

Durand Line - UPSC International Relations Notes

The Durand Line is an important international boundary line, running between the countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is important to know more about this line's history, origins, problems and present status for the [UPSC exam](#) international relations segment.

Durand Line - Facts

The Durand Line is the international border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

- It was fixed by British civil servant Sir Henry Mortimer Durand and the then Afghan Emir, Abdur Rahman Khan in 1893.
- 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. It was accepted as the then Indo-Afghan border.
- The line cuts through the Pashtun homelands of the region. The line divides ethnic Pashtuns and Balochs, who live on both sides of the border.
- The Pakistani side of the border includes, among others, the North Western Frontier Province, which was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010.
- The length of the Durand Line is 2430 km.
- The line was slightly modified by the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919. The treaty was meant to be for 100 years, but in 1999, it was not renewed.
- The modern state of Afghanistan does not accept the Durand Line.
- However, it is internationally recognised as the western border of Pakistan.
- India also has a small claim to the borderline, through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (about 105 km of the easternmost section of the boundary line).
- The border line is deemed as one of the most dangerous in modern times.

Durand Line Origins

In this section, you can read about the history of the line, giving you a better understanding of the present geo-political situation.

- The area through which the line cuts through has been inhabited by the ethnic Pashtuns since ancient times.
- In the First Anglo-Afghan War in 1839, the British were defeated.
- After the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878 - 80), the British enthroned Abdur Rahman Khan as the Emir of Afghanistan. And, as per the Treaty of Gandamak signed in 1880, Afghanistan ceded many frontier lands to the British Empire.
- In 1893, the Durand Line Agreement was concluded by Mortimer Durand and the Emir.
- This treaty led to the formation of the North Western Frontier Province.
- However, the Third Anglo-Afghan War broke out in 1919 (this war is known as the War of Independence in Afghanistan).
 - This war ended with the Treaty of Rawalpindi.
 - As per this treaty, Afghanistan recognised the Durand Line as the international border between Afghanistan and British India.
 - Also, Britain recognised the independence of Afghanistan.
- Britain wanted to create a buffer zone in the region of Afghanistan in order to prevent Russia from making incursions into the Indian subcontinent.
- After India achieved independence and was partitioned into India and Pakistan, the latter inherited the same borders with Afghanistan.

Durand Line Present Status

The present establishment in Afghanistan does not recognise the Durand Line.

- Not only does Afghanistan not recognise the internationally-accepted border with Pakistan, it also has territorial claims to regions stretching from the border to well-inside the boundary, which is almost 60% of the area of Pakistan.
- Even though an independent Afghanistan had accepted the line (according to the Rawalpindi Treaty), after India's independence, it has claimed territories beyond the borders and also questioned the legitimacy of the Durand Line Agreement.
- Upon the founding of modern India and Pakistan, Afghanistan demanded that the Pashtuns living in Pakistan be given the right to self-determination.
- Pakistan and Britain refused this demand.
- Pakistan claims that as a successor state of British India, it has inherited the border line with Afghanistan. This is one of the chief problem areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- Afghanistan also claimed that in 1999, the holdings should have gone back to it because the Durand Line Agreement was for 100 years.
- However, Pakistan rejected this 100-year time frame.
- So, even though the Durand Line is recognised internationally, the present establishment of Afghanistan does not recognise it, saying that the Durand Line was forced on the Afghans by the British. Keep in mind that historically, it had been recognised by the Afghan establishment.
- The Durand Line also is in many ways linked to the present political situation of Afghanistan.
- In the 1950s, when Pakistan was increasingly drawn towards the USA for support and arms, Afghanistan became wary of this, and turned to the USSR for support.
- Two coups took place in 1973 and 1978, which paved the way for the 1979 Soviet Invasion. The events which took place then have ramifications to this day. You can read more about this, from the links in the table below.

Saur Revolution

Soviet Afghan War

