

Pak-Afghan Relations through the Lens of Regional Security Issue



p- ISSN: 2708-2121

e-ISSN: 2708-3616

L- ISSN: 2708-2121

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Abstract

The study describes the key challenges and obstacles that have shaped the dynamics between the two countries Pakistan and Afghanistan in the regional security context. By examining the historical, political, economic, and social factors that have influenced their relationship. However, their relationship has been characterized by a mix of cooperation and conflict, with a history of disputes over territory, trade, and religious and ethnic differences. Both countries have suffered from terrorism and militant attacks. The study provides insight into the underlying causes of the persistent tensions and conflicts in the region. Further, it finds how to address these challenges and promote greater cooperation and understanding between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Key Words: Afghanistan, Security, Regional

Pak-Afghan relations and security issues

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a porous border that stretches 2,600 KM. The two countries have a shared history, culture, and religion, which have created close ties between the people of the two nations. In the 1950s and 1960s, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan improved significantly as both countries sought to align themselves with the United States during the Cold War. However, tensions flared up again in the 1970s when Afghanistan supported Pashtun separatist movements in Pakistan, and Pakistan provided support to anti-government factions in Afghanistan (Baha, 1986)

Over the years, Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of interfering in its internal affairs, particularly during the Soviet-Afghan War and the subsequent Afghan civil war. These historical factors created a backdrop of mistrust and suspicion that shaped the dynamics between Karzai's Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained strained during the Karzai era, with both countries accusing each other of supporting insurgent groups operating on their respective territories. The factors that influenced the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship are examined in detail below.

Boarder Issue Between the Two States

After gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1947, Pakistan sought to establish a strong relationship with its neighbour to the west. However, tensions began to emerge soon after Afghanistan gained independence in 1919 when it refused to recognize the Durand Line, a disputed border drawn by the British in 1893 that divided the Pashtun tribes between Afghanistan and British India. One of the key issues that needs to be addressed is the problem of cross-border militancy. Due to the lack of clear demarcation and cultural ties, the people living along the Durand Line often cross the border willingly and do not respect its boundaries. Family ties extend across

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the border through inter-tribal marriages, and many locals have properties or homelands in both Pakistan and Afghanistan ([Cheema, 1983](#))

Soviet Withdrawal

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, the country descended into civil war, with various factions vying for power. Pakistan supported the Taliban, a militant group that emerged from the chaos and took control of Afghanistan in 1996, while Afghanistan accused Pakistan of providing support to other militant groups operating in the country. The situation escalated further in the 1980s when Pakistan, with the support of the United States, began providing training and weapons to the Afghan Mujahideen to fight against Soviet forces that had invaded Afghanistan ([Edward, 1986](#)) This led to a flood of refugees into Pakistan, and the establishment of militant groups and refugee camps that continue to cause security concerns in the region

Pak-Afghan Relations in the Karzai Government

The Karzai government made some significant achievements in promoting socio-economic development in Afghanistan, such as improving access to basic social services, expanding infrastructure, and increasing economic growth. However, progress was often slow, and the country faced ongoing challenges, such as insecurity, corruption, and weak governance. The government also faced criticism for its failure to address poverty and inequality adequately. The Karzai government made several efforts to tackle insurgency and terrorism in Afghanistan during its tenure. These included efforts to negotiate with the Taliban, pursue reconciliation with former militants, and strengthen the Afghan security forces. However, progress was often slow, and the government faced ongoing challenges, such as corruption and lack of capacity. Additionally, some critics argued that the government's efforts were not sufficient to address the root causes of insurgency and terrorism ([Ghufran, 2006](#)).

Despite these tensions, Karzai also made efforts to engage with Pakistan and seek its support for the peace process in Afghanistan. In 2007, he initiated the Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Peace Jirga, which brought together Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders, politicians, and intellectuals to discuss peace and reconciliation in the region. Overall, Karzai's policies towards Pakistan were marked by a mix of cooperation and criticism. He recognized the importance of a stable relationship between the two countries but also believed that Pakistan needed to take stronger action against militant groups operating within its borders.

There were instances of collaboration between Karzai's government and Pakistan in pursuit of reconciliation and peace talks with the Taliban. Pakistan played a significant role in facilitating negotiations, hosting several rounds of talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. These efforts aimed to find a political solution to the conflict in Afghanistan and promote stability in the region. However, progress was limited, and mistrust continued to plague the relationship.

Regional Security Challenges

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a border that stretches over 2,600 kilometres, making their relationship significant in the context of regional stability and security ([Muzaffar, Jathol & Yaseen, 2017](#)). The history of their relations has been marked by periods of cooperation and conflict. Pakistan was one of the few countries to officially recognize the Taliban government in Afghanistan in the late 1990s ([Tober, 2007](#)) After the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Pakistan played a complicated role. On one hand, it was a U.S. ally in the War on Terror, but on the other hand, there were accusations of elements within Pakistan's intelligence agency supporting the Afghan Taliban. Both countries have accused each other of harbouring and supporting militant groups that have launched attacks across the border. This has strained relations, with Afghanistan alleging that the Taliban receives support from elements within Pakistan. They have cooperated on projects like the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) to facilitate trade and transit of goods ([Dupree, 2004](#))

China is an important player in the region and has an interests in stabilizing Afghanistan. Pakistan has close ties with China through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and this relationship can influence Pakistan's stance on Afghanistan. In this context, the relationship between Afghanistan and its neighbours, including Pakistan, Iran, and China, as well as the United States and other Western countries, is of great importance. Each of these actors has a role to play in shaping the future of Afghanistan, and the success of any peace process will depend on the cooperation and engagement of all relevant parties ([Greene, 2017](#))

Refugee Crises Links Regional Security

Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees over the years, which has put significant strain on its resources. The presence of a large Afghan refugee population has been a point of tension at times. The situation in Afghanistan evolved significantly with the Taliban's takeover in August 2021. Pakistan was among the few countries that initially recognized the Taliban government, citing the need for engagement for stability.

Security Challenges to Pakistan

Security challenges and border issues further complicate the Karzai-Pakistan relationship. Both countries faced common threats from terrorist organizations such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda. However, Afghanistan accused Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), of backing certain militant factions that targeted Afghan security forces. The porous border between the two countries facilitated the movement of militants and illicit activities, exacerbating tensions and straining relations ([Hatam, 2019](#)) Pakistan accused Rabbani of colluding with India to undermine the Peshawar Agreement and infringe upon Pakistan's interests. During this period, Pakistani citizens in Kabul were unjustly labelled as enemy agents, leading to a significant deterioration in the relationship between the two countries. As a result, the Pakistani embassy in Kabul was shut down in July 1994, followed by the closure of the Pak-Afghan border. From the ashes of this conflict between rival powers in southern Afghanistan, a new force known as the Taliban emerged unexpectedly ([Hiegemann, 2014](#)).

Pakistan has been accused of supporting the Taliban in order to counter Indian influence in Afghanistan, and to ensure that Afghanistan remains friendly to Pakistan. Pakistan has denied these accusations, but there is evidence that the country has provided support to the Taliban, including weapons and safe haven ([Khan, 2017](#))

War on Terror

Pakistan condemned this brutal act and publicly declared wrong, terrorism in all its demonstration. The United States warned the Taliban, the government of Afghanistan, to hand over Osama Bin Laden or face the hard times. However, the Taliban refused completely to hand over Osama as their guest according to Afghanistan who fought to free their homeland from the Russians. Besides that, America decided to attack Afghanistan to destroy Osama and its terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, fall apart the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, giving exceptional and unparalleled amassing of power to the Northern Alliance, which was mainly a non-Pakhtuns entity ([Noor, 2006](#))

Pakistan had to face the U.S. in the war against Al Qaida and either therefore the Taliban continued with their support or are the victim of yank retaliation the Taliban or standing. Pakistan chose to support the international coalition and provided bases for intelligence, flight corridors and logistical support recovery within the October 7 US invasion of Afghanistan 2001. George Tenet, former head of the CIA, records Pakistan's efforts to bring the Taliban to the table and avoid war. In 2009, Pakistan began constructing a fence along its border with Afghanistan to stop the movement of militants. However, the fence was not popular in Afghanistan, as it was seen as a violation of Afghan sovereignty. The Karzai government opposed the fence and claimed that it would not solve the problem of cross-border terrorism.

Regional Security Challenges

The Taliban played a significant role in shaping the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship during the Karzai era. While Pakistan officially supported the US-led coalition forces in their fight against the Taliban, there were allegations that Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), provided support to the Taliban. This support was seen as a way for Pakistan to exert influence in Afghanistan and counter the growing influence of India in the region. Afghanistan accused Pakistan of harbouring Taliban leaders and providing them with safe havens in Pakistan's tribal areas. This led to a breakdown in relations between the two countries, with Afghanistan accusing Pakistan of supporting terrorism and Pakistan accusing Afghanistan of failing to control its border with Pakistan. The growing influence of India in Afghanistan was seen as a threat by Pakistan during the Karzai era. India provided aid and support to Afghanistan's government, including the construction of roads, hospitals, and other infrastructure. This was seen as a way for India to exert influence in the region and counter Pakistan's influence.

Pakistan viewed India's involvement in Afghanistan as a security threat, as it believed that India was using Afghanistan as a base to launch terrorist attacks against Pakistan. This led to tensions between Pakistan and India, with both countries accusing each other of supporting insurgent groups.

Conclusion

Security challenges, historical factors, and border issues further complicate the dynamics. Efforts for reconciliation and peace talks provided brief moments of cooperation, but underlying mistrust persisted. Overall, the demarcation process of the Durand Line involved negotiations, disputes, and agreements between the British and Afghan governments. It aimed to establish a clear border between British India and Afghanistan, but it also resulted in territorial claims and disputes that would continue to be contentious in the years to come. The inability of both countries to secure their borders led to a breakdown in relations between the two countries, with both countries accusing each other of supporting insurgent groups. The two countries have different views on the legitimacy of the border, and the concept of Pakhtunistan has further complicated their relationship. The issue has been exploited by external actors to influence the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship, making it even more complex.

This issue has further complicated the already complex relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which has been marred by various other factors such as cross-border terrorism, refugee influx, and drug trafficking. External actors have also used this issue to influence the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship, adding to the complexity of the matter. It is true that the resolution of these issues ultimately rests with Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, the international community, including neighbouring countries and global powers, may have a role to play in facilitating dialogue and promoting peaceful resolution of disputes. Ultimately, the stability and security of the region are important for the well-being of its people and for regional and global peace and stability ([Ahmadi, 2016](#)).

Recommendations

Overall, it is essential for both Pakistan and Afghanistan to maintain open lines of communication, enhance cooperation in various sectors, and address mutual concerns through dialogue and diplomacy. By fostering trust, resolving disputes, and promoting regional integration, the two countries can contribute to peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

It is also important for Pakistan to address the root causes of militancy and extremism within its own borders, such as poverty, lack of education, and political instability. Addressing these issues can help prevent the spread of militancy and extremism and reduce the likelihood of cross-border attacks. These militants then carried out attacks that worsened the relationship between Afghanistan and the country from which they had fled.

The Pakistani government and security forces should take immediate steps to address this issue and prevent such attacks from occurring in the future. This may involve increasing security

measures along the border, improving intelligence gathering and sharing with Afghan authorities, and taking diplomatic measures to engage with Afghanistan to address the issue.

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