

TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

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THE GDELT PROJECT



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AFGHANISTAN RETALIATES AGAINST PAKISTAN WITH DEEP-TERRITORY DRONE STRIKES AND BORDER SEIZURES AS A WIDER REGIONAL CONFLICT ERUPTS INVOLVING IRAN, ISRAEL, AND THE UNITED STATES.

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

The security architecture of South and Central Asia underwent a tectonic shift on February 28, 2026, as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) launched a massive retaliatory military campaign, dubbed "Operation Rad-e-Zulm" (Repelling Oppression), against the Pakistan military. This escalation followed Pakistani airstrikes in Khost, Paktika, and Nangarhar provinces that allegedly targeted civilian returnee camps, resulting in at least 52 civilian deaths. In an unprecedented move, the IEA deployed unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to strike military targets deep within Pakistan, including the capital, Islamabad, and major military installations in Rawalpindi and Abbottabad. This technological display has shocked regional observers, signaling that the IEA has acquired or developed sophisticated

long-range strike capabilities that bypass Pakistan's traditional air defense systems.

Simultaneously, the IEA ground forces launched a coordinated offensive along the Durand Line, reportedly seizing 27 Pakistani border posts and two major military bases, primarily in the Dand-e-Patan and Alishir districts. The IEA claims to have killed over 55 Pakistani "militia" soldiers while capturing several others. This direct conventional conflict is being leveraged by the IEA leadership to consolidate domestic legitimacy, with state media broadcasting widespread public demonstrations of support from Herat to Badakhshan. The narrative has shifted from one of "brotherly neighbors" to a staunch defense of "territorial integrity" against a "mercenary regime" in Islamabad. To maintain internal cohesion, the IEA has moved aggressively against domestic dissent, shuttering the Rah-e-Farda television network for its perceived support of Pakistani actions.

The conflict is unfolding against the backdrop of an even larger regional conflagration. Reports indicate that the United States and Israel launched joint strikes against several Iranian cities, including Tehran and Qom, prompting Iranian missile and drone retaliations against U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf. This convergence of crises suggests a potential multi-front regional war. Pakistan now finds itself in the historically unique and precarious position of having been subjected to airstrikes by three of its neighbors—India, Iran, and Afghanistan—within a three-year period, a fact highlighted by Pakistani opposition figures as evidence of a total failure in the military-led foreign policy of General Asim Munir.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Operation Rad-e-Zulm Retaliation:** The IEA launched a multi-vector military response to Pakistani cross-border aggression, claiming the [capture of 27 border posts](#) and inflicting heavy casualties on Pakistani forces.
- **Strategic Deep Strikes:** Afghan forces utilized drones to target [military centers in Islamabad](#), Miranshah, and Abbottabad, marking the first time in history an Afghan government has conducted successful air raids on the Pakistani capital.
- **Downing of Pakistani Aircraft:** IEA defense officials claimed the [destruction of a Pakistani jet](#) in Nangarhar and the use of "laser weapons" to down a drone in the Alishir district of Khost.
- **Civilian Massacres and Displacement:** Pakistani airstrikes reportedly targeted [camps for returning refugees](#) in Torkham and Kandahar, with officials confirming a death toll of 52, including many women and children.
- **Suppression of Internal Dissent:** The IEA Ministry of Information and Culture [suspended Rah-e-Farda TV](#), a media outlet linked to Mohammad Mohaqiq, accusing it of threatening national unity by justifying Pakistani strikes.
- **Wider Middle East Conflict:** Global reporting integrated into Afghan bulletins detailed [U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran](#), including targets in Tehran, Karaj, and Tabriz, escalating the global risk profile.

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

National Security & Territorial Integrity

The IEA has moved to a "total defense" footing. Minister of Higher Education Neda

Mohammad Nadim declared that [defending the soil is a fard-e-ayn](#) (individual religious duty). The military leadership under the Chief of Staff has reportedly been given a mandate to respond "proportionately and beyond" to any violation of Afghan airspace or land, transitioning the military from an anti-insurgency force to a conventional regional power.

- The use of "laser weaponry" and advanced drones indicates a [rapid modernization of IEA forces](#).
- Military commands in the 201 Khalid bin Walid and 203 Mansouri Corps have been [placed on high alert](#) following successful border captures.

International Relations & Diplomatic Engagement

Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi is engaged in "active neutrality" combined with aggressive defensive posturing. While the IEA is fighting on the border, Muttaqi has held urgent consultations with [counterparts in Turkey, Qatar, and Uzbekistan](#). The IEA's strategy appears to be isolating Pakistan diplomatically by portraying it as the "project of instability" in the region.

- Qatar and Turkey have offered [to act as mediators](#) to prevent a full-scale war.
- Pakistan is reportedly using [back-channel diplomacy with Saudi Arabia](#) and Oman to negotiate a ceasefire to stop Afghan drone strikes on its interior.

Domestic Stability & Social Order

The IEA is successfully channeling public anger over civilian casualties into a nationalist fervor. Protests in [Panjshir, Bamyan, and Samangan](#) show a rare moment of ethnic and regional unity against a foreign adversary. This "rally 'round the flag" effect is being used to solidify the IEA's grip on power, portraying the

Taliban not just as a religious movement but as the sole protectors of the Afghan nation.

- The High Commission for Shiites [issued a statement supporting the IEA](#) military, signaling a move toward cross-sectarian national defense.
- Public figures like Mohammad Mohaqiq are being [branded as traitors](#) for questioning the retaliation against Pakistan.

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The day was dominated by executive decrees and emergency military orders rather than traditional legislation, as the IEA transitioned to a wartime governance model. Key policy shifts focused on media regulation and the mobilization of resources for border defense.

- **Emergency Media Decree:** A directive from the Ministry of Information and Culture established that any media outlet justifying foreign aggression or "threatening national unity" [faces immediate termination](#), leading to the closure of Rah-e-Farda TV.
- **Refugee Protection Protocol:** The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation issued a formal condemnation of [strikes on returnee camps](#), labeling them a violation of international humanitarian law and war crimes.
- **Diplomatic Briefing:** Foreign Minister Muttaqi held a high-level briefing with [foreign diplomats in Kabul](#), urging them to verify the sites of Pakistani airstrikes to witness civilian casualties firsthand.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The Collapse of "Strategic Depth" For decades, Pakistan's military establishment viewed Afghanistan as a "strategic depth" to be managed through proxies. This policy has reached a catastrophic terminal point. The IEA is no longer acting as a proxy but as a peer competitor capable of [targeting the "heart of Pakistan"](#). Pakistani politicians are openly criticizing the "failed policies of the generals," noting that Pakistan is now surrounded by hostile neighbors. The narrative that the TTP is an Afghan-sponsored threat is being countered by Afghan claims that Pakistan is the [true source of regional instability](#).

Drones as the Great Leveler The most significant military trend is the IEA's successful integration of drone technology. By striking Islamabad, the IEA has signaled that traditional geographical barriers and Pakistani military superiority are no longer absolute. The ability of a sanctioned, unrecognized government to [penetrate sophisticated airspace](#) suggests a major shift in the proliferation of UAV technology in the region, likely through domestic innovation or specialized procurement networks. This "democratization" of airpower allows the IEA to conduct "asymmetric conventional warfare."

Information Warfare and Selective Sovereignty Both sides are engaged in a fierce battle for the narrative. The IEA is utilizing images of [dead children in returnee camps](#) to shame the international community for its silence. Conversely, the IEA is being accused by Pakistan of harboring the TTP. However, the international community's relative silence on Pakistani strikes—

with skepticism in Afghan broadcasts as a result of [Pakistan's management of global relations](#)—is driving the IEA toward more radical self-reliance and harder-line nationalist policies.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect continued high-intensity skirmishes along the Durand Line. The IEA will likely attempt to hold the seized Pakistani posts as leverage for negotiations. If Pakistan launches another major airstrike, the IEA may target economic infrastructure in Punjab or Sindh via drones. Domestic unrest in Pakistan, fueled by political opposition and economic despair, could reach a breaking point as the [military faces humiliation](#) on the border.

Medium Term (1-6 Months): A total freeze in Pak-Afghan trade is likely, severely impacting Pakistan's access to Central Asian markets and exacerbating Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis. The IEA will likely deepen ties with China, Russia, and Uzbekistan, positioning itself as a more stable (if autocratic) partner compared to a volatile Pakistan. The "Rad-e-Zulm" campaign will be codified in IEA history books as the moment the movement transitioned into a [defender of the Afghan state](#).

Long Term (1-5 Years): We may witness the structural disintegration of the Pakistani state's current form if the military cannot re-establish border control. For Afghanistan, this conflict could lead to a permanent militarization of the border and a shift in the IEA's focus from domestic morality policing to conventional regional power projection. The broader U.S.-Israel-Iran conflict, if it persists, will turn Afghanistan into a [critical land-](#)

[bridge or buffer zone](#), fundamentally changing its value in global geopolitics.

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For International Policy:

- The international community must urgently move beyond "silence" to prevent a full-scale war between two heavily armed states. Direct mediation involving [Qatar and Turkey](#) is the most viable path to an immediate ceasefire.
- Humanitarian organizations should prepare for a massive influx of displaced persons as [border villages become combat zones](#).
- There is a dire need for an independent verification mechanism for the [alleged "war crimes"](#) in refugee camps to prevent further escalatory rhetoric.

For Private Sector/Investors:

- **Supply Chain Rupture:** The Torkham and Spin Boldak crossings are now active war zones. Logistics firms must seek alternative routes through [Iran \(Chabahar\) or Central Asian corridors](#) (Uzbekistan/Turkmenistan) as the Pakistan route is indefinitely compromised.
- **Regional Instability Risk:** The reported [missile strikes in the Persian Gulf](#) (Bahrain, Qatar, UAE) pose a severe threat to energy markets and regional insurance premiums.
- **Asset Vulnerability:** Investors in Pakistan should account for "regime collapse" scenarios, as the military faces [attacks from three neighbors](#) and mounting internal political pressure.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends

and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

For questions or suggestions, please contact kalev.leetaru5@gmail.com. You can also learn more about the GDEL T Project at <https://blog.gdel tproject.org/> and the Internet Archive's TV News Archive at <https://archive.org/details/tv>.