

ASPIRE-KP ROUNDTABLE REPORT

Pak–Afghan Tensions and Their Regional Implications

Date: November 15, 2025

Venue: Institute of Management Sciences (IMSciences), Hayatabad, Peshawar

Organized by: Advocacy for Sustainable Policy and Implementation Reforms – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ASPIRE-KP)

1. Introduction

ASPIRE-KP convened a high-level Roundtable on “*Pakistan–Afghanistan Tensions and Their Regional Implications*” on **15 November 2025** at IMSciences, Peshawar. The initiative stemmed from ASPIRE-KP’s objective to promote informed, evidence-based dialogue on issues of national and provincial importance and to provide actionable policy inputs to state institutions.

The Roundtable took place at a time of heightened tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan during October–November 2025, marked by border clashes, fluctuating negotiations, accusations and counter-accusations, and a general atmosphere of mistrust. Given Pakistan’s long and complex relationship with Afghanistan—rooted in geography, shared history, humanitarian responsibilities, and economic interdependence—the situation has profound implications for the region, particularly **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)**, which faces the most immediate effects in terms of security, trade, mobility, and humanitarian pressures.

The Roundtable brought together political leaders, academics, civil society representatives and members of the business fraternity to assess the unfolding situation and propose a set of balanced, pragmatic, and forward-looking recommendations.

2. Objectives of the Roundtable

The Roundtable aimed to:

- 1. Assess the Current Crisis:** Analyse the October 2025 escalation, including its effects on border management, cross-border movement, trade, and refugees.
- 2. Provide a Knowledge-Driven Platform:** Engage individuals with deep understanding of Afghanistan’s political culture, internal dynamics, and societal structures.
- 3. Generate Policy Options:** Formulate practical recommendations for the Federal Government as well as the Provincial Government while identifying implications unique to KP.

4. **Encourage Citizen-Level Engagement:** Explore mechanisms for reducing distrust and encouraging meaningful people-to-people interaction.
5. **Prepare for Broader National Dialogue:** Position the issue for an all-Pakistan panel discussion at a later stage.

3. Participants

The Roundtable was attended by the following senior members of ASPIRE-KP, political leaders, academics, civil society, and representatives from commerce and industry:

ASPIRE-KP (Hosts)

Muhammad Shehzad Arbab (Chairman), Habibullah Khan Khattak, Arbab Muhammad Arif, Himayatullah Khan, Zaffar Iqbal, Rukhshanda Naz, Dr. Muhammad Rasul Jan, Dr. Qibla Ayaz, Hifz ur Rahman

Group I – Political Leadership

Nur ul-Haq Qadri (Senator)
Ahmad Karim Kundi (Member, Provincial Assembly)

Group II – Academia

Dr. Azmat Hayat
Aamir Raza
Dr. Abd ur Rahman Khalil

Group III – Civil Society / Scholarly Voices

Tahmeed Jan Azhari
Israr Madani
Maulana Abd-ur-Rab
Sultan Hanif Orakzai
Shams Mohmand

Group IV – Commerce & Industry

Sajjad Zaheer (SCCI)
Zia ul Haq Sarhadi (PAJCCI)
Sartaj Ahmad Khan
Hazrat Ali Behlol (KCCI)
Kiran Afridi (SCCI)
Mohammad Yousaf Afridi (Khyber CCI)
Wajid Ali Shinwari (KCCI)

4. Program Outline

- Recitation from the Holy Quran
- Opening Remarks by Chairman ASPIRE-KP
- Issue Overview by Dr. Qibla Ayaz
- Open Discussion among Participants
- Summary of Proceedings by Hifz ur Rahman
- Vote of Thanks

5. Opening Remarks by Chairman ASPIRE-KP

Chairman Muhammad Shehzad Arbab welcomed the participants and highlighted:

- The depth of Pakistan's humanitarian, cultural, and economic relationship with Afghanistan
- The need for composure, clarity, and a strategically disciplined approach in managing tensions
- The importance of drawing upon the experience of individuals who understand Afghanistan's societal and political dynamics
- The disproportionate burden borne by KP in terms of border closures, mobilization of refugees, disruptions in transit trade, and security risks

6. Overview of the Situation

Dr. Qibla Ayaz outlined the historical and contemporary dimensions of Pak-Afghan relations. Key points included:

- The long and turbulent trajectory of bilateral relations since 1947
- Pakistan's substantial humanitarian role, hosting between **3–5 million Afghans** at various periods
- The renewed influx following August 2021
- The October 2025 breakdown of talks leading to clashes, escalation, and renewed mistrust
- Afghanistan's capacity constraints in managing militant elements, and Afghan concerns regarding Pakistan's own internal challenges
- The risk that unresolved tensions may deepen economic and social instability on both sides

He emphasized the need for **empathy, realism, and recognition of mutual interdependence**.

7. Proceedings and Key Deliberations

Participants shared diverse perspectives based on political, scholarly, administrative, and commercial experience.

7.1 Understanding Afghanistan's Perspective

It was stressed that Afghanistan's worldview is shaped by history, sovereignty sensitivities, and resistance to external pressure. Effective engagement requires appreciating this mindset and acknowledging on-ground capacity limitations in border management.

7.2 Importance of Citizen Diplomacy

Participants noted that tension and confrontation aggravate suffering for people on both sides. Broader societal engagement—including religious scholars, academics, media representatives, business leaders, and civil society—should be leveraged to reduce hostility and promote constructive dialogue.

7.3 Trade and Transit Issues

Participants from the business and trade sectors observed that:

- Treatment of exporters and importers at border points needs urgent improvement.
- Torkham, a centuries-old trade corridor, must reflect professionalism and facilitation.
- Trade should be insulated from politics to avoid unemployment and the risk of militancy.

7.4 Handling of Refugees

The Roundtable underscored that:

- Refugee management must be undertaken with dignity, care, and oversight.
- Particular attention is needed for women and children.
- Implementation agencies must uphold moral and societal values to avoid creating negative impressions domestically or internationally.

7.5 Intellectual Responsibility in KP

It was noted that youth in KP often lack an informed understanding of the historical and contemporary dimensions of Pak-Afghan relations. Participants emphasized the need for sustained intellectual engagement across universities, think tanks, and public forums to develop a more grounded perspective.

8. Recommendations

Based on forum deliberations and additional suggestions, the recommendations are reorganized under two clear headings:

A. Measures Required from the Federal Government

1. Diplomatic Engagement

- Improve understanding of Afghanistan's worldview and avoid simplistic assumptions.

- Engage individuals with long-standing experience of Afghan society to guide policy.
- Adopt an all-encompassing diplomatic approach involving clergy, scholars, media, business leaders, and civil society to create a conducive environment for dialogue.

2. Trade, Transit, and Visa Policy

- Decouple trade from politics to protect livelihoods and mitigate risks of unemployment-linked unrest.
- Reform customs procedures and improve conduct at border crossings, especially Torkham.
- Reassess visa policy and ensure its fair and consistent implementation.

3. Treatment of Traders and Business Community

- Ensure transparency and facilitation at customs checkpoints.
- Engage chambers of commerce from both countries to address grievances and explore solutions.

4. Refugee Policy

- Ensure humane and dignified implementation of refugee policies.
- Exercise stringent oversight to prevent mistreatment, especially of women and children.
- Maintain adherence to Pakistan's social and moral values to prevent exploitation of isolated incidents on media platforms.

5. National-Level Intellectual Engagement

- Encourage structured public discourse on Pakistan–Afghanistan relations.
- Promote research, seminars, and writings to clarify misconceptions and foster deeper understanding.

B. Measures Required from the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

1. Provincial Preparedness and Long-Haul Strategy

Acknowledging the pressures faced by KP as the frontline province, the Roundtable stressed the need for a **proactive provincial strategy** to mitigate the effects of prolonged tensions. KP must:

- Support border communities, traders, transporters, and students affected by disruptions
- Safeguard essential services and maintain economic stability
- Prevent socio-economic alienation that may arise from extended periods of uncertainty

2. Establishment of a Provincial Task Force

Building on forum discussions, it is recommended that the KP Government establish a:

“Provincial Task Force on Pak–Afghan Border Impacts”

with the mandate to:

- Assess difficulties faced by all affected stakeholders
- Propose targeted mitigation measures independent of the Federal Government’s timelines
- Facilitate traders, importers, exporters, and chambers in resolving operational issues
- Monitor implementation of refugee-related policies within KP
- Provide regular, preferably weekly, strategic updates to the Provincial Cabinet

3. Institutional Facilitation for Trade

- Create a provincial arrangement to facilitate trade and transit activities.
- Provide support to chambers of commerce and import/export sectors in dealing with operational bottlenecks.

4. Intellectual and Social Engagement within KP

- Encourage universities and think tanks to initiate informed dialogue on Pakistan–Afghanistan relations.
- Promote a deeper and more reflective understanding among youth to counter misinformation and polarization.

9. Additional Reflections

9.1 Federal–Provincial Disconnect

It was observed that meaningful results require the Federal Government to consider the views and concerns of KP, which directly endures the consequences of tensions. Ignoring these ground realities risks weakening policy effectiveness.

9.2 Recognizing Practical Constraints

Participants recognized that Afghanistan has capacity challenges in addressing Pakistan’s demands, just as Pakistan confronts its own internal security constraints. Only a realistic assessment of ground limitations can produce workable solutions.

9.3 KP’s Need to Prepare for a Long Haul

The province cannot remain reactive. It must anticipate prolonged disruptions and adopt a people-centered approach to protect communities, maintain economic activity, and support vulnerable groups.

10. Conclusion

The Roundtable concluded that Pakistan–Afghanistan relations require prudence, empathy, historical understanding, and multidimensional engagement. Lasting peace cannot be achieved through pressure alone; it must be rooted in dialogue, realism, and cooperation.

Participants emphasized that **KP stands at the critical intersection of risk and responsibility**. While federal actions remain central to the broader policy framework, KP must proactively safeguard its people, economy, and institutions.

ASPIRE-KP will continue to contribute to national and provincial dialogue and, as recommended, will expand this discussion through a national-level panel engaging stakeholders from across Pakistan.