, capital goods and

intermediate goods increased by 45 percent, 9 percent, and 35 percent, respectively. For these imports, Iran served as the largest import partner, followed by the UAE, Pakistan, and China, contributing 29 percent, 19 percent, 13 percent, and 8 percent, respectively, to overall Afghan imports.

Afghanistan's Imports (\$Millions)

Figure 4



Source: The Afghan Monitor³¹

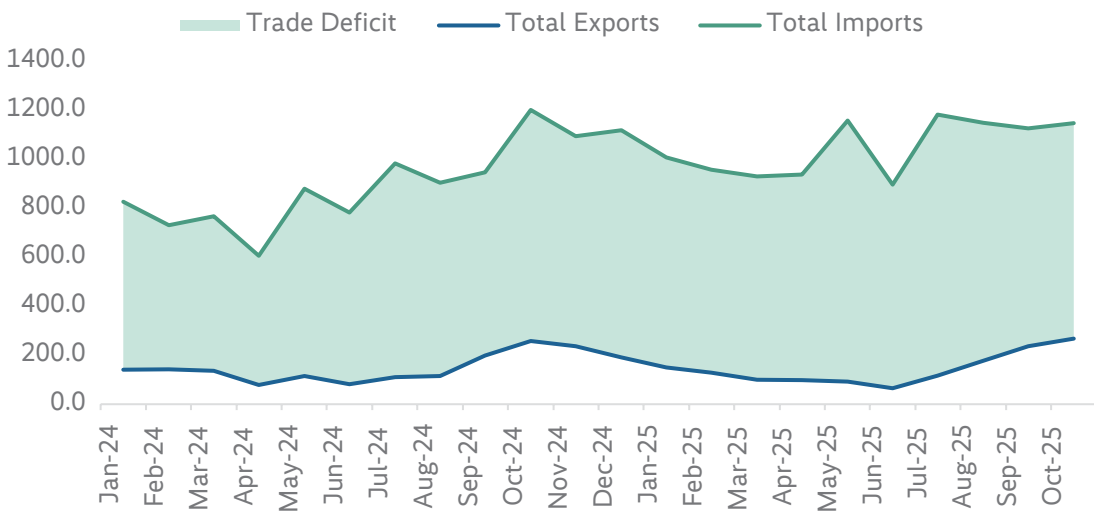
In October 2025, Afghanistan's imports experienced an increase by 2 percent - reaching \$1.15 billion - on a MoM basis. Whereas, on a YoY basis, Afghan imports decreased by 4.5 percent due to border tensions with Pakistan, leading to trade disruptions and increased transport costs. In the overall imports, the intermediate import products accounted for 62.1 percent. Subsequently, the capital goods accounted for 26.6 percent. Whereas, consumer goods and intermediate capital goods made up 14.5 percent of the total Afghan imports.

Trade Deficit

In October 2025, Afghanistan's trade deficit narrowed by 1 percent on a MoM basis, reaching \$0.88 billion. This was mainly associated with a 13 percent rebound in the country's exports as compared to a minimal rise in its imports in October 2025. Though there was a mid-October closure of the border with Pakistan, Afghanistan's imports remained mainly stable at \$1.15 billion due to higher inflows from countries like Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. Similarly, on a YoY basis, the trade deficit narrowed by 7 percent. Overall, during the first seven months of FY25, Afghanistan's trade deficit increased by 22 percent, reaching \$6.5 billion as compared to \$5.3 billion during the same period of FY24.

Afghanistan Trade Deficit (\$Millions)

Figure 5



Source: The Afghan Monitor³²

Foreign Situation

Since coming into power, the Taliban are trying to engage with the international community. As part of this the group has been assuming the control of Afghan embassies across the world. Despite this, the group lacks any formal recognition except from Russia, which is the only country formally recognizing Afghanistan and has dropped it from the terrorist list. As of December 2, 2025, Afghanistan hosts 15 embassies and 17 consulates. Whereas, it controls 43 embassies, 19 consulates and 3 other representations across the world.³³

Zabiullah Mujahid, spokesperson for the Afghan Foreign Ministry, stated that the Taliban want to have “good relations” with all the states. Regarding this, he reiterated that their relationship with the USA “should rely on two channels: diplomatic and trade”. Therefore, he stated that the US, instead of focusing on the Bagram Airbase, should consider reopening the US embassy in Afghanistan in a bid to have “proper and legitimate relations.”³⁴

China is another country with which the Taliban enjoy their relationship, as the former was the first country to appoint its ambassador to Kabul in September 2023. More recently, Afghanistan condemned the killing of five Chinese workers in Tajikistan, when Afghan-based “members of an armed terrorist group” attacked workers of a Chinese road construction company. This deteriorating situation has forced the Chinese embassy in Dushanbe to “urgently evacuate the Tajikistan-Afghan border area”.³⁵ Earlier, Afghanistan and Tajikistan have had a tense relationship, as the latter has repeatedly raised

concerns of drug smuggling and illegal miners working along the border areas.³⁶

China has also been actively assisting Pakistan and Afghanistan to improve their relations via mutual dialogues and shared cooperation. In light of this effort, in October 2025, China appreciated the temporary ceasefire announcement between Islamabad and Kabul by calling it a “positive step” towards regional peace. Subsequently, Beijing also supported the two countries in realizing a sustainable ceasefire by eradicating differences through dialogue and political settlements. To materialize this, China has also offered a “constructive role” to normalize relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.³⁷

Afghanistan’s relations with Pakistan have strained in recent months, mainly due to the latter’s apprehensions over the Afghan Taliban’s patronage for Tahreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In October 2025, the two countries had a border standoff, resulting in casualties on both sides, which was followed by a series of failed negotiations in Qatar and Turkiye.³⁸ Resultantly, the border crossing between the two countries are closed, posing a serious hindrance for trade and people-to-people interaction. In light of this, the Taliban Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Mullah Baradar, has urged the Afghan business community to divert its trade routes from Pakistan and find alternative commerce routes to export or import products.³⁹ As part of this, he gave the Afghan businessmen a three-month deadline to close their accounts and culminate all their imports from Pakistan,

including medicines. He further warned the traders that in case any trader continues to conduct trade from Pakistan, then “the Taliban administration will not intervene.” Amid such calls for decoupling from Islamabad, and failure of negotiations, delegations from Pakistan and Afghanistan have met in Saudi Arabia for a closed-door session. Sources privy with the development said that the session failed to produce any breakthrough as the two sides are not willing to make any compromise on their stated positions. For Pakistan, its resumption of trade talks with the Taliban is dependent upon the latter’s written guarantees regarding credible actions against TTP, which is responsible for cross-border terrorism in Pakistan.⁴⁰

In this situation, Taliban’s overture to India has added more complexity in the strained Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship. In mid-October, the Taliban Foreign Minister, Amir Muttaqi, paid a week-long visit to India, which was the first official visit by any Taliban leader since August 2021. During his meeting with Indian Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India announced the decision of re-opening its embassy in Kabul that was closed since August 2021. Similarly, the Afghan minister announced the resumption of direct flights between the two countries as well.⁴¹

Other than having relations with various countries, the Taliban have been making efforts to engage with the wider international community by participating in various international events. One such event was attended by the group in early October in Moscow, when for the first time, the Taliban attended the Moscow Format after receiving an invitation from the Russian Federation. The Afghan Foreign Minister, Amir Muttaqi, attended the Seventh meeting of the Moscow Format - this was the first time Afghanistan joined the Format as a formal member, as earlier it used to join as a guest participant.⁴² Moreover, in November 2025, Taliban’s cultural attaché in Turkiye, Qari Hamidullah Tamkin, attended a three-day international conference on “Health, Culture, and Tourism”, which was held in the city

of Izmir. As per the Taliban Foreign Ministry, such engagement allows the group to have an opportunity of expanding cultural, healthcare, and tourism relationships with different countries.⁴³

Security Situation

As per the United Nations' quarterly-September report, the security situation in Afghanistan is showing fluctuations. The UN recorded nearly 2660 incidents related to security and stability from May to July 31, 2025 - indicating a 9 percent increase in such cases as compared to the same period in 2024. The UN noted that during this period, no significant armed opposition group posed any challenge to the Taliban's control over Afghanistan. The Afghan Freedom Front, the National Resistance Front, the Afghanistan Liberation Movement, the People's Sovereignty Front, and the National Mobilization Front, 47 attacks across the country, of which 19 were verified.⁴⁴

Contrary to this, the same period showed a decline in the magnitude and frequency of attacks by ISKP due to continued operations by the Taliban forces. Resultantly, many ISKP fighters have been killed in GDI's operations in Kunar, Badakshan, and Nangarhar provinces. To fund such operations, the Taliban have spent AFN 75.6 billion - 49 percent of Afghanistan's total expenditure - as compared to AFN 80.1 billion, 51 percent of the total expenditure, which was allocated for civilian purposes.⁴⁵

During the same period, the UN documented 57 security incidents, affecting its personnel. As part of this, in May, a number of female UN staff members received death threats from unidentified people regarding their work with the UN. Though the Taliban have negated their involvement, they have not apprehended the culprits. Moreover, during this period, the UN reported 14 incidents when the Taliban security forces engaged with Pakistani security forces in armed clashes and cross-border shelling in

Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, and Paktika provinces.⁴⁶ Lately, a renewed and relatively more intense border standoff took place between Afghanistan and Pakistan, mainly due to the latter's apprehensions over the inflow of TTP fighters from Afghanistan in Pakistan's border regions.⁴⁷ It has been briefed at the United Nations (UN) by Denmark that TTP poses a "serious threat" to the peace and stability of the Central as well as South Asia.⁴⁸ Serving as a chair of the Security Council ISIL (Daesh) and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee, Denmark's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, Sandra Jensen Landi, noted that TTP, "with its approximately 6,000 fighters, is another serious threat emanating from the region, receiving both logistical and substantial support from the de facto authorities". She further briefed the UNSC committee that the TTP "has conducted numerous high-profile attacks in Pakistan from Afghan soil, some of which incurred mass casualties." She added that ISKP is one of the most serious threats in Central as well as South Asia, as it has at least 2,000 fighters under Sanaullah Ghafari, who "continue to target Shia communities, de facto Afghan authorities and foreign nationals."

Showing similar concerns, in September 2025, Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran, met on the sidelines of the UNGA session and issued a joint statement, urging Taliban authorities to take "effective, concrete, and verifiable actions" in a bid to dismantle terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan's soil. Their quad partite joint statement said: "The four sides expressed deep concern over the security situation related to terrorism in Afghanistan, noting that terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaeda, the Eastern

Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish Al-Adl, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and other similar groups in the region including Majeed Brigade, as well as others, based in Afghanistan, continue to pose a serious threat to regional and global security.⁷⁴⁹

Opinion Corner

The National Resistance Front and Regional Powers' Interests: Rethinking Afghanistan's Political Future

By Ahmad Sharifzad

Introduction

The political landscape of Afghanistan has undergone profound changes with far-reaching consequences since the return of the Taliban in 2021. Contrary to the expectations of many regional actors, the Taliban's rule has not restored stability in Afghanistan. Instead, it has facilitated the resurgence of extremist networks and triggered a new wave of instability across the region.

In this context, the National Resistance Front (NRF) of Afghanistan has emerged as the only organised, nationalist, while respecting inherent diversity of Afghanistan, and anti-extremist force in Afghanistan, capable of offering a credible political alternative for the country's future. The NRF's young political and military leadership, coupled with modern political ideas, a commitment to peaceful coexistence with neighboring countries and regional integration, promises a sustainable and hopeful future for both Afghanistan and the wider region.

Today, as regional countries reassess their involvement in Afghanistan and redefine their policies toward the country, it has increasingly becoming clear that their long-term interests align more closely with constructive engagement with the NRF than with the Taliban regime.

1. Why the Taliban Cannot Serve Regional Interests

1.1 Turning Afghanistan into a Safe Haven for Regional and Global Extremists

The Taliban's ideological alignment with jihadist and extremist groups has turned Afghanistan into a safe haven for the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Iran's Jeish al-Adl (JeA), the various branches of Al-Qaeda, and many other extremist groups from the region and from around the globe. Contrary to the initial expectations of regional countries, the Taliban is not a stabilising force. Instead, they have become a new center of regional insecurity, seriously threatening collective security in the region, South, Central and West Asia.

Under Taliban rule, Afghanistan has become a ticking time bomb, a threat that could erupt at any moment, with consequences far reaching that can endanger the security of all neighboring countries and far afield. Let's quickly review some of the immediate threats.

1.2 Pakistan's Security Crisis

Pakistan's predictions regarding the consequences of the Taliban's return to power were completely mistaken. Islamabad's expectations of a stable Afghanistan under the Taliban have been turned completely upside down. The Taliban has not only failed to become a strategic partner for Pakistan but has effectively positioned itself against Pakistan's security and political interests.

Every day, dozens of fighters affiliated with anti-Pakistani groups are trained in Afghanistan and prepared for terrorist attacks. Attacks by Taliban-backed anti-Pakistani elements have reached their highest level in two decades, placing Pakistan in one of the most serious security crises in recent years. Pakistan's political engagement with the Taliban has proven a complete failure, and now the country bears the heaviest costs of the Taliban's continued rule.

1.3 Tensions Between Iran and the Taliban

Iran has repeatedly clashed with the Taliban over Helmand water rights, border management, and the status of Shia communities in Afghanistan. The Taliban's refusal to implement the Helmand water agreement has escalated tensions to a dangerous level.

Furthermore, the Taliban's ideological differences with the Islamic Republic of Iran have created a favorable environment for anti-Iranian terrorist groups, including Jeish al-Adl, to operate from Afghanistan territory. This constitutes a serious threat to Iran's national security. The Taliban bear anti-Shia sentiments too, which has proved precarious for the Hazara and other Shia communities of Afghanistan.

1.4 Concerns of China and Central Asian States

China, as a major regional power, remains deeply concerned about the presence and activities of ETIM fighters along the Afghanistan–China border. Similarly, to not curbing other extremist groups, the Taliban has so far taken no effective action to curb the ETIM networks.

Central Asian countries are also facing a new wave of security threats, including increased drug trafficking, activity by extremist groups such as the Taliban of Tajikistan, or Ansarullah, as well as movements of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, and the Taliban's inability to control northern borders, and terrorist activities within Afghanistan territory.

The current situation has intensified instability in Central Asia, heightening security concerns in Tashkent, Dushanbe, and Ashgabat. The recent killing of Chinese citizens in Tajikistan, in two separate occasions, is another prove of the imminent danger.

2. Why the National Resistance Front Is More Aligned with Regional Interests

2.1 A Nationalist and Anti-Extremist Movement

Unlike the Taliban, the National Resistance Front (NRF) of Afghanistan is rooted in genuine Afghanistan nationalism, with the maturity to respect the inherent diversity and pluralism of the country. It has no affiliation with transnational jihadist ideologies and actively opposes such movements. The NRF openly combats extremist and terrorist groups and supports anti-terrorism cooperation with regional countries.

The NRF is committed to good-neighborly relations and rejects any interference in the internal affairs of regional states. Unlike the Taliban, who export terrorism across borders, the NRF emphasizes positive neutrality at the regional level. The NRF respects all inherited borders of the country with Iran, Central Asia and Pakistan, unlike the Taliban and Pashtun nationalist groups in Afghanistan calling the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan Durand "Line," not border.

Equally importantly, the NRF is of the opinion that without connectivity and integration of the South, Central and West Asia, these regions won't achieve their economic and development potentials and therefore actively support ideas of regional integration and regional development.

2.2 Historical Record of Cooperation

The NRF inherits the legacy of the popular Afghanistan resistance that effectively

cooperated with regional countries against the Taliban, al-Qaeda and their regional terror groups, and played a key role in the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. This historical record demonstrates the NRF's political reliability, popular support, and capacity to establish sustainable regional partnerships, a capability that is increasingly relevant today.

In other words, the NRF has the legacy of both resisting the Leftist-Soviet supported regime of Kabul in 1980s, while in the 1990s it resisted the conglomerate of Islamist extremist groups like the Taliban, al-Qaeda and their regional terror outfits. The NRF, therefore, has the respect of the diverse communities of Afghanistan and also is internationally respected due to this rich legacy.

2.3 Commitment to Inclusive and Decentralized Governance

The NRF's political approach supports an inclusive and decentralised governance model that reduces ethnic, sectarian, and political tensions and prevents the spread of extremist groups across Afghanistan. Many regional countries regard this model as the most effective pathway to lasting stability in Afghanistan and the broader region.

There has been a longstanding demand by the diverse communities of Afghanistan to make its governance compatible with the inherent diversity of the country, and this policy of the NRF is commitment to this long-standing demand as well as good governance.

2.4 Alignment with Regional Economic Priorities

As hinted above, the NRF stand for regional connectivity and integration. It supports regional energy, transit, and trade projects that promote economic development. In contrast, the Taliban have built an economy based on smuggling, extortion from neighboring countries, and illegal taxation poor population of Afghanistan, pushing the country into unprecedented poverty and economic distress.

By pursuing a legitimate and sustainable development path, the NRF enables Afghanistan to reconnect with major regional economic networks from Central to South and West Asia, transforming the country from a regional obstacle into a reliable and active partner and bridge in economic cooperation.

3. Analysis of Regional Countries' Interests

3.1 Pakistan

After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, Pakistan has faced a sharp increase in violence and organised attacks from anti-Pakistani groups such as the TTP and BLA, which operate under Taliban protection in Afghanistan. In this situation, Islamabad requires a strategic partner in Afghanistan that aligns with Pakistan in countering extremism.

Since the Taliban are no longer a reliable partner and have become a threat to Pakistan's national security, the NRF presents a stable and viable alternative for strategic cooperation. The NRF's political approach, based on non-interference in other countries' internal affairs and positive neutrality, makes it a more reasonable option for official engagement with Pakistan.

3.2 Iran

Given Iran's interest in cooperating with anti-ISIS and anti-extremist forces in Afghanistan, it is natural that Tehran cannot place trust in the Taliban, which itself is an extremist group with ideological opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this context, the National Resistance Front (NRF) offers a suitable alternative to meet Iran's security expectations and long-term interests.

With its emphasis on good-neighbourly relations, peaceful dispute resolution, and constructive engagement, the NRF has the capacity to address critical issues such as the Helmand water dispute in a fundamental and cooperative manner. Also, as mentioned, the

NRF not only respects but also wants to institutionalise diversity and pluralism, including the Shia and Ismaili communities of Afghanistan. The NRF, therefore, can serve as a predictable and compatible political partner for Iran in the long term.

3.3 China and Central Asian States

China and the Central Asian countries need a stable, predictable Afghanistan free from extremist groups. Under the Taliban, however, Afghanistan has become a safe haven for organizations such as ETIM, IMU, and other jihadist networks, while the Taliban lack the capacity to ensure long-term stability or control over the borders.

This situation, combined with the Taliban's lack of legitimacy and widespread mistrust, poses a serious obstacle to major economic and transit projects in the region and directly threatens the security of China and Central Asia.

In contrast, the NRF, with its anti-terrorism stance, regional cooperation approach, and non-interventionist foreign policy, is more aligned with the security and economic interests of these countries and can serve as a more reliable partner for Afghanistan's future.

4. The NRF as a Responsible Regional Actor

With a deep historical legacy, over the past four years, the National Resistance Front (NRF) has established itself as a force capable of anti-terrorism cooperation with regional countries. Drawing on the heritage and experience of the first resistance (in 1990s), the NRF also has the capacity to participate in regional peace processes; a notable example is the successful involvement in peace efforts in Tajikistan and the formation of an inclusive government there.

The NRF is able to facilitate transit and trade with countries in South, Central and West. With its strong popular base in Afghanistan's border regions, it can play a key role in maintaining

border stability to support major regional trade initiatives.

Furthermore, in a context where no regional country can tolerate internal instability or the influence of extremist groups, the NRF represents a more reliable and stable alternative to the Taliban for security, economic, and political cooperation at the regional level.

5. A Roadmap for Regional Engagement with the NRF

Regional countries can establish positive political engagement with the National Resistance Front (NRF) of Afghanistan by expanding diplomatic and political channels and inviting the NRF to key security meetings and working groups related to Afghanistan. The NRF is part of a larger coalition of political and civil society groups under the name of Vienna Process for a Democratic Afghanistan. Regional countries can engage with the Vienna Process more actively. The sixth round of the Vienna Process will be held early next year in 2026.

In the security dimension, regional states can collaborate with the NRF on intelligence sharing, border management, and countering extremist groups that continually operate from Afghanistan territory against neighboring countries.

In the economic sphere, engaging the northern regions of Afghanistan, where the NRF holds significant political influence, in trade, energy, and transit projects that benefit both sides can create a strong foundation for cooperation.

Finally, by integrating the NRF into long-term regional strategies, countries can gradually recognize its role and capacity within regional security and economic frameworks, thereby strengthening positive collaboration. Such constructive engagement can provide a credible political alternative in Afghanistan and help bring an end to the current undesirable status quo.

Conclusion

The political future of Afghanistan and regional stability depend on a clear understanding of new realities. The Taliban has not only failed to restore stability in Afghanistan but has also threatened regional security structures and created conditions for the resurgence of extremist groups within the country.

In contrast, the National Resistance Front (NRF) represents a nationalist, anti-extremist, and cooperative alternative that aligns positively with the security and strategic interests of all regional powers.

For Pakistan, Iran, China, and the Central Asian republics, the time has come to redefine Afghanistan's future not based on hope or illusions about the Taliban, who has never been reliable and whose past engagement has proven disastrous for Pakistan and increasingly other countries, but based on ground realities and security necessities.

Stability in Afghanistan is not only a domestic need but a regional imperative. The path to such stability lies through constructive engagement with the NRF, a nationalist and freedom-oriented movement committed to good-neighbourly relations, mutual respect, non-interference in other countries' affairs, and positive neutrality. Regional countries must recognise this necessity sooner rather than later.

The Ongoing Crisis in Afghan Taliban-Pakistan Relations

In October 2025, the relations between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan reached a crisis over the former's ties with the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that remains unresolved. This led to airstrikes by the Pakistani military in Kabul and Paktika on 9 October, which unleashed a series of subsequent cross-border clashes.⁵⁰ The two sides have engaged in at least eight rounds of cross-border clashes and airstrikes while mediation efforts by Qatar, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia have stalled.

This escalation contrasted sharply with optimism marked by mutual diplomatic upgrades four months earlier. On 30 May 2025, Pakistan announced that it would upgrade its diplomatic mission in Kabul from Chargé d'Affaires to Ambassador to maintain the momentum created after Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar visited Kabul on 19 April, which put bilateral relations on a "positive trajectory."⁵¹ The Taliban reciprocated by upgrading their own Chargé d'Affaires in Islamabad to the rank of Ambassador.⁵²

This article examines the escalation between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan in the final quarter of 2025. First, it details the cross-border attacks since 9 October. Second, it explores why mediation efforts by Qatar, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia have stalled. Third, it discusses the two major issues that led to the unravelling of the relations between the two sides and remain primary sticking points stalling negotiations. Finally, it reviews the consequences of these tensions for civilians, trade and transit, and Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

Cross-border attacks

On 9 October, the Pakistani military conducted airstrikes in Kabul and Paktika. The airstrikes in Kabul targeted TTP leader, Noor Wali Mehsud. While Mehsud survived, two "important" TTP members were killed in the attack.⁵³ Pakistan declined officially to confirm or reject the attacks. On 11 October, the Taliban launched retaliatory

attacks on Pakistan's military posts along the border in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, prompting a response from the Pakistani military.⁵⁴ On 15 October, Pakistan's military carried out "precision strikes" in Kabul city to target the TTP leadership.⁵⁵ Taliban's spokesman for the police chief in Kabul, Khalid Zadran, claimed that two drone strikes had hit a civilian house and a market in Kabul city. On the same day, the Taliban and the Pakistani military engaged in heavy cross-border fighting in the Spin Boldak district of Kandahar. Both sides blamed the other for initiating the attacks.⁵⁶ Two days later, on 17 October, the Pakistani military carried out airstrikes in the border area of Paktia province. The Taliban accused Pakistan of killing civilians, including three cricket players, but Pakistan rejected the accusation, saying that it had targeted militants.⁵⁷ On 6 November, the Taliban accused the Pakistani military of conducting a cross-border attack on Spin Boldak, claiming that their forces had refrained from retaliating "out of respect for the negotiation team and to prevent civilian casualties."⁵⁸ The Pakistani Ministry of Information and Broadcasting rejected the claims by the Taliban, saying that the Pakistani forces only responded to the firing initiated by the Taliban.⁵⁹ On the night of 24/25 November, the Pakistani military carried out another round of airstrikes in Paktika, Khost, and Kunar provinces. The Taliban said that a "necessary response will be taken at the proper time."⁶⁰ Pakistan denied the airstrikes.⁶¹ However, the airstrikes came hours after two suicide bombers attacked the headquarters of a paramilitary force in Peshawar, killing three security officials and wounding at least 12 people.⁶² It seems that Pakistan has adopted a denial strategy for airstrikes inside Afghanistan, likely mirroring the Taliban's denial of the TTP's presence in Afghanistan and their assertion that the group is Pakistan's internal problem. Finally, on 5 December, the Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahed, accused Pakistan of launching cross-border attacks in the Spin Boldak district of Kandahar, which he said prompted Taliban forces to respond.⁶³

The Table below shows a timeline of these cross-border attacks in reverse chronology

<i>Date</i>	<i>Cross-border clashes/ airstrikes</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
5 December 2025	Cross-border attack	Spin Boldak district, Kandahar	The Taliban blamed Pakistan
Night of 24/25 November 2025	Airstrikes	Paktika, Khost, Kunar	Pakistan denied the strikes
6 November 2025	Cross-border attack	Spin Boldak district, Kandahar	The Taliban and Pakistan blamed each other
17 October 2025	Airstrikes	Border areas, Pakitka	The Taliban accused Pakistan of targeting civilians; Pakistan said it had targeted militants
15 October 2025	Heavy cross-border fighting	Spin Boldak district, Kandahar	Both the Taliban and Pakistan blamed the other
15 October 2025	Two drone strikes	Kabul city	Pakistan declined to confirm or reject
11 October 2025	Taliban's "retaliatory operation" and Pakistan's counteroffensive	Pakistan's military posts along the borders in Baluchistan and KPK	The Taliban said they conducted "retaliatory operation"
9 October 2025	Airstrikes	Kabul and Paktika	Pakistan declined to confirm or reject

A stalled mediation process?

Three countries— Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye —have acted as the primary mediators between the Taliban and Pakistan. Qatar and Saudi Arabia intervened to halt the first cross-border clashes on 11 October.⁶⁴ Qatar also brokered a temporary, 48-hour ceasefire after cross-border fighting broke out again on 15 October. Since then, they have hosted and mediated four rounds of talks between the Taliban and Pakistan, but have failed to reach an agreement on a sustainable and definitive ceasefire.

→ Qatar hosted the initial two-day negotiations in Doha from 18 to 19 October, which resulted in “an immediate ceasefire” and “the establishment of mechanisms” for “lasting peace and stability” between the two countries.⁶⁵ While this preliminary ceasefire has been extended in the subsequent rounds of talks, it has been fragile.

→ During the second round, the Taliban and Pakistani delegations held five days of talks in Istanbul from 25 to 30 October. They agreed on three key points: (a) to maintain the ceasefire established in Doha; (b) to hold “a Principal level meeting” in Istanbul a week later to discuss “[f]urther modalities of the implementation”; and (c) to establish “a monitoring and verification mechanism” to maintain peace and impose a “penalty on the violating party.”⁶⁶

→ The third round of talks between the Taliban and Pakistani delegations was held again in Istanbul from 6 to 7 November 2025, but ended in failure. This round of negotiations was intended to establish a mechanism for monitoring and verification of ceasefire violations and imposing a “penalty on the violating party” based on the agreements from the second round. Both sides blamed the other for the failure. The Taliban attributed it to the Pakistani delegation’s “irresponsible and non-co-

operative attitudes,” claiming that Pakistani representatives “attempted to refer all responsibilities regarding its security” to the Taliban government, without showing “any willingness to assume responsibility for either Afghanistan’s security or its own.”⁶⁷ Pakistan claimed that the Taliban had engaged in “hypothetical allegations and unfounded claims” instead of focusing on the establishment of an effective monitoring mechanism. It also accused the Taliban of trying to prolong the temporary ceasefire without taking concrete and verifiable actions against the TTP and BLA “elements present on Afghan soil” and of misrepresenting “the issue of Pakistani terrorists hiding in Afghanistan as a humanitarian issue.”⁶⁸

→ Finally, in late November, Saudi Arabia quietly mediated a fourth round of negotiations between the Taliban and Pakistani delegations. The talks concluded on 30 November without any breakthrough, as both sides stuck to their guns.⁶⁹ The two sides only loosely agreed to maintain the preliminary ceasefire established in the previous rounds, which has not been holding, as evidenced by the renewed cross-border attacks on 5 December. Saudi Arabia’s mediation seems to have outmaneuvered Türkiye’s plan to send a high-level delegation to Pakistan in the last week of November in a bid to revive the talks between Pakistan and the Taliban.⁷⁰ However, the visit has not yet happened, apparently because of Saudi Arabia’s mediation track.

Sticking points

Two major issues that triggered the recent tensions between the Taliban and Pakistan in the first place remain the main sticking points. First, Pakistan complains that the Taliban allow the TTP to use Afghanistan’s soil to launch attacks inside Pakistan. The Taliban, however, deny the presence of any foreign groups in Afghanistan, characterising the TTP attacks as Pakistan’s internal security problem. They also make a counter-claim that Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP) is operating out of

Pakistan to carry out attacks inside Afghanistan.⁷¹ Second, Pakistan appears to be unhappy with the Taliban’s recent diplomatic relations with India, Pakistan’s archrival, and accuses the group of conducting a proxy war against Pakistan on India’s behalf. For instance, Pakistan’s Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, told local media, “Right now, Kabul is fighting a proxy war for Delhi.”⁷² Pakistan’s 9 October attacks in Afghanistan were seen as a direct response to a week-long visit by the Taliban’s foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, to India, as the strikes happened on the same day Muttaqi arrived in New Delhi. During a virtual press conference on 19 November, the Taliban’s defence minister, Mullah Yaqub Mujahed, who led the Taliban delegation in the first round of talks in Doha, said their relations with Pakistan and India were independent and not at the expense of one another. He said that they would not allow the issue of their independent foreign relations to be brought up at the negotiation table.⁷³

To resolve the first issue, Islamabad has demanded that Taliban leader Mullah Hibatallah issue a formal fatwa against TTP. On 12 November, Rahmatullah Najib, the Taliban’s deputy minister of interior and a member of the negotiation team, confirmed the Pakistani demand, saying that the Taliban had responded that their leader does not issue a fatwa but suggested that Pakistan could submit a written request to the Taliban government’s Dar ul-Ifta for a fatwa, without a guarantee that the fatwa that would be issued would be in Pakistan’s favour.⁷⁴

It’s unclear whether or not Pakistan sent any request to the Taliban’s Dar ul-Ifta. However, on 10 December, the Taliban did gather hundreds of Ulema Council members from across the country for a one-day meeting in Kabul. The ulema issued a five-point resolution. This included a prohibition on Afghanistan’s nationals from engaging in military activities abroad because they had not been permitted by the amir sharia (ie, the Taliban leader).⁷⁵ This seemed to be a response to Pakistan’s demand.

However, this was not a new position. Senior Taliban officials previously declared that fighting outside Afghanistan's borders would not be recognised as jihad for Afghan nationals fight abroad. For example, as early as in August 2023, the Taliban's Defence Minister Mullah Yaqub said that if an Afghan leaves Afghanistan for jihad, their participation in such a conflict is not considered as jihad. This was reportedly in response to claims by Pakistani officials that Afghan nationals were increasingly involved in attacks in Pakistan.⁷⁶

Therefore, the ulema resolution did little to satisfy Pakistan. A day later, on 11 December, the spokesman for Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tahir Andrabi, said that Pakistan's demand was "written assurances" from Taliban leadership, on which the Pakistani delegation had insisted during the talks mediated by Qatar and Türkiye. As long as the TTP continues to carry out attacks inside Pakistan, it's likely that Pakistan will continue to blame the Afghan Taliban and threaten cross-border retaliation. After an attack on a military camp in North Waziristan district, which killed at least four Pakistani soldiers, Pakistan's foreign ministry summoned the Taliban's Deputy Head of Mission to convey Pakistan's "grave concern over" the Taliban's "continued support" for TTP, "enabling them to carry out terrorist attacks" against Pakistan military and civilian population along the border. The ministry said that Pakistan would "take all necessary measures to respond to terrorism originating from Afghan soil."

It's also unclear if the resolution will have any bearing on the TTP activities in Pakistan. Speaking at a Ulema conference in Islamabad on 10 December, Pakistan's Chief of Defense Forces, Gen. Asim Munir, claimed that 70 per cent of the "TTP formations" entering Pakistan were Afghans.⁷⁷ Two days earlier, on 8 December, Munir, said that Pakistan had delivered a "clear message" to the Afghan Taliban: it must choose between a relationship with Pakistan and TTP.⁷⁸

Planning a regime change in Afghanistan?

Pakistan has been trying to coerce the Taliban into severing ties with the TTP. On 16 December, Jan Achakzai, caretaker Minister for Information and Public Relations for the Government of Baluchistan, asserted that efforts were underway to unite the armed groups against the Afghan Taliban. Describing the National Resistance Front (NRF) and the Afghanistan Freedom Front (AFF) as the "only true armed opposition" challenging the Taliban, he claimed that they would receive political support from regional countries, including Pakistan, to launch their campaign in the coming spring. Achakzai asserted that this realignment was happening rapidly and the anti-Taliban armed groups had already started receiving support, weapons and money to fight the Taliban.⁷⁹ On 20 November, the New Lines magazine reported that Islamabad was planning regime change in Afghanistan partly because of the Taliban cultivating closer ties with India. Islamabad, according to the report, has opened channels of dialogue with representatives of anti-Taliban armed groups.⁸⁰ On 22 November, the Ambassadors' Lounge, "a non-partisan" platform by Pakistani diplomats held a talk titled "Should Pakistan go for regime change in Afghanistan" with two former diplomats including with Asif Durani, Pakistan's former special envoy for Afghanistan. Asif Durani said that "this Taliban regime is heading toward a regime change by themselves because they have proved that they are unable to govern and control the country." The moderator, Ambassador Imran Yawer, concluded that the future of Afghanistan and the region should not remain in the hands of a regime, which is "repressive," "unpopular," and "isolated" at home, while "systematically encourag[ing] terrorism" abroad. He said, therefore, a regime change is "desirable for a more meaningful stability in the region."⁸¹

On their part, the Taliban continue to engage in provocative gestures. On 3 December, Aamaj News published a photograph of a "Greater Afghanistan" map, which it said had been

erected by the Taliban on the grave of Pashtun nationalist poet Matiullah Turab.⁸² The map included parts of Pakistan's provinces of KPK and Baluchistan, including Dera Ismail Khan and Quetta. When questioned about the map on 11 December, spokesperson Andrabi called it "theatrics," which meant nothing to Pakistan. He said that Pakistan and Afghanistan have "a settled international border recognized under international law." Indian media reported on the map with great interest.⁸³

Civilian casualties, expulsion of refugees, and closure of border crossings,

The tensions between the Taliban and Pakistan have led to civilian casualties, expulsion of refugees from Pakistan and closure of border crossings. The exact number of civilian casualties on both sides of the border remains unknown. In Afghanistan, some of the cross-border clashes have taken a heavy toll on civilians. For example, on 16 October, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that, based on preliminary information, at least 17 civilians had been killed and 346 injured in Spin Boldak on the Afghan side of the border the day before.⁸⁴ On 25 November, UNAMA confirmed that at least ten civilians had been killed and six others injured in airstrikes in Khost and Kunar provinces the night before. UNAMA noted that most of the victims were children.⁸⁵ The civilian casualties from six other cross-border fighting and airstrikes remain unknown.

Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan seem to be bearing the brunt of the tensions. On 17 October, the Pakistani government decided to expedite the expulsion of Afghan refugees and shut down all Afghan refugee camps in the country. It also decided to establish additional exit points along the border to allow the accelerated expulsion of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan.⁸⁶ In an editorial on 19 October, Dawn called on the Pakistani government not to use the Afghan refugees as an "instrument of political signaling or retaliation" in response to its frustration with the Taliban government over security issues.⁸⁷

Finally, Pakistan closed the border crossings and suspended all trade with Afghanistan after the cross-border clashes on 11 October due to the support of the Taliban for TTP and Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) "terrorist elements." It conditioned the reopening of the border crossings on the Taliban's decision "to halt its support and abetment to terrorist outfits operating from the Afghan soil" and "stop Afghan nationals from carrying out terrorist attacks inside Pakistan."⁸⁸ In response, on 12 November, the Taliban directed Afghan traders to seek alternative trade routes to Pakistan and ordered them to stop importing Pakistani medicines, giving them a three-month deadline to settle any existing contracts with Pakistani companies. The Taliban also instructed the Taliban's Ministry of Finance not to clear customs or allow anyone to import medicines from Pakistan after this deadline.⁸⁹ Before the closure of the border crossings, Afghanistan imported 60 to 70 percent of its medicines from Pakistan (with the remaining 30 percent imported from countries such as India, Türkiye, Iran, and Bangladesh). This means it would be difficult for Afghanistan to find an alternative in the near future.⁹⁰ The ban has led to a price hike and shortage of vital medicines in Kabul.⁹¹

In early December, Pakistan decided to allow the movement of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan based on the UN agencies' request and its own "commitment to humanitarian access" in three phases: (1) allowing containers carrying food items; (2) granting access to containers carrying pharmaceutical and medical supplies; and (3) permitting containers transporting other essential goods related to education. He, however, stressed that the border crossings would remain closed for trade and overall movement.⁹²

It seems that the Taliban have not accepted Pakistan's unilateral reopening of the border only for humanitarian purposes. On 4 December, the Taliban's chief spokesman Mujahed said that Pakistan had closed the trade and transit routes "illegally and as a means of political and economic pressure," resulting in "serious losses"

for the people of both countries. He said that the trade routes with Pakistan would reopen only when the Pakistani government gave “strong assurance” that the routes would not be closed for “political pressure, illegal use, or to put people under pressure.” Mujahed claimed that the Taliban government was providing for its needs from “numerous other countries.”⁹³ On 18 December, spokesman Andarabi said that there had been a statement from the Taliban that they were not “willing to receive anything,” likely referring to Mujahed’s 4 December statement, which conditioned the reopening of the border on strong assurances from Pakistan.

Conclusion

Since 9 October, Pakistan and the Taliban have engaged in at least eight rounds of cross-border clashes and airstrikes. They agreed to a temporary ceasefire on 15 October, which was superseded by a preliminary ceasefire on 19 October as a result of two days of talks in Doha. This ceasefire was extended in three subsequent rounds of talks in Istanbul and Riyadh but remains fragile, and the continued cross-border attack shows that it is not holding.

The mediation efforts by Qatar, Türkiye and Saudi Arabia have largely stalled as both the Taliban and Pakistan remain entrenched in their positions on the primary sticking point: the Taliban’s relationship with TTP which continues to operate out of Afghanistan. The Taliban’s attempt to temper down the crisis by convening a ulema meeting in Kabul that issued a prohibition on Afghan nationals from engaging in military activities abroad has done little to satisfy the Taliban. As long as the TTP continues to intensify its attacks inside Pakistan, the normalisation of bilateral relations remains unlikely.

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Afghanistan Monitor

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This edition of the Afghanistan Monitor covers developments from August to November 2025, ranging from Afghanistan's political and humanitarian situation, to economic, security, foreign situation, infrastructure projects, and the state of human rights and women's rights. The monitor provides in-depth facts and figures for the aforementioned time period. Although the Taliban government has been in place for 4 years now, not much has changed for the better. On the contrary, the worsening humanitarian crisis, draconian laws affecting women, and poor security situation due to internal militant outfits continue to exacerbate the country's problems.

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