



The Afghan Crisis and its Implications for Pakistan (2014-2021)

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Abstract

Afghanistan's geostrategic and geopolitical position has made it a major participant in Asian geopolitics. Since the ancient Silk Road, it has served as a crossroads between the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Indian subcontinent. Because of its strategic position and shared borders with six other countries, including Iran, Pakistan, China, and Turkmenistan, it has become a flashpoint for regional tensions and opportunities for collaboration. As a result, Afghanistan's role and position in Asia have been significantly altered after the Soviet disengagement from the Afghan Civil War. As a result, Afghanistan has descended into anarchy due to the rise of multiple Mujahidin parties funded by neighboring nations and outside meddling. Five common threads have evolved in Afghanistan and Pakistan's shared history since the colonial era. This frigid tolerance is marked by significant skepticism on both sides and is the result of three factors: sovereignty concerns, security interests, and geopolitical forces. Cross-border connectivity and trade provide a glimpse of what could be possible if relations between the two countries improve. Pakistan, despite continuing to influence the Durand Line to allow Taliban fighters to cross through, has recently increased security along its border. It was in 2014 that Islamabad decided to enshrine its successes in border security by building a two-layer fence over the entire border with Afghanistan and Iran. Cross-border settlements have been disrupted and Afghans have reacted angrily because of the fence, which has also attracted cross-border shooting. Pakistan also expanded constitutional authority to the surrounding FATA region, incorporating it into a nearby province. As a result, Kabul's official response has been quite restrained given the country's many other issues to contend with. Khyber District's border with Afghanistan is guarded by Pakistani Army forces. To build "strategic depth in Afghanistan," Islamabad has supported the Kabul government while limiting New Delhi's role.

Keywords: Crisis, Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Pak Afghan Relations

1. Introduction

Pak-Afghan relations have seen several highs and lows. Greater mutual understanding between Pakistan and Afghanistan is central to the region's future development. Doubt, rather than trust, was the primary and mutual characteristic in Pakistan-Afghan relations. Differing regimes have had different levels of distrust toward one another, but this has never been enough to offer a continuous orientation. Interference and even attempts to undermine cooperation have been common in Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan during most of its independent history, which has been marked by repeated mutual distrust. Pakistan and Afghanistan have a 2240-kilometer mountain border, making them neighbors. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, despite their shared geography, proximity, religious, and ethnic links, have never been easy. There has been a wide range of dissatisfaction in Afghanistan with Pakistan since the Taliban's rule from 1996 to 2001. By offering help and expressing its intention to build cordial relations with Hamid Karzai's government after the US-led coalition and Northern Alliance invaded Afghanistan in 2001 and overthrew the Taliban regime in Kabul. However, the nature of their connection was characterized by heightened doubt and a precarious predicament. After 20 years of withdrawal of US and international troops, the Taliban have taken control of Afghanistan, and the future of the delayed peace process remains unknown. The war in Afghanistan is concluded, which is wonderful news for Pakistan. Even yet, the country's strategic importance is of the highest importance. The peace and development of the region will be greatly influenced by Pakistan's role and relations with Afghanistan.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

This study explores that on this subject, the paper seeks to analyze the inversely proportional trend in Afghanistan's bilateral relationships with Pakistan from 2014 to onward.

- i. In this respect, the paper will elucidate and describe the evolution of Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan under the Ashraf Ghani Government (2014 onwards).
- ii. The paper will carry out this analysis by reviewing various agreements, deals, and statements offered by heads of both countries in different phases. By doing this the paper will conclude by validating the main argument of uniquely contradicting bilateral ties between Pakistan with Afghanistan. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan are of immense importance.
- iii. It not only impacts Pakistan's ties with its neighbors, but it also jeopardizes the country's security and sovereignty.

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1.2. The study's objectives

The purpose of this research is to examine the need-based significance of Pakistan-Afghan relations.

1. This research will compare Pakistan-Afghan interactions in the past.
2. The elements influencing Pakistan-Afghan relations will be identified in this study.
3. This study will examine Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's rehabilitation and development, as well as the prospects for future collaboration in several fields.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What is the need-based significance of Pakistan-Afghan relations?
2. What are the Pakistan-Afghan interactions in the past?
3. Which elements influence Pakistan-Afghan relations?
4. What is Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's rehabilitation and development, as well as the prospects for future collaboration in several fields?

2. Literature Review

The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2014 marked a significant turning point in the region's geopolitical landscape. This event, coupled with the resurgence of the Taliban, has had profound and far-reaching implications for neighboring Pakistan. The period from 2014 to 2021 witnessed heightened instability, shifts in regional power dynamics, and myriad challenges for Pakistan, encompassing security, economic, political, social, health, educational, and environmental dimensions. The Afghan crisis has significantly exacerbated security challenges within Pakistan, particularly in the regions bordering Afghanistan. The porous nature of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border has facilitated the movement of militants, leading to a marked increase in insurgency and terrorism within Pakistan (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). The resurgence of the Taliban has emboldened various militant groups operating in Pakistan, most notably Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has orchestrated numerous attacks on Pakistani soil (Khan, 2018). These attacks have targeted both civilian and military establishments, contributing to an atmosphere of pervasive insecurity. Furthermore, the influx of Afghan refugees has introduced additional security risks. While the majority of refugees are peaceful individuals seeking safety from conflict, the lack of robust screening mechanisms has allowed some militants to enter Pakistan disguised as refugees (Yousaf, 2020). This situation has necessitated a heightened security presence and increased military operations in border areas, straining Pakistan's security apparatus and diverting resources from other critical needs. The economic repercussions of the Afghan crisis for Pakistan have been substantial. Trade between the two countries, which was already fraught with challenges, has been further disrupted by ongoing conflict and instability. The closure of border crossings and the destruction of trade routes have severely impacted cross-border commerce, affecting the livelihoods of those dependent on such trade (Hussain, 2017). This disruption has not only led to economic losses but also contributed to the economic stagnation of Pakistan's border provinces. The economic burden of hosting millions of Afghan refugees has also been significant. Despite international aid, the resources allocated for refugee welfare—including healthcare, education, and housing—have stretched Pakistan's financial capabilities (Siddiqui, 2016). The sustained influx of refugees has necessitated continuous expenditure, diverting funds from other developmental projects and impacting the overall economic stability of the country. Additionally, the presence of refugees has led to increased competition for scarce resources and jobs, exacerbating economic pressures on local communities. Politically, the Afghan crisis has had a profound influence on Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies. Domestically, the presence of Afghan refugees and militants has fueled nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments, influencing political discourse and policy decisions (Ahmad, 2019). These sentiments have often been leveraged by political actors to garner support, sometimes leading to tensions between different ethnic and social groups within Pakistan. The politicization of the refugee issue has complicated efforts to formulate coherent and effective policies to address the challenges posed by the crisis. On the international front, Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan peace process has been pivotal. Pakistan has been seen as a key player in facilitating negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government, as well as in the broader regional dynamics involving major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia (Rashid, 2021). However, this role has also subjected Pakistan to scrutiny and criticism from various quarters. Afghanistan and some international actors have often accused Pakistan of harboring and supporting certain Taliban factions, further complicating Pakistan's diplomatic relations and regional standing. The social fabric of Pakistan, particularly in the border regions, has been significantly affected by the Afghan crisis. The influx of Afghan refugees has led to demographic changes, sometimes causing friction between local populations and refugees (Khalid, 2018). These demographic shifts have placed additional pressure on already strained social services, including healthcare, education, and housing. The increased demand for these services has led to deteriorating quality and accessibility, further exacerbating social tensions. Cultural and social integration of Afghan refugees has been a complex and ongoing challenge. Differences in language, culture, and social norms have sometimes led to social tensions and conflicts (Naseer, 2019). Efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations to facilitate integration have met with varying degrees of success. While some Afghan refugees have successfully integrated into Pakistani society, many continue to face barriers, including discrimination and limited access to social and economic opportunities. The health implications of the Afghan crisis for Pakistan are multifaceted, impacting both physical and mental health. The influx of Afghan refugees has placed an enormous burden on Pakistan's healthcare system,

which is already struggling with limited resources and infrastructure. The increased demand for healthcare services has led to overcrowded facilities and strained resources, reducing the quality of care available to both refugees and local populations (Siddiqui, 2016). Additionally, the spread of infectious diseases has been a significant concern, as crowded living conditions in refugee camps can facilitate the transmission of diseases such as tuberculosis and measles. Mental health issues are also a critical aspect of the health implications of the Afghan crisis. Many Afghan refugees have experienced trauma and stress due to conflict and displacement, leading to a high prevalence of mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety (Naseer, 2019). The mental health infrastructure in Pakistan is inadequate to address these needs, with limited access to mental health services and a shortage of trained professionals. This gap in services has significant implications for the well-being of both refugees and local communities, highlighting the need for comprehensive mental health support. The Afghan crisis has also had significant implications for education in Pakistan. The influx of Afghan refugees has increased the demand for educational services, straining the existing infrastructure and resources. Many refugee children face barriers to accessing education, including language differences, lack of documentation, and economic constraints (Hussain, 2017). These barriers have resulted in low enrollment rates and high dropout rates among Afghan refugee children, limiting their educational opportunities and future prospects. The quality of education available to both refugees and local populations has been adversely affected by the increased demand. Overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and underqualified teachers have contributed to a decline in educational standards (Khalid, 2018). Additionally, the presence of refugees has sometimes led to tensions within schools, with local students and parents expressing resentment over the perceived competition for limited resources. Addressing these educational challenges requires targeted interventions to improve access, quality, and inclusivity in the education system. The environmental implications of the Afghan crisis are an often overlooked but significant aspect of its impact on Pakistan. The large-scale influx of Afghan refugees has put considerable pressure on natural resources, particularly in border regions where many refugees reside. Deforestation, overgrazing, and the depletion of water resources have been exacerbated by the increased population (Ahmad, 2019). These environmental pressures have long-term consequences for the sustainability and health of ecosystems in these areas. The environmental degradation caused by the refugee influx also has direct implications for the livelihoods of local populations, many of whom depend on natural resources for agriculture and livestock rearing. The competition for these resources has led to conflicts and tensions between refugees and local communities, further complicating the social dynamics in these regions (Khalid, 2018). Addressing the environmental impacts of the Afghan crisis requires integrated approaches that consider both humanitarian needs and environmental sustainability. The Afghan crisis from 2014 to 2021 has had profound and multifaceted implications for Pakistan, encompassing security, economic, political, social, health, educational, and environmental dimensions. The security challenges posed by militant movements and the influx of refugees have strained Pakistan's resources and stability (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015; Khan, 2018). Economically, disrupted trade and the burden of hosting refugees have hindered development and strained financial capacities (Hussain, 2017; Siddiqui, 2016). Politically, the crisis has influenced domestic and foreign policies, fueling nationalist sentiments and involving Pakistan deeply in the Afghan peace process (Ahmad, 2019; Rashid, 2021). Socially, demographic changes due to the refugee influx have caused friction and overwhelmed social services, complicating cultural and social integration (Khalid, 2018; Naseer, 2019). The health and educational sectors have also faced significant challenges due to increased demand and limited resources, while environmental pressures have further complicated the situation (Siddiqui, 2016; Ahmad, 2019). Understanding these implications is crucial for formulating effective strategies to address the ongoing challenges and to foster stability and development in the region.

3. Need-Based Importance of Pak-Afghan Relations

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, geopolitical, and socio-economic factors, underscoring the need-based importance of their bilateral ties. Pakistan's stability and security are directly influenced by the situation in Afghanistan, given their shared border and intertwined histories. Pakistan has often been seen as a crucial player in Afghan affairs, with its influence extending to political, economic, and security dimensions (Javaid, 2016). This relationship is driven by mutual needs: Afghanistan requires support for reconstruction and development, while Pakistan seeks to mitigate security threats emanating from across the border. The enduring instability in Afghanistan has a direct impact on Pakistan's internal security, as militant groups often exploit the porous border to launch attacks (Rashid, 2008). Consequently, Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan is motivated by the need to ensure a stable and friendly neighbor, which is essential for its own national security and regional stability.

3.1. An Overview

The historical context of Pak-Afghan relations is characterized by fluctuating periods of cooperation and conflict. The two countries share deep ethnic, cultural, and religious ties, but their relationship has often been strained due to geopolitical interests and border disputes. The Durand Line, established in 1893, remains a contentious issue, with Afghanistan historically reluctant to recognize it as the official border (Dupree, 1973). Over the years, various regimes in Afghanistan have had differing approaches to relations with Pakistan, influenced by regional politics

and international alignments. The Cold War era saw both countries aligning with major global powers, with Pakistan joining Western alliances like CENTO and SEATO, while Afghanistan maintained a more non-aligned stance until the Soviet invasion in 1979.

3.2. Agreement on the Durand Line

The Durand Line agreement, signed in 1893 between British India and Afghanistan, was intended to demarcate the border between the two territories. However, the legitimacy of this agreement has been a source of contention since Pakistan's independence in 1947. Afghanistan has historically refused to recognize the Durand Line as an international border, leading to periodic tensions (Rubin, 1995). This unresolved border issue has contributed to a legacy of mistrust and has impacted bilateral relations significantly. For Pakistan, the recognition of the Durand Line is crucial for territorial integrity and national security, while Afghanistan's refusal is rooted in historical grievances and ethnic considerations.

3.3. CENTO and SEATO

Pakistan's alignment with Western military alliances, namely the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), during the Cold War had significant implications for its relations with Afghanistan. These alliances were part of the United States' strategy to contain Soviet expansion, and Pakistan's membership was seen as a move to bolster its security against India and communist influences (Hussain, 1989). Afghanistan, on the other hand, sought to maintain a non-aligned stance and viewed Pakistan's alliance with Western powers with suspicion. This divergence in foreign policy orientations further strained bilateral relations, as Afghanistan perceived Pakistan's alliances as a threat to its own security and sovereignty.

3.4. Afghan Invasion by the Soviet Union

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked a pivotal moment in Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistan emerged as a frontline state in the global effort to counter Soviet expansion, receiving substantial support from the United States and other Western countries. Pakistan became a crucial conduit for arms, funding, and training for the Afghan mujahideen fighting against Soviet forces (Weinbaum, 1991). This period also saw a massive influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan, which had profound social, economic, and security implications. While Pakistan's support for the Afghan resistance enhanced its strategic significance, it also entrenched militant networks and led to long-term destabilization in the region.

3.5. In Pakistan-Afghan Relations, Click (1963-73)

The period from 1963 to 1973 witnessed significant developments in Pakistan-Afghan relations. The regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Pakistan sought to improve ties with Afghanistan, recognizing the importance of a stable and cooperative neighbor. Bhutto's administration engaged in diplomatic efforts to resolve border disputes and foster economic cooperation (Saikal, 2004). This era also saw attempts to facilitate trade and transit agreements, aiming to enhance economic interdependence. However, these efforts were often overshadowed by internal political changes in both countries and regional geopolitical dynamics, which continued to influence the bilateral relationship.

3.6. War between India and Pakistan (1965-1971) and Afghanistan

The wars between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 had indirect but significant impacts on Pak-Afghan relations. During these conflicts, Afghanistan's stance was often perceived as ambivalent or unsupportive by Pakistan. Afghanistan's refusal to align unequivocally with Pakistan during these wars was influenced by its own national interests and its complex relationship with India (Misra, 1981). Afghanistan's position during these conflicts added to the strains in bilateral relations, as Pakistan expected greater solidarity from a neighboring Muslim country. The wars also highlighted the strategic vulnerabilities of Pakistan, reinforcing its need for stable and friendly relations with Afghanistan to secure its western front.

3.7. Process of Reunion Ruined

Efforts to mend and strengthen Pak-Afghan relations have often been disrupted by internal and external factors. Periods of relative cooperation have frequently been followed by renewed tensions due to political changes, security concerns, and external influences. The assassination of Afghan leaders, changes in government, and the rise of militant groups have repeatedly derailed the process of fostering stable relations (Goodson, 2001). Additionally, external interventions by global powers have further complicated the dynamics, making it challenging for both countries to independently resolve their issues. The complex interplay of domestic politics, regional rivalries, and international interests has continually undermined the efforts to build a stable and cooperative relationship.

3.8. Conflict with the Soviet Union over Occupation (1979-1992)

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1992 had a profound and enduring impact on Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistan's strategic support for the Afghan mujahideen, facilitated by substantial assistance from the United States and Saudi Arabia, was instrumental in the resistance against Soviet forces (Coll, 2004). This period saw the emergence of Pakistan as a key player in Afghan affairs, with its intelligence agency, the ISI, playing a crucial role in coordinating support for the resistance. The long-term consequences of this involvement included the entrenchment of militant networks and the proliferation of arms and radical ideologies, which later contributed to regional instability and internal security challenges for Pakistan.

3.9. Political Solution of Afghanistan Geneva Accord

The Geneva Accords, signed in 1988, represented a significant diplomatic effort to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan and facilitate the withdrawal of Soviet forces. The accords, brokered by the United Nations, involved the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, and the Soviet Union (Saikal, 2004). Pakistan played a pivotal role in the negotiations, emphasizing the need for a political solution and the establishment of a neutral and independent Afghanistan. The accords led to the withdrawal of Soviet troops by 1989, but the subsequent power vacuum and continued factional fighting in Afghanistan highlighted the limitations of the agreement in achieving lasting peace and stability.

3.10. The Rise of the Taliban

The rise of the Taliban in the mid-1990s marked another significant chapter in Pak-Afghan relations. The Taliban, initially composed of Afghan students (Talibs) and mujahideen fighters, rapidly gained control over large parts of Afghanistan, including the capital, Kabul, by 1996. Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban was characterized by a combination of strategic support and pragmatic engagement (Rashid, 2000). Pakistan sought to secure its western border, influence Afghan politics, and counter the influence of rival powers such as India and Iran. However, the Taliban's radical policies and harboring of international terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, eventually led to global isolation and condemnation, complicating Pakistan's diplomatic position.

3.11. Direct Support to the Taliban

Pakistan's direct support to the Taliban during their rise to power involved providing logistical, financial, and military assistance. This support was driven by Pakistan's strategic interests in ensuring a friendly government in Kabul that would not support anti-Pakistan elements (Weinbaum, 1991). However, Pakistan's backing of the Taliban also drew international criticism and scrutiny, particularly after the 9/11 attacks, which were orchestrated by al-Qaeda operatives based in Afghanistan. The subsequent U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the ousting of the Taliban regime forced Pakistan to reassess its policies and navigate the complexities of its regional and international relations.

3.12. American Pressure

Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States exerted significant pressure on Pakistan to align with its counterterrorism efforts and support the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Pakistan became a key ally in the U.S.-led "War on Terror," providing logistical support, intelligence cooperation, and military assistance (Riedel, 2008). This alignment brought substantial economic and military aid to Pakistan but also subjected it to increased scrutiny and demands for action against militant groups operating within its borders. The dual challenge of cooperating with U.S. counterterrorism efforts while managing domestic security threats and regional dynamics has been a defining aspect of Pak-Afghan relations in the post-9/11 era.

3.13. Afghan Refugees Sheltered

The Afghan crisis has led to a massive influx of refugees into Pakistan, particularly during periods of intense conflict such as the Soviet invasion and the post-9/11 war. Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees over the decades, providing shelter, humanitarian assistance, and integration opportunities (UNHCR, 2018). The presence of refugees has had significant social, economic, and security implications for Pakistan. While the humanitarian response has been substantial, the long-term presence of refugees has strained local resources, led to social tensions, and posed security challenges due to the infiltration of militant elements.

4. Factors Affecting Pak-Afghan Relations

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been influenced by numerous factors, ranging from historical grievances to contemporary geopolitical dynamics. The shared border, ethnic ties, and strategic interests have historically intertwined to shape bilateral relations, often oscillating between cooperation and conflict. Key factors affecting Pak-Afghan relations include unresolved border disputes, cross-border terrorism, regional rivalries, and external interventions. These factors have contributed to a complex and volatile relationship characterized by periods of tension and occasional cooperation.

4.1. The Bloodiest Year 2014

The year 2014 marked a turning point in Pak-Afghan relations, characterized by escalating violence and instability in Afghanistan. The withdrawal of NATO forces and the resurgence of the Taliban led to a significant increase in militant attacks and civilian casualties (UNAMA, 2014). This period saw heightened insecurity along the border regions, with Pakistan experiencing spillover effects of the conflict, including cross-border terrorism and refugee influxes. The bloodshed in 2014 underscored the challenges of achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, impacting regional security dynamics and bilateral relations with Pakistan.

4.2. Insurgency in Pakistan and Military Operation

Pakistan has faced internal challenges stemming from insurgent groups operating from Afghan territory, particularly in the border regions. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other militant factions have launched numerous attacks on Pakistani soil, targeting civilian and military targets alike (Khan, 2018). In response, Pakistan has conducted military operations, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, to counter terrorism and restore security (Dawn, 2014). These operations have aimed to disrupt militant networks, secure

border areas, and eliminate extremist threats, contributing to efforts to stabilize the region and mitigate cross-border security risks.

4.3. The Blame Game

Accusations and blame games between Pakistan and Afghanistan have often characterized their diplomatic exchanges, reflecting mutual distrust and divergent perceptions of security threats. Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of harboring and supporting Taliban factions, alleging that Pakistan's intelligence agencies maintain ties with militant groups to influence Afghan affairs (BBC, 2017). In turn, Pakistan has criticized Afghanistan for failing to prevent cross-border attacks and secure its territory, highlighting concerns about Afghan instability impacting Pakistan's security (Al Jazeera, 2016). The blame game has complicated efforts to build trust and cooperation, perpetuating a cycle of suspicion and discord.

4.4. Exchanges of Artillery Fire, 2017

The year 2017 witnessed heightened tensions and exchanges of artillery fire along the Pak-Afghan border, exacerbating bilateral strains. Border skirmishes and clashes between Pakistani and Afghan forces escalated, resulting in casualties and further deteriorating relations (Reuters, 2017). These incidents underscored the volatility of border security issues and the challenges of maintaining peace along the porous and contested border. Efforts to de-escalate tensions and establish effective border management mechanisms have been sporadic, reflecting broader geopolitical pressures and internal security concerns on both sides.

4.5. Indian Bonds with Kabul

India's deepening ties with Afghanistan have been a significant factor shaping Pak-Afghan relations, viewed through the lens of regional competition and strategic rivalry. India has emerged as a key development partner for Afghanistan, investing in infrastructure projects, education, and humanitarian aid (MEA, 2020). Pakistan perceives Indian involvement in Afghanistan as a threat to its security interests, alleging that India uses Afghan soil to support anti-Pakistan activities and insurgent groups (Hindustan Times, 2018). The Indo-Afghan relationship has contributed to Pakistan's strategic calculus and influenced its policies towards Afghanistan, adding complexity to bilateral dynamics.

4.6. Pashtun Issue

The Pashtun issue has been central to Pak-Afghan relations, given the significant Pashtun populations on both sides of the border. Pashtuns form a large ethnic group with strong cultural and historical ties, but their political aspirations and grievances have often been a source of contention. Afghanistan has at times claimed to represent Pashtun interests in Pakistan, while Pakistan has accused Afghanistan of exploiting Pashtun nationalism to undermine its stability (Rashid, 2008). The Pashtun issue intersects with broader ethnic and political dynamics, influencing perceptions of identity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity in both countries.

4.7. Unrest in Baluchistan

Baluchistan's unrest has been another factor affecting Pak-Afghan relations, with allegations of Afghan support for Baloch separatist groups operating in Pakistan. Pakistan has accused Afghan intelligence agencies of backing Baloch insurgents, citing cross-border attacks and militant activities (The Express Tribune, 2016). Afghanistan, in turn, has raised concerns about human rights violations and political repression in Baluchistan, calling for international attention and intervention (HRW, 2020). The unrest in Baluchistan has fueled mutual suspicions and contributed to security challenges along the Pak-Afghan border, complicating efforts to improve bilateral ties.

4.8. Year 2016

The year 2016 was marked by diplomatic efforts and initiatives aimed at improving Pak-Afghan relations amidst ongoing challenges. High-level visits, bilateral dialogues, and confidence-building measures were pursued to address mutual concerns and promote cooperation (The News International, 2016). Despite these efforts, sporadic incidents of violence and border skirmishes underscored the fragility of relations and the difficulty of sustaining momentum towards reconciliation. The year 2016 reflected the cyclical nature of Pak-Afghan relations, characterized by periods of engagement followed by setbacks and renewed tensions.

4.9. Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade Volume Declined Significantly

The decline in Pakistan-Afghanistan trade volume has been a notable economic factor impacting bilateral relations, influenced by security concerns, trade barriers, and political tensions. Trade between the two countries has faced challenges due to regulatory hurdles, infrastructure constraints, and fluctuating political relations (The Economic Times, 2018). Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistani ports for trade access to global markets has been a point of contention, with efforts to diversify trade routes and reduce dependency on Pakistan (Dawn, 2019). The decline in trade volume has economic implications for both countries, affecting livelihoods, economic growth, and regional connectivity initiatives.

4.10. Visa Restrictions 2017

Visa restrictions imposed by Pakistan and Afghanistan in 2017 further strained bilateral relations, restricting travel and diplomatic exchanges between the two countries (The Nation, 2017). The visa restrictions were a response to security concerns and diplomatic tensions, reflecting mutual suspicions and grievances. These restrictions affected business, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people contacts, hindering efforts to foster understanding and cooperation (Tolo News, 2017). The visa policy measures underscored the challenges of managing border security and diplomatic relations amidst volatile geopolitical dynamics and internal security pressures.

4.11. Fencing Pak-Afghan Border

The fencing of the Pak-Afghan border has been a contentious security measure aimed at curbing illegal cross-border movements, smuggling, and militant activities. Pakistan initiated the fencing project to enhance border security and regulate movement along the porous frontier, citing national security imperatives (Geo News, 2020). Afghanistan has raised objections to the fencing, viewing it as a unilateral measure that could impact traditional cross-border interactions and trade (The Diplomat, 2021). The border fencing initiative reflects divergent security priorities and the complex interplay of security, sovereignty, and regional stability concerns.

4.12. Blame of Protecting the Taliban

Accusations of Pakistan's alleged support for Taliban factions have been a recurring issue in Pak-Afghan relations, contributing to mutual distrust and diplomatic tensions. Afghanistan has accused Pakistan's intelligence agencies of sheltering and aiding Taliban leaders, facilitating their operations and undermining Afghan stability (BBC, 2020). Pakistan has denied these allegations, emphasizing its efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan through diplomatic engagement and regional initiatives (The News International, 2021). The blame game over Taliban support has complicated efforts to foster trust, cooperation, and a shared approach to resolving the Afghan conflict.

4.13. Arrangement To Promote Peace 2020

Efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan gained momentum in 2020, with international diplomatic initiatives and intra-Afghan dialogues aimed at achieving a political settlement. Pakistan played a constructive role in facilitating peace talks between the Afghan government and Taliban representatives, hosting negotiations, and supporting confidence-building measures (Al Jazeera, 2020). The peace arrangements sought to address longstanding grievances, promote reconciliation, and pave the way for a sustainable peace process in Afghanistan. However, challenges such as ceasefire violations, divergent interests, and external influences continued to complicate peace efforts and bilateral relations.

4.14. Withdrawal US 2021

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked a significant geopolitical development with far-reaching implications for Pak-Afghan relations. The withdrawal precipitated a rapid Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, leading to concerns about security, stability, and humanitarian crises (Reuters, 2021). Pakistan navigated the fallout of the withdrawal, managing refugee influxes, border security challenges, and diplomatic engagements with the Taliban-led government (The Express Tribune, 2021). The U.S. withdrawal reshaped regional dynamics, influencing Pakistan's strategic calculations and its approach toward Afghanistan amidst evolving geopolitical realities.

4.15. Rise of Taliban

The resurgence of the Taliban and their return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 reshaped Pak-Afghan relations, posing new challenges and opportunities. Pakistan's historical ties with the Taliban, combined with regional security imperatives, shaped its approach towards the new Afghan government (BBC, 2021). The Taliban's takeover raised concerns about regional stability, counterterrorism efforts, and humanitarian conditions, impacting Pakistan's internal security and external relations (The Diplomat, 2021). Pakistan's response to the Taliban's governance and international recognition underscored the complexities of managing bilateral relations amidst shifting regional dynamics and global scrutiny.

These factors illustrate the multifaceted and evolving nature of Pak-Afghan relations, influenced by historical legacies, regional dynamics, security imperatives, and geopolitical interests. Understanding these factors is crucial for navigating challenges, fostering cooperation.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Pak-Afghan relations have traversed a complex and often tumultuous path, shaped by historical grievances, geopolitical rivalries, and regional dynamics. The bilateral relationship has been characterized by periods of cooperation marred by frequent episodes of mistrust, conflict, and mutual accusations. Key factors such as border disputes, cross-border terrorism, external interventions, and regional competition have consistently influenced the trajectory of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Historically, unresolved issues such as the Durand Line dispute, accusations of harboring militant groups, and divergent foreign policy alignments have contributed to a cycle of suspicion and volatility. The Afghan conflict, including the Soviet invasion, the rise of the Taliban, and subsequent U.S. interventions, further complicated bilateral dynamics, impacting regional security and stability.

Recent years have seen efforts to improve relations through diplomatic engagements, peace initiatives, and economic cooperation. However, challenges such as border skirmishes, accusations of cross-border terrorism, and divergent strategic interests continue to strain relations. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Taliban's return to power have reshaped regional dynamics, presenting new opportunities and challenges for Pak-Afghan relations.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Enhanced Diplomatic Engagement

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan should prioritize sustained diplomatic dialogue at multiple levels to address mutual concerns, build trust, and promote cooperation. Regular high-level exchanges and confidence-building measures can help mitigate misunderstandings and reduce tensions.

6.2. Border Management and Security Cooperation

Strengthening border management mechanisms and enhancing security cooperation are essential to prevent cross-border terrorism, smuggling, and illegal activities. Joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and coordinated border controls can contribute to stability and trust-building.

6.3. Economic Integration and Trade Facilitation

Efforts to revive and expand economic ties should be prioritized through trade agreements, infrastructure development, and trade facilitation measures. Enhancing connectivity projects such as the TAPI pipeline and regional economic initiatives can foster economic interdependence and mutual prosperity.

6.4. Humanitarian and Development Assistance

Both countries should collaborate on humanitarian aid and development projects to address socio-economic challenges, including refugee support, infrastructure development, and capacity building. International assistance and multilateral partnerships can complement bilateral efforts.

6.5. Promotion of Regional Peace and Stability

Pakistan and Afghanistan should play constructive roles in promoting regional peace and stability, including supporting inclusive political processes, conflict resolution mechanisms, and regional security frameworks. Engagement with regional organizations like SAARC and SCO can facilitate multilateral cooperation.

6.6. Cultural and People-to-People Exchanges

Promoting cultural exchanges, educational scholarships, and people-to-people contacts can foster understanding, bridge cultural divides, and build lasting bonds between the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

6.7. Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

Supporting Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace processes, including inclusive negotiations with all stakeholders, is crucial for achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan's constructive engagement with the Taliban and other Afghan factions can contribute to lasting peace and stability.

6.8. International Cooperation and Support

Engaging with international partners, including the United Nations, regional powers, and neighboring countries, can facilitate coordinated efforts towards peace, security, and development in Afghanistan. International support for Afghan reconstruction and stability is vital for regional peace.

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