

India's Calculated Diplomacy: Engaging the Afghan Taliban

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Summary

India's engagement with the Afghan Taliban is largely seen as a part of its strategy in the region. However, it may add to further tensions with Pakistan and put additional strains on Afghanistan-Pakistan ties.

In a significant political development, Afghanistan's interim foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi landed in New Delhi on 9 October 2025 for a week-long visit. His visit was possible after a United Nations committee temporarily lifted a travel ban on him for diplomatic engagement. It was the first high-level face-to-face meeting between India's leadership and the interim Afghan Taliban government. Earlier, on 8 January 2025, India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met Muttaqi in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. India's External Minister S Jaishankar also had a telephonic conversation with Muttaqi during the India-Pakistan military confrontation following a terrorist attack in Pahalgham in Jammu & Kashmir in April 2025. India also [transported relief materials](#) to Kunar province via Chabahar port.

During the [meeting between Jaishankar and Muttaqi](#), the two sides emphasised “respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity” and India agreed to “deepen its engagement in development cooperation projects, particularly in the sectors of healthcare, public infrastructure and capacity-building”. It was also agreed that India would establish a Thalassemia Centre, a Modern Diagnostic Centre, replace the heating system at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul, construct a 30-bed hospital in Kabul's Bagrami district, an Oncology Centre and a Trauma Centre in Kabul and five Maternity Health Clinics in the provinces of Paktika, Khost and Paktia. New Delhi would also provide [20 ambulances to Afghanistan](#). At the same time, India expressed its willingness to reconstruct buildings in the earthquake-affected areas of Afghanistan. The two sides welcomed the commencement of the India-Afghanistan Air Freight Corridor. Afghanistan invited Indian companies to invest in its mining sector. The two sides also [agreed to cooperate on hydroelectric projects](#) to address Afghanistan's energy needs and support its agricultural activities. Notably, Jaishankar announced that India would upgrade its Technical Mission to [the status of an embassy](#). In India, Afghanistan has active consulates in Mumbai and Hyderabad.

Historically, India's engagement with Afghanistan has angered Pakistan, as the latter feared strategic encirclement and it also influenced [Islamabad's Afghan policy](#). In addition to its concerns with India-Afghanistan relations, Islamabad would like the Afghan Taliban to recognise a little more than the 2,600-kilometre long Durand Line as the international border between the two countries. However, the Afghan Taliban are open to engaging with India and they do not recognise the Durand Line as the legitimate border, terming it as a [“hypothetical line” or an “imaginary line”](#). Pakistan-Afghanistan ties are also strained over the Afghan Taliban hosting the [Pakistani Taliban](#) (or Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan [TTP]), a group

Islamabad accuses of carrying out militant attacks inside the country, as well as due to the [deportation of many Afghan refugees](#) from Pakistan.

While Muttaqi was in New Delhi, an explosion occurred in Kabul and Paktika province, for which the Afghan Taliban blamed Pakistan. Islamabad did not [accept or deny the accusation](#). A [deadly clash ensued](#) in which the Pakistan military claimed that it killed more than 200 Afghan fighters, while the Taliban reported the death of 58 Pakistani soldiers. A ceasefire was agreed after mediation by Qatar and Türkiye. The [statement released by Qatar](#) used the word “border”, signifying the Durand Line, but this was omitted later. This omission was largely regarded a [diplomatic victory for the Afghan Taliban](#). The truce did not last long though, as the Taliban accused Pakistan of [carrying out air attacks](#) in their territory and killing at least 10 people. On Pakistan-Afghanistan military clashes, [Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson of India’s Ministry of External Affairs](#), raised three points, namely, Pakistan hosts terrorist groups, Islamabad blames others for its internal failures and India remains committed to “the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Afghanistan”.

Pakistan has also accused India of sponsoring and supporting [terrorism in its territory](#). In May 2025, Pakistan designated all terrorist/insurgent organisations operating in Balochistan as *Fitna al Hindustan*, aimed at framing India’s alleged role in terror activities in Pakistan. [Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif](#) has accused India of ‘inciting’ the Afghan Taliban, and Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif has accused Kabul acting as a “proxy of India”. During a [weekly media briefing](#) on 17 October 2024, Pakistan’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Ambassador Shafaqat Khan, answering a question, said, “...And we understand India nurturing and supporting terrorists who are attacking Pakistan and based in Afghanistan”. Later, [Pakistan’s Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir](#), stated that “Indian sponsored proxies, Fitna al Hindustan and Fitna al Khawarij [TTP], propagate anti-people and anti-development agendas with malicious intent to perpetrate violence”.

New Delhi’s interaction with the Afghan Taliban is an antithesis of the values and norms enshrined in the Indian constitution. However, [analysts argue](#) that engagement with the Taliban is a strategic move to counter Pakistan’s influence and Chinese footprint in Afghanistan. By engaging with the Afghan Taliban, India is also looking to protect around US\$3 billion (S\$3.9 billion) [investment it made between 2001 and 2021](#) in Afghanistan. Whatever the objectives New Delhi needs to stay on alert, as its engagement with the Afghan Taliban may further escalate tensions in South Asia, particularly between the region’s nuclear rivals.

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