Pakistan's Airstrikes in Afghanistan

Why in news?

Recently Pakistan conducted airstrikes in the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Khost.

Why there is a straining relationship between Afganistan and Pakistan?

- **Dispute over Durand line-** The longstanding disagreement over the Durand Line, which serves as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, has fueled tensions.

  Durand Line is a 2,670-kilometre border stretching from China to Iran.

- Both sides have historical and territorial claims over Pashtun-dominated regions along the border, leading to disputes and resistance from Pashtun communities, including Taliban factions.
- **Border disputes**- Following the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, they outrightly rejected the Durand Line as a permanent border, further exacerbating tensions with Pakistan.
- **Presence of militant groups-** Pakistan accuses Afghanistan, particularly the Taliban, of providing sanctuary and support to the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militant groups operating against Pakistan.
- Despite assurances from the Taliban about not allowing Afghan soil to be used for attacks against any country, Pakistan claims that TTP militants continue to find refuge in Afghanistan, leading to cross-border attacks and destabilization.
- The resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and its increased attacks within Pakistan have strained relations further.
- **Surge in violence-** There was a significant increase in terror incidents, deaths, and injuries in 2023, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan being the most affected provinces.

  The violence-related fatalities in Pakistan reached a six-year high in 2023, with over 1,500 deaths reported.

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Why there is disagreement over Durand line?

- In 19th century Afghanistan was used as a buffer by the British against the fear of Russian expansionism to its east.
- Hence it was fixed by *British civil servant Sir Henry Mortimer Durand* and the then Afghan Emir, Abdur Rahman Khan in 1893, the treaty was meant to be for *100 years*, but it was *not renewed*.
- It was established in order to fix the respective spheres of influence and also to improve the diplomatic ties between the British establishment in India and the Afghan Kingdom.
- The line puts the *strategic Khyber Pass* on the British side, it cuts through Pashtun tribal areas, leaving villages, families, and land divided between the two spheres of influence.
- It was accepted as the then Indo-Afghan border, the modern state of Afghanistan does not accept the Durand Line.
- However, it is internationally recognised as the western border of Pakistan.
- The Pakistani side of the border includes, among others, the North Western Frontier Province, which was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010.
- *India* also has a small claim to the borderline, through *Pakistan-occupied Kashmir* (about 105 km of the easternmost section of the boundary line).
- When the Taliban seized power in Kabul the first time, they also rejected the Durand Line
- The cross-border tensions peaked in 2017 with several attacks on Pakistani border posts by militants
- Pakistan accused Afghanistan of sheltering – while the Afghan government accused Pakistan of giving safe haven to Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network.

What triggered the recent air strikes?

- The airstrikes were response to a dead attack on Pakistan by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) where a suicide bomber killed seven Pakistani soldiers in North Waziristan.
- The Taliban claimed that Pakistani planes bombed districts in Paktika and Khost provinces, causing civilian casualties.
- Pakistan acknowledged the airstrikes targeted the TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, which had claimed responsibility for recent attack.
- The Taliban warned Pakistan of severe consequences if such attacks continue, denying allegations of sheltering TTP militants while admitting challenges in controlling some border areas.

References

1. The Hindu- Pakistani air strikes
2. First Post- Afghanistan and Pakistan armed conflict



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