



By: TA | AP Brief

Afghan and Pakistani delegations head to Doha for crisis talks



Afghan and Pakistani delegations are heading to the Qatari capital, Doha, hoping to defuse the deadliest crisis between them in several years, after more than a week of fighting killed dozens of people and injured hundreds on both sides.

The Taliban government said Saturday that the Afghan delegation included the defense minister and the head of the national intelligence agency.

A Pakistani delegation was due to depart on Saturday, the national broadcaster PTV had said a day earlier. It did not give further details.

Each country says it is responding to aggression from the other. Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harboring militants who carry out attacks in border areas, a charge rejected by the Taliban.

Regional powers, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have called for calm, as the violence threatened to further destabilize a region where groups including the Islamic State group and al-Qaida are trying to resurface.

A 48-hour ceasefire **intended** to pause hostilities expired Friday evening. Hours later, Pakistan struck across the border.

Pakistani security officials confirmed to The Associated Press that there were strikes on two districts in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika province.

The targets were hideouts of the militant Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, according to the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

One said the operation was a direct response to the suicide **bombing** of a security forces compound in Mir Ali, in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province a day earlier.

The Pakistani Air Force raids killed dozens of armed fighters and there were no civilian deaths, they said.

Mutual security

But Afghan officials said the aerial assaults killed at least 10 civilians, including women and children. The attacks prompted the national cricket board to **boycott** an upcoming series in Pakistan.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban government's chief spokesman, condemned the "repeated crimes of Pakistani forces and the violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty."

Such acts were deemed provocative and viewed as "deliberate attempts" to prolong the conflict, he added.

Pakistan's army chief urged Afghans to choose mutual security over perpetual violence

The two countries share a 2,611-kilometer (1,622-mile) border **known** as the Durand Line, but Afghanistan has never recognized it.

Pakistan is grappling with surging militancy, especially in areas bordering Afghanistan. It also accuses its nuclear-armed **neighbor** and rival India of backing armed groups, without providing any evidence.

Pakistan's army chief, Asim Munir, urged Afghans to choose "mutual security over perpetual violence and progress over hardline obscurantism."

"The Taliban must rein in the proxies who have sanctuaries in Afghanistan," he told an audience on Saturday at the Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.