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**Abstract:** *Stability and reconciliation in Afghanistan have been the goals of the difficult and drawn-out Afghan peace process. Being a major regional player and neighbor, Pakistan has been instrumental in promoting the peace process. In addition to stressing Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, regional influence, and possible obstacles, this article offers a succinct summary of Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan peace process. Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan peace process stems from its own security concerns, as instability in Afghanistan directly affects Pakistan's security landscape. It has facilitated dialogues, provided venues for negotiations, and encouraged both sides to engage in meaningful talks. Furthermore, Pakistan is positioned as a key player in the peace process due to its historical ties to the Taliban and its influence over some factions. The parties' ability to communicate and come to the bargaining table has been greatly aided by Pakistan's mediation role.*

**Key Words:** Regional Player, Stakeholders, Taliban, Mediator, Pakistan

## Introduction

Pakistan's role in the rise of the Taliban has been a subject of debate and controversy. While Pakistan officially denies providing direct military support to the Taliban, there is evidence to suggest that Pakistani intelligence agencies, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), provided assistance to the Taliban during their fight against rival Afghan factions in the 1990s. Pakistan's support was motivated by a desire for strategic depth and influence in Afghanistan, as well as concerns about the influence of their regional rival, India, in the country. Pakistan's support for the Taliban included providing them with sanctuary, training, and supplies. It is widely believed that the Taliban leadership had a presence in Pakistan and that Pakistani officials had close ties to the group. However, it is important to note that the level and extent of Pakistan's support for the Taliban have been a matter of debate, with some arguing that Pakistan's involvement was more nuanced and complex than a simple case of direct support.

Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001, the Taliban's influence has fluctuated. They were initially removed from power and faced military pressure from international forces. However, the Taliban regrouped and launched an insurgency against the Afghan government and foreign forces, gradually regaining control over significant portions of the country. In recent years, peace negotiations have taken place, and in 2020, the United States signed an agreement with the Taliban aimed at facilitating a political settlement in Afghanistan (Ullah, 2023).

The events of 9/11, or the terrorist attacks that took place in the United States on September 11, 2001, had a significant impact on the subsequent U.S. On September 11, 2001, the extremist group Al-Qaeda prepared a number of well-planned attacks against the United States. Four commercial aircraft were hijacked by individuals connected to Al-Qaeda. When the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93 attempted to regain control from the hijackers, the plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field. Two other

planes slammed into the World Trade Center buildings in New York City, and one into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia. Approximately 3,000 individuals died as a result of the attacks. Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan: Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, who had been conducting operations out of Afghanistan with the backing of the Taliban government, was the architect behind the 9/11 attacks. At the time, the Taliban, an extremist Islamist organization, controlled the majority of Afghanistan and had given Al-Qaeda a place to hide out. Under President George W. Bush's direction, the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom, a military campaign in Afghanistan, in reaction to the 9/11 attacks. The principal goals were to demolish Al-Qaeda, overthrow the Taliban, and stop terrorists from using Afghanistan as a shelter. Pakistan, as a neighboring country to Afghanistan, played a crucial role in the aftermath of 9/11. Initially, Pakistan had supported the Taliban regime and maintained diplomatic relations with them. However, Pakistan chose to side with the US as a result of strong international pressure and the possibility of US military action. Pakistan gave the US crucial intelligence and logistical help while it invaded Afghanistan. Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the intelligence wing of Pakistan, was instrumental in helping the United States acquire intelligence and plan operations. With Pakistan's help, numerous senior Al-Qaeda figures were apprehended, including Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man suspected of being the 9/11 mastermind. Through cooperative efforts between American and Pakistani security services, they were captured ([Aamir Junaid, 2021](#)).

The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan led to a significant influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan. Pakistan had to manage the flow of refugees and tighten its border controls to prevent infiltration by Taliban or Al-Qaeda members. Despite Pakistan's cooperation, there have been criticisms and suspicions of elements within the Pakistani government and intelligence agencies maintaining ties with extremist groups. There have been allegations of some elements within the ISI providing support to the Taliban or harboring terrorists. However, it is essential to note that

Pakistan has also suffered from terrorist attacks and has conducted military operations against militant groups within its own borders. One important event that happened in 2021 was the US soldiers' withdrawal from Afghanistan. It signaled the end of the military's over two decades-long occupation of the nation. Former US President Donald Trump made the first decision to withdraw, which was subsequently implemented by President Joe Biden ([Sarwar, 2021](#)).

For the region to become stable, a peaceful Afghanistan is essential. The prolonged Afghan war has had the greatest impact on Pakistan as a neighbor. The entire area as well as the United States are not benefited by the war in Afghanistan international leaders. A peaceful Afghanistan could encourage transit trade across Central Asia. Initiatives led by the Chinese in the region are similar to China, Pakistan, Kabul, and the Central Asian Republics can choose to use One Belt One Road and the Pakistan Economic Corridor for transit trade; however, this will only be feasible if Afghanistan is peaceful. Negotiations are the only way to stop the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan was essential in getting the Taliban to the negotiation table and helping to sign the peace accord between the United States and the Taliban on February 29, 2020. The Afghan government and the United States were urged by Pakistan to watch out for potential spoilers. Now that the Taliban have sat down for negotiations, the world is appreciating Pakistan's helpful role in doing so. Evidently, Pakistan's involvement in the peace process hasn't pleased the Afghan administration. To scuttle this peace effort, the Afghan government has employed numerous delay strategies. Those opposed to peace are working hard to sabotage this effort and further their own agendas by using Afghan soil. This peace accord is not to Ashraf Ghani's liking and other close advisers of his. They believe that this peace agreement puts the Taliban in the driver's seat. This study examines Pakistan's contribution to the Afghan peace process. This study also emphasizes the connections between Pakistan and Afghanistan ([Nixon, 2011](#)).

The stability of Pakistan's domestic situation is strongly impacted by the Afghan conflict. The ongoing fighting in Afghanistan and the presence of more than a million Afghan refugees are destabilizing the internal order in Pakistan. Open worries have been voiced in Pakistan that any increased ties to Afghanistan may cause Pakistan to lose focus on the Kashmir issue. Critics in Pakistan claim, among other things, that Islamabad is overextended and is failing on both the Afghan and Kashmir fronts as a result. The other concern is that the Pushtunistan issue could resurface if Afghanistan were to become divided along ethnic and regional lines. The potential of the Pushtunistan issue resurfacing may be further increased by the Taliban's emergence, which is dominated by Pushtuns. According to the principles of Hong Kong's unification with China, the Afghans had every right to regain regions up to Attok when the Durand Line Agreement expired in 1993. According to one school of thinking, Pakistan even built up its Taliban force in preparation for interested countries like India and Britain bringing up the Durand Line issue following the treaty's expiration in 1993. According to Pakistan, the Taliban's inception has contributed to elevating Islam's universal goal above any Afghan nationalist objectives. Although Pakistan currently looks to have a solid grip on the Taliban leadership, it may have limited long-term control over the actions of the force. In the Afghan crisis, Pakistan is alone both globally and among its neighbors. Islamabad is too invested in the issue for other regional players to view it as a negotiation for a peaceful resolution ([kousar, 2023](#)).

## Literature Review

Ghulam (2020) states that the largest winner of peace in Afghanistan is Pakistan. Pakistan is contributing in a positive way to the stabilization of Afghanistan. Pakistan has repeatedly attempted to improve relations with Afghanistan but has been unsuccessful. Although Pakistan has voiced opposition to RAW's operations in Afghanistan due to concerns over Indian influence there, the Afghan government is not showing any signs of

improvement. Pakistan is attempting to interact with all facets of Afghan society after learning from its past errors. Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan has now shifted, and other Afghan figures are being invited to join various sects and political groups. Pakistan has made every effort to negotiate with the Taliban. Islamabad is eager to participate in the intra-Afghanistan talks. The US is praising Pakistan's contribution to the peace effort in Afghanistan. India has attempted to undermine the peace accord reached between the United States and the Taliban thus far without success. 80% of the work on Pakistan's border fence with Afghanistan has already been completed. The fact that the international community is now appreciating Pakistan's efforts to establish a lasting peace in Afghanistan is encouraging. This study focuses on the positive role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process. However, this study did not explain the challenges faced by Pakistan during this process.

Nazeer (2019), in his article, stated that since the US invaded Afghanistan in 2001, the Afghan people have experienced numerous challenges as a result of the war on terror, security issues, and political and economic upheaval. Being a neighbor, Pakistan can contribute significantly to the establishment of stability and peace by assisting in the peace process. Pakistan should use its power to persuade the Taliban to engage in talks, as desired by both the Afghan and US governments. This paper attempts to investigate Pakistan's participation in the ongoing peace process, which has caused the participating parties to comprehend that it is peaceful and stable. The whole region benefits from Afghanistan. There are significant challenges that need to be handled carefully. These challenges include the governance system in Afghanistan, the constitution, and finding a power-sharing arrangement that all parties can accept. For any peace agreement to be successful, all parties involved must show strong commitment. Peace is crucial not only for Afghanistan but also for the entire region. Pakistan should continue supporting Afghanistan's stability and actively participate in the peace negotiations for the greater benefit of the region. The previous study

highlighted Pakistan's role in the peace process while this study neglect the specific strategies or approaches Pakistan can employ to effectively bring the Taliban to the negotiating table and contribute to the stability and peace of Afghanistan.

Mustafa (2021) examines in his research paper the United States has taken a significant step towards ending its longest war in history by signing a historic Peace Accord with the Taliban on February 29, 2020, in Qatar's capital city. This groundbreaking agreement marked a departure from previous approaches, as America decided to engage in direct negotiations with Taliban leaders, excluding the Afghan government's presence. The international community, including world and regional actors, widely welcomed this development, considering it a momentous milestone in Afghanistan's history. The accord generated hope among the Afghan people that peace could be achieved in the near future. Moreover, neighboring states such as Pakistan, India, Iran, China, and Russia expressed their support for the Peace Process and pledged to assist the people of Afghanistan. The initiative for peace in Afghanistan received widespread encouragement and support from various quarters. However, there were also individuals or groups, often referred to as "spoilers," who sought to disrupt or manipulate the peace process to serve their own agendas. These spoilers pose a challenge to the successful implementation of the Peace Accord and the achievement of lasting peace in Afghanistan. there may be a gap in research regarding the specific actions and strategies employed by spoilers to undermine the peace process.

### **Role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process**

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The Murree negotiations, which sought to end the conflict in Afghanistan, were crucial in determining both regional and international security. With Pakistan serving as a moderator and facilitator in these negotiations, the United States (US) and China are giving Pakistan a significant chance to show that it is a responsible

nation dedicated to advancing peace in Afghanistan and between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The talks between the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban have advanced significantly with Pakistan's help. Pakistan can take advantage of this chance to re-establish confidence with Afghanistan, protect its northwest borders, reshape its political, economic, and social ties to the country, and balance out India's influence there. Pakistan's objectives include ensuring that the peace process remains Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, minimizing external interference, and concluding the talks to the satisfaction of Afghan and Taliban leaders, 21 despite the current suspension of negotiations. However, achieving these objectives will not be easy for the Afghan leaders, Taliban, or Pakistan, as there are several obstacles that could potentially hinder the process. Each party must remain vigilant and address these challenges. The direct implications of the peace talks for Pakistan justify conducting a detailed study on this subject, as it is an ongoing issue with various possibilities that could have positive or negative consequences for Pakistan. ([kousar, 2023](#)).

### **The Developments**

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The "Afghan Peace Process," also known as the "Murree talks," began on July 7, 2015, following a 14-year standoff between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The Afghan government's deputy foreign minister, Hekmat Khalil Karzai, and Mullah Abbas Durrani, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, were the main participants in the negotiations. Participants included officials of the Qatar office and the Taliban's highest political body, the Shura. Aizaz Chaudhry, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, acted as the nation's representative in the mediation ([Kazmi, 2016](#)).

Pakistan received plaudits from the US for its substantial diplomatic efforts, which made the discussions possible. In an attempt to portray itself as a nation that values peace, Pakistan is adamant that maintaining peace in Afghanistan is essential for regional and worldwide harmony as well as for Pakistan's own security. At the same

time, Pakistan's Foreign Office is dedicated to making sure that Afghanistan continues to be the owner and leader of the peace process, free from outside intervention or undue influence. The first round of peace talks, conducted at Murree, Pakistan, during the Islamic month of Ramadan, fostered a discussion-friendly environment. According to reports, there was general amity and both parties were transparent about their unresolved concerns, which allowed them to make sure their positions were well stated. The meeting continued until the early hours of Sehri (pre-dawn meal) ([Qayum, 2018](#)).

During the negotiations, the Taliban made a number of demands, including the removal of Taliban leaders from US sanction lists, a deadline for the complete withdrawal of foreign forces, the release of Taliban detainees, amendments to the Afghan Constitution, and the installation of a transitional government until a new representative government is duly elected. The Afghan government representatives kindly accepted the other proposals for consideration, with the exception of the requirement about the interim government. The US and China two powerful nations, are participating as observer states, demonstrating the importance of the peace process to both regional and international players. It's crucial to remember that some Afghan factions continue to reject these negotiations ([Nixon, 2011](#)).

Furthermore, cross-border terrorist actions continue to be a threat and a barrier to the peace process' advancement. The Afghan Taliban rejected the peace process soon after the negotiations began, especially after their leader Mullah Omar passing was made public. However, Pakistan is actively trying to get the parties back to the negotiating table and is still dedicated to seeing peace prevail in Afghanistan. But obstacles have appeared, such as Mullah Mansoor's death and the worsening Pakistan-Afghanistan ties, which pose significant obstacles ([Kazmi, 2016](#)). The next round of negotiations was initially set to take place four or six weeks into winter. On the other hand, real progress in this direction has not been made. After Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was killed in a US drone attack in Pakistan's

Baluchistan province on May 21, 2016, the situation underwent a dramatic shift. Regarding the peace process's future after his passing, opinions have differed. Although there have been speculative suggestions that his passing will improve the talks, they have not succeeded thus far. According to Mr Sartaj Aziz, Pakistan's National Security Advisor, Pakistan has raised concerns about Mullah Mansoor's death because it feels it has impeded progress. Pakistan, nevertheless, is still optimistic that the peace process will resume. Mr. Sartaj Aziz said that even though the insurgency in Afghanistan increased after the first round of discussions began, the continuation of talks is still necessary to find a solution ([Nixon, 2011](#)).

### Prospects for Pakistan

While the peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban initially showed promise, they have recently reached a standstill. However, if the Pakistani leadership can effectively capitalize on the situation, these talks could bring significant benefits to Pakistan. Pakistan's geographical proximity, ideological similarities, and cultural affinity with Afghanistan, combined with its established role as a facilitator in the peace talks, present an excellent opportunity for Pakistan to enhance its position in regional politics ([Yaseen, 2020](#)).

### Peaceful Neighbour

Pakistan and India, its eastern neighbour, have had difficult relations for a long time. Pakistan has maintained friendly relations with other South Asian states, but its policy orientation has primarily focused on India. As a result, a sizeable amount of Pakistan's budget is earmarked for defence in order to protect the nation from its more powerful and militarily advanced eastern neighbour. Pakistan cannot afford to enrage another neighbour on its western border in the current circumstances. Pakistan would suffer greatly if hostile elements were allowed to flourish in Afghanistan while already having to contend with India. Therefore, Pakistan's top priority is to have a neighbour that is calm and free of internal

issues that could negatively affect Pakistan along its western border ([Kazmi, 2016](#)).

### Peace in Afghanistan

Pakistan firmly believes that peace in Afghanistan is essential to ensure its own security. Pakistan's security interests are directly intertwined with the stability of Afghanistan. The proliferation of terrorism within Afghanistan's borders would be stunted by a peaceful and stable nation, which would be advantageous to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. One way to drastically lessen the threat of terrorism is to build understanding between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Not only would this arrangement increase security along Pakistan's northwest border with Afghanistan, but it would also foster peace inside Afghanistan ([Kaura, 2018](#)).

### Security Implications

A peaceful neighbour in Afghanistan would have numerous positive implications for Pakistan's security. Firstly, it would help prevent the spillover of violence and extremist ideologies from Afghanistan into Pakistan. The porous border between the two countries has been exploited by militant groups in the past, leading to security challenges for Pakistan. By ensuring stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan can mitigate these risks and enhance its own security. Secondly, a peaceful Afghanistan would diminish the influence of non-state actors and extremist groups that often find safe havens in unstable regions. Such groups pose a significant threat to both Afghanistan and Pakistan, as they can carry out cross-border attacks and destabilize the region. By promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan can effectively counter these elements and maintain its territorial integrity ([Qayum, 2018](#)).

### Diplomatic Engagement

Pakistan understands that maintaining diplomatic relations with Afghanistan is essential to promoting harmony between the two countries. It aggressively advocates for an all-inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan involving the Taliban, the Afghan government,

and other regional players. Pakistan wants to help bring about a sense of sustainable peace in Afghanistan by encouraging communication and fostering reconciliation ([Nixon, 2011](#)).

### Creating Pakistan's Positive Image

Pakistan is committed to strengthening its good reputation in the region and around the world. It wants to be known as a responsible state that is totally dedicated to regional development and peace. Pakistan's noteworthy mediation efforts in peace negotiations have been widely acknowledged internationally. This development has portrayed Pakistan in a positive light, significantly elevating its international standing and increasing the likelihood of being taken seriously on important issues. These efforts have not only brought dignity to Pakistan but have also underscored the crucial role it plays in achieving peace in Afghanistan. Due to its involvement, Pakistan is now seen as a key actor with the ability to promote peace and reduce bloodshed. Pakistan has a great chance to improve its standing as a "Peace promoter" internationally through the ongoing peace negotiations ([Sarwar, 2021](#)).

### Rebuilding Mutual Trust

The Murree meeting served as a clear demonstration of Pakistan's genuine intentions to bring stability to Afghanistan. It is crucial for the Afghan leadership to duly acknowledge these intentions. Both sides need to evaluate each other's moves and focus on building trust. Pakistan can play a pivotal role in convincing Afghanistan to establish open channels of cooperation and information sharing. Trust building between the two nations will not only foster a result-oriented approach towards peace-building but also ensure that both sides consider each other's interests. This can be achieved through the implementation of confidence-building measures, ensuring their positive implementation and follow-through ([Yaseen, 2020](#)).

## **Eradication of Terrorism/ Enabling Economic Prosperity**

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Although Afghanistan's instability is not the only factor causing instability in Pakistan, it is nevertheless a major source of instability given the country's potential impact on national security, economic growth, and the fight against terrorism. Pakistan still faces several terrorist threats even though it is a front-line ally of the United States in the war against terrorism. Pakistan has long faced the threat of terrorism; in fact, the country dealt with it before the 9/11 attacks brought the phenomenon's worldwide attention. Pakistan was actively involved in the Afghan conflict in the late 1970s, which brought with it a number of difficulties, such as the emergence of Jihadism, the spread of Madrassahs, the introduction of Kalashnikov culture, the flood of Afghan refugees, and the drug trade ([Aamir Junaid, 2021](#)).

Pakistan is currently dealing with a maze of social, political, economic, and security issues as a result of these reasons. These problems have spread from Afghanistan into Pakistan in part because of the porous nature of the border between the two countries. Disgruntled and displaced Afghans sought sanctuary on the Pakistani side of the border, where local groups shared cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious connections, after the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving the Afghan Mujahideen without US patronage. Sadly, 26 of these weak people turned into simple pickings for exploitation. The key to a more optimistic course for the peace process in Afghanistan lies in the Afghan government and the Afghan Taliban acknowledging Pakistan's involvement in the ongoing peace process ([Kaura, 2018](#)).

As this becomes more apparent, Pakistan will begin to perceive the potential of peace on its own soil. The potential for repatriation of Afghan refugees would be a significant outcome and would have a positive impact on Pakistan's economy. This financial respite would allow Pakistan to invest in its collapsing social sector. Furthermore, by working together with the Afghan government, a framework that is both

acceptable to all parties and effective may be developed to jointly combat the threat posed by terrorists. Pakistan will have a stronger ability to maintain its national security by reducing both internal and external threats. ([Idrees, 2019](#)).

## **Conclusion**

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The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been complex and multifaceted. Throughout history, both countries share a border spanning over 2,400 kilometres, which has significant implications for their political, economic, and security dynamics. Both countries have suffered from cross-border attacks, exacerbating tensions and mutual distrust. Establishing effective border management and addressing security concerns remain critical challenges. Despite the historical challenges, Pakistan and Afghanistan have recognized the importance of economic cooperation. Efforts have been made to enhance bilateral trade, develop transportation infrastructure, and foster economic ties. However, trade barriers, political instability, and security concerns continue to impede the full potential of economic collaboration. Pakistan has played a crucial role in facilitating the Afghan peace process, leveraging its regional influence and historical ties to bring the parties to the negotiating table. Pakistan has acted as a mediator and facilitator between the Afghan government, the Taliban, and other stakeholders. It has provided platforms and venues for negotiations, encouraging direct dialogue and engagement. Pakistan's diplomatic efforts have been instrumental in creating an environment conducive to peace talks. Pakistan has utilized its historical ties with the Taliban to encourage their participation in the peace process. Through dialogue and persuasion, Pakistan has urged the Taliban to engage in negotiations, make concessions, and contribute to a political settlement that addresses the concerns of all Afghan stakeholders. As a neighbouring country, Pakistan's regional influence has been crucial in shaping the peace process. It has engaged with other regional actors, including China, Russia, and Iran, to garner support and coordination for the Afghan peace process. Pakistan's ability to

navigate regional dynamics and build consensus has contributed to the broader international efforts for peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan's cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts has been vital for the Afghan peace process. It has worked closely with international partners to combat

militant groups and disrupt their cross-border activities. By addressing security concerns and promoting stability, Pakistan has created an environment more conducive to negotiations and peace-building.



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