

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this memo is to evaluate the likelihood of an escalation of conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan between January 2026-June 2026, including likely actors and the most likely primary cause of escalation.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

It is likely that Pakistan and Afghanistan will see an escalation of conflict between January 2026-June 2026 as a result of increased tension over conflict caused by Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) against Pakistani civilians and security forces. A secondary, somewhat likely, factor in this escalation is India's positive involvement with the Taliban.

## **BODY**

Pakistan has taken the lead on engaging with the Afghan Taliban regime (USIP). Where it was once the primary supporter of the Taliban prior to the Taliban's taking control of Afghanistan's government, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have grown tense as a result of attacks on civilians and security personnel by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) (CH). TTP has reportedly caused 2,500 fatalities from over 440 attacks in 2024. TTP has safe-havens set up in Afghanistan, and has announced that it is allegiant to the Taliban in Afghanistan (USIP).

Other neighbouring countries have responded to the Taliban's government in different ways: talks to follow through with the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline (TAPI) were underway as of 2021 (BI), yet some neighbours, namely Tajikistan, exhibit some hostility toward the current Afghan regime by hosting opponent groups such as the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front (BI). India, China, and Russia are among the larger actors that are on better terms with the Taliban's government (BI, USIP).

Critical to the Taliban's desire is international recognition as a legitimate government body (USIP). This desire can be used as leverage by Western nations and other nation actors who desire the Taliban adopt safeguards for human rights and other policy issues. However, that leverage by the West may be undermined by non-West nations who begin to recognize the Taliban as a government.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Escalating tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan over the TTP is likely to increase, as the Taliban has done little to dissuade or prevent the TTP from committing further violence against Pakistani citizens; though the information is outdated (reported 2021), it is possible that the Taliban may be facilitating discussions between Pakistani officials and the TTP (USIP).

India's positive, albeit low, involvement with the Taliban, may serve as a secondary cause to escalate tensions between Pakistan and the Taliban due to current escalating tension between Pakistan and India (Economist). It is unknown whether other international actors, such as Russia and China, would increase or decrease the likelihood of escalating conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is likely that an escalation of conflict will occur between Pakistan and the Taliban as a result of conflict caused by the TTP. A somewhat likely secondary factor may be India's positive involvement with the Taliban and increased conflict between India and Pakistan.

## **APPENDIX A**

*Brookings Institution, the* (BI). “The Taliban’s three years in power and what lies ahead”. August 14, 2024. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-talibans-three-years-in-power-and-what-lies-ahead/>

*Chatham House* (CH). “What the West can do now in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan”. February 5, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/02/what-west-can-do-now-taliban-ruled-afghanistan>

*Economist, the*. “A bombing in Delhi raises tensions in the region”. November 13, 2025. <https://economist.com/asia/2025/11/13/a-bombing-in-delhi-raises-tensions-in-the-region>

*United States Institute of Peace* (USIP). “Taliban Seek Recognition, But Offer Few Concessions to International Concerns”. September 28, 2021.

<https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/09/taliban-seek-recognition-offer-few-concessions-international-concerns>

## **APPENDIX B**

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