A photograph of a man with a long white beard and a white cap, wearing a green jacket and pants, walking barefoot on a paved path. He is carrying a large, colorful sack on his back, secured with ropes. The background is a weathered brick wall. The lighting is bright, casting a long shadow of the man on the ground.

# Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Pitfalls and the Way Forward

Huma Baqai and Nausheen Wasi (Eds.)



# **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Pitfalls and the Way Forward**

**Huma Baqai and Nausheen Wasi (Eds.)**

September 2021

Editors

**Huma Baqai and Nausheen Wasi**

Responsible:

**Dr. Jochen Hippler** | Country Director  
**Hamayoun Khan** | Programme Coordinator  
**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)**, Pakistan Office

mprint

© 2021 **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)**, Pakistan Office  
1st Floor, 66-W, Junaid Plaza, Jinnah Avenue, Blue Area,  
P.O Box 1289, Islamabad, Pakistan

Phone: +92 51 2803391-4

Fax: +92 51 2803395

Website: <http://pakistan.fes.de>

Facebook: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Pakistan

Twitter: @FES\_PAK

Cover Photo:

Copyright Jochen Hippler

To order publication: [info@fes-pakistan.org](mailto:info@fes-pakistan.org)

Commercial use of all media published by the  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted  
without the written consent of the FES.

ISBN: 978-969-9675-30-0

The views expressed in this publication are not  
necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

## **Acknowledgements**

This book is a collective effort, without which it would not have seen the light of the day. As such, acknowledgements are due to:

- Dr. Hippler, Pakistan Country Director, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, (FES) for accepting our book proposal within days and agreeing to publish it
- Mr. Hamayoun Khan and Mr. Abdullah Dayo, Programme Coordinators, FES for facilitating the entire process
- Ms. Sabiha Mehreen, Project Coordinator and Ms. Maria Hassan from IBA.
- Dr. Kaiser Bengali for his never ending support

And most of all, to all our very esteemed contributors for agreeing to write scholarly chapters and for putting up with our requests for reviews.



This volume is dedicated to those who have paid the price of conflict  
with their lives, livelihoods and more...

آسیا یک پیکرِ آب و گل است  
ملت افغان در این پیکر دل است  
در کشاد او کشادِ آسیا  
در فساد او فسادِ آسیا

Asia is like a body made of water and clay  
The Afghan nation is like a heart in the body  
Peace in Afghanistan brings tranquillity in Asia  
Chaos in Afghanistan brings disorder in all Asia  
(Iqbal)





## Preface

### Rethinking Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has always been difficult. This has been true since the time of the founding of Pakistan, when Afghanistan at first had voted against admitting Pakistan as a member of the United Nations. The contested Durand line, drawn up by the British colonial power, has remained an ongoing point of conflict, since Pakistan considers it its international border, while Afghanistan does not recognize it. In the last decades, the relationship between both countries has remained complicated and was often characterized by political confrontation. While Pakistan's assistance in the struggle against the Soviet occupation was often appreciated, what has been perceived as "meddling in Afghan affairs" by many Afghans has created difficulties and resentment. A strong anti-Pakistani sentiment has developed in Afghanistan as a result. On the other hand, Pakistan has traditionally accused Afghanistan to cooperate with India against Pakistan, and of allowing anti-Pakistani militants operate from Afghan territory. Despite having much in common, the bilateral relationship of both countries, therefore, has often been marred by disputes. At the same time, the Durand Line, besides being a symbol of both colonial arrogance and Pakistan-Afghan enmity, also implied commonality. It was so contested exactly because the Pashtuns living on both sides of the border feel a shared history, a shared culture, and family and tribal relationships, which to many made the border feel artificial. Commonality and enmity at this point flowed from the same source.

Given the strong interlink between inter-state and inter-society relations between both countries it is quite surprising that in the past this relationship has only been discussed on a government-to-government level, in both countries. While in Afghanistan many observers have been focusing on the Pakistan Government's and the ISI's role in Afghanistan, most Pakistani analysts – both state functionaries, journalists, think tanks, and academics – have concentrated on the Afghan Government, and its real or imagined link to India. In Afghanistan it often has been overlooked that the ISI is not identical with Pakistan society (or even politics), while in Pakistan the dynamics and contradictions in Afghan society were typically ignored. This corresponded to some degree to the widespread misunderstanding in Western Governments and by academics in regard to Afghanistan, which led to

thinking. Western observers often were satisfied with a kind of Potemkin State in Afghanistan, and took the appearances of statehood, and democracy, for real. The sudden disappearance of the Afghan state in the first two weeks of August 2021 has proven that this state was artificial, and in some regards not even a real state, because it lacked functioning capacity in the countryside, and legitimacy. To a big degree, the lower levels of statehood outside the bigger cities had been taken over by selfish private interests, abusing the local population. Without some semblance of legitimacy statehood remains an empty shell – an observation which to a much lesser degree and under different circumstances might also become relevant in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The takeover of power in Afghanistan by the Taliban should be seen in this light. While the Taliban-led Government will be an important factor in future Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, it should not be considered the only, or even the main factor. Though it will be relevant which persons will become and which will remain members of the Government and what policies they will pursue, this might very well be a lesser factor for the future of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. More important might be questions like this: (1) Will the different Taliban groups be able to put their differences aside and manage to remain united and rule jointly? (2) Will the Taliban – or the ones who might keep on to power – be able to establish a functioning and more or less legitimate state in Afghanistan? (3) Will the strong tensions between the Taliban and relevant sectors of society (mostly in the cities) lead to more conflict and violence after a few years, or will it be possible to integrate them in to a new political system? And (4) will jihadist forces supported from abroad (like the so called “Islamic State” or al Qaida) be able to mount a serious challenge to the Taliban, or will they be able to use Afghan territory again for staging violent attacks against third countries, including Pakistan? Such and similar questions will probably be more relevant for Afghanistan-Pakistan relations than who will be a member of the Government.

In any case, the topic of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations will not be less important in the future, but probably even more so. The Taliban in power will open a new chapter in this relationship. This will be placed in a regional context, with besides Pakistan also Iran, China, and perhaps some of the Central Asian countries and India being involved. And it will also be written in the context of global competitions, both economically and in regard to the growing US-Chinese antagonism. The future of bilateral relations therefore will strongly be influenced by the interplay with these third-party actors, which mostly share an interest in a stable region. Economic development and regional peace will depend on the ability and willingness to cooperate across borders, and on stability and peace inside the countries concerned. Many countries, nearby and far away, will have to look for ways to interact and to some degree cooperate with the new regime in

Kabul. It is unlikely that the Taliban will be popular on the international stage, but still the need for cooperation exists. China seems to be interested in Afghanistan's natural resources and the development of infrastructure, Western countries will be interested in allowing former employees or potentially threatened Afghans emigrate and later regulating migration flows, and in a counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan. And the Central Asian countries will want to use Afghanistan as an export route for their natural gas and oil to Pakistan, India, and to the open sea of the Indian Ocean. If Afghanistan could avoid serious internal conflict and violence, build a stable and functioning state, and utilize the potential for regional cooperation, it would transform into a major economic and political opportunity for Pakistan. If, on the other hand, Afghanistan would fall back on its long history of conflict and war, or if it will take the road of an extremist ideological state, repressing ethnic and religious minorities, dissidents, and women, then Afghanistan might become a serious embarrassment for Pakistan, which has some co-responsibility for creating the Taliban regime. In the first case, Pakistan might become a bridge between Afghanistan and the outside world, in the second it might have to pay a high price internationally for its longstanding support to the Taliban, and maybe even domestically.

The new chapter in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations that will be written now will not be without its history, without national and regional frameworks, without continuities and discontinuities. Therefore, it is important and even urgent to re-think the past, current, and future relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, if we want this new chapter to be less confrontational and harmful than some of the preceding ones. And in this regard the book in your hand, "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Pitfalls and the Way Forward", is highly relevant, and a very important contribution. This book has been edited by two eminent Pakistani academics, Dr. Huma Baqai from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi and Dr. Nausheen Wasi from the University of Karachi. They have brought together experts from Pakistan and Afghanistan in this field, for this important publication. FES wants to congratulate both the editors and the authors for their outstanding work. May it help to stimulate more thinking on the future of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, and even contribute to help improve them, in the long term.

**Dr. Jochen Hippler**

Country Director

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Pakistan Office

Islamabad, September 2021



# Contents

<b>Preface: Rethinking Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations</b> by Jochen Hippler.....	i
<b>List of Abbreviations &amp; Acronyms</b> .....	vii
<b>Introduction</b> by Huma Baqai and Nausheen Wasi .....	xi
<b>Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Emergence of New Nation States and the Search for Identity</b> by Hameed Hakimi & Zalmay Nishat.....	1
<b>Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Towards a New Horizon</b> by Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry.....	29
<b>Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations</b> by Bettina Robotka .....	45
<b>Governance, Nation-ness and Nationality in Afghanistan</b> by Omar Sharifi.....	55
<b>Cultural, Religious and Economic Integration: Future of Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations</b> by Ali Maisam Nazary.....	75
<b>Pakistan-Afghanistan Economic Relations: Basis for Cooperation</b> by Vaqar Ahmed.....	89
<b>Proxy Politics – Working Towards Dead End</b> by Mushtaq Muhammad Rahim.....	115
<b>Politics of Proxy Wars and Terrorism</b> by Rahimullah Yusufzai .....	135

**Afghanistan Peace Process: Missed Opportunities**  
by Maleeha Lodhi ..... 151

**Afghanistan Peace Talks: Envisioning a Political Settlement**  
by Shabnum Nasimi ..... 161

**Afghanistan Peace Process and Involvement of Outside Powers**  
by Zahid Hussain ..... 175

**Conflict Management Mechanisms in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations**  
by Moonis Ahmar ..... 189

**Chronology of Afghanistan Conflict & Pakistan-Afghanistan  
Relations 2001 to 2021**  
by Wajahat Rehan ..... 203

**Editors** ..... 231

**Contributors** ..... 233

**Endorsements** ..... 239

## List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
APAPPS	Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity
APTTA	Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement
APTTCA	Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BSA	Bilateral Security Agreement
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Corridor
CARs	Central Asian Republics
CASA	Central Asia-South Asia power project
CBTA	Cross Border Transport Agreement
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CRSS	Center for Research and Security Studies
EAD	Economic Aid Division
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
FATA	Financial Action Task Force
FBR	Federal Board of Revenue

FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GHQ	General Headquarters
HCNR	High Council for National Reconciliation
IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRoA	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IS	Islamic State
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
IS-K	Islamic State-Khorasan
JEC	Joint Economic Commission
JLC	Jiangxi Copper Company Limited
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MCC	Metallurgical Group Corporation
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NAP	National Action Plan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Directorate of Security
NSW	National Single Window
NTB	National Training Bureau, Islamabad
NWFP	North West Frontier Post
PAJCCI	Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
PTA	Preferential trade agreement
PTM	Pashtun Tahafuz Movement

RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RPI	Regional Peace Institute
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Area
SBP	State Bank of Pakistan
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SIGAR	Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
SROs	Special Regional Offices
TAPI	Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline
TIR	Transports Internationaux Routiers
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia
TTP	Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
WBG	World Bank Group



# Introduction

Huma Baqai and Nausheen Wasi

The night sky of Kabul on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2021 lit up with gunfire as Taliban celebrated victory after wheels went up on the airplane taking the last of US soldiers out from Afghanistan, a day before the announced deadline for complete withdrawal of troops. America's 'forever war,' the longest in its history, would be remembered forever for its colossal failures, unfulfilled promises, and a frantic exit. It cost 240,000 Afghan deaths, 2500 American soldiers, 2.3 trillion US dollars, and spectacular humiliation to the mightiest superpower of the World. It is in fact a story of American hubris and blunders that spans over a period of 20 years and four presidencies both Democrat and Republican.

The rapidly changing situation and the recapture of Afghanistan by the Taliban at an astonishing pace has left observers both breathless and in fear. America betrayed its allies in the West, Afghanistan, its people and those who served and lay down their lives in Afghanistan. In the midst of all of this, the sufferings of the Afghan people continue unabated. The skepticism about the Taliban is evident from the frenzy and confusion seen at the Hamid Karzai International airport where people in their desperate quest to get out chose to fall from planes rather than live in Afghanistan. The lives and future of not just women but every single ordinary Afghan hangs in the balance. Taliban are now the official political face of Afghanistan. They stand politically and militarily strengthened.

However, all is not hunky-dory for the Taliban as they celebrate victory. The real test for the Taliban was not the capture of power it is more about legitimacy, recognition, acceptance, and performance. Resisting foreign occupation for twenty years may not have been easy, but to bring peace and sanity to Afghanistan which has seen nothing but disruption for the last forty years is a tall order. The challenges that the Taliban face are multiple and complex which include the mundane issues of every day governance and the strategic future of Afghanistan. Failure on any is not an option.

The new Taliban appear more pragmatic and politically savvy. They are displaying political acumen which is refreshing and raises hope for the better. Many a confidence building measures have been initiated to cultivate domestic and international support and trust. Britain, Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, the

Central Asian Republics, and even India seem ready to work with the Taliban if nothing else for lack of choice. The Taliban are constantly in touch with the intelligence outfits of the Western world and are giving them due assurances. The most pertinent being not allowing Afghan land to be used against any other country and that they have no designs beyond Afghanistan. If they deviate from these agreements or are unable to control the situation on the ground there will be serious regional and international repercussions.

Afghanistan has been in the midst of a theatre of the 'Great Game' for centuries and global security debate for four plus decades. Drugged with the arrogance of power and an easy win in mind, empire after empire, nation after nation came to occupy and dominate, but faced humiliation and defeat and had to exit. The British learned their lessons in 1842, the Soviets in 1991, and more recently the Americans; who have lost the war in Afghanistan to what the Bush administration in 2001 called a 'rag-tag' militia. Twenty years of use of force by one of the most powerful countries of the world could not defy the tyranny of history. Ironically, none of the major powers that invaded the country ever invested in working with the diverse geo-ethnic landscape and only exploited it to serve their objectives. Post colonization period brought its own set of problems. The colonial mindset of leaving conflicts unresolved and divide and rule had the bearing on not only the domestic power structures but on future bilateral relations with neighbouring countries.

Afghanistan is once again at the crossroads. An unwarrantable situation has unfolded on the ground because of the US cut-and-run, instead of a condition-based withdrawal. The specter of Afghanistan's takeover by the Taliban is now a reality. The threats of violence, destruction, displacement and death have once again surfaced. The stakeholders have a huge trust deficit amongst each other and their commitment to peace remains elusive. The world is watching and talking about Afghanistan but the country most affected by the situation in Afghanistan remains Pakistan. The return of Taliban rule presents new and more serious challenges for Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan relations which are unique in genesis and character. Few relationships have been as intrinsically linked to each other's development and prosperity, on the one hand, and to regional and global peace, on the other. Stability in Afghanistan is extremely crucial. Both sides must learn from history and not make mistakes of the past.

The four decades of constant power struggle and war in Afghanistan has resulted in institutional and governance collapse. Many domestic and systemic factors have contributed to this; however, the Afghans largely hold external interventions and interferences responsible for their plight, rather than having a more holistic approach to find solutions. Pakistan is flagged far more frequently

than others and there are cogent reasons for this. It was the frontline state and an ally to the US in its war against Soviets in 1979 and later against Al-Qaeda in 2001. Pakistan's 'strategic depth' doctrine is largely viewed as breaching Afghanistan's sovereignty; its continued active support to Mujahideen since the 1980s and later to the Taliban is a constant aggravation.

Pakistan is cognizant of Afghan sensitivities on issues like strategic depth and has revisited it. However, it maintains that the matrix of relationship should not be viewed without a peek into history. Afghanistan's malicious policies towards Pakistan during the first thirty years of its inception pushed Pakistan towards a defensive approach in the subsequent years. Its irredentist claims on Pakistan's territory, its non-acceptance of the Durand Line as the international border, its support to the Pashtunistan issue, and its readiness to play a proxy role for India rubbed Pakistan the wrong way. This continues to be the case to date.

The relationship is burdened with Afghanistan's exaggerated distrust of Pakistan and latter's sensitivities of being misunderstood and an ungrateful Afghanistan. The sufferings are on both sides of the border. This manifests itself in the use of each other's land for nefarious designs; which include use of proxies, cross border infiltration, and instigation of extremism, radicalization and social fragmentation. The two countries have paid a very high cost for this mutual paranoia, which has turned their relationship into a graveyard of missed opportunities.

A realignment of the relationship has been attempted at various points in history, but to no avail; largely because Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are predominantly sculptured by super power rivalries. However, power shifts in regional and global politics offer opportunities to both countries to revisit their relations. Several factors are contributing to this phenomenon. Most importantly, it was the realization in the US of the imperative to engage with the Taliban despite the odds. The change was triggered by the consistent rise of the Taliban since 2015 and their subsequent recognition as a key player in Afghanistan by major powers and neighbouring states. This allowed Pakistan to get squarely back into the game and validated its earlier position of finding a political solution to the conflict. Pakistan played a vital role in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table, which made the Doha talks a possibility. The talks then became a precursor for the eventual US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Afghanistan policy post US withdrawal is very clear. It is for an 'Afghan owned and Afghan led peace process.' Perhaps for the first time, Pakistan is also walking its talk by drawing redlines in its relationship with US vis-a-vis Afghanistan. The political and military leadership in the country have

confirmed their commitment not to allow Pakistan's land to be used in any kind of conflict. Pakistan remains committed to facilitating peace building, bridge building and negotiation initiatives only. It wants the will of the Afghan people to be sacrosanct. There is, however a huge trust deficit on the Afghan side over Pakistan's role in their country.

The book ***Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Pitfalls and the Way Forward*** aims at addressing this enigma. The volume was conceived with an objective to bridge the perception divide between two states. It has the unique distinction of having contributions from both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The authors have outstanding profiles and are influencers and opinion makers in their respective countries and globally. The book should not be viewed in the context of immediate post US exit, it is on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. It has a more holistic approach and is geared towards achieving peace in Afghanistan. It aims at suggesting a way forward that is indigenous and sustainable; rooted in lessons learnt. The contributors, very seasoned policy makers, diplomats and academics, have chosen to focus beyond the obvious. A historical lens minus rhetoric has been used to build a fuller understanding of why there is an acrimonious paradigm of inter-state interactions despite the rich history of cordial relations and connectivity spread over centuries before the region succumbed to colonial ambitions.

Contributions from Pakistan and Afghanistan with refreshing objectivity discuss these features in detail. Recurring themes across the intellectual discourse are:

- The long history of conflict has scarred both the societies.
- Holistic analysis to understand problems in the two countries should replace the blame game.
- Work with and not against each other.
- Peace and regional connectivity are mutually reinforcing.
- Radicalization in both the societies needs to be addressed.

Hameed Hakimi and Zalmay Nishat in ***Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations: Emergence of New Nation States and the Search for Identity*** explain why the two countries have bitter relations. They argue that the friction in state-to-state relations is a consequence of the post-colonial experience of nation-states emerging in a region where societal links, fluidity of boundaries and historical ties permeated the lives of inhabitants previously. It is an interesting read on how profoundly the divergent courses of nation building caused a mismatch between Afghanistan's desire to address problems with Pakistan on a bilateral level and Pakistan's attempts to treat disputes with Afghanistan as part of its regional security approach.

Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry in ***Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Towards a New Horizon*** explores vistas of positive and negative interdependence between the two states. He maintains that there is an emerging consensus in Pakistan that a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is the most desirable prerequisite to positive interdependence. Using a scenario analysis approach, Aizaz examines the factors that are critical for a durable relationship and dwells upon policy options Pakistan may exercise to ensure a win-win.

**Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations** by Bettina Robotka is a neutral perspective from a South Asian historian on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. She argues that both countries need to overcome a great deal of historical baggage carried over from the colonial drawing of borders and the ideology of territorial nationalism, which in the current phase of globalization is fast losing its utility and is self-defeating for both countries.

Omar Sharifi in ***Governance, Nation-ness and Nationality in Afghanistan*** dives deep into the indigenous factors contributing to the fractured societal construct of contemporary Afghanistan. He pitches the fact that, even when Afghanistan was not a victim of foreign interventions and interferences, its governance paradigm failed to include all sections of the population. The Afghan regional identities are far more entrenched than the project Afghan nation state. The geo-ethnic spread of Afghan society was always exploited by indigenous leader and outsiders that seamlessly merged into how Afghanistan functions today. He pleads for a broad-based inclusive governance model to address issues on the ground.

Ali Maisam Nazary in ***Cultural, Religious and Economic Integration: Future of Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations*** captures the anthropological genesis of the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship, where years of mistrust and conflict between the two has eroded their common cultural identity and prevented their growth and prosperity. The way forward as per Nazary is three-pronged. It is to work on cultural integration as rooted in their shared history and civilization, to work for the revival of moderate Islam to counter radicalization, and to allow regionalism to replace toxic nationalism.

***Pakistan-Afghanistan Economic Relations: Basis for Cooperation*** by Vaqar Ahmed is a very well researched piece on the dividends of economic cooperation between the two countries. His research is based on a survey of 400 firms in Pakistan and 300 firms in Afghanistan, facilitated by Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI). He outlines how economic cooperation is a meeting ground for the two countries to come out of the conflict quagmire and explores the potential of TAPI, CASA 1000 and China-Afghanistan corridor in reviving the Silk Route connectivity.

***Proxy Politics – Working towards Dead End*** by Mushtaq Raheem is a self-explanatory title. Afghanistan and Pakistan have both used proxies against each other in pursuance of a mutually hurting agenda. The investment in the politics of hate and proxies has turned reconcilable differences into an enmity of sorts, which was even able to triumph commonality of culture and religion. He is of the view that the past now haunts the present and the future of both the countries. In this backdrop Mushtaq suggests a comprehensive way forward from Afghanistan's perspective.

Rahimullah Yousuf Zai in ***Politics of Proxy Wars and Terrorism*** writes on the contentious topic based on his indigenous links on both sides of the border and reporting from the field for over forty years. He gives a holistic understanding of the use of proxies and objectively explains the friction paradigm between the two states. The content covers both Afghan grievances and Pakistani sensitivities. He argues that if the intra-Afghan and US-Afghan talks succeed, Islamabad-Kabul relations could finally improve after many missed opportunities. Rahimullah gives a very detailed way forward from Pakistan's Perspective.

Maleeha Lodhi in ***Afghanistan Peace Process: Missed Opportunities*** also uses the scenario analysis approach and explores three likely scenarios and their outcomes, post US and NATO withdrawal, to outline both successful and failed peace parleys. She is of the opinion that if Afghanistan's 'forever war' continues the repercussions for Pakistan will be precarious and would further prolong the agony and suffering of the people of Afghanistan. Her conclusions underline the imperative for peace, particularly for Afghanistan that has seen nothing but war and conflict generation after generation.

Shabnum Nasimi's ***Afghanistan Peace Talks: Envisioning a Political Settlement*** is an insight into the legal anomalies of Afghan constitutionalism, holding the Loya Jirga to be without legal writ. She also gives firsthand information of Afghan life style under twenty years of US tutelage and dwells upon the contradictions of twenty years of westernization of the Afghan society and resilient Talibanization on the ground. In this context, she flags the deficiencies and inadequacies of the peace negotiation process and warns of the imminent societal regression in case of a Taliban takeover.

Zahid Hussain in ***Afghanistan Peace Process and Involvement of outside Powers*** touches upon the crux of every debate on Afghanistan. He states how Afghanistan has long been the epicentre of great power game and regional rivalries and continues to be the pivot of future realignments. The role of India, Iran, China, Russia and Central Asian states are factored in. Pakistan-India relations and its impact on Afghanistan is further emphasized as the most

important variable. He also endorses the view that Afghanistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are once again at crossroads and the shifting dynamics carry within its fold, both, the seeds of potential conflict and hope for economic connectivity and cooperation for the region and beyond.

Moonis Ahmar in ***Peace and Conflict Management Mechanisms in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations*** examines the importance of conflict management as a precursor to peace. He maintains that Pakistan's role in Afghan conflict management mechanisms is significant, and crucial to Pakistan's stability and progress. He discusses prospects of a viable Afghan peace process and how Pakistan as an influential neighbour and an important party to the conflict can play a meaningful role towards positive conflict transformation.

The diversity of contributors' background and the objectivity of the views expressed will make this volume of use to students, academics, journalists and policymakers. The narratives by some contributors may not pass the test of academic fact check; however, they carry the essence of undocumented ground realities. We have chosen not to impede upon the freedom of the authors. A ground has been set for future discourse, where we hope that negativity would be filtered and rationality and objectivity would surface.

Interestingly, contributors from both sides are sensitive to one another's concerns and there appears to be a consensus that conflict should not have been the natural course of the relations between the two states. That the two countries, often described as 'conjoined and inseparable twins' and sharing many commonalities throughout history, could not reconcile their differences in the nation-state age is deemed to be tragic.

All contributors accept that Afghanistan has suffered substantially more and understandably feels more wounded. The history of conflict is long and torturous. Enough damage has been done on both sides and the hurt is mutual. The din of missed opportunities is louder than before. Despite pitfalls, the two countries need to move forward, turn the page on conflict and start a fresh chapter titled "Cooperation". Understanding and recognition of the other provides a meeting ground for future course of action. Course correction to achieve peace is the only way forward.



# Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Emergence of New Nation States and the Search for Identity

Hameed Hakimi & Zalmay Nishat

The Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, almost 20 years after the US-led military invasion removed their regime from Kabul. Many unknowns remain in place about the trajectory of events, trends and policies under a so-called Taliban 2.0. To prepare in Pakistan for some inevitable outcomes in Afghanistan under the new Taliban regime, the history of bilateral relations since 1947 can be a force of wisdom. The history of state-to-state relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan is rather gloomy: filled with mutual misgivings and afflicted by outright animosity since the inception of Pakistan in 1947. By contrast, the people-to-people relations entail mutual embracement, understanding and solidarity, especially at times of difficulty. The most obvious example is Pakistan's welcoming of millions of refugees from Afghanistan in different periods: after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the wave of refugees escaping the so-called 'civil war' of 1992 – 1996, and the exodus during the Taliban rule. Over the years, much has been written about this obvious mismatch, but how can we explain it for our contemporary understanding of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations?

One possible explanation for the dismal state-to-state relations is to examine the difference between pre-modern times and the advent of modern nation state, a phenomenon that emerged in the temporal and spatial context of the colonial powers such as Britain. There is a need to provide a *longue durée* historical context and then contrast it with the period of nation-state formation.<sup>1</sup> To provide a synoptic picture to draw contrasts with the modern era, we argue that there is a need to undertake an intellectual analysis of the region's history.

After a brief glimpse at the region's intellectual history, the chapter discusses three distinct phases of state-to-state relations. First, 1947 to 1978, when Afghanistan's claims of irredentism led to the abandoning of its policy of 'non-

---

1. The term literally means 'long duration,' introduced by the French historian Fernand Braudel. It is a standard term of reference in the work of the Annales School, which Braudel helped to establish. For details see: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100114325>

alignment,' opening the way for further Soviet influence, and leading to the leftist coup d'état in 1978.<sup>2</sup> Second, 1979 – 2001 saw the abandoning of the state-to-state relations as state-to-proxy relations prevailed. As the Soviet military withdrawal was being negotiated under a United Nations mechanism, Pakistan was keen for Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, among the Mujahideen, to lead the new Afghan government, but it did not happen.<sup>3</sup> In 1994, Pakistan fostered relations with the Taliban, who took over Kabul in 1996 but failed to control the whole of the country. A fierce resistance against the Taliban by the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, renamed in Pakistan as the Northern Alliance, remained in place. In the third phase, 2001 – present, the state-to-state relations were restored between Islamabad and Kabul, but Pakistan continues to provide support for proxy elements, namely the Taliban.<sup>4</sup> This trend of a 'double game' continues from 2001 till today. Even after a realistic chance of peace with the government of Afghanistan, the Taliban do not show signs of abating.<sup>5</sup>

By glimpsing<sup>6</sup> at these phases, we argue three key points. First, the friction in state-to-state relations is a consequence of the post-colonial experience of nation-states emerging in a region where societal links, fluidity of boundaries and historical ties permeated the lives of inhabitants previously. Second, profoundly different experiences of the ruling elites in both countries with the colonial powers set them on divergent courses of nation building. This second point is at the heart of a mismatch between successive governments' desire in Afghanistan to address problems with Pakistan as bilateral issues, while Pakistan has continually treated disputes with Afghanistan as part of its regional security approach, particularly in the framework of a zero-sum game with India. Third, despite severe ups and downs, including Afghanistan's irredentism and cross-border armed clashes, the Afghanistan-Pakistan relations prior to 1979

- 
2. Lee Jonathan, *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).
  3. Since the conflict in Afghanistan between 1992 – 1996 had a component of external interference, we caution against dubbing the conflict in this period purely in terms of a 'civil war' without acknowledging the external meddling. In the early part of 1990s, several regional countries were jockeying for influence in Afghanistan by supporting their proxy groups, resulting in a proxy-induced 'civil war'.
  4. There is significant literature on this subject matter. Dexter Filkins of the *New York Times* tried to explain this 'double game', early in post-2001 period, by empirically investigating the issue within Pakistan's former FATA region and further afield. See Dexter Filkins, "Right at the Edge," *The New York Times Magazine*, 5 September 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/07/magazine/07pakistan-t.html>
  5. Alexander Chris, "Ending Pakistan's Proxy War in Afghanistan," MacDonal-Laurier Institute, March 2021, <https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/ending-pakistans-proxy-war-afghanistan-new-paper-chris-alexander/>
  6. Throughout the chapter we highlight further readings on various sections as detailed discussions are hampered due to space limitation.

unveil a period when both countries were able to iron out differences and to plan initiatives entailing a potential normalisation of bilateral ties. Both King Zahir Shah (between 1963 and 1972) and President Daoud Khan (in 1976 – 1978) were keen to establish better ties with Pakistan, which Islamabad ostensibly reciprocated. The course for such warmth was only discernible when socioeconomic calculations prevailed over zero-sum geopolitical considerations, and both sides avoided the use of proxy forces against each other, or to gain a ‘strategic depth’.

## An Intellectual History Perspective

The political structures and history of the region remained connected and integrated until the arrival of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent and the Tsarist Russia's incremental encroachment towards today's Caucasus and Central Asia. This mainly took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the height of the ‘Great Game,’ where current Afghanistan's borders were drawn as the ‘buffer’ state between the Tsarist Russian Empire (later the Soviets Union), and the British Empire in India, and Persia in West Asia (later Iran).<sup>7</sup> The issue of a ‘buffer zone’ was so serious that the British offered an increase of the annual stipend of Abdur Rahman Khan (1840/1844–1901) from 12 to 18 lakh rupees, if the latter was to accept annexation of the Wakhan corridor within his Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan, thus, for the first time became a neighbour of China through the corridor.<sup>9</sup> During Abdur Rahman Khan's reign, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand (1850–1924)<sup>10</sup> headed the commission that drew the Durand Line/boundary between Afghanistan and the British India (later inherited by Afghanistan and Pakistan). The British and the Russian Empires, with delegation from Afghanistan, formed a Joint Anglo-Russian Boundary Commission for a joint effort in an attempt to determine the northern borders of Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> The commission between Russia and Britain was formed in 1884 and completed its work in 1888. The current boundaries of Afghanistan were, more or less, fully drawn as a buffer state by the two colonial powers.<sup>12</sup>

---

7. Keith McLachlan, Afghanistan: ‘The geopolitics of a buffer state, *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629379708407579>

8. Angelo Rasanayagam. 2003. *Afghanistan: A Modern History*, London: I.B. Tauris.

9. Ibid.

10. The complete report of Sir Henry Mortimer Durand is available in the British Library, India Office, and one of the authors have seen and obtained a copy of it.

11. For a detailed reading on Afghanistan's boundaries, see: Hopkins, B., and Marsden, M., *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2011).

12. Cynthia Smith, “The Great Game and the Boundaries of Afghanistan,” <https://blogs.loc.gov/maps/2019/07/the-great-game-and-the-boundaries-of-afghanistan/>, accessed on 19 July, 2019.

A quick glimpse at the history of the region shows that there were early migratory journeys by the Central Asian inhabitants southward, towards the region of the subcontinent and infusing their language (Sanskrit), culture and way of life with the locals in the Indus Valley, and from there towards the southern parts of India and beyond.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent have always been closer to the Iranian Plateau and more connected to the Central Asian and West Asian regions. The conquest of the region by Alexander the Great and the rise of Greco-Buddhist civilisation in the region is another important episode in the long-shared history and fate of this larger region. This civilization, before the rise of Islam, both eastern Iran (i.e. Central Asia) and Northern India were part of the Great Kushan Dynasty and were part of the Sarvastivada Buddhist worldview.<sup>14</sup>

With the advent of Islam, this vast region was ruled by the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties from Baghdad, but under them in Khurasan and Transoxiana new Persian literary text came into being, which was written in Arabic script. Local governors of eastern frontiers of the Abbasid caliphate, the breakaway polities of Samanid (819–999) and Saffarid (861–1003) dynasties, promoted the New Persian literature in their respective courts.<sup>15</sup> During these two dynasties, the New Persian poetry and prose slowly became highly influential.<sup>16</sup> The Samanid attracted such poets to their capital at Bukhara as Abu Abdullah Rudaki (d. 941).<sup>17</sup> This trend was further accelerated by later Turkic dynasties of the region, the Ghaznavids (977–1186) and Great Saljuqs (1016–53) through expansion of both literature and bureaucracy, while the former took this influence to the Indian subcontinent, the latter to West Asia, especially to Anatolia. Two institutions proved highly effective in this enterprise, *madrassa* and *Khanaqah* (the school and the convent), which increased the influence of *ulema* and Sufis.<sup>18</sup> In the context of the subcontinent, the Ghaznavids and later Ghurid Dynasty laid the foundations of an era that deeply connected the Indian subcontinent to the Persianate World, integrating it not only with Khurasan and Transoxiana, but

---

13. Richard Fotz, *A History of the Tajiks: Iranians of the East* (London: I.B. Tauris. 2019).

14. Jan Westerhoff. 2019. *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. In passim. Also, see Richard Fotz., op.cit.

15. Moshe Sharon, *Black Banners from the East: The Establishment of the Abbasid State*. Two volumes. ACLS Humanities E-Book. Actually, the seeds of destruction the Umayyad was sowed mostly in Khurasan Province and Transoxiana, and hence the Abbasid dynasty takeover was made possible from these regions.

16. Nile Green (ed.), *The Persianate World: The Frontier of a Eurasian Lingua Franca* (California: University of California Press, 2020), p. 12.

17. *Ibid*, p. 13.

18. *Ibid*, p. 16–17.

also what Shahab Ahmed called “Balkan-to-Bengal complex”<sup>19</sup> and what John Perry calls the “homoglossic” Persian.<sup>20</sup>

Most of these terminologies are variants of what Marshall G. S. Hodgson coined in 1960s: ‘Persianate World.’ Hodgson argued:

“The rise of Persian had more than purely literary consequences: it served to carry a new overall cultural orientation with Islamdom... Most of the more local languages of high culture that later emerged among Muslims likewise depended upon Persian wholly or in part for their prime literary inspiration. We may call all the cultural traditions, carried in Persian or reflecting Persian inspiration, ‘Persianate’ by extension.”<sup>21</sup>

Among others, Muzaffar Alam and Richard Easton have written extensively to show the extent of connectedness of the region with each other.<sup>22</sup> These deep ties between the region, particularly between contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan, lasted until the mid-19th century when the British East India Company ended the Mughal Dynasty in the subcontinent. Later the Muslims of the subcontinent served in Afghanistan. In the 1920s King Amanullah Khan assisted the cause of Indian independence.<sup>23</sup>

Before the formation of Afghanistan as a ‘buffer zone’ serving Tsarist Russian and British colonial interests, it served as an area that was the site of fierce competition between the Mughal Empire in India, the Saffavid in Iran and the Timurid-Tuqhay in Bukhara. Arguably, the rise of the Durrani Empire in Kandahar was not an aberration from this rule, but as a direct consequence of this rivalry. It is key to emphasise that the region did not experience the emergence of modern nation state until late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup>

---

19. Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

20. John R. Perry, “New Persian: Expansion, Standardisation and Exclusivity,” in Spooner and Hanaway (eds.), *Literacy and the Persianate World: Writing and the Social Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2012).

21. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilisation*. Three volumes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). Both ‘Persianate’ and ‘Islamicate’ concepts have been coined by Hodgson and by the latter he wants to draw on cultural diversity within the so-called ‘Islamic world’ and by the former he means all the cultures and languages, which have been heavily influenced by the Persian language and civilisation.

22. Muzaffar Alam, *The Language of Political Islam: India 1200 – 1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Also, see Richard Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765* (Milton Keynes: Penguin Random House UK, 2020).

23. Jonathan L. Lee, *Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

24. A large historical evidence has been produced recently on this subject matter, but Jonathan Lee’s “Ancient Supremacy” is a classic account of it. See Johanathan Lee, *The “Ancient Supremacy”: Bukhara, Afghanistan, and the Battle for Balkh, 1731-1901* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

Even with a narrow gaze at the history of Afghanistan and Pakistan relations, it is fascinating to note the extent of deep and rich interconnectedness, and a shared history, of this region until the advent of colonialism. The failure of the state-to-state relations can be interpreted in light of the imposition of the territorially bounded nation-state without the agency of the indigenous inhabitants. An important outcome of this was Afghanistan's almost complete cut off from the rest of the region during the 'Great Game'.<sup>25</sup> What we briefly highlight so far emphasises that Afghanistan and Pakistan are bound by a fraternal relationship, rooted deep in shared history, language and commonalities of faith, culture and traditions. Geographic and environmental commonalities further deepen these connections.

For the purpose of this chapter, we want to underline the fact that modern state institution is an *artifact* created in Europe around 17 and 18 Centuries and was imposed, or exported, by European colonial system in Afghanistan's region in the 19<sup>th</sup>, or even later, 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. One implication of this was an arbitrary drawing of the geographical boundaries of the new 'states' without much influence by the indigenous inhabitants. We show this in relation to current boundaries of Afghanistan in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## **Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations**

Unpacking the nature and the process of state formation in both countries can help explain the difficulty, moving beyond the simplistic narratives that have dominated the state-to-state relations. We pay more attention to the Afghanistan case due to limited space. We argue that this apparent cognitive dissonance of perceptions, a deep sense of disconnect from each other's experiences of modern state building, sowed the seeds of discontent in the mutual relations.

### ***Afghanistan and Pakistan, 1947 – 1978***

Upon independence in 1947, Pakistan was immediately concerned about its land defences, which also involved relations with Afghanistan. The first generation of Pakistani military leaders had been trained as part of the British Indian army; they applied their training to developing a defence strategy for Pakistan, a smaller entity than British India. The vividly conflictual relations with India overshadow our wider understanding of Pakistan's ambitions for strategic depth in Afghanistan prior to the 1970s period. These ambitions began with

---

25. The account of which has vividly provided by Shah Mahmoud Hanifi. Shah Mahmoud Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

Pakistan's inception.<sup>26</sup> Inferring from the history of the region under British India, and in light of the regional geography, the early security establishment in Pakistan were keen for the 'integration' of the two states – bestowing a greater role for Pakistani state as the bigger country.<sup>27</sup> However, Pakistan's vision for such an arrangement did not find any enthusiasm in Afghanistan, not least because the proposed integration was squarely aimed at containing the Soviet Union and curtailing the influence of India. From its inception, Pakistan was convinced that only those Afghans who subscribed to Islamic ideologies would see the significance of Pakistan for the 'revival' of Islam's glorious past. As early as 1960s, this realisation drove Pakistan's intelligence agencies to encourage the country's Islamist groups to forge ties and seek ideological alliances in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup>

Between 1947 and 1978, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan centred on the former's irredentism and rejection of the Durand Line separating Pashtuns between the two countries. In late September 1947, at the United Nations' 92<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting, the representative of Afghanistan, Hosayn Aziz, did not vote for Pakistan's membership into the UN. His statement to the meeting:

"Afghanistan heartily shares in the rejoicing of the peoples of Pakistan in their freedom. We have profound respect for Pakistan. May Pakistan prosper. The Afghanistan delegation does not wish to oppose the membership of Pakistan in this great Organization, but it is with the deepest regret that we are unable at this time to vote for Pakistan. This unhappy circumstance is due to the fact that we cannot recognize the North-West Frontier as part of Pakistan so long as the people of the North-West Frontier have not been given an opportunity free from any kind of influence - and I repeat, free from any kind of influence - to determine for themselves whether they wish to be independent or to become a part of Pakistan. The reasons which compel our present action will be given in a statement which I shall make at a later date to the General Assembly."<sup>29</sup>

---

26. For a detailed reading see: Hussain Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005) – especially Chapter 5: *Afghan Jihad*

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. UN Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Vol. 1, 16 September to 13 November 1947, UN. Doc A/399, p. 314; <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/NL4/709/42/PDF/NL470942.pdf?OpenElement>, accessed on 5 Mar 2021

The Afghan government finally withdrew their negative vote before the end of 1947 and expressed 'willingness to discuss Pashtunistan with Pakistan through normal diplomatic channels'<sup>30</sup>; the two countries exchanged ambassadors in February 1948.<sup>31</sup> Seemingly, Afghanistan did follow up on the statement to engage with Pakistan diplomatically. According to Pakistani authors<sup>32</sup>, Afghanistan's envoy, Sardar Najibullah Khan, met with Governor General of Pakistan – Mohammad Ali Jinnah – in early 1948 to present Afghanistan's position on the Pashtunistan issue, and highlighted the lack of opportunity for the Pashtuns in the North West Frontier and the Tribal Areas to meaningfully express their political views for Pashtun autonomy. Jinnah vehemently dismissed the Afghan views on the matter.<sup>33</sup>

In the initial formative years, Pakistan blamed Afghanistan for waging a propaganda campaign to stir tension among the Pashtun populations on the other side of the Durand Line. As a countermeasure, Pakistan established a 'Radio Free Afghanistan' in Quetta in 1949; it also increased subsidies to the tribal areas with a view to encourage closer integration of Pashtuns on its side of the Durand Line with the Pakistani socioeconomic landscape. But the suppression of Pashtunistan sympathisers by Pakistan, and the arrest – even alleged execution – of some Pashtuns, alienated the moderates. This was coupled with occasional strikes in the Tribal Agencies by Pakistan Air Force. During one such airstrike, reported to have taken place on 12 June 1949, 'a Pakistani aircraft (inadvertently, according to the Pakistanis; deliberately, according to the Afghans) bombed the village of Moghulgai, 2,100 yards inside the Afghan border'.<sup>34</sup> Although Pakistan offered to pay a compensation (which Afghans refused to accept), it rejected Afghanistan's claim that the bombing was intentional. In fierce reaction, the Afghan government held a *Loya Jirga* in Kabul – which was attended by the National Assembly – on 26 July 1949; the *Jirga* 'voted national support for the "Pashtunistan" issue and officially declared the 1893 Durand Agreement, the Anglo-Afghan Pact of 1905, the Treaty of Rawalpindi of 1919, the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921, and any other treaties which referred to the status of the Pushtun, to be illegal and dead'.<sup>35</sup>

In early 1950s, Afghanistan's irregular forces entered Pakistan to plant the Pashtunistan flag; Pakistan, angered by this move, imposed a blockade on

---

30. Dupree, op. cit., p491.

31. Ibid.

32. See for instance: M. Rizvi, *Pak-Afghan Relations Since 1947: An Analysis*, Pakistan Horizon, Vol. 32, Issue 4, 1970, pp. 34 – 50.

33. Ibid., p37

34. Dupree, op. cit., p492.

35. Ibid.

Afghan transit goods and oil imports.<sup>36</sup> Pakistan ended the blockade in 1952, but tensions with Pakistan led to closer economic (and by extension, political) ties between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> In 1955, under the Afghan premier Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan,<sup>38</sup> Pakistan-Afghanistan riots led to border closure again. The mutual strains increasingly resulted in both countries joining different alliances. In 1954, Pakistan received arms supply under a mutual security agreement with the United States. In the same year, Pakistan became a founding member of the pro-American Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Pakistan also became a member of the Baghdad Pact, which was aimed at curtailing Soviet expansionism.

In parallel, Afghanistan sought dissimilar alliances; these translated into either non-aligned organisations or closer ties with the Soviet Union, or both.<sup>39</sup> Afghanistan maintained 'a strict wartime neutrality during both World Wars and remained impartial during the post-war ideological confrontations, striving to maintain balanced relations between the East and the West'<sup>40</sup>. Afghanistan joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War. Prior to World War II, Afghanistan joined the Saadabad Treaty of Non-Aggression of 1937, which was signed in Tehran.<sup>41</sup> Yet, in 1941, Afghanistan refused to back Iraq against Britain citing Kabul's declaration of neutrality in 1939.<sup>42</sup> The Afghan state emphasised 'neutrality' – even when it was not achieved fully – as a cornerstone of Afghanistan's foreign policy and external relations; both the 19<sup>th</sup> century experience of a 'buffer-state' and the inter-war period of non-alliance inspired such aspirations for neutrality.

From the official Pakistani perspective, Afghans' stance on the Durand Line has always been interpreted as somehow connected to Indian collusions to weaken and encircle Pakistan. The ruling elites in Afghanistan maintained ties with the

---

36. Although there are several sources on the chronology of tense moments in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, the authors have relied on the references to these events in: R. H. Magnus, and E. Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx and Mujahid* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2002)

37. *Ibid.*, p228.

38. Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan remained particular tense during the premiership of Daoud Khan from 1953 – 63, until his anti-Pakistan stance led to his removal by King Zahir Shah in 1963.

39. For example, in 1955 Afghanistan-Soviet new barter agreement was signed; when Soviet leader, Khrushchev, visited the country in the same year it resulted in approximately US\$ 100 million development aid, military aid and Soviet support for plebiscite on Pashtunistan (see Magnus and Naby, pp. 228-228)

40. N. A. Andisha, N. A. *Neutrality in Afghanistan's Foreign Policy*, The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Special Report 360, March 2015.

41. Also known as the Saadabad Pact, the treaty was signed by Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Turkey; for original text of the Treaty see: <http://www.worldlii.org/int/other/LNTSer/1938/163.html>

42. Andisha op. cit., p14

frontier Pashtuns such as Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan)<sup>43</sup> and Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai, who were advocating for the rights of Pashtuns during the British Indian rule. For the Afghan political elite, there were legitimate reasons to support the Pashtunistan issue, which predated the formation of Pakistan. For instance, at the Bannu Resolution on 21 June 1947, an influential group of Pashtun leaders demanded that Pashtuns within British India be given a choice to have an independent state of Pashtunistan, and should be exempted from automatic allocation to either India or Pakistan.<sup>44</sup> However, the North-West Frontier Province referendum of July 1947 – which was boycotted by the organisers of the Bannu Resolution including Ghaffar Khan – only offered Pashtun voters the choice to either opt to join India or Pakistan; those who attended overwhelmingly supported to join the Muslim majority Pakistan. As Pashtun citizens in the newly created Pakistan became a demographic minority, Ghaffar Khan and his Khudai Khidmatgar movement became adversaries of the Pakistani political and security establishment, and were at times punitively targeted. This is despite the fact that Ghaffar Khan took an oath allegiance to the newly formed Pakistan, and throughout his life remained active in Pashtun politics among Pakistanis.

On Pakistan, among Afghans, there was (and continues today) a sense of remoteness about the bitter pains of the partition of British India into two dominions of India and Pakistan; the partition entailed the displacement of approximately twenty million people along religious lines and the death of almost two million others. It is somewhat incongruous that Afghanistan continued to invest all political capital in continued irredentism without fully assessing the level of meaningful support for Pashtunistan among the new Pashtun citizens of Pakistan. The relationship with Khudai Khidmatgar was intrinsically linked to this issue. While Afghanistan viewed the Durand Line/Pashtunistan as a bilateral matter to resolve with Pakistan, Pakistani establishment perceived Afghanistan's support for Pashtuns' autonomy through a regional prism, mainly Pakistan's concerns about Indian encroachment. However, as early as 1950s India ceased

---

43. Abdul Ghaffar Khan, also known as Bacha Khan (1890 – 1988), was a Pashtun independence activist against the British colonial rule in India. He led the non-violent Pashtun resistance movement, *Khudai Khidmatgar*, which literally translates as 'servants of God'.

44. Britain refused to accept the demand of the Bannu Resolution arguing that the British stance did not support such an exemption. Earlier in 1944 the Afghan government had approached the Government of British India in a letter confirming its interest in the fate of Pashtuns on the Indian side of the Durand Line; although Britain at the time ignored the demands of the Afghan state, Lord Mountbatten – the last British Viceroy in India – did state in the 'Partition Agreement' that vaguely seemed like a concession on the Pashtuns: "Agreements with the tribes on the North-West Frontier of India will have to be negotiated with appropriate successor authority". For a detailed reference see chapter on *Pashtunistan* in Dupree (1980).

official support to Afghanistan on the Pashtunistan issue, partly in response to Pakistan exerting itself as a nation state.<sup>45</sup>

### **State Formation in Afghanistan and Nationalism**

The British and Russian imperial powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century found a convergence of interests in setting frontiers for their spheres of influence, leaving a so-called 'buffer' Afghan state in the middle. Contemporary scholarly opinion recognises such labelling as 'buffer', 'rogue' and 'fragile' to be essential elements of 'imperial sense-making'.<sup>46</sup> This had a direct impact on how the boundaries were assessed and drawn. The 'colonial spatialisations' of places like Afghanistan continue to impact our contemporary understanding of the Afghan state.<sup>47</sup> The post-19<sup>th</sup> century history of Afghanistan reveals a curious case of the state's frontiers shaping up as a result of conflicts, wars, negotiations and treaties between the British, the Russians and the Afghans.<sup>48</sup> With boundaries demarcated, 'some were respected and many persist, but... neither the British or Russian invaders nor the native Afghan governments that mediated between these empires and inherited the 'state' exercised complete control over [these boundaries]'.<sup>49</sup>

We argue that the region where Afghanistan is situated has a singular feature as far as historical boundaries are concerned: historically, they were all fluid. The fluidity of the frontiers also highlights the other key feature of people-to-people relations: the *longue durée* of mobility<sup>50</sup> - or mobility as a way of life and for survival.<sup>51</sup>

The construction of a modern Afghan 'nation state' akin to the Western model began under Abdur Rahman Khan (1880 – 1901) who broke the tradition of 'sultanism' by refraining to name his heirs as provincial governors,<sup>52</sup> thus curtailing the vast levels of autonomy enjoyed by a previously decentralised

---

45. Dupree, op. cit. p491.

46. N. Manchanda, "Rendering Afghanistan legible: Borders, frontiers and 'state' of Afghanistan", *Politics*, Vol. 37, Issue 4, 2017, pp. 386 – 387.

47. Ibid.

48. G. Dorronsoro, *Revolution Unending: Afghanistan - 1979 to the present* (London: Hurst and Company, 2005), p.24. For a more detailed account of Afghanistan's history before 1979 see: L. Dupree, op.cit.

49. Manchanda, op. cit., p389.

50. M. Quie, and H. Hakimi, "The EU and the Politics of Migration Management in Afghanistan." *Research Paper*, Chatham House – The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2020.

51. For further reading see: M. Marsden, *Trading Worlds: Afghan Merchants Across Modern Frontiers* (C Hurst & Co Publishers, 2016); A. Monsutti, *War and Migration: Social Networks and Economic Strategies of the Hazaras of Afghanistan* (Routledge, 2012)

52. Dorronsoro, op. cit.

system.<sup>53</sup> By centralising power at the throne, the *amir* attempted to reduce the influence of tribes – particularly of Pashtuns – on whose loyalty previous monarchs relied. But in the absence of tribal loyalty the state still needed sources of legitimacy; this was provided by relying on Islam (and the *ulema*) and rallying the *believers*. Starting with Abdur Rahman Khan, and maintained by his successors Habibullah Khan and Amanullah Khan, it was required of the *ulema* to recognise the ‘divine origins’ of *amir’s* powers.<sup>54</sup> But the militarily weak Afghan state needed to avoid confrontations while concurrently attempting to strengthen its legitimacy. The utilisation of Islam was not always adequate; so, the added phenomenon of *nationalism* was employed to foster a new identity for the inhabitants of Afghanistan.

The roots of this modern nationalism can be traced principally to the reformers: Mahmud Tarzi<sup>55</sup> and the *Young Afghans* movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *Young Afghans*, it has been argued<sup>56</sup>, wanted the nullification of the Gandamak Treaty of 1879 with Britain that forced Afghanistan to give up independence in foreign affairs; the Durand Line agreement of 1893 further shrunk the territories under Afghanistan’s control. While the former (i.e., regaining independence in foreign affairs) was restored in 1919 by King Amanullah Khan, himself reportedly a member of the *Young Afghans*, the latter (i.e., regaining Pashtun territories lost to Britain) remained unresolved.

In 1946/1947, as a ‘spiritual heir’ to the *Young Afghans* reformist movement, the *Weekh Zalmiyan* (also spelled: *Wesh Zalmian*) - *Awakened Youth* - emerged as a group of nationalist activists and reformers. Though not exclusively Pashtun, they were dominated by a strong group of Pashtun intellectuals. While credited to be the first publicly founded political party in Afghanistan,<sup>57</sup> *Weekh Zalmiyan* regarded the ‘Pashtunistan issue’ as one of their key concerns.<sup>58</sup> Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan,<sup>59</sup> a young army officer at the time and a royal, who advocated for Pashtunistan, was considered to be a sympathiser of the *Weekh*

---

53. We want to emphasise that decentralisation in this historical case did not equate with the modern notions of decentralised systems of governance, local governance and devolution.

54. For more details see: N. Keddie, *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California, 1972).

55. Tarzi was a key Afghan political figure in early 20th century Afghanistan, and an intellectual whose modernisation vision loosely mirrored the Young Turks in the last period of the Ottoman Empire.

56. See: T. Ruttig, “Afghanistan’s Early Reformists: Mahmud Tarzi’s ideas and their influence on the Wesh Zalmian movement”, *AAN Occasional Paper* (2011), [https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/20110428TRuttig-Tarzis\\_Ideas-final.pdf](https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/20110428TRuttig-Tarzis_Ideas-final.pdf)

57. See: F. Bezhan, “The Pashtunistan Issue and Politics in Afghanistan, 1947 – 1952”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 2, Spring 2014, pp. 197 – 209.

58. *Ibid*, p. 204.

59. Prime Minister of Afghanistan 1953-1963, and later President 1973 - 1978

*Zalmiyan*.<sup>60</sup> Poets and intellectuals such as Malang Jan, Benawa, Majrouh and others provided the reference points in their prose and poetry, invoking history and community ties, and delivered a narrative that packaged the Afghan nation with the Pashtuns on the opposite side of the Durand Line. This was building nationalism based on a shared past, a phenomenon that Benedict Anderson has referred to as 'imagined communities.'<sup>61</sup>

For the reformers in this period, in *forming* a unifying *national identity*, there were two distinct challenges: the role of Islam – both its efficacy, or danger if mobilised – and the ethno-lingual heterogeneity and diversity of Afghanistan. Should the direction taken be towards the recognition and accommodation of the heterogeneity, or the assimilation of other ethnic groups into the politically dominant group (i.e., the Pashtuns), following the Turkish model.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, in Turkey, the Turkish language has a historical depth and Turkish ethnic group was the majority. By adopting the Turkey model, Tarzi advocated for the learning of Pashto language – at the expense of Persian, which was the lingua franca – to be made compulsory.

This was aggressively pursued in the 1930s under King Mohammad Nadir Shah, who removed Habibullah Kalakani<sup>63</sup> from power after the latter had unseated King Amanullah Khan in 1929. In 1936, Pashto was raised to the status of 'national language', equating it with the *Persian* language, which was officially renamed *Dari* in 1964 Constitution, in Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> In 1946, the school curriculum adopted Pashto-Persian bilingualism, after a brief but futile attempt to enforce Pashto as the dominant language in education.<sup>65</sup> The narrative goes that in adopting the 1964 constitution, during the *Loya Jirga* (grand assembly) non-Pashtuns demanded that the constitution should affirm that 'Afghan' applied to all citizens in the country, and not to the Pashtuns alone. This shows that until that date the two were synonymous. This was addressed by the amendment of Article 1 in that constitution:<sup>66</sup>

---

60. A. Arnold, *Afghanistan's Two Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq* (Stanford University: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), p10.

61. These 'imagined' communities can be either real or perceived, or partly both. See: B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2006).

62. Dorronsoro (2005), p.36; Arnold (1983) – pp. 7 – 11.

63. Habibullah Kalakani was a Tajik rebel leader (1924 – 1931); although he rebelled against Amanullah Khan's reforms because he saw them anti-Islamic, Kalakani did enjoy support among the Tajiks of the Kuhdaaman region

64. This issue remains highly controversial still to this day. Historians argue that 'Dari,' as opposed to 'Farsi', was emphasised by the Afghan political and intellectual elites, and institutionalised in 1964 Constitution, in order to differentiate Afghanistan's new identity with Iran.

65. Dupree (1983); Dorronsoro (2005).

66. Dorronsoro, op. cit., p. 39.

*“... The Afghan nation is composed of all those individuals who possess the citizenship of the State of Afghanistan in accordance with the provisions of the law. The word Afghan shall apply to each such individual.”<sup>67</sup>*

In this context of ‘building nationalism,’ the issue of Pashtunistan was elevated in the agenda of leaders such as Daoud Khan. His decade of premiership had to come to a hasty end in 1963 after a bitter stand-off with Ayub Khan in Pakistan over the former’s staunch position on the Durand Line and the latter’s decision to shut diplomatic and economic relations with Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the reluctance to fully embrace Pakistan before 1979, however, Afghan leaders did show signs of cooperation and compromise. This was partly in response to Pakistan exerting itself regionally and internationally. But crucially, Afghan leaders recognised that as a low-income and landlocked country, with significant aid-dependence, Afghanistan could not afford stifling economic prosperity as a price for confrontation with Pakistan. Afghan leaders also felt that Pakistan was reciprocating with goodwill.

In the post 1964 constitutional phase, King Zahir Shah sought friendly relations with Pakistan and downplayed the issue of Pashtunistan. Afghanistan not only stayed ‘quiet on Pashtunistan’ during Pakistan’s weak moments in the 1965 war with India, it also allowed vital supplies through Kandahar into Pakistan.<sup>69</sup> In the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war Afghanistan’s restraint was admirably evident: Zahir Shah purportedly refused Moscow’s request to allow Soviet Union and India access through Afghanistan for a detrimental offensive against Pakistan.<sup>70</sup> In 1976, Pakistani and Afghan leaders undertook friendly visits to Kabul and Islamabad; President Daoud Khan, formerly a staunch supporter of the Pashtunistan cause, was warming up to cordial relations with Pakistan. He ‘diversified’ the training of Afghan officers by sending some to Pakistan; he was apparently given a briefing by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) about clandestine activities in Kabul against his regime by Afghan communist elements and Soviet intelligence officials.<sup>71</sup> In his visit to Pakistan in March 1978, Daoud Khan ‘came

---

67. Constitution of Afghanistan = Assasi Qanun (1964); University of Nebraska – Lincoln, May 2005, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=afghanenglish>

68. Ayub Khan’s rule was also marked by the ‘One Unit’ policy in Pakistan which weakened the role of the provinces in the constitution.

69. Magnus and Naby, op. cit., pp. 116 – 119.

70. Ibid. Soviet Union offered the Afghan King Pashtunistan in return for Afghanistan’s cooperation in allowing Soviet and Indian troops to attack Pakistan, asking the King to simply stand-by and let the Soviet-Indian onslaught to take place. Among other factors, Soviets viewed Pakistan’s cooperation with China as a threat which would justify the attack.

71. Ibid.

close to concluding a deal with Pakistan that would have recognized the Durand Line and ended Afghanistan's support for Pashtunistan in return for Baloch and Pashtun autonomy within Pakistan'.<sup>72</sup> Domestically, Daoud Khan cracked down on the leftist/communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Pakistani Baloch and Pashtun activists were also informed that Kabul would no longer harbour them.<sup>73</sup>

### ***Frictions and Proxy Friends: 1979 - 2001***

The communist regime in Kabul came to power under Noor Mohammad Taraki after a bloody coup d'état that killed President Mohammad Daoud Khan and his entire family in April 1978. The belligerent new regime suffered significant internal fissures at inception: Taraki was assassinated by Hafizullah Amin, the second in command, who installed himself as the new leader. Soviet Union was alarmed by the events, fearing that Amin was disloyal and could ally with the United States. Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, authorised the 40<sup>th</sup> Army to enter Afghanistan on 24 December 1979. The military invasion led to the killing of Amin and installed Babrak Karmal as the president of Afghanistan.

Pakistan recognised the new regime but relations with the communist government were sour. Meanwhile, Islamabad welcomed Afghan refugees; they were largely part of the rebellion against the Soviet invasion of their country and wanted to wage a Jihad against both the Soviet military and the communist regime in Afghanistan. Afghan fighters, under Mujahideen *tanzims* in Pakistan, found support from Pakistani establishment. Promoting Jihad against the Soviet Union seemed well-placed with the Islamisation agenda in Pakistan under Zia-ul-Haq (1978 – 1988). Outwardly, Pakistan's Islamisation agenda naturally fused with Islamabad's promotion of Jihad in Afghanistan. This resulted in an unprecedented mobilisation and integration of the Islamist elements in Pakistan with the Afghan Mujahideen groups. It also provided the impetus to expand and consolidate the madrassah networks in Pakistan.<sup>74</sup> Afghanistan and Pakistan had already carried out a 'low intensity' conflict between 1973 and 1977; Daoud Khan supported Baloch rebels in Pakistan, and Pakistan backed Afghan Islamists (mainly Jamiat-e-Islami of Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar) who were based in Peshawar since early-to-mid 1970s.<sup>75</sup>

---

72. Haqqani, op. cit., See Chapter 5: *Afghan Jihad*.

73. Ibid.

74. See a summary discussion on the rise of Islamist groups in Pakistan, *DAWN*, 03 September 2009, <https://www.dawn.com/news/812995/pious-follies>

75. Haqqani 2005, chapter 5: *Afghan Jihad*

However, there was a significant other upshot of the Soviet invasion for Pakistan's army and security establishment. The invasion set the stage for galvanising Islamabad's 'threat perception' against India, and ultimately allowed Pakistan to carry out a major modernisation of its army with pivotal technical and financial support from the United States.<sup>76</sup> 'Since 1947, the policy-maker's greatest concern [had] been to find means to thwart India's hegemonic designs or plans to gain a prominent status in the region's geo-politics'.<sup>77</sup> Pakistan interpreted the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan through the lens of rivalries and tensions with India. Therefore, 'the projection of the Soviet threat was vital for Pakistan's military modernization plans'<sup>78</sup>, which led to embedding Afghanistan in Pakistan's security architecture. Pakistan's Afghan policy landed squarely in the army's General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi; Jihad in Afghanistan was promoted as 'defending' Pakistan.<sup>79</sup> Increasingly, the GHQ – and successive civilian administrations – saw the creation of a pro-Pakistan regime in Afghanistan as a 'politico-strategic' objective that had to be achieved at all costs. 'The relations forged with the various mujahideen groups during the military struggle in the 1980s put the GHQ in a favourable position to manipulate local politics in Afghanistan.'<sup>80</sup> This vigorous approach became a cornerstone of Pakistan's pursuit of a 'strategic depth' for Pakistan armed forces: the major Afghan mujahideen groups, such as Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, ISI's favourite, 'was seen as an additional infantry battalion to be used, if the need arose, against India.'<sup>81</sup>

To dominate local politics and establish a pro-Pakistan administration in Kabul, Pakistan wanted to accomplish a larger plan 'to project Pakistan as a militarily strong Islamic country that would eventually control the newly established Central Asian republics and the states in the Middle East.'<sup>82</sup> The GHQ pursued its objectives even after Zia-ul-Haq's death through ISI's covert operations in support of friendly but fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan; propping such groups and individuals would fluctuate on expediency, from Gulbuddin Hikmatyar to the Taliban.<sup>83</sup>

---

76. For a detailed account of this period and Pakistan army's modernisation efforts, see: Ayesha Siddiqi Agha, *Pakistan's Arms Procurement and Military Buildup, 1979 – 99: In Search of a Policy* (Palgrave: Hampshire, 2001).

77. *Ibid.*, p13.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 13 – 14.

79. The famous slogan of events hosting Afghan Mujahideen in Pakistan read in Urdu "جہاد افغانستان دفاع" (translation: Jihad in Afghanistan, defending of Pakistan)

80. Ayesha Siddiqi, *op. cit.*, pp. 15 – 17.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

In the aftermath of Soviet invasion, the communist regime in Afghanistan was entangled in internal splits between the *Khalq* and *Parcham* factions.<sup>84</sup> After 1979, 'Pashtun nationalism was effectively drowned by the pervasiveness of Islamic radicalism in Afghanistan as well as Pashtun regions of Pakistan.'<sup>85</sup> Nationalist intellectuals and figureheads who promoted the Pashtunistan issue under previous governments faced persecution, imprisonment and even death during the communist reign.<sup>86</sup> Others simply left the country for Pakistan or emigrated to Western Europe and the United States.<sup>87</sup> The Afghan state's narrative on Pakistan shifted starkly from a Pashtunistan-centric approach to one that portrayed Pakistan as part of the American-led 'imperialist' nexus, which threatened the Afghan 'socialist revolution'. For instance, in August 1984, President Karmal accused Pakistan of being behind a bomb attack on Kabul Airport that killed 30 and injured over a 100, and called President Zia-ul-Haq 'a stooge of the Americans'.<sup>88</sup> The government of Afghanistan continued to keep close ties with the successors of Khudai Khidmatgar Pashtun nationalists,<sup>89</sup> but such relationships were secondary to the primary official narrative.

### ***Pakistani Establishment and the Domestic Pashtun Struggle***

In the latter part of his life, after spending decades in exile and in Pakistani jails, Ghaffar Khan grew dismayed as Pashtun populations on both sides of the Durand Line were inflicted by severe violence. It was the ultimate anguish for his ideology of non-violence. In an interview during Zia-ul-Haq's rule, he said:

*"Jinnah's Pakistan is no more... Those who chant 'Pakistan, Pakistan' are merely the wealthy industrialists and [army] generals of Punjab... In this land, we [Pakistan's provinces] are four brothers; we are Muslims: Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab and NWFP... I have said Punjab is our elder brother (sic.) ... for almost forty years whatever they [Punjabis] have done to us, we*

---

84. These were the two major factions of the Afghan communist regime that came to power after the 1978 Saur Revolution / coup d'état

85. A. S. Qassem, "Afghanistan-Pakistan relations: border controversies as counter-terrorist impediments," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No.1, 2007, pp. 65-80.

86. The targeting of these individuals was simply as a result of their association with the regime/s in the pre-communist era, or their lack of endorsing the communist regime

87. For example Abdul Rauf Benawa and Abdul Rahman Pazhwak both died during 1980s in exile in the US and in Pakistan respectively

88. <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/09/02/Afghan-President-Babrak-Karmal-accused-Pakistan-Sunday-of-responsibility/2098462945600/>, accessed on 18 Mar 2021.

89. In 1988, Afghanistan offered Bacha Khan's funeral the highest official protocols and also observed a day of ceasefire in his honour. He passed away in Peshawar but was buried in Jalalabad based on his last will.

*have tolerated it but now our patience has run out. If they want to live with us as brothers, we can be brotherly otherwise we cannot remain in their Ghulaami [subordination] anymore (sic).<sup>90</sup>*

Gauging Ghaffar Khan's interviews and speeches, particularly in the last decade of his life, it is clear that he primarily wanted equality and dignity for Pashtuns of Pakistan within the Pakistani federal system. Yet, he was considerably frustrated that the Pakistani establishment did not see any value in his non-violent activism. He was evidently disappointed, also, that successive Afghan leaders used his advocacy, and Pashtuns' legitimate demands, to cement tensions with Pakistan.<sup>91</sup> In a sombre interview with an Indian journalist in March 1980, a frail 91-year-old Ghaffar Khan, speaking from his residence in Jalalabad, retorted:

*"The idea [of Pashtunistan] never helped us. In fact, it was never a reality. Successive Afghan governments just exploited it for their own political ends. It was only towards the end of his regime that Daoud Khan had stopped talking about it. And Taraki in the early part of his regime also didn't mention it. So when I met him, I thanked him for not raising the issue. But later, even he raised the issue because he wanted to continue the problem for Pakistan. Our people suffered greatly because of all this... I always tried to serve my people and God. Khuda-ee-khidmatgaar (servant of God), that's what I tried to be. But today, it's all different..."<sup>92</sup>*

Meanwhile, Pakistan promoted an alternative group of political actors that originated from Pashtun areas. Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Islam (JUI), as the two key Islamist parties, have been dominated by the Pashtuns in Pakistan. Individually, or together, the JI and JUI have mentored Afghan Islamists at different periods: Jamiat-e-Islami under Burhanuddin Rabbani and Hizb-e-Islami Gulbuddin Hikmatyar in 1970s-1980s, and supporting the Taliban since 1990s.<sup>93</sup> By backing such marriages of convenience and contortions, 'the prevalence of Islamic radicalism among the Afghan Pashtuns' has enabled

---

90. Bacha Khan (exact date of interview unknown), 'Bacha Khan... The Real King. 11 of 16', Urdu interview with a Pakistani journalist, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajKjylHElg8&t=1s>, accessed 23 Mar 2021.

91. Some scholars have argued that pursuing the Pashtunistan agenda was partly about seeking US and Soviet interests in Afghanistan. For example, see: E. Leake, Tribes Spooks, "Holy Men: The Central Intelligence Agency and the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol.53, No.1, pp. 240-262.

92. <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/neighbours/story/19800331-everything-in-afghanistan-is-done-in-the-name-of-religion-khan-abdul-ghaffar-khan-806546-2014-01-31>.

93. Qassem, op. cit., p72.

Pakistan to shift the centre of Pashtun leadership away from Afghanistan to Pakistan; 'whereas in the past the Pashtun nationalist forces revolved around Kabul for patronage, now the Pashtun radical Islamists revolve around Peshawar and Quetta.'<sup>94</sup> The Islamist Afghan Pashtuns turned into powerful policy tools as one of the main proxies of ISI that Pakistan mobilised at will.

Zia-ul-Haq's Afghanistan policy 'was premised on the twin options of playing the ethnic and Islamist cards simultaneously. By favouring Pashtun-led Islamist parties in Afghanistan and Pakistan and by appealing to Islamic solidarity, Zia hoped to neutralize the Pashtunistan issue'.<sup>95</sup> By subduing Pashtun nationalism on both sides of the Durand Line pragmatically, a new environment emerged where Islamist lexicon, framing and solidarities provided the basis of Pashtun-to-Pashtun cooperation. These dynamics have persisted and continue to provide the platform for mobilisation of Islamist sentiments in Pashtun-majority territories on both sides of the Durand Line. Instead of responding to Pashtun demands for domestic political inclusion and socioeconomic equality, Pakistani military and security establishment successfully tied any non-Islamist Pashtun mobilisation to machinations of India and Afghanistan's intelligence services.<sup>96</sup> Even when Islamabad has had legitimate concerns about Kabul's close ties with Delhi, for years it has deployed a 'calculated campaign to exaggerate the Indian threat, in order to justify intervention in Afghanistan.'<sup>97</sup>

### ***The Beginning of the Unravelling of Afghan State***

In the immediate aftermath of 1978, Afghanistan's state structures were faced with exceptional strains that some scholars have argued marked the beginning of the process of state failure in the country. The intelligentsia, particularly the nationalists among them, 'who would have been those with strongest commitment to working towards strengthening of the state, were put off by the presence of the Soviets'.<sup>98</sup> We argue that the failure of state structures ultimately manifested in 1992; it continued until the removal of the Taliban regime in late 2001, and since then the process of rebuilding state institutions in Afghanistan has been ongoing. Although Taliban's return to power nearly two

---

94. Ibid.

95. Farzana Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p.154.

96. This applies to the current wave of Pashtun mobilisation in Pakistan under Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) is advocating for the dignity of Pashtun citizens under the Pakistani constitution

97. International Crisis Group, "Resetting Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan," *Asia Report* No. 262, 28 October 2014.

98. A. Giustozzi, "Afghanistan: Transition without end; An Analytical Narrative on State-Making," *Crisis States Working Papers Series 2, Working Paper 40* (The London School of Economics and Political Science: Crisis States Research Centre)

decades after 2001 demonstrates their spectacular success against the United States and other stakeholder they have fought against, the challenges of state institutions and of rebuilding the state will likely continue to haunt their efforts at effective governance.

The United States accepted a UN brokered process, the 1988 Geneva Accords, for the full withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Zia-ul-Haq and the ISI insisted that the Accords should tackle the issue of who would run Afghanistan post-Soviet departure. However, this was not addressed. Zia-ul-Haq wanted the United States to acknowledge Pakistan's contributions in the fight against the Soviet Union by installing his favourite Mujahideen leader, Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, as the head of a 'Mujahideen coalition government'.<sup>99</sup> Eventually, the communist regime under Dr Najibullah collapsed in 1992, an orderly transition of power never took place. Afghan Mujahideen groups returned to Kabul and established the Islamic State of Afghanistan, initially headed by Sibghatullah Mojaddedi and later by Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was the first head of state to visit Kabul in April 1992; he gave Mojaddedi a cheque for 250 million rupees (the equivalent of 10 million US dollars) and donated essential food items.<sup>100</sup> Later, Sharif mediated (with Saudi and Iranian backing), and played an instrumental role, in bringing together the seven Mujahideen *tanzims* who signed a power-sharing agreement under the Islamabad Accord of March 1993.<sup>101</sup> Bitter divisions, particularly between Hikmatyar and other Mujahideen leaders including Ahmad Shah Masood, prevented the implementation of the Accord; the dreadful war of 1992 – 1996 ensued among the Mujahideen groups. After Hikmatyar failed to secure power and hence could not mollify Islamabad's anxieties, 'Pakistan decided to shift its patronage to the Taliban'.<sup>102</sup>

Through its relationship with the Taliban, Islamabad was keen to set up a trade route with Central Asia; it also wanted to nullify any potentials of a rise of Pashtun nationalism. Perhaps more significantly for the region, Pakistan wanted 'to train Kashmiri Jihadis, and to stabilize its western borders'.<sup>103</sup> Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996. Pakistan was the first country to formally recognise the Taliban regime, latterly joined by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab

---

99. Haqqani, op. cit.

100. Archival footage of the visit: <https://fb.watch/4swe5k7F2v/>

101. United Nations Security Council, Islamabad Accord of March 1993, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF\\_930307\\_AfghanPeaceAccord%28en%29.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/AF_930307_AfghanPeaceAccord%28en%29.pdf)

102. R. Kakar, "Pak-Afghan Relations: Tracing the Roots of Troubled Past 1947 – 2001," *Journal of Asian Politics and History*, No. 1, Fall 2012, p.134.

103. Ibid.

Emirates. With the Taliban, arguably, Islamabad found the perfect proxy: an anti-India puritanically religio-extremist group that maintained strong relations with Pakistani *madrassas* and drew inspiration from Pakistani Deobandi Hanafi branch. More importantly for Pakistan, Taliban held a strong detestation against traditional Afghan nationalism – including Pashtun nationalism – that defined the historical tribal, urban, local and community aspects of life in Afghanistan.

### ***Frosty Neighbours waiting for the Warmth: 2001 – Present***

Pakistan supported the US-led *Operation Enduring Freedom*, or the so called ‘War on Terror’ in October 2001, which resulted in the collapse and removal of the Taliban regime. Following the 9/11 attacks, although initially allowed to hold news conferences, Pakistan detained Taliban ambassador and shut their embassy in Islamabad.<sup>104</sup> In the last two decades, substantial literature from academia, policy and civil society point to a contradiction in Pakistan’s policy in Afghanistan: supporting the US efforts and the Afghan governments since 2001, but simultaneously providing sanctuary to the Taliban leadership in Pakistani cities. Three key insurgent/terrorist groups found sanctuary in Pakistan after 2001: the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and Al Qaeda. The death of major figures in the war on terror – including two leaders of the Taliban - happened inside Pakistan: Osama Bin Laden (killed in May 2011 in a US SEAL TEAM Six attack on his compound in Abbottabad), Mullah Omar in 2013 (reportedly died of tuberculosis in a Karachi hospital), Akhtar Mohammad Mansour (killed in a US drone strikes in July 2015).

The enigma this Pakistani approach presents is profoundly unsettling for confidence building measures to take hold in bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Islamabad has continued to highlight, justifiably, the adverse impact of the war in Afghanistan on its population in erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province; Pakistan’s economy suffers as a result of rising militancy and insecurity in the country. Therefore, for the Afghan policy makers and citizens, it is hard to fathom Pakistan’s rationale for its continued support of the Taliban insurgency that has wreaked havoc in Afghanistan and harmed the Pakistani economy and society by extension. Citizens of Afghanistan interpret Pakistan’s provision of sanctuary and support to the Taliban (whether by the state directly or through non-state entities which Islamabad tolerates) as either a plot to subjugate the Afghan nation, or that Pakistan wants to dominate the region by exporting terrorism

---

104. Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, the Taliban ambassador to Islamabad in this period, was detained in Pakistan in late 2001; he ended up in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp but subsequently released in 2005.

through proxy from Afghanistan – or both. The salience of the ‘India factor’ in the calculations of Pakistani security establishment, nonetheless, evades the analysis in Afghanistan. Afghans see Pakistani fear of Indian encroachment through Afghanistan as a hyperbole. Authors sympathetic to Pakistan, such as Anatol Lieven, concur that Pakistan exaggerates the India factor in Afghanistan, but argues that such fears in Islamabad should not be viewed as irrational.<sup>105</sup> In the formal engagements, however, Pakistan’s emphatic list of grievances against Indian ‘encroachment’ through Afghanistan surprise many Afghans who struggle to find the level of Indian influence/presence in their country that Islamabad alleges.

The anxiety of a US – Indian alliance against Pakistan was a clear factor that led President Pervez Musharraf to join the US War on Terror against the Taliban; he presented the fear of India to convince ordinary Pakistanis of the necessity to support the American mission.<sup>106</sup> For the army and the ISI, the notion of a US military presence in the region, with heavy reliance on Pakistan for logistics and counter terrorism, presented a unique opportunity to drag the US into the Kashmir dispute. However, successive administrations in Washington refused to offer any mediatory or political support, to the absolute dismay of Pakistani security establishment.

The mistrust and panic about India were ‘both a reason and an excuse for Pakistan not to redeploy more troops from the eastern border with India [as the US would have liked] to fight against the Taleban in the west.’<sup>107</sup> Amidst a history of conflicts, India blamed two Pakistani Islamist groups, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba, for a suicide attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001. In January 2002, the US Secretary of State, Collin Powell, was warmly welcomed in Islamabad; he praised the Pakistani leadership for their support of the US war on terror, pledging that the Bush administration was willing to ‘nudge India towards resolving the Kashmir dispute.’<sup>108</sup> Pakistan Army’s official timeline for this period states: the ‘Indian escalation on the Eastern border using pretext of attack on Indian Parliament [aims] to exploit Pakistan’s vulnerability along Pak-Afghan border.’<sup>109</sup> Within the security establishment in Pakistan, the

---

105. Anatol Lieven, *Pakistan: A Hard Country* (Penguin Books, 2011), see chapter.1.

106. Anadolu Agency, *Pakistan’s Musharraf defends supporting US’s Afghan war*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistans-musharraf-defends-supporting-uss-afghan-war/644962>

107. Lieven, op. cit.

108. But the ‘nudge’ never materialised, or had any impact on Pakistani-Indian dynamics. See: S. Dasgupta (2002) *Musharraf’s Big Move*, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/musharrafs-big-move/>

109. Official website of Pakistan Army

ultimate fear is that Afghanistan could turn into 'an Indian client state, leading to India's strategic encirclement of Pakistan.'<sup>110</sup>

### ***Pakistani Security Establishment and the Afghan Taliban***

For several years, despite credible reports, Pakistani security establishment refused that the ISI and/or the army were aiding Taliban sanctuaries inside Pakistan. As early as 2006, conclusions within the analytical community revealed: 'The real question is not whether Pakistan is or is not supporting the Taliban, but why it is doing so.'<sup>111</sup> In 2009, Pakistan's defence minister, Ahmad Mukhtar, admitted that Taliban's Quetta Shura existed. At the same time, a report by Stanley McChrystal, senior US commander in Afghanistan at the time, stated that 'the top Taliban leadership was in Quetta and that they were master-minding attacks on international forces in Afghanistan.'<sup>112</sup> In 2011, combined evidence from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) and the National Security Agency (NSA), conclusively established that ISI maintained strong links with the Haqqani Network, including support for their active commanders that carried out attacks inside Afghanistan.<sup>113</sup> In September 2011, while testifying to the US Senate, Admiral Michael Mullen, then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made the blunt statement that: 'The Haqqani Network acts as the veritable arm of the Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency.'<sup>114</sup>

Pakistan's explanation for Taliban presence in major cities across the country (Quetta, Peshawar, Karachi) have fluctuated from claiming they were simply 'dormant and would return to Afghanistan after international troops leave,'<sup>115</sup> to arguing that among millions of Afghan refugees it was hard to keep a tap on who is or is not a Taliban member. Meanwhile, other fieldwork-driven and investigative reporting has pointed that partly the real motivation behind Pakistani military support for the Taliban is that it guarantees international funding for Pakistan's security and aid economies.<sup>116</sup>

---

110. Lieven, op. cit.

111. F. Grare, F. "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era," *Carnegie Papers*, No 72, October 2006.

112. [https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/12/quetta\\_shura\\_exists\\_no\\_longer.php](https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/12/quetta_shura_exists_no_longer.php), accessed on 23 Mar 2021.

113. For a fascinating and detailed reading see: S. Coll, *Directorate S: The CIA and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan, 2001 – 2016* (Allen Lane publisher, 2018.)

114. Ibid., p577.

115. "Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan," *Asia Report*, No. 255, 23 January 2014, p. 20.

116. D. Filkins, "Right at the Edge," *The New York Times Magazine*, 5 September 2008.

Nevertheless, the historical baggage of tensions with India is the ceaseless *raison d'état* that Pakistani security and political establishment present to explain Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. As a continuum, Pakistan's national security anxieties with India remain a focal issue although the proxies in Afghanistan have evolved: Islamists in 1960s-70s, Mujahideen after 1978 (particularly Hikmatyar), Taliban before 2001, Taliban after 2001.

As the US-Taliban agreement in Doha was signed in February 2020, political association and dialogue with the Taliban are no longer derided or frowned upon. However, almost a decade ago Pakistani establishment formed the view that US-led military intervention in Afghanistan was going to fail. Once this assessment was adopted, the belief that the post-2001 Afghan state could not survive the international troop withdrawal has become official stance. Hence, once the Afghan state fails and there is civil war and anarchy again, akin to the 1990s, 'every regional state [including India] will have its own allies – and so must Pakistan.'<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, as tens of billions of US dollars in aid and military spending poured into Afghanistan since 2001, Pakistan has proactively sought to capture the lion's share of the Afghan import/export market. Karachi continues to be the key transit route for landlocked Afghanistan; this is likely to remain the case even as Afghanistan has attempted to diversify its connectivity via other land and air 'corridors' – in part to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan. The two countries have significant opportunities for economic connectivity, including for Pakistan's ambitions to achieve infrastructural and energy connectivity with Central Asia. The situation in Afghanistan can also impact the security and success of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and other significant infrastructural initiatives such as China's Belt and Road Initiative. Afghanistan's security is no longer about the country itself, but it can hamper – or help – Pakistan's regional economic connectivity.

## **Conclusion**

We have consciously avoided discussions that attempt to carve a cartography of claims, and counter-claims, around security incidents in both countries. As we demonstrate, though briefly, the paradoxes of formal bilateral ties need unpacking through an analysis that goes deeper than simplifications, and beyond the media-centric headlines and the blame game. In attempting to situate an explanation for the ostensible cognitive dissonance – the mismatch

---

117. Lieven, *op. cit.*

– in Afghan and Pakistani official perspectives and narratives concerning their bilateral ties, we proposed that the varied experiences with the imposition/emergence of the nation-state offer helpful answers. The post-colonial trauma of a new political reality in the region, the polities that were constructed but were void of indigenous agency, the need for new nationalism/s – all of these phenomena – convoluted the difficult journey to peaceful co-existence.

Since their current geographic boundaries were drawn, Afghanistan and Pakistan have attempted to devise pathways to create unifying national identities for its citizens. The ethno-linguistic and cultural heterogeneities have been glossed over by elite attempts to drive centralised nationalism programmes. In Afghanistan, not dissimilar to many countries, not all its inhabitants agree on a singular notion of a 'national identity,' but their ideals of nationhood – of national attachments – lie in a common past with a geography where community, unity and continuity were its accepted features; these features persisted in the absence of strong formal institutions. Arguably, their nationalism can be anchored in the past; to restore a 'glorious' past is to become prosperous again. But Afghanistan needs functioning state institutions to achieve full potential; this includes regional and economic connectivity with its neighbours. This aspiration remains unfulfilled largely due to external proxy conflict inside Afghanistan.

Pakistan was born as an ideal that promised a secure common 'future' to Muslims in British India, rooted in a 'modernist' understanding of Islam, but also in a promising nation-state that would be inspired by, and inspiring, the international system in the post-World War II era. Yet, Pakistan's quest to form a unifying identity has been riddled with paradoxes. Subsequent wars with India, the breaking away of Bangladesh and Pakistan's pervasive anxieties about its land defences have created a Pakistani state that is militarily mighty but persistently prefers to foster proxy clients to destabilise, or maintain a *strategic depth* in, its neighbourhood. The support of security establishment for proxy non-state actors in Afghanistan is the single issue that breeds antagonism towards Pakistan among Afghans; this is not merely emotional as ordinary Afghans bear the heavy brunt of an everyday conflict that has external backers.

Pakistan's support for the intra-Afghan dialogue with the Taliban was consequential. But Afghan government and political elite failed to meaningfully engage with Pakistan to communicate where anxieties about India are real, and where Islamabad or the ISI need to re-evaluate their threat perception. These dynamics will continue to dominate Afghanistan-Pakistan relations even under the new Taliban administration. Afghanistan should also consider elevating its bilateral relations with Pakistan to the regional level. This will help minimise the current dissonance where Pakistan's Afghan policy is part of its South Asian

security complex,<sup>118</sup> while Afghanistan after 2001 until the return of Taliban to power in 2021 maintained separate bilateral tracks with Islamabad and Delhi. The last thing war-weary Afghans need is a proxy theatre between Delhi and Islamabad in Afghanistan.

The dividends are great if bilateral relations are peaceful and mutual suspicion is minimised. The history of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations proves two key arguments. First, the domestic, regional and global dynamics are profoundly different to the previous decades. For whatever reason, including as a result of Taliban onslaught, if there is an implosion of the state structures in Afghanistan to the extent that a state collapse is inevitable, Pakistan will not be insulated, and the conflict will almost-certainly spill over despite the fencing on the Durand Line by Islamabad. Pakistan has supported proxy elements in Afghanistan in four different phases since 1960s but none has delivered Pakistan's desired outcome: a subordinate Afghan state. Neither Afghanistan can tolerate another phase of proxies nor Pakistan can contain the boomerang impact of policies supporting armed Islamists. Second, Afghanistan's antagonising policies towards Pakistan – especially on the issue of Pashtunistan – have not benefited Afghans. Both countries need to cooperate to devise policies that deepen people-to-people contacts, moving away from a securitisation of relations to strengthening geoeconomics.

Afghanistan-Pakistan relations never peaked to full fruition even when bilateral relations seemed to be on a positive trajectory. Mutual mistrust and securitisation of all aspects of mutual relations have marred state-to-state ties. While it will be a monumental task to quash the entrenched suspicion, the ingredients for bettering relations are present in the societal and people-to-people relations. Generations of Afghans have lived, worked and studied in Pakistan; this allows Pakistan to seek the goodwill of Afghans who are integrally familiar with the country. Economic prospects, especially in cross-border areas, offer employment to many Pakistanis and Afghans. But to strengthen the socioeconomic, cultural and political prospects for Afghans and Pakistanis, state-to-state relations have become both an impediment and an enabler. Ruling and security elites in both countries must capitalise on the societal transformation in their countries, particularly the generational shift and bulging youth populations who expect and deserve peace in their countries, co-existing without the fear of proxy conflicts. The Taliban's return to power, and the seeming collapse of yet another regime in Afghanistan opens a new chapter for Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. This will most certainly be a different chapter. However, Pakistani political and

---

118. For further details see: Q. Siddique, "Pakistan's Future Policy Towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and US," *DIIS Report 2011:08*, Danish Institute for International Studies.

security elite must not forget the lessons of history where any attempt to prop up a pro-Pakistan regime in Kabul will fail if a Taliban administration does not ensure inclusivity internally or disregards wider societal diversity including any grievances against Pakistan's perceived or real negative policies toward Afghanistan.



## **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Towards a New Horizon**

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

The people of Pakistan and Afghanistan share an intricate overlap that encompasses nearly every dimension of their life. From strategic location to bilateral trade to meeting common challenges, the people of the two countries have interacted with each other for centuries. This interaction has ranged from manifestly positive interdependence underpinned by close cooperation to acutely negative interdependence marked by outright hostility. At one end of the spectrum, the affinities of faith, language, culture, bilateral and transit trade, as well as constant people to people exchanges have kept the two nations closely bonded. Yet, different historical and political experiences, unsettled borders, and mutual suspicions have kept them away from even good-neighborly relations. At no time in history was this strategic interdependence, both positive and negative, more evident than the last forty years, during which peace or lack of it in one country invariably affected the other.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979, Afghanistan immersed into the vortex of superpower contest. After 9/11, Afghanistan experienced the US invasion purportedly to oust Al Qaeda and fight terrorism. In both instances, Pakistan got dragged into great powers' wars in Afghanistan. The ensuing instability brought in disastrous consequences for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and indeed for the region and the world at large. Although in recent years, Pakistan has made discernible gains against terrorism, the threat still exists due to the presence of the Islamic State (IS) and other militant outfits in Afghanistan. Therefore, peace attained so far is tentative and will remain so, if Afghanistan next door is not stable.

In Pakistan, there is a visible emerging consensus that a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is the most desirable pre-requisite to ushering in a renewed positive inter-dependence of peace, economic development, and vistas of connectivity to benefit the entire region. Can the two countries move towards such a horizon of positive interdependence - the horizon of hope for a peaceful and prosperous future for both countries? The recent attempts for reconciliation, including the intra-Afghan talks, duly facilitated by Pakistan and the US, provide that glimmer of hope, howsoever shaky it may appear.

Understandably, the success of intra-Afghan talks cannot be taken for granted. Given the deep scars of the past forty years of fratricidal war, the healing process will not be easy. However, the people of Afghanistan have no choice but to rise above the fray to forge a spirit of peaceful co-existence. They must realize that violence, bloodshed, and war have brought to their country nothing but devastation, poverty, and misery. For its part, Pakistan must become a sincere partner of the people of Afghanistan as they struggle in their quest for peace and stability of their country. A constructive and cooperative bilateral relationship is thus critical to securing the ever-elusive peace between Afghanistan and Pakistan. A vision of strategic inter-dependence rather than parochial and myopic self-interest should guide the leadership of both countries. Can they make a common cause and succeed? Can they reach out to that horizon of enormous opportunities of peace and prosperity? Only time will tell.

This discourse examines the factors that are critical to stitch together a durable relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It envisages possible scenarios about the direction that the ongoing peace and reconciliation process can take in Afghanistan and then explore what policy options Pakistan must exercise to ensure that both the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan are the ultimate winners.

Afghanistan is an ethnic mosaic enriched by Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazara, Uzbek and ten other ethnic groups.<sup>119</sup> Fiercely independent, Afghans are a proud people who have braved wars and violent conflict, witnessed conquerors and invaders, and dealt with traders and migrants throughout its recorded history of more than two thousand years. For greater part of history, since the Aryan invasions six thousand years ago or from the time Alexander led his Macedonian army to India through Afghanistan, the country has been a gateway for invaders and migrants alike to the territories that now comprise Pakistan and India. After the advent of Islam, majority of Afghans embraced the faith and to this date Islam has been their common bond with the people of Pakistan. Today, the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan share bonds of history, culture, faith, language, and economic interactions that bind them into a strategic inter-dependence. These interwoven linkages have deepened tangible cooperation at one level while generating friction and hostility on the other. Managing the bilateral relationship has never been easy. Both nations have struggled to find that common space which builds on what brings them together and reconciles where they differ.

In recent history, three watershed events have impacted the region and the bilateral strategic inter-dependence of Afghanistan and Pakistan most

---

119. Afghanistan's 2004 constitution recognized fourteen major ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkman, Baluch, Pashai, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujur and Brahwi.

profoundly. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 was an event of phenomenal import that exacted a heavy toll on the South Asian region and also global peace and stability. The concept of Afghan *jihad* that was conceived and executed by the US and Pakistan to evict the Soviet forces may have achieved its objectives of pushing out the Russians from Afghanistan, but left deep scars on the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have continued to haunt the two nations for the past forty years. While Afghanistan suffered from fratricidal infighting amongst the erstwhile *mujahideen*, Pakistan received millions of Afghan refugees putting enormous pressure on its economy. A constant cross border movement of militants wreaked havoc in both countries. From the chaotic infighting of the *mujahideen* arose the Taliban who formed an ultra-conservative government in Kabul with focus on curbing social freedoms in the name of Islam.

The second turning point came after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Center Twin Towers and Pentagon, unleashing American fury against Afghanistan because Americans believed that it was Afghanistan-based Al Qaeda that had carried out the 9/11 attacks and the earlier terrorist attacks against the US. When American bombs rained over the mountains of Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan, most of the militants fled towards Pakistan's tribal areas. Since Pakistan opted to support the international coalition in fighting what the Americans called the Global War on Terror, Pakistan became a target of both Afghan and Pakistan based militants. From 2004 to 2014, Pakistan suffered a debilitating wave of terrorist attacks, mostly by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), obliging Pakistan to launch a massive military operation in 2014, called Zarb e Azb in the tribal areas starting with North Waziristan.<sup>120</sup> Within a few years, most of the tribal areas were cleared of the militants' sanctuaries, albeit at a phenomenal human and financial cost, leading ultimately to the merger of tribal areas with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, thus denying militants of ungoverned spaces to conduct terrorist attacks.

The third and most recent defining moment occurred in 2018 when the US decided to pursue the peace process of reconciliation with the Taliban after eighteen years of hefty fighting which cost the Americans billions of dollars, thousands of American lives, and failing to prevent the success and influence of the Taliban in large parts of Afghanistan. For the US to hold direct talks with the Taliban, which it had long recognized as terrorists, must not have been an easy decision. Similarly, the Taliban too, seemed to have become flexible, possibly realizing that they could no longer conquer the entire territory of

---

120. Zahir Shah Sherazi, "Zarb-e-Azb Operation: 120 Suspected Militants Killed in N Waziristan," Dawn, 15, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1112909>.

Afghanistan and could get more on the table than the battlefield alone. The Afghan government in Kabul was, however, uneasy as the US-Taliban peace talks accorded recognition to the Taliban as a political interlocuter rather than a terrorist entity. Despite the hurdles and opposition, the US and the Taliban signed a peace agreement on February 29, 2020 initiating an intra-Afghan dialogue as a basis for lasting peace in Afghanistan, which the Afghan government reluctantly agreed to join.<sup>121</sup> Pakistan lost no time in welcoming this shift in US policy away from a military solution and decided to facilitate the peace process in whatever way it could, most notably by bringing Taliban to the negotiating table.

At the time of writing this chapter, the reconciliation process is still underway amidst clear recognition that the process would not be easy and would require all stakeholders, internal to Afghanistan and external, to come on one page in the larger interest of peace in Afghanistan. In the US, a new administration has come in, headed by Joseph R Biden, who is determined to pull troops out of Afghanistan latest by September. In Pakistan, the government has embarked on a revitalized effort to improve bilateral relations with Afghanistan in all its dimensions, particularly bilateral and transit trade, border management, and people to people contacts.

## **A Symbiotic Relationship**

Before indulging into the discussion as to where the Afghan peace process currently is headed and what is it that Pakistan can or must do to help, it would be useful to recognize that Afghanistan and Pakistan are bound together in a symbiotic relationship. This means that what ails one country affects the other and what benefits one has an automatic salutary effect on the other. This reality of strategic interdependence is sometimes overlooked on both sides to mutual peril. If the two sides had recognized this reality, and worked through mutual confidence rather than mutual suspicion, they would have handled the first two of the above mentioned three turning points much differently. The enormous negative fallout of those developments could have been curtailed.

Four dimensions of the strategic interdependence between Pakistan and Afghanistan illustrates, that the future will not be any different from the past if a positive attitude is not adopted by the leadership of both countries:

First is the recognition in both nations that they cannot defeat the evil forces of terrorism and violent extremism unless they deal with these and other common

---

121. Center for Preventive Action, "The Road to Peace in Afghanistan," <https://www.cfr.org/article/what-know-about-afghan-peace-negotiations>.

challenges in a spirit of mutual trust and bilateral collaboration. Since 9/11, both countries have suffered at the hands of these two menaces. Instead of treating terrorism as a common challenge, and without realizing that the people of Pakistan had suffered enormously from the evil forces of terrorism, successive Afghan governments since 9/11 adopted a belligerent tone towards Pakistan, accusing the latter of harboring the Afghan Taliban who attack the Afghan forces. Pakistani leaders attempted repeatedly to convince the Afghan and American interlocutors that bulk of the Taliban cadre was in Afghanistan and whoever came to Pakistan to meet family members living as Afghan refugees were being pressurized to give up violence and join the political process in Afghanistan. When Afghan leaders refused to see the Pakistani perspective, Pakistan made it clear that it would not fight the Afghan war on Pakistani soil and urged the Afghan government to create a conducive environment where the Taliban must see more benefit on the table than on the battlefield. This advice was shunned until the Trump administration changed tracks and started talking to the Taliban with a view to finding a political solution of the crisis in Afghanistan. Had Pakistan's advice been accommodated, the prospects of peace in Afghanistan could have brightened much sooner.

A related dimension is the role played by the countries of the region in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. Iran, Russia, China and the Central Asian States have stakes in eliminating terrorism and extremism and achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan and to this end have expressed their desire to work with the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan. With regard to India, however, there has been a continuing concern in Pakistan that New Delhi has been provided considerable space in Afghanistan which Indian strategists have used to instigate instability in Pakistan. This has been done by providing support and abetment to terrorist networks such as the TTP (based in Afghanistan) as well as nationalist and secessionist elements, creating a "double squeeze" against Pakistan. Although successive Afghan governments have given assurances that they would not allow Afghan soil to be used against Pakistan, however, there is no evidence of this assurance being followed up on ground. For its part, Pakistan has indicated at various levels of its leadership that it has no issues with India's role in Afghanistan regarding developmental assistance and investment as long as it is not detrimental to Pakistan's interests.

The second area of gainful interdependence is bilateral trade and transit trade. Whenever Pak-Afghan relations improve, bilateral trade increases, bringing tangible economic dividends to people on both sides of the border. The surge in volumes of bilateral trade experienced some years ago illustrates the high potential of mutual benefit that this area of cooperation offers to both countries. On transit trade, Pakistan is duty bound, under international law, to

accord to Afghan traders, industrialists and investors access to Pakistani ports to import and export its goods. Pakistan has provided that access willingly and generously even though there has been notable economic injury to Pakistan when the goods in transit either stayed back in Pakistan without paying any customs duty or entered Afghanistan only to be smuggled back into Pakistan. Instead of working positively to take full advantage of this interdependence, Afghan leaders have threatened to shift the Afghan transit trade to other routes, without realizing that transit through Pakistan makes far more economic sense than other routes.

The third important element of the relationship is regional connectivity that could bring enormous benefits to both countries owing to the geo-strategic location of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both countries connect three important sub-regions of Asia – South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia. Regrettably, the benefits of regional connectivity could not be reaped. Afghan governments have impeded Pakistan's access to energy-rich Central Asian states. President Ashraf Ghani has conditioned Pakistan's access to Tajikistan upon providing India with land access to Afghanistan via Pakistan. This reflects a lack of sensitivity on the part of the Afghan leadership regarding Pakistan's security concerns vis-a-vis India. Nor does it recognize that allowing millions of Indian trucks on Pakistani roads requires considerable preparatory work, for which the Indian side has yet to create an enabling environment. Despite these hurdles, it has been wise of the Pakistani leadership to unilaterally allow Afghan goods to move to India via the Wahga border.<sup>122</sup> Conditionalities imposed by the Afghan government have not only been detrimental for Pakistan and Tajikistan (which has been keen to link up to Pakistan via Afghanistan), but even more so for Afghanistan's own economic development.

The fourth dimension of the relationship that works to the benefit of both countries, if handled with mutual trust, is effective border management. Historically, the border has been porous and difficult to manage. People living on both sides of the border also enjoy easement rights to be able to cross over without passports or visas. However, militants operating on both sides have exploited this loosely managed border, by carrying out terrorist attacks in one country and seeking refuge in the other. In this regard, it has become all the more necessary to carry out effective border management.

---

122. "Two Afghan Trucks Enter India First Time after Pakistan Allows Transit," The News International, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/688944-two-afghan-trucks-enter-india-first-time-after-pakistan-allows-transit>

In June 2014, when Pakistan launched its military operation namely, *Zarb e Azb* against all militants located in North Waziristan, the Afghan government was approached to cooperate by apprehending militants fleeing the Pakistani side and seeking refuge on the Afghan side. Instead, the Afghan government first dilly-dallied and then subjected its cooperation to a condition that *Zarb e Azb* must also target the Afghan Taliban, thus wasting a golden opportunity to eliminate terrorists through a hammer and anvil approach. To make it worse, the Afghan intelligence started harboring TTP leaders, who used Afghan soil to attack Pakistan. This ostensibly was the former's way of neutralizing the alleged Pakistani support to the Afghan Taliban. Despite repeated affirmations by the Pakistani leadership that *Zarb-e-Azb* was aimed at targeting all militants, the Afghan leadership remained unconvinced.

To make matters worse, the successive Afghan governments have continued to insist that they do not recognize the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, insisting to call it the Durand Line. Every time, Pakistan has tried to fence the border or create posts, there have been attacks from the Afghan side. Pakistan has always maintained that the Pak-Afghan border has been internationally recognized and regardless of what name the Afghan government uses for it, the border must be managed better in the larger interest of peace and stability for both countries. In the last few years, Pakistan has invested enormous resources to manage the border as much as possible, and where the terrain is too rugged to be fenced, posts have been created to allow regular border patrols. This will help interdict cross border movement of terrorists and benefit both countries. The latest attempts to fence the border in 2020 and 2021 were actively resisted by Afghan side by regular army and irregular groups. Had the Afghan side seen this issue from a broader perspective, border management would have been far more effective. Border management is not intended to stop the crossings of legitimate travelers, traders, tourists, students or ordinary people. If anything, the additional crossing points and creation of border posts are intended to promote people to people contact, bringing enormous benefit to common man on both sides of the border.

## **Where is Afghanistan Headed?**

It has been a monumental tragedy that so much time has been spent on winning a war in Afghanistan than winning peace. Even after nineteen years of war in Afghanistan, there is not much to celebrate. During all these years, the US and NATO forces kept fluctuating from surge in numbers to periodic draw-down

of troops. The US dropped millions of munitions on Afghanistan,<sup>123</sup> yet at no stage was the entire country under the control of the Afghan government. The reports of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), which conducts independent audit and analysis for the US Congress, have consistently highlighted how large territories of Afghanistan were still ungoverned, providing space to militants from different parts of the world.<sup>124</sup> The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) were also suffering from several issues, including ghost soldiers and pilfering of fuel, weapons and other supplies intended for Afghan forces. There were also high desertion rates, and growing green on green and green on blue attacks. Morale was running low.

As the war went on, so many precious lives were lost. Max Boot has penned, a biography of a CIA operative, who reportedly advised a peace agreement and not war in Vietnam.<sup>125</sup> His advice was not accepted. It was only after 58,000 American and millions of Vietnamese lives were lost that the US gave up the quest for a military solution and opted for peace. It is worth mentioning that it is the same Vietnam that later progressed economically and became America's friend. It makes sense to deduce that Afghanistan must not become another Vietnam or Iraq, both expensive wars in blood and treasure.

It is in the above context that the February 29, 2020 agreement marks an important turning point and a pragmatic recognition of ground realities. The peace agreement was a product of a series of talks between the US and the Taliban, which started in 2018 when American officials met the Taliban in Doha secretly. Later, the American-Taliban contacts became overt and talks became more frequent. The most significant part of the deal was a commitment by the US to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, which has been the primary condition for the Taliban. The Taliban in return gave a commitment to prevent Al Qaeda from using territory under Taliban control for planning terrorist attacks - a commitment that they were not ready to give before. Another significant outcome of the deal was to start intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government to chalk out a future of peace for their country. More notably, the Taliban agreed to talk to the Afghan government, which previously they had been reluctant to do so. The initial hiccup in starting intra-Afghan talks were caused by the dispute over the results of the 2019 Afghan presidential elections where Abdullah Abdullah refused to accept his electoral defeat. The compromise was reached in May 2020 when Abdullah was appointed

---

123. Eric Schmitt reported in NYT in December 2017 and Ivo Daalder, former US PR to NATO Council and president of Chicago Council of Global Affairs wrote in CNN that in 2017 the US dropped more than three times munitions on Afghanistan than in 2016. But even the uptick in 2017 was only around four fifths of the peak in 2011. Despite this surge in use of force, the tide had not turned. In fact, the Taliban were reacting with more ferocious attacks.

as chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR). The next hurdle that delayed the talks was President Ashraf Ghani's refusal to release Taliban prisoners, arguing that the Afghan government was not a party to the US-Taliban deal and prisoner swap should be part of the intra-Afghan talks. This hurdle was crossed by August 2020, when the Afghan government released over 5,000 Taliban prisoners and the Taliban released nearly 1,000.<sup>126</sup> Another serious roadblock has been the surge in violence. The Taliban did not attack the US-led Coalition forces but violent confrontations between the Taliban and the Afghan security forces continued.

The intra-Afghan talks started in September 2020 but were consumed by differences on basic framework of discussion. Amidst reports of a breakthrough on agreed rules and procedures for talks, the second round of talks occurred on January 5, 2021 in Doha. The talks reportedly revolved around the issues of power-sharing and ceasefire. It is important to note that President Ghani rejects the idea of an "interim government" and wants to serve the entirety of his elected term. On the ceasefire, while the Afghan government attaches the subject high urgency, for the Taliban, the ceasefire would follow after an agreement on the shape of the future government.

The talks have not yet yielded any notable breakthrough so far. Meanwhile, the US President Joe Biden has ordered a review of the February 2020 US-Taliban deal brokered by President Trump with a view to assessing whether the Taliban were following up on their commitment that they would cut ties with terrorist groups, reduce violence, and engage in intra-Afghan talks. As the incoming government, it is only natural that such a review should be conducted, first to understand the status of the peace deal and secondly because it would want to know the contents of the annexes of the deal that were classified. However, when one considers the fact that the Biden administration wants to end the so-called "forever war" and wants to bring its troops back<sup>127</sup>, there appears to be every likelihood that the ongoing peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan would continue.

---

126. Susanna George, "Talks between Taliban, Afghan government to begin this weekend after 6 high-value prisoners released from Afghan custody," Washington Post, September 11, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks-prisoner-release/2020/09/10/195c7f5e-f183-11ea-8025-5d3489768ac8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks-prisoner-release/2020/09/10/195c7f5e-f183-11ea-8025-5d3489768ac8_story.html)

127. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said at his Senate confirmation hearing on January 19, 2021 that "We want to end this so-called forever war. We want to bring our forces home. We want to retain some capacity to deal with any resurgence of terrorism, which is what brought us there in the first place", <https://www.dw.com/en/us-to-review-afghan-peace-deal-with-taliban/a-56320989>

## **Critical Components of the Peace Process**

Will the people of Afghanistan finally find the peace they have been waiting for the past four decades? This is a question that is on every one's mind. This question is particularly important for Pakistan because in the absence of a stable polity in Afghanistan, the bilateral relationship cannot scale the heights it deserves to reach. While there has been progress towards reconciliation, there are still several profound roadblocks to peace that must be overcome. It would be in order to review and assess how these impediments to peace will be overcome. Four key areas need a closer look:

First is the question of troops withdrawal by the US and NATO troops. According to the February 29, 2020 agreement, the US committed to initial reduction of troops from 13,000 to 8,600 by July 2020 and then full withdrawal within 14 months (by May 2021), provided the Taliban kept their commitments. In November 2020, President Trump announced that he would want to cut the number of US troops in Afghanistan from 5,000 down to 2,500 by mid-January 2021. While there is a general consensus in the US that American troops must come back home, it was deemed necessary by the US leadership that all troops not withdraw rapidly lest the vacuum is exploited by militants. It is clear that if the American and coalition troops leave hastily, there is reason to believe that the Afghan security forces might not be able to prevail over the militants and ensuing conflict could move towards another round of civil war. There have thus been calls, including from Pakistan, that the US withdrawal of troops must be carried out in a responsible manner. Three factors are relevant. One, the withdrawal of troops must be contingent upon creation of a stable governance mechanism in Afghanistan; two, the Taliban upkeep their commitments as per the February 29 agreement; and three, the vacuum must not be filled by ISIS, which has lately upscaled its violent activities. In case the review of the February agreement being conducted by the Biden administration takes longer, that could further delay the peace process and possibly the timetable for withdrawal of the US troops. Biden's Secretary of State Blinken in his Senate confirmation hearing confirmed that the US would want to bring its forces home, but would "retain some capacity" to deal with any resurgence of terrorism.<sup>128</sup>

Secondly, there is no clarity as to what kind of future political set up will provide stability in Afghanistan. The intra-Afghan talks have a gigantic task of producing consensus on the form of government that would be acceptable to all Afghan stakeholders. This is easier said than done. Many of the Afghan factions do

---

128. Anwar Iqbal, "Biden Administration to Revive Military-To-Military Ties with Pakistan," *DAWN*. 20 January, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1602541>.

not share the worldview and value system of the Taliban, who still eulogize the Islamic Emirate they had established from 1996 to 2001. Will the Taliban accept the Afghan constitution is another open-ended question. What mechanism would be created to ensure social freedoms, especially women rights, which the Taliban had severely curtailed during their rule? Will the Taliban accept Western-style democracy or will they insist on a theocratic form of government? These are some of the questions that would require a resolution and consensus for a meaningful conclusion of the intra-Afghan talks.

The third issue that could make or break the fragile peace process is whether there would be an agreement on instituting a mechanism for enforcing a ceasefire and cessation of violence. Recent months, especially June 2020, witnessed an unprecedented surge of violence. IS has become active and the fighting between the Afghan forces and the Taliban continues unabated. Although the Taliban have refrained from attacking the US troops, continued fighting with government troops could derail any further progress in the peace talks. For Taliban, agreeing to a ceasefire is a card that they would probably hold till every other element of the peace talks has been agreed upon. But then, how could peace talks be successful if violence continues. This is a catch 22 situation.

The fourth important piece of the puzzle is a regional consensus by all major powers and Afghanistan's neighbours to support the peace process and not to use Afghan soil for their proxy wars and create instability in the region, in order to achieve myopic strategic objectives. Pakistan, for instance, has a grievance that India is using Afghanistan and abetting the anti-Pakistan elements to carry out terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The recent peace process provides a rare opportunity where all relevant powers will benefit from securing peace in Afghanistan. This opportunity must not be squandered away.

## Scenarios

Each of the above factors would require separate discussions and consensus, which in turn would facilitate action on the other components of the peace deal. The reverse is also true. It would be useful to envisage the likely scenarios of how the peace process could pan out. There could be three likely ways ahead:

- *Stability*: The US-Taliban agreement is a web of mutually inclusive commitments by the US and the Taliban. Although the Biden administration is honouring its commitments to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan with a slight delay. However, the Taliban are not very receptive of this. The levels of violence have risen in Afghanistan. . The peace process is stalled for now, the subjects being discussed are thorny and difficult to resolve.

This scenario will provide hopes for a peaceful Afghanistan, provided the withdrawal happens and the Taliban are roped in for talks both in Doha and with the Afghan government.

- *Stalemate*: If the concerned parties - the US, the Taliban and the Afghan government – only selectively honour their commitments and choose to hedge their bets until the other side has given in, then the peace process will linger on, and violence would also continue. This is a likely scenario given the enormous baggage of mutual mistrust that each party carries. Pakistan would need to work real hard to break this stalemate, facilitate peace talks as much as it can, and make special efforts to maintain its positive relationship with all factions of the Afghan polity.
- *Disaster*: If the commitments undertaken in the February 29 agreement are not honoured by either party, the agreement would collapse, and the fighting would intensify leading to the eruption of a civil war. This is a highly dangerous and somewhat likely scenario that must be avoided at all costs. In this scenario, Pakistan would be the most affected party almost as much as the people of Afghanistan.

## **What must Pakistan do to Facilitate Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan?**

No country has suffered more from the conflict in Afghanistan than Pakistan. There is a growing realization in Pakistan that a peaceful, stable, sovereign, and prosperous Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interest. There are no takers of the 'strategic depth' narrative in Pakistan. There is also no political appetite to have any 'favourites' in Afghanistan. In fact, a conscious effort is being made to maintain friendly ties with all Afghan factions. Given its vital stakes, Pakistan must work actively towards the *stability* scenario and facilitate the implementation of the peace process in order to avoid a collapse of the agreement. To this end, Pakistan should urge the US to undertake a responsible withdrawal of its troops so that there is no sudden vacuum that is exploited by the terrorist entities. The US withdrawal should be calibrated to coincide with institution of a political and security mechanism that ensures stability after the US troops leave. That means the intra-Afghan talks must succeed in putting together the blueprint of a post-US governance mechanism. Pakistan must also emphasize upon the Taliban to honour their commitments by not linking up with any terrorist entity, show flexibility in intra-Afghan talks, ensure a visible reduction in violence while moving towards a ceasefire, and work on the basis of live and let live philosophy. Pakistan must also stay engaged with other important players like China, Russia and Iran to ensure that they all support the peace process.

In the *Stalemate* scenario, Pakistan's responsibility will increase manifold as there would be implications that Pakistan must prepare well to handle. For instance, if the US and Taliban do not honour their commitments and make their actions contingent upon the actions of the other party, they both may end up in a wait and see scenario. This stalemate could lead to a surge of violence by the Taliban to negotiate better terms. The spoilers of the peace process that are internal to Afghan polity as well as external would also come into action and discourage the Afghan government to give any concessions to the Taliban. The situation could deteriorate and the US might be forced upon to put on hold the withdrawal of its forces. This explosive environment will lead to a continuation of the war with no winners. In such a scenario, Pakistan must maintain contacts with all stakeholders and to prevail upon them not to abandon the peace process.

It is the *Disaster* scenario that could unleash the most destructive process both for Afghanistan and Pakistan and indeed for all its neighbours. The fighting would intensify and peace talks could halt. All stakeholders would return to square one. The renewed fighting could encourage terrorist groups like the IS to kick in their brand of violence. All this could evoke another wave of refugees rushing towards Pakistan, putting enormous strain on border management. Moreover, internal and external spoilers of the peace process would become active. This scenario must be prevented as it would be a no-win situation for the genuine stakeholders of peace in Afghanistan.

## **Pakistan's Policy Choices**

Regardless of the scenario that ultimately unfolds in Afghanistan, there are certain policy choices that Pakistan must pursue to secure its interests viz the situation in Afghanistan and to contribute to securing peace in Afghanistan:

First, there must be an across-the-board realization that a sovereign, peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interests. By and large, there is an emerging consensus on this policy option. In pursuit of this over-arching objective, Pakistan needs to keep open channels with all stakeholders:

- First and foremost is to maintain and consolidate the relations with the new US administration Pakistan has rightly advised a responsible withdrawal of troops.
- Pakistan must also continue to underline to the Taliban the need to honour its commitment of not supporting Al Qaeda or any other terrorist entity, reduce violence with the aim to enter into a ceasefire, and be flexible in the intra-Afghan talks.

- The full spectrum of Afghan polity must also be engaged in a multi-prong strategy to nudge them to avail this rare opportunity for peace in Afghanistan. It is encouraging to see that Pakistan has been reaching out to different political and ethnic factions in Afghanistan and has recently hosted Abdullah Abdullah, Hikmatyar, Ustad Karim Khalili and parliamentary delegation in Islamabad, to name a few.
- Bilateral contacts with the Afghan government must be maintained in a positive spirit.
- Pakistan must also coordinate with the major powers, like China and Russia, and neighbours of Afghanistan, like Iran and Central Asian Republics, to support the current peace process.
- Movement of militants, transnational terrorist threats like the ISIS, drugs and arms trafficking from Afghanistan is a serious concern for regional countries and neighbours of Afghanistan, requiring all to join hands to assist Afghanistan.

Second, Pakistan must convince the Afghan leadership that a positive bilateral relationship is in the best common interest of the two countries. The positive vibes emerging from Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Kabul in November 2020, at the invitation of the Afghan President was highly encouraging. To not lose the momentum, it is important that the working groups of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) must continue working in full stride.

Third important area of common interest of both countries is effective border management. Recently, Pakistan has taken a number of steps to facilitate cross border movement of goods and people. These are steps in the right direction. More bilateral trade and facilitation of transit trade will help build peace constituencies in both countries. More people to people exchanges, especially for medical treatment and students in Pakistani institutions, should be promoted.

Fourth, the projects of regional connectivity, like the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI) and the Central Asia-South Asia power project (CASA 1000), are important both for Afghanistan and the region. Likewise, extension of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan could earn peace and economic dividends. Afghanistan could also benefit from transit trade through Gwadar port.

Fifth, in talks with the Afghan government, Pakistan must emphasize the need to create 'pull factors' for Afghan refugees based in Pakistan to undertake a voluntary, dignified, and gradual return to Afghanistan.

Allama Iqbal called Afghanistan the “heart of Asia.”<sup>129</sup> President Ashraf Ghani has characterized his country as the “economic roundabout.”<sup>130</sup> It is important that Afghan government works with a spirit of accommodation and sees in the current peace process an opportunity to make Afghanistan a hub of connectivity for the three sub regions of Asia, a true economic roundabout. For its part, Pakistan must facilitate achieving this objective. After all, there is no doubt left that a peaceful Afghanistan is a strategic imperative for Pakistan, quintessential to making their bilateral inter-dependence touch the new horizon of peace and prosperity.

---

129. “Heart of Asia’ countering security threats, promoting connectivity,” *Dawn*, 9 December, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1225229>

130. Public Talk “Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 27 June, 2019, [http://issi.org.pk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/07/Report\\_June\\_27\\_2019.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wpcontent/uploads/2019/07/Report_June_27_2019.pdf).



## Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Bettina Robotka

The US-Afghan war has been fought initially under the pretence of terrorism, and religion, and later progress, and democracy. However, the War on Terror has destroyed the tribal structure so much so that local warlords have taken over the place of the traditional tribal elite, undermined the Afghan state structure while the reconstruction efforts by the West aimed at 'progress' have alienated large parts of the population. The limited utility of Western ideas of progress can be nicely illustrated by an adage ascribed to the Taliban but what is actually an Afghan proverb. It says "You have the watches, we have the time."<sup>131</sup> Amid the scramble for 'democracy' the Afghan economy, especially food production, has been destroyed, the growing of and addiction to drugs among the Afghan population is rampant and US multinationals have delimited their territorial claims where they want to exploit Afghanistan's mineral resources in future.

The money that has been spent by the West in Afghanistan has, according to the latest report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), found over \$ 15 billion in waste, fraud and abuse<sup>132</sup> and while doing so, promoted corruption in Afghan society as much as in the foreign organizations handling the money. The Soviet invasion in 1979, and the substantial Soviet military presence during the 1980s resulted in the militarization of Afghan society. The introduction of large quantities of weapons and funds exacerbated simmering historical ethno-linguistic, sectarian, and regional divisions in Afghanistan and encouraged indigenous power struggle resulting in alternative social and political structures.

During the social and political instability millions of Afghans participated in fighting, robbery and smuggling, including drugs, across international borders further aided by the fragility and actual absence, of the Afghan state and the viability of local rule as an adaptation to the waning and eventual disappearance of central power. The radicalization of Islam in Afghanistan started immediately after the United States assumed sponsorship of the Mujahideen in early 1980. The Soviet withdrawal and the corresponding termination of US subsidies for the Mujahideen are events that, ipso facto, have little to do with the collapse of the state of Afghanistan, the emergence of the Taliban, and the penetration of the country by al-Qaida. The ideological and material seeds for these transformations

were sown during 1979-1980.<sup>133</sup> They were perpetuated during the longest war fought by the US and NATO since 2001. Displacement and poverty caused by the continuing war is a huge issue in the country. Ninety per cent people in Afghanistan live below poverty line and cannot afford basic necessities of life. Starvation and malnutrition run rampant. Since 2001, 241,000 people have died in the war. Civilians comprised 73,000 of those killed.<sup>134</sup> The United States air strikes and raids have significantly contributed to these numbers.<sup>135</sup>

The impact of those forty years of war in Afghanistan on Pakistan is also being devastating. During the first ten years of Soviet occupation, the US used Pakistan as a launch pad for its proxy war against the Soviet Union and communism. The most longstanding influence was exerted by the US-Saudi Arabian campaign to promote Wahabi-style jihad in Pakistani madrassahs and through Pakistani media. Existing jihadi ideologues subsequently became powerful and used the same to influence the young generation of Pakistan. Militancy and sectarianism reached to a new height under Ziaul Haq, disfiguring the societal fabric of Pakistan permanently. Many young Pakistanis participated in jihad in Afghanistan, they were completely radicalized and on their return worked towards the establishment of a Pakistani Taliban movement. Further to this, the influx of millions of Afghan refugees was a huge burden on Pakistani economy and labour market. Foreign-supported military rule undermined the stability of the Pakistani state and its institutions. Pakistan became known for drug trafficking and Kalashnikov culture.

The second foreign intervention in Afghanistan post 9/11, once again used Pakistan as a launching pad and gave its military ruler the much-needed legitimacy. The subsequent influx of Afghan refugees led to growing insecurity on Pakistani streets and adversely impacted all sectors of Pakistani economy. Weapons for Afghan troops were routed through the Karachi port yet again. However, all of them did not reach Afghanistan. Many fell into the hands of miscreants and militants in Pakistan.<sup>136</sup> Pakistan suffered a rise of terrorism in the streets, markets, schools, and mazaars. This took a heavy toll on the civilian population, on the economy and infrastructure – a feature that despite years of hard efforts of fighting against terrorism and militancy is still present in the country.

---

133. M. Jamil Hanifi, "Causes and Consequences of the Destabilization of Afghanistan," Middle East Institute, 2018, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/causes-and-consequences-destabilization-afghanistan>

134. "Afghan Civilians Costs of War," Watson Institute For International And Public Affairs (Brown University, 2011), <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>

135. "War in Afghanistan and Its Effects," *Borgen Magazine*, <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/war-in-afghanistan-and-its-effects/>

136. IGP Reviews Security Measures for PSL," *The News International*, 19 February 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/616394-fbr-confirms-24,000-containers-missing-from-karachi-port>

The two foreign intervention wars in Afghanistan and the nation-building efforts of the West present quite a bleak picture. Instead of supporting peace and development in Afghanistan, the country was devastated and destabilized. Secularist ideology by the Soviets and a Wahabi-style religion spread by the US in combination with brutality that had never been seen before in Afghan society eroded and may have eradicated parts of indigenous culture and religiosity. But even worse, the military intervention was increasingly resented at home in the Soviet Union and burdened its economy with the result that the Afghan war played a considerable role in the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union itself. The same can be said about the US and NATO.

Despite the so-called War on Terror, terrorism has been spiking and spreading. The destabilization of Afghan state and society have deepened. Poverty and corruption have risen, and development efforts have shown modest success at best; much of it has fallen prey to the ongoing warfare. Al Qaida and Islamic State (IS) has gained a foothold and regional militia have been promoted and armed by the US.<sup>137</sup> The Afghan army to-date cannot handle the security situation in Afghanistan independently. It took US over a decade to understand the indigenous Taliban movement. The extent of popular support it enjoyed against its resistance to foreign intervention and the level of its resilience to fight back both the US-backed Afghan government and foreign troops.<sup>138</sup> The results of both foreign interventions into Afghanistan thus have not much to show on the positive side for neither side which allows to draw the conclusion that foreign intervention militarily or even with the objective of implanting socio-economic 'progress' and political 'democracy' (like imagined in the Bonn conference of 2001) are less than helpful and rather counterproductive. It took until July 2018 for the US administration – the main contributor to the war – to concede that the war was not winnable and enter into direct negotiations with its declared enemy, the Taliban. Underlying was the acknowledgement that a face-saving agreement for withdrawal was needed.

---

137. Astri Suhrke and Antonio De Laur, "The CIA's "Army Threat to Human Rights and an Obstacle to Peace in Afghanistan," (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, Brown University, 2019) [https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20CIA%20Afghanistan\\_Aug%2021%2C%202019.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20CIA%20Afghanistan_Aug%2021%2C%202019.pdf).

138. Davis, Paul K., Eric V. Larson, Zachary Haldeman, Mustafa Oguz, and Yashodhara Rana. "Public Support for the Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan." In *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*, 71-98, RAND Corporation, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg1122osd.11>

## **Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan**

The starting position bodes ill for the US-Taliban “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan,” concluded in Qatar’s capital Doha. Few are surprised that it has not ended the over four decades long war in Afghanistan. It is becoming increasingly questionable that it ever will. One main draw-back of the agreement is that it is naturally concluded between the two warring sides, the US and the Taliban. The Afghan government that is a dependent of the US has been left out of the purview with the result that it had no say in the conditions of the agreement but had to comply with certain of its stipulations such as releasing 5000 Taliban prisoners from jail. The published part of the Doha Agreement<sup>139</sup> does not bind the Taliban to stop fighting, observe a ceasefire or even reduce violence. There had been an agreement on a period of a ‘reduction of violence’ before its signing and since then the US acknowledges that attacks against American and other foreign troops have mostly stopped, as have large scale Taliban attacks on city centres. But Taliban attacks on the Afghan army, al Qaida and local Afghan militias have risen resulting in a spike of civilian casualties. The US has so far met its commitment to start removing troops and bases, though it seems that so far it has not fulfilled its pledge contained in the Agreement to review U.S. sanctions against the Taliban or encourage the UN Security Council to remove Taliban individuals from the UN sanctions list. Giving this situation a deeper consideration, it would be surprising if the flaws in the deal were just diplomatic blunders. As a matter of fact, the US was more focused on selling a deal at home than on paving the way for a real peace process.<sup>140</sup> In addition, they did not realize or care that the Afghan government after a troop withdrawal would hardly survive or be in a position to negotiate a satisfactory political settlement with the Taliban successfully.

Because of this lukewarm commitment of the US the internal peace negotiations between the Taliban and the current Afghan government of President Ghani had to start under the agreement but its end or outcome was left open as far as the US was concerned. Those talks started and ended abruptly in January this year, only days after they had started and both sides had submitted their wish lists for points to be tackled during the talks. Certainly, the Taliban were stalling keeping in mind the May deadline for troops pull-out after which they would have a much easier ride towards a power-sharing arrangement. Ever since then the Doha talks between the two Afghan sides are dormant and in need of revival.

---

139. It is unclear if there is an unpublished part or any other additional stipulations

140. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/war-and-peace/a-deal-in-the-mist-how-much-of-the-us-Taliban-doha-agreement-has-been-implemented/>

While ending the war in Afghanistan under the main headline of his “America first” policy was the stated priority of the US government of Donald Trump this seems to be different under the current government of Joe Biden. After having spent an estimated \$4 billion per year to sustain Afghanistan’s National Security Forces against the Taliban the Biden administration after “reviewing” last year’s agreement with the Taliban delayed the pull-out from Afghanistan which now would be finished by September 11, 2021. But neither US administration thinks that the troop pull-out would mean to give up real American interest in Afghanistan and the region. Still under the previous government in November 2020 acting Secretary of Defence Christopher Miller actually alluded to these objectives in his announcement of the troop pullback. According to him, the pullback “does not equate change” to outstanding U.S. policies and objectives.<sup>141</sup> Among those objectives admitted by the US are to disrupt China’s BRI initiative, secondly to potentially leap on Pakistan’s nuclear stockpile, which U.S. analysts see as the most unstable stockpile in the world. And third, US presence in Afghanistan could enable the CIA to launch operations in China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and exploit ethnic tensions amongst Uyghurs in Xinjiang as an effective way to destabilize China. So, in effect, the commitment for full withdrawal may not have been quite sincere from the beginning.

On the other side, US presence in Afghanistan has during the last forty years figured as a key determinant in the strategies of the region’s other main actors, including not least Russia, China, Pakistan and India. This has been showing in the efforts of China and Russia to come to an understanding with the Taliban who could be trusted in their anti-American stance once the troop pull-out has taken place. Russia’s initiative of homing the recent Afghanistan conference and its plans to integrate a Taliban-led Afghanistan with its Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), an economic union of states located in Eastern Europe, Western Asia, and Central Asia are pointing to this<sup>142</sup>. Thus, the Biden administration is backpedalling.

But this is an idea that is endangering the whole process since February 2020. The central point of interest from the Taliban point of view is the withdrawal of all foreigners – not only foreign troops, but including all additional service providers, military contractors, advisers and so on. In a comment titled “How can intra-Afghan negotiations succeed” published on 22 March on the Taliban webpage they write “We must stress that the most fundamental point

---

141. Bradley Blankenship, “U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan Would Require an End to Interference in China’s Affairs,” CGTN, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-11-19/Afghan-withdrawal-requires-end-to-interference-in-China-s-affairs-VxV2xGgjVC/index.html>

142. Salman Rafi Sheikh, “Why Biden Won’t Likely Leave Afghanistan,” *Asia Times*, 4 April, 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/2021/04/why-biden-wont-likely-leave-afghanistan/>

for settlement is commitment to the agreement that was signed between opposing parties a little over a year ago in Doha and supported and endorsed by prominent world powers including the United Nations. This agreement is vital because it serves as a framework and guiding principle towards a resolution and defines the responsibilities of each party — the implementation of which shall gradually lead this process to a final and true settlement.”<sup>143</sup> They reacted to President Biden’s caution saying they would launch ‘jihad’ if the United States didn’t fulfil its commitment and prolonged the stay of foreign forces in Afghanistan beyond May 2021. “The valiant and Mujahid Afghan nation will be compelled to defend its religion and homeland and continue Jihad and armed struggle against foreign forces to liberate the country. All responsibility for the prolongation of war, death and destruction will be on the shoulders of those who committed this violation,”<sup>144</sup> That means that the “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan” with regard to the US is almost dead and may have been dead from the beginning and the war will go into another round. That feature has come up in the recent meeting on the Afghanistan issue in Moscow where the Russian Special Envoy on Afghanistan Kabulov mentioned the termination of the agreement of 2020 as a distinct possibility.<sup>145</sup>

## **Pakistan’s Role in the Peace Process**

Given its close knowledge of and old connections to the Taliban Pakistan has played a behind-the-scenes but crucial role in courting the Afghan Taliban into the intra-Afghan peace talks, aiming at political reconciliation and an end to decades of violence in the war-stricken country. This is a fundamental change in Pakistan’s attitude towards the war in Afghanistan in which Pakistan had kept playing a crucial role in aiding the US-side of the war but on the other hand, supporting the Taliban quietly and allowing them to have a retreating option in Pakistan. Nevertheless, over the years especially the brutal terrorist wave that swept into Pakistan from across Afghanistan feeding an indigenous Pakistani militancy and terrorism brought about a reconsideration of Pakistan’s role among the policy makers. A decisive event was surely the attack on an army public school in Badaber in 2014 that left 150 people dead, mostly children and

---

143. <http://alemarahenglish.net/?p=43982>

144. Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Taliban Warn of ‘Jihad’ If US Fails to Withdraw Forces before May,” *The News International*, 27 March, 2021 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/810633-taliban-warn-of-jihad-if-us-fails-to-withdraw-forces-before-may>

145. Elena Teslova, “Russia Envoy Suggests Interim Government in Afghanistan,” Anadolu Agency, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/russia-envoy-suggests-interim-government-in-afghanistan/2187008>

female teachers.<sup>146</sup> As a result, an all-parties conference was held in Peshawar that swiftly agreed to a 20-point National Action Plan (NAP) consisting of internal and foreign policy initiatives aimed at combating and finally eliminating the threat of terrorism in Pakistan.<sup>147</sup> The change of stance can be seen in the border fencing efforts along the Afghan-Pakistan border that were initiated in March 2017 and is about to be completed. The decades-long war in Pakistan's neighbourhood has finally convinced the military and foreign policy leaders that the war in Afghanistan is not winnable militarily. Najmuddin Sheikh, a former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, advised in 2020 "We must ask the Taliban on our soil to move back to Afghanistan and carry on negotiations with the US from their bases in Helmand and Kandahar. Make it clear that we recognise the Kabul government and support an Afghan-led and -owned peace process. This negotiation, if it materialises, will be long and complex; if asked we will try to help."<sup>148</sup>

Besides Pakistan's own trouble with the war in the neighbourhood, it is the international political situation that has changed. US economic weakening and its 'America first' policy has lost them much sympathy and support worldwide. Pakistan has its own experience with American and NATO demands to "do more". The BRI and CPEC initiative of China has strengthened Pakistan's commitment in Asia and with the growing alienation between the US and China and Russia new alliances are coming up and changing the global and regional power balance. It seems, Pakistan has finally understood that peace in the neighbourhood is in its own interest and ongoing war damages Pakistani economic and political interests and disrupt efforts to fight militancy and terrorism in Pakistan. The need to fight poverty and develop the economy has been declared as one of the central tasks of the current Pakistani government which has contributed heavily to the visible change in Pakistan's foreign policy direction that has now taken a regional outlook and moved from geo-politics to geo-economics. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi underscored that "My government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan, attaches great importance to enhancing Pakistan's trade and economic relations with our partners. The transformed Pakistan's focus is shifting from geopolitics to geo-economics."<sup>149</sup> Another important sign of the changed understanding is that economy and economic and food security have been included into Pakistan's

---

146. "132 Children Killed in Peshawar School Attack," The Express Tribune, 16 December, 2014, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/807564/gunmen-target-school-in-peshawar>

147. National Counter Terrorism Authority, *National Action Plan*, 2014 (2014), <https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/>

148. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1531345>

149. "Pakistan's Focus Shifting from Geopolitics to Geo-Economics, Qureshi Informs Hungary Dialogue", *Dawn*, 25 March, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1614535>

new security paradigm.<sup>150</sup> With these changes in understanding and policy Pakistan has become a valuable player in the efforts aiming to bring peace to Afghanistan which is a pre-condition for the successful implementation of geo-economic goals and projects in the region and beyond. This has shown during the recent Moscow conference on Afghanistan where Special Envoy Kabulov particularly stressed the important role of Pakistan in the intra-Afghan peace talks. He said “Pakistan is making very active and constructive efforts, and we have agreed to continue and deepen our cooperation. Pakistan is one of the key players, and the Pakistanis are doing a lot to attract Iranian partners to these negotiations. And we very much look forward to the continued, equally active role of Islamabad”.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, the long-standing alliance with China that has strengthened since the CPEC plan has been rolled out and the more recent one with Russia – both of whom resent US presence in Afghanistan – will help to strengthen Pakistan’s commitment in this regard further.<sup>152</sup>

## **Light at the End of the Tunnel**

It is quite clear that the outlook for peace in Afghanistan in the near future is not bright and the so-called ‘peace agreement’ is wavering. In order to rescue whatever chances are there, and with the Doha talks stuck, new efforts are required to revive the process. While Pakistan is unwavering in its support for peace in the neighbourhood, its access to the hearts and minds of the Afghan government is limited and additional forces are needed to bring the peace process back to life. In addition, it seems that the current US government has second thoughts about withdrawal or may be even the previous one was never entirely honest about it so that the responsibility is falling upon regional forces to secure peace in Afghanistan and the region. First initiatives have already been taken. The recent meeting in Moscow with the regional powers Russia and China attending was an attempt to find a way forward. The Taliban’s insistence on full troop withdrawal according to the 2020 agreement and their considering the Afghan government placeholders of the US the two demands could have been game breakers. It is due to regional players China and Russia, but mainly to Pakistan’s efforts to not let the peace process crumble.

---

150. Raashid Janjua, “A New Security Paradigm,” *The News International*, 30 March 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/811892-a-new-security-paradigm>

151. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/russia-envoy-suggests-interim-government-in-afghanistan/2187008>

152. M. K. Bhadrakumar, “China Resents US Presence in Afghanistan,” *Indian Punchline*, 27 March, 2021, <https://www.indianpunchline.com/china-resents-us-presence-in-afghanistan/>

There is another, more long-term thought as well that may apply to the situation. Afghanistan and Pakistan have been at loggerheads since the pull-out of the British and the creation of the independent state of Pakistan in 1947. Both countries in accordance with their colonial or semi-colonial histories define themselves as nation states, a main feature of which is a well-defined territory which made the Durand Line controversial. Even during Taliban rule when relations with Pakistan were at their best, the Taliban despite having no stake in territorial nationalism ideologically refused to recognize the Durand Line.<sup>153</sup> It is thus too much to expect that this problem would be solved by itself in the course of the forthcoming reorganization of political power structures in Afghanistan. The way forward for both countries as seen by this author is to overcome a great deal of historical baggage lying mainly in the colonial drawing of borders and the ideology of territorial nationalism that in the current phase of globalization and Eurasian coalescence is fast losing its utility.<sup>154</sup>

## Why is that so?

Territorial nationalism is a creation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Benedict Anderson<sup>155</sup> analysed the emergence of territorial nationalism in Europe where in the wake of industrialization, secularization and enlightenment traditional communities in society like village community or religious community loosened and successive empires fell apart. The need of men to belong to a community, according to Anderson, led to the formation of new ideal or imagined communities based on common territory and a common narrative of their identity in which print-capitalism played a determinative role. They imagined themselves as 'nation', defined strict borders for their national state and build a national ideology and imagination through a purposefully streamlined national history, tradition and identity.

In colonial and semi-colonial societies like Pakistan and Afghanistan, the idea of nation was imported by the British and utilized in the anti-colonial struggle which gave an otherwise alien idea a local bearing. But a growingly globalized world has changed the situation quite a bit. Despite a populist resurgence of nationalism mainly in the homeland of it in Europe and the US

---

153. "The Durand Line - a Razor's Edge between Afghanistan & Pakistan," The European Foundation for South Asian Studies, <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/the-durand-line-a-razors-edge-between-afghanistan-and-pakistan/>

154. The work on finding a solution is ongoing as former president H. Karzai pointed out in Spiegel interview <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/former-afghanistan-president-hamid-karzai-we-afghans-are-just-being-used-against-each-other-a-81412b96-c7e5-4287-b423-fbc2b600f317>

155. Anderson, Benedict R. O. G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

(America first, vaccine nationalism), in the economic and financial markets a borderless globalization is already ruling the roost and climate change and health emergencies has visibly demonstrated to the world that if we want to survive, we can do that only as a global community. This implies that ideas like 'sovereignty' are rooted in the idea of independence of states and nations are readily challenged because nationally taken 'independent' decisions are negatively influencing the welfare of the whole region and beyond. That applies to water management, air pollution and other fields of activity.

Thus, instead of the sovereign decision of a national government apart from the impact on one's own country the impact on neighbours has to be kept in mind if conflicts are to be avoided. That means the impact of one country's decisions on neighbours and the region comes increasingly into view as our interdependence with each other becomes more important and perceptible. The signs of the new time are already visible in Pakistan in a shift towards closer alignment with regional forces such as China, Russia, Iran and a positive engagement with Afghanistan. They are also visible in the shape of regional economic and infrastructure projects like BRI and CPEC that will interconnect Asia and Europe, facilitating the exchange of goods, people and ideas. They are visible in the presence and growing importance of political and security-related organizations like SCO, of common market initiatives like the EEU, the upcoming Pakistan-Iran-Turkey alliance and others.

The thrust in this development should be a win-win situation for all which excludes the presence of superpowers that aim to secure for themselves super-benefits to the detriments of others. It seems that in a closely interconnected world or regions, the role borders are playing, is undergoing a transformation. While in the era of nationalism borders meant sharp division and limitation, borders in a globalized world will become rather connecting lines and reference points of organizational importance.

For the time being the reorganization and rehabilitation of Pakistani and Afghan economies will require peace on both sides and must be done within the framework of nation states. In Pakistan the change is visible through its public acknowledgement of the Afghan-owned, and Afghan-led peace process. Afghanistan needs the full and timely withdrawal of foreign troops and a successful inner-Afghan arrangement for peace to open their gaze to the opportunities that lie ahead.

# Governance, Nation-ness and Nationality in Afghanistan

Omar Sharifi

When formal state institutions are weak and incapable of providing services or distributing goods within a territory, crafting a “national attachment” between a government and its people represents a difficult but vital project. This requirement did not exist in the premodern period where the only commitment governments made in return for extracting resources was to maintain order. Nor did traditional dynastic rulers see a natural connection between themselves and the people they ruled, not even their own ethnic group. While nationalist historians credit Ahmad Shah Durrani with being the founder of a new Afghan national state, in his own time he portrayed himself as the founder of a new dynasty where Pashtuns (Afghans) were only one of its many components.<sup>156</sup> After declaring independence in 1919, Durrani monarchs felt the need to convert this dynastic legitimacy into a nationalist legitimacy in which they and the people of Afghanistan, particularly their fellow Pashtuns, were declared to be bound together in some intrinsic fashion. But the project of constructing a common national identity in a country that was home to so many different ethnic groups and where regional identities had far deeper roots than an Afghan nation state was no simple task. It remained a work in progress as the country approached its centenary.

## **State and Society, the Evolution of the Concept of State in Afghanistan**

The link between state formation, political stability and governing legitimacy is well studied in political science and sociology. A number of scholars from various disciplines have wrestled with questions about the authority of the state in the Afghan context as well.<sup>157</sup>

As in many multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic Central Asian contexts, the relationship between the state and society in Afghanistan has historically depended on a system of reciprocity that bound national leaders to the local elite and them to the government. Until the rise of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901), Afghan monarchs made a point of respecting local traditions

and cultivating ties with regional elites as a way to link themselves with their subjects. Unlike the classical Persian model of absolute rule or the post-colonial quasi-Westernized systems or military dictatorships in the rest of the region, Afghan leaders engaged in continuous negotiations as a way to build a consensus between the central authorities and local elites.<sup>158</sup> Those that thought this unnecessary, such as King Amanullah in 1919-29 or the Khalqis (a faction within the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) in 1978-9, soon found themselves unable to rule and were ousted from power.

The pattern was based on a historic solution to an old problem: how does an elite minority reach beyond its own small group to buttress its authority? For 700 years that regional minority was composed of conquerors of Turko-Mongolian descent who created a dualistic system in which the ruler combined men of the sword (Turks) with men of the pen (literate Persian speakers). The former provided the ruler with his coercive force, the latter with needed administrative capacity. When a Pashtun dynasty came to power in 1747 it adopted this model, with the Pashtuns now dominating the military and the Persian speakers filling their traditional administrative role.<sup>159</sup>

In this system the government was not expected to provide services to the population but was expected to prevent the emergence of *fitna* or chaos. In return for his protection, subjects were required to obey the ruler but any replacement who could maintain the bargain was deemed legitimate should the incumbent fail. One restriction on this replacement, however, was that among Turko-Mongolian peoples only those born into aristocratic descent groups had the right to compete for power. This was very unlike the egalitarian Pashtun system in which a much wider range of notables could serve. Although Pashtun in origin, the Durrani dynasty that founded and ruled the Afghan state managed to graft this old Turkic aristocratic tradition onto their own royal house so that only members of the certain Durrani clans were deemed eligible to compete for power. While different lines of descent within these Durrani groups regularly warred with one another (three different lines took power in the monarchy's 230 years history that lasted until 1978), other ethnic groups and non-Durrani Pashtun tribes were excluded.

---

158. The Persian model had a Shahanshah, king of kings, but one who recognized the subsidiary solidarity despite the absolute rule of the shah. It allowed a top-down system to exert absolute sovereignty yet provide autonomy to the provinces where local elites could rule in their name as governors or even subsidiary kings.

159. Barfield, op. cit., pp. 67-77.

## State-building under the Iron Amir

Amir Abdur Rahman Khan fundamentally changed the nature of the state that had existed earlier and created a new model of governance that redefined the relationship between the state and local populations by imposing direct control over the entire country for the first time since the formation of Afghan state in 1747. Unlike his predecessors, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan deliberately destroyed local autonomous governance structures, often employing extreme violence, in every region and city across the country. He extinguished the autonomy of the Kohistani Tajik chiefs (1881-84), suppressed a Ghilzai revolt (1886-8) with a rapacity that was unprecedented in Afghan history and then impoverished them through direct and extortionate taxation. After crushing these groups, which had played the most crucial role during the First and Second Anglo-Afghan wars, he abolished the autonomy of Afghan Turkistan, defeating his cousin Ishaq Khan, the governor of Mazar-e Sharif, who had rejected his centralization policies.

Abdur Rahman Khan's next campaign (1891-93) was against the Shia Hazara areas of central Afghanistan where his regular army and tribal levies broke the resistance of Hazaras, killing many, enslaving thousands and forcing many more to flee to Baluchistan and Iran. The Hazaras were impoverished through sheer destruction of their property, enslavement, and the distribution of their pasturelands to Pashtun nomads. His last campaign was against the Kafirs (1895) who lived in eastern Hindu Kush mountain region. In a short military operation, the region was conquered, renamed Nuristan (the land of light), and incorporated into Afghanistan. Unlike the brutal destruction of Hazaras, the Amir treated the newly converted Kafirs with leniency and recruited thousands of them into the army and administration.<sup>160</sup>

By destroying all regional elite and power structures, Amir Abdur Rahman Khan brought the different polities that had previously defined the diverse regions of Afghanistan into a single national state. His standardized taxation system, laws, single currency and unitary administrative structure made all Afghans his subjects to be ruled from Kabul. His policies were not limited to removing the local governance structures but also targeted the religious establishment. Before his rule, the ulema functioned as an independent polity from the government. He abolished their independence by bringing all waqf (religious endowments) under direct central government control by forcing them to pass government examinations and make them dependent on the government for their payment and livelihood.<sup>161</sup>

---

160. Kakar, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

161. *Ibid.*, p.45.

Abdur Rahman Khan created a model of unitary state institutions that successive Afghan governments keenly followed and adopted in modified forms, often justified as means to preserve the national unity of Afghanistan. As Thomas Barfield has noted, "Much as the establishment of the Durrani Empire by Ahmad Shah in 1747 is seen as the beginning of Afghan history, Amir Abdur Rahman's reign is seen as the beginning of Afghanistan as a nation-state."<sup>162</sup> Afghanistan's history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was shaped significantly by such policies and processes. Even when it came time to forge a new government after the fall of Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan remained captive to Abdur Rahman's legacy.

Rather than reconfigure the structure of a political system that had collapsed twice in the preceding century in (1929 and 1992), the 2004 constitutional *Loya Jirga* restored it by reinstating a government with a rigid top-down decision-making process where the leader's power had few checks or balances and where decisions made in Kabul were deemed non-negotiable. Abdur Rahman's centralization had put so much power in the hands of the ruler that it left other government institutions weak and ineffective. His emphasis on making Kabul the only power center in the country also starved the other regions of Afghanistan of investment and human talent. And, while sidelining regional elites increased Kabul's power, it did not follow that the center alone could achieve political legitimacy, maintain stability, or promote national identity without them.

## **Imagining the Historical Nation "Afghanistan" as a Dialogical Project of Nation-Making**

Part of Abdur Rahman's success lay in his ability to employ modern weapons against local populations that were less well armed. He was also strategic enough to take on different regions and tribes serially rather than simultaneously. If he had been forced to fight on multiple fronts, he would have faced problems similar to those of the British who had just been forced to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1880 at the end of the Second Anglo Afghan War. While it was not particularly apparent during his reign, Abdur Rahman's reorganization of the Afghan state had the unexpected consequence of undermining the formerly unquestioned legitimacy of his dynastic rule. Beginning with the establishment of the Durrani Empire in 1747, rulership had always been the exclusive privilege of small royal dynastic elite that asserted the belief that ordinary people should have little or no voice in national government.

---

162. Barfield, op. cit., p. 160.

However, in the two Anglo-Afghan wars in the 19th century, it had been the “ordinary people” rather than the dynastic elites who had driven the British invaders out. While they acquiesced to the restorations of dynastic rule each time, they were also each time less willing to return to the status quo ante. In earlier periods of Afghan history, dynastic rulers competed only with other members of the elite in conflicts to gain power. While Abdur Rahman’s battles with his two cousins Ayyub Khan (Governor of Herat) and Ishaq Khan (Governor of Turkistan) had fit this pattern, the series of wars afterward did not. The fact that Abdur Rahman needed to suppress an unprecedented number of revolts by tribes and regions that rose up against him across the country demonstrated that ordinary people now played a role in politics that could not be ignored. Abdur Rahman succeeded by killing a large number of Afghans, but his need to do so showed that concepts of legitimacy were shifting.

Despite its harsh measures, the Kabul-based ruling elite would remain vulnerable to calls for wider public participation in political affairs and for greater regional autonomy. The use of successive *loya jirgas* to ratify state policies throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was evidence of this. There was no such institution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because rulers did not even pretend they needed to consult with the public.<sup>163</sup> Now they did so regularly, but the *loya jirga* was always expected to ratify some (usually controversial) policy or document produced by the government. This did not stop rebellions from breaking out against Amanullah in 1929 or the PDPA in 1978 in the wake of radical policies they attempted to implement unilaterally. Similarly, a set of relatively powerless parliaments in the 1940s and 1960s promised popular consultation that proved elusive. Still, with the expansion of educational and infrastructural systems that improved communication, the demand for greater public participation got much stronger during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Unfortunately, with the PDPA coup in 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979 that participation would be in a war that consumed all of Afghanistan. In its wake, Thomas Barfield, professor of anthropology at Boston University, asserted that the wartime experience had produced new expectations about the nature of Afghan domestic politics for the post-2001 era.

*If in the past ordinary people had been all too willing to see government as none of their business, they now demanded a greater role in it. This set up a conflict between those who saw restoring stability in Afghanistan as the reimplementation of a centralized, top-down, kinglike authority, and those who insisted that the country needed a new model of political*

---

163. Buchholz, *Loya Jirga: Afghanischer Mythos, Ratsversammlung Und Verfassungsorgan*.

*organization derived from the cooperation and consent of the governed. If looked at from a longer time perspective, this demand for a more consultative government was not new at all but rather a reversion to the country's most stable political and economic equilibrium, in which Afghanistan's historic regions and social groups (qawm, religious sect, or locality) regained the political influence that they had held earlier.<sup>164</sup>*

During the destructive civil war and Taliban regime between 1992 and 2001, Kabul's power declined precipitously and reached a historic low point. By contrast, the importance of the country's regions rose and their autonomy returned to a level not seen since before the reign of Abdur Rahman. In the immediate post-2001 period, it was clear that a weak government in Kabul needed to reach out to its component parts. Given the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nature of the Afghan society, tapping into cultural and historical traditions had become one of the most effective ways for a government to establish authority and meet the public demand for political participation. Many traditional patterns of leadership proved remarkably robust in spite of war and changing governments. Attempts to weaken or abolish them by the PDPA and the Taliban had little success. Local level structures such as kinship groups (*qawm*) and localities (*mantiqa*), and festivals remained relevant and resilient. The careful participation of government officials in important regional cultural events allowed them to give these events state endorsement and to reaffirm the bond between the central government and the population, in turn receiving the social imprimatur required to rule with greater authority.

A consideration of what I will call nation-ness and its relationship to political order in Afghanistan is relevant to understanding identity formation more generally for several reasons. First, despite being among the oldest states in the region, the Afghan state is characterized by weak institutions, incapable of providing services or distributing goods to its citizenry. Second, the three decades of war and active insurgency have produced political, social and ethnic divisions within different groups that make identification with a specific political order or official "national narrative" very difficult if not impossible. These issues raise important theoretical questions about the sense of nation-ness and practices through which national attachment can be enacted.

Joel Migdal in his work on "strong societies and weak states" argued that the state's coherence and authority cannot be taken for granted. Rather it should be understood as being in steady, often turbulent, conversation with surrounding social elements:

---

164. Barfield, op. cit., 296.

*People do not automatically consider the state to be the proper authority to settle the crucial questions or even the appropriate forum within which various social groups will struggle over the future course of the society .... The state is not a fixed ideological entity. Rather, it embodies an ongoing dynamic, a changing set of goals, as it engages other social groups .... The formulation of state policy is as much a product of this dynamic as it is a simple outcome of the goals of top state leaders or a straightforward legislative process.*<sup>165</sup>

In the Afghan case, I argue that the creation of the nation involves precisely this kind of dialectic; social actors—religious, economic, political and military—imagine and re-imagine the Afghan nation in dialogue with the state. The power of state institutions waxes and wanes, but Afghan nation-ness persists precisely because non-state actors remain its custodian throughout. In discussing the concept of nation in Afghanistan, I am inspired by Benedict Anderson's definition of an imagined political community, "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear from them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion."<sup>166</sup>

My concept of nation-ness differs from the Andersonian definition because the Afghan national imagining has been made only in part by the heavy-handed work of the state and its various technologies. In the Afghan case, the "social" has been consistently integral to the construction of this imagined sense of nation-ness. Thus, it survives despite the ups and down of statehood.

## **The State's Attempt to Make the Nation**

According to Anderson, what makes nationalism different and distinct is that this connectivity is enabled by modern technological innovations such as print media, railroads and communication. These innovations increased the power of the state to record, educate and control the people, thus making itself central to the establishment of nationalist imagining.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Afghan state set about constructing the Afghan "nation" in Andersonian terms. First, the government adopted a modernist constitution in 1923, thus signifying a transition from classical state to modern,

---

165. Joel Samuel Migdal, *State Power and Social Forces* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 10-12.

166. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), p.49.

territorially defined state. Afghan statehood and nationality, for the first time, was defined by the concept of nation-state and geographically distinct and historically unique Afghan nation.<sup>167</sup> Second, with the expansion of modern education, especially after the 1950s, the uniform syllabus was adopted in order to diminish differences between different Afghan ethnic groups. Third, the creation/invention of a secular “national” past that extends to the dawn of history in the region. This was done by signing the first formal agreement for archeological research with the French Archeological Institute as early as 1922.<sup>168</sup> The agreement specifically emphasized on research about the pre-Islamic history of the Afghan “nation” and connecting modern Afghans with historical ancient people and dynasties in the Central Asian region such as the Bactrian people, Greco-Bactrian kingdom (256-130 BC), Kushan Empire (40-220), and Hephthalites (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century). It was, in other words, the state institutions that exercised their powers and resources to record, educate and create a certain narrative about the nation. This nationalist ideology presumed an association between the “people” and state institutions from the dawn of history.

In the early 20th century, the Afghan nationalist intellectuals, primarily Mahmud Tarzi (1865-1933), pointed to this history to demonstrate Afghanistan’s continuity. They sought to link the politics of their day to a coherent past stretching indefinitely back in history. As such, their project could be understood in Andersonian terms: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”<sup>169</sup> In particular, nationalist and reformist groups in the 1920s and 30s invested novel political significance in specific background conditions. Contemplating the fact of Afghanistan as the only “nation” that successfully resisted colonial aggression and preserved its independence, they indexed a territory that, in the context of nationalist discourses, could be made the object of attachment for an imagined people.

Statehood and nationality were thus founded on territorially defined conceptions of modern nation-state, of a geographically and historically distinct Afghan nation.<sup>170</sup> The term *watan* which traditionally means one’s birthplace, in a

---

167. Sanzil K. Nawid, *Tarzi and the Emergence of Afghan Nationalism: Formation of a Nationalist Ideology* (2009), p. 5.

168. Formal archeological research began in 1922, when the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan (q.v.; hereafter DAFA) was established by official agreement between the French and Afghan governments, <http://www.ifre.fr/c/211>

169. Anderson, op. cit., 26.

170. Nawid, op. cit.

nationalist definition, referred to a territory with fixed boundaries, separated and different from other countries. Mahmud Tarzi wrote in *Saraj ul Akhbar*:

*To love your country is [as sacred as] to believe in true faith. Afghans accepted Islam voluntarily. This proves that Afghanistan (as the homeland and nation) is blessed by God. Therefore, love of watan-e-Afghan ha (the land of Afghans) is a divine duty of everyone. Watan (the homeland) is (as sacred as) your religion. There is no contradiction in loving your country and believing in the true faith. While we are all part of the Muslim ummat (community), each [Muslim] nation has its unique political and social characteristics. They are living as part of the ummat but in different and separate countries and have natural love and attachment to their homeland. Thus, love for your country and homeland complements your faith. Therefore, love of your country and love for your faith are the two sides of the same coin.<sup>171</sup>*

Mahmud Tarzi's ideas were embraced by subsequent Afghan governments and gradually became the cornerstone of Afghan nationalism. Tarzi's son-in-law, King Amanullah, moved the nation-building project forward with the promulgation of a constitution in 1923 that made people subjects of the Afghan national state. "Afghan" had long been synonymous with "Pashtun," so Afghanistan—land or the Afghans—could also be glossed Land of the Pashtuns. But, at least formally, "Afghan" nationality became distinct from ethnic identity as articulated in the constitution's eighth article: "Every person who lives in Afghanistan is called, without any religious or sectarian distinction, an Afghan subject. Afghan nationality can, according to special rules, be acquired or abandoned."<sup>172</sup> While Amanullah appears to have meant to expand Afghan to be more inclusive, his Musahiban dynastic successors (1929-1978) went in the other direction.

They attempted to replace historic notions of nationhood inspired by a common Persianate cultural, political and religious traditions with an ethnic and then race based identity. This was strongly influenced by Nazi racial concepts that had come into prominence in the 1930s. This new historical ideology of Aryanism linked Afghanistan and its peoples to the ancient Aryans and their homeland of Bactria or Aryana and put a strong emphasis on Afghanistan's pre Islamic archeological past.<sup>173</sup> The genesis of these policies can be traced to the Amir

171. Sims Williams, "The Afghan newspaper Siraj Al Akhbar." *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1980, pp. 118-122.

172. Constitution of the Preeminent Government of Afghanistan, 1923.

173. N. Green, *From Persianate Past to Aryan Antiquity. Transnationalism and Transformation in Afghan Intellectual History, c. 1880-1940* (California: University of California, 20018).

Abdur Rahman Khan's creation of an ethnic based hierarchy in which Pashtuns ranked above other ethnic groups. Thus while all subjects of Afghanistan were "Afghans," the government made an effort to elevate Pashtuns above others.

This political frame asserted the racial and cultural supremacy of one ethnic group, the Pashtun tribes, as the most 'pure' of Aryan races over all non-Pashtuns who were not Aryan.<sup>174</sup> The ruling elite understood Afghan/Pashtun racial supremacy as a "gift from God" and came to see it as a basis for the establishment of a social order, political legitimacy, and the cultural and administrative structures required to construct their desired "Afghan" nation-state. As Sayed Askar Mousavi explains, "While all inhabitants of Afghanistan are referred to as 'Afghan', the Pashtun tribes [were] considered 'more Afghan' than others."<sup>175</sup> The state sought to subvert the prevailing systems of cultural meaning and alter notions of ethnicity, cultural identity, morality and personhood mostly through its ethnic, linguistic cum racial policy in order to redefine communities and establish a new identity based on the doctrine of Afghan/Pashtun racial supremacy.

As in many other examples of nationalism, state-sponsored intellectuals in Afghanistan played a key role in asserting the eternal and uninterrupted existence of the Afghan nation, as well as in offering divergent understandings of what Afghanistan meant. Tarzi, the most prominent among them, wed the projects of modernization and nation-making together, as Senzil Nawid explains, "he wrote that a 'nation cannot survive without language and a language cannot survive without literature.' He declared 'Islam, history and Pashto form the mortar that permit the country's ethnic mosaic to mold into one nation.'<sup>176</sup>

Like Amanullah, Nadir Shah and later his successor, Zahir Shah created space for public intellectuals to make Afghanistan a coherent object of historical inquiry and analysis, establishing the Historical Association in the 1930s to sponsor scholarly studies. These studies, in most cases, tended to privilege the ethnic-based Afghan state and portrayed it as a continuous entity. They also imposed a particularly secular historical account onto what was otherwise a set of different, fragmented, often distinctly regional accounts.<sup>177</sup> The historian Ghulam Mohammad Ghubar's 1963 *Afghanistan dar Maseer-e Tarikh* [*Afghanistan in the Course of History*] was an effort to address the diverse nature of the Afghan society and history and proves instructive here. At times, his language denoting

---

174. Syed Askar Mousavi, *The Hazaras of Afghanistan* (London: Routledge, 1998), p 159.

175. Mousavi, *ibid.*, p. 9.

176. Nawid, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–35.

177. Green, *op. cit.*

*Afghanistan-e Bozorg*, Greater Afghanistan, became part of an established narrative of Afghan history and nationalism.<sup>178</sup>

In order to accommodate different ethnic groups in Afghanistan, Ghubar's history tried to designate a territorially larger country extending from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean to emphasize Afghanistan's distinct history and culture and portray it as a continuous entity. Not surprisingly because he was a prominent Afghan nationalist, Ghubar developed his narrative following a primordialist view of history, depicting Afghanistan as a nation with an ancient civilization whose members settled in the fertile valleys of both sides of Hindu Kush Mountain. The historic kingdoms of Kushans (40-220), Hephthalites (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries), the Persianate kingdoms of Safarids (9<sup>th</sup> century) Samanids (10<sup>th</sup> century), the Turko-Persian dynasties of Ghaznavids (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Timurids (15<sup>th</sup> century) up to the emergence of Durrani Empire in 18<sup>th</sup> century were all described as dynasties and generations that succeeded one another in a stable way with little to no interruption.

This imagining resonates with Ernest Gellner's concept of a "sleeping beauty" in which nations wake up, build national states and achieve the national consciousness of their predecessors' naturally shared culture and language, history and substance.<sup>179</sup> Thus, like most nationalist discourses, this Afghan narrative stressed the people's antiquity, their continuous occupation of a territory and the struggle and sacrifices that 'they' made in the effort to preserve national sovereignty and identity.

## **Towards a More Encompassing Nation**

Not all Afghan intellectuals endorsed such a continuous or homogenous depiction of history. For them what was considered "Afghanistan" remained contested even before the communist coup of 1978. In particular, non-Pashtun groups resented the hierarchical re-structuring of Afghan society. Given that Persian had been the lingua franca of the country for over a millennium, the lack of trained and literate Pashto teachers, and other ethnic groups such as Uzbeks and Turkmens who accepted Persian as the second language over time, the adoption of a new language nationwide was no trivial task. Furthermore, changing the language of bureaucracy caused massive disruptions in daily government business. The deleterious effects of foisting the Pashto language on other groups, and on the country's economic, administrative and educational

---

178. Nile Green(ed.), *Afghan History through Afghan Eyes* (Oxford: Hurst Publishers, 2016).

179. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), pp.47-48.

systems, forced the government to reverse the policy and recognize Persian, alongside Pashto as the official language.<sup>180</sup>

While the Musahiban's preference for ethnic politics continued until the end of the dynasty in 1978, its negative effects on bureaucracy and general harmony forced the government to incorporate other cultural traditions and bring them within the nationalistic Afghan discourse. For example, in early 1950s, the government adopted the Turkic game of Buzkashi (played only in the north) as the country's national game.<sup>181</sup> In the new constitution, ratified in 1964, the government modified its previous policy and recognized Persian (*Dari*) alongside Pashto as the second official language of Afghanistan. Non-Pashtuns, especially Persian-speaking Hazaras, were allowed relatively greater access to institutions of higher education. And the government declared the Persianate holiday of Nauroz as the national holiday in late 1950s.

The possibilities for such accommodations were foreshadowed—and undergirded—by the work of scholars like Mir Muhammad Sediq Farhang, a historian and senior official under King Zahir Shah. He wrote the influential book *Afghanistan Dar Panj Qarn Akheer* [*Afghanistan in the Last Five Centuries*], presenting himself as an Afghan but clearly repudiating the idea of Afghan history as a single, continuous process. In his book, he not only discussed the history and traditions of the Pashtun tribes, but also focused on other ethnic groups.<sup>182</sup>

The communist government took a new approach to ethnicity when it came to power in 1978 by adopting a more systematic Soviet inspired cultural policy. The communist government established poets and writers association under the Ministry of Culture and Information and a special committee was formed within the PDPA central committee to direct cultural policies and conform the traditions to the state's ideological lines. Furthermore, after the Soviet invasion in 1979 and takeover of the moderate Parcham faction of the PDPA, the communist government declared its firm commitment to equality of all ethno-linguistic groups.<sup>183</sup> In the 1985 constitution, the PDPA government declared Afghanistan a multi-ethnic society and affirmed its commitment to development of the culture and language of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan.<sup>184</sup>

---

180. Farhang, *Afghanistan dar panj Qarn-e-Akhir*.

181. G. Whitney Azoy, *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (London: Waveland Pr. Inc., 2002).

182. Farhang, *Afghanistan dar panj Qarn-e-Akhir*, 343.

183. Senzil Nawid, *Language Policy in Afghanistan: Linguistic Diversity and National Unity* (New Jersey: Brill, 2012), p.43.

184. *Constitution of 1987*, Article 14, Principle policies of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, articles 28 and 29.

The policies of PDPA were initially highly ideological, rejecting many Afghan cultural traditions as superstitious or backward. But they gradually became more nationalistic and inclusive.<sup>185</sup> With the drawdown of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, the communist government under President Najibullah (1986-1992), a Ghilzai Pashtun, changed the name of the PDPA to *Watan*, the Homeland Party, and began to embrace cultural traditions. The regime adopted a much more pluralistic nationalistic policy where attempts were made to include all ethnic and linguistic groups in Afghanistan in the process of (re)making the state in Afghanistan. The massive expansion of state institutions under the communist regime was critical in the dissemination of new nationalistic ideas and practices in the urban areas.

The official name of Afghanistan was changed from the Democratic Republic of the People of Afghanistan to the Republic of Afghanistan. Educational institutions and media were gradually de-Sovietized, while respect for Islam, Afghan history, and traditions were emphasized as the core values of government.<sup>186</sup> The Nauroz festival and especially the *janda bala* ceremony remained the most recognized and widely attended cultural event among Afghans of all ethnicities. They not only received official recognition and sponsorship but were incorporated into the state propaganda to legitimize the communist government policies.<sup>187</sup>

## Nation-Making without a State

With the Soviet invasion of 1979, the trajectory of the state building project in Afghanistan entered a period of prolonged crisis. At this moment the Afghan story departed from the Andersonian model; as Midgal would have it, the country's social forces took hold of the nation-making project. Many observers conflated the profound failure if not collapse of the Afghan state with the demise of the Afghan nation. Throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s the country was fragmented along regional lines, a fragmentation interpreted by many as the beginning of its disintegration into ethnic and tribal enclaves. Even after 2001, many political analysts and Western diplomats argued that the "breakup of the country along the ethnic lines [held] real dangers."<sup>188</sup>

---

185. *Manifesto of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan*, article 13.

186. Antonio Giustozzi, *War, Politics and Society in Afghanistan, 1978-1992* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2000), pp. 155–56.

187. *Manifesto of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan*

188. Glatzer, "Is Afghanistan on the brink of ethnic and tribal disintegration?"; see also Wilder and Lister, "State-building at the Subnational Level in Afghanistan: A Missed Opportunity; Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*.

With the collapse of the Afghan communist regime in 1992, various mujahedin groups who fought the Russians and later the Kabul government, took control of the country. The Mujahedin Islamic State of Afghanistan [*Dawlat-e Islami Afghanistan*] that ruled Afghanistan from 1992-96 was divided into a number of competing factions. The Persian-speaking Tajiks dominated the *Jamiat-e Islami* party under the political leadership of Burhānuddīn Rabbānī who served as the country's president and under the military leadership of Commander Ahmad Shah Masoud. It was opposed by *Hizb-e Islam*, a predominantly Pashtun party led by Gulbudin Hekmatyar, a favorite of Pakistan, who shelled the Kabul from his base just south of the city. A former communist general based in Mazar-e Sharif, Abdul Rashid Dostam, led a secular Uzbek party, *Junbish-e-Milli*, and while the Hazaras were organized into the *Hizb-e Wahdat-e Islami Afghanistan* led by Ali Mazari until his murder in 1995.

Mujahedin disunity and fighting opened the way for the Taliban, a Salafist religious group from Kandahar led by the one-eyed Mullah Omar, to take power. Drawing heavily on a southern Pashtun base of recruitment, the Taliban displaced Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e Islami* in 1995. In 1996 they captured Kabul and installed their new Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001). Once the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, they abandoned the notion of the Afghan *dawlat* and declared themselves to be an Islamic emirate, *D'Afghanistan Islami Emarat*, under the personal leadership of Mullah Omar as Commander of the Faithful. The Taliban, acting within a network of regional and local Islamist groups, had developed their own conception of political legitimacy, one that relied purely on a *Salafi* interpretation of Islam and a corresponding opposition to nationalism in its secular forms.

This opposition was strongly rooted in the notion of a political Islam that had emerged in Pakistan and South Asia more generally during 1980s. The Taliban's political Islam aspired to introduce a more inclusive national identity based on religion that would include all ethnic groups. They existed, ideologically, outside the bounds of a historically grounded understanding of Afghanistan and the Afghan state, remaining perpetually linked to a transnational network of Islamists. Such links made many Afghans view the Taliban as an anti-Afghan phenomenon.<sup>189</sup> As a religious movement led by Afghan Pashtuns who were trained in Deobandi madrasas over the border, they sought to banish anything they deemed "un-Islamic."

Under these circumstances, it is easy to see why observers, Afghan and foreign, might have feared the demise not only of the state-based political order but

---

189. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/special-reports/ideology-in-the-afghan-taliban-a-new-aan-report/>

also the plural, historically grounded, and expansive conception of the Afghan nation as it had existed heretofore. From 1996-2001, the civil war pitted the Pashtun dominated Taliban Emirate against the United Front alliance of the above-mentioned Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara parties (also called the Northern Alliance). The United Front insisted that it was still the legitimate government of the continuing Islamic State of Afghanistan, a case buttressed by the Taliban's failure to garner international recognition beyond that of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates even after they held 80% of the country.

And, yet, in spite of the United Front's hostility to the Taliban, it does not appear that any of their component groups used anti-Pashtun rhetoric to mobilize their own people mostly located in non-Pashtun areas of northern and central Afghanistan. They rejected all allegations of representing an anti-Pashtun block and continued to justify their war against Taliban as defending a legitimate Afghan government's sovereignty and independence from a usurping Taliban regime that was Pakistan's cat's paw. Similarly, the Taliban movement and its later Emirate always asserted that it was a legitimate government that met accepted Islamic standards of inclusiveness. While the Taliban drew most of its supporters from the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and certainly had a strong Pashtun tribal base, it continued and still continues to portray itself as a government that transcends ethnicity and region. Declaring Pashto the language of government was no innovation nor particularly radical. Previous monarchical regimes going back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century had done the same with little success in a bureaucracy that continued to be run on a Persianate model of administration that had persevered for a thousand years.

Similarly, ethnic preferences and exclusions in government positions were more a by-product of a traditional spoils system that rewarded supporters, mostly Pashtuns, and excluded perceived opponents, mostly non-Pashtuns. The result was an ethnic bias, but not one rooted in ethnic nationalism. The strongest evidence that the Taliban was a religious rather than an ethno-nationalist movement could be seen in their policies that pitted a strict Salafist interpretation of Islamic sharia law against some of the core values embodied in the Pashtun code of honor or Pashtunwali. For example, the Taliban outlawed the tradition of resolving blood feuds by the exchange of girls in marriage [*baad*] between the groups in conflict, although the effective enforcement of this law is still debated.<sup>190</sup> They also discouraged the use of traditional Pashtun tribal councils, *jirgas*, to solve disputes based on customary law in favor of the clerical (*ulema*) run councils that employed *sharia* law. In this respect, ironically, the Taliban

---

190. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254892431\\_Traditional\\_practices\\_in\\_Afghan\\_marriage\\_responding\\_to\\_women's\\_health\\_needs](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254892431_Traditional_practices_in_Afghan_marriage_responding_to_women's_health_needs)

resembled the communist PDPA, as both sought to replace customary practices with their own universalistic laws enforced by the power of the state.

A closer examination of the civil war in the 1990s and the current Taliban insurgency will show that no faction ever advocated secession from Afghanistan, even as a threat. Despite the active war between these factions, which led to many atrocities, no political group seemed to believe that breaking up a unitary Afghanistan would be beneficial to its cause. The narrow focus on the dangers of ethnic division as a recipe for state collapse became a kind of policy and academic “MacGuffin,” a thesis that seemed of obvious and critical importance initially but one that proved less and less relevant when examined in the Afghan cultural context. In an era when many nation-states are being challenged by ethnic conflict and the fragmentation of previously unified multi-ethnic political communities, and others are undermined by transnational patterns of migration and wars, Afghanistan—despite its civil war, its political fragmentation in post-Soviet invasion, and a complete breakdown of the state system during 1990s—never witnessed any separatist movement nor any secessionist tendencies. On the contrary, separatist tendencies were strongly rejected by all political and ethnic groups.

In fact, all Afghan factions in the 1990s sought to avoid the label of rebels, regional militias, or ethnically based movements. Each claimed to be a legitimate state (dawlat) that had the capacity to represent all ethnic groups and regions in the country and vehemently opposed any notion of ethnic exclusivity. It was always their enemies who would label them otherwise. The United Front painted the Taliban as an exclusively Pashtun movement, while the Taliban denigrated their United Front rivals as a cabal of Tajik, Uzbek or Hazara warlords. Each group’s effort to claim a more plural constituency stood in stark contrast to an ethno-nationalism that would consciously invoke a shared group history, language and tradition to exclude non-members and unite its own. Such movements saw the single ethnic polities as a necessity because otherwise they would not have a state to rule. While factions in Afghanistan during the 1990s derived their core supporters from one or another ethnic group, to define themselves that narrowly would undermine their claims as legitimate caretakers of the state.

In this period new forms of historical writings by some of the moderate Mujahedin and anti-Soviet authors actually privileged the much more diverse and regionally anchored history of Afghanistan, in their cases foregrounding the nation’s historical, religious and socio-cultural ties to Islamic histories of the wider Central and South Asian regions. Furthermore, during the 1980s jihad against

the Soviet Union, multiple historical chronicles and publications demonstrated the significations of and the ways in which nationalist discourses connected with the development of Islam in Afghanistan. These publications denoted an expanding influence of the Islamic discourse into the formation of Afghanistan as a nation and the emergence of national state. Leading historians, poets and writers in exile such as Khalilullah Khalili (1907-1987), Abdur Rahman Pazhwak (1919-1995) and Bahauddin Majrouh (1928-1988) established the first literary and historical associations and educational institutions among Afghan refugees in Pakistan where many Afghans were educated with the ideas of Afghan Islamic nationalism.

## Unraveling the Ethnicity Knot

While it is easy to label the core supporters of different factions with national ethnic labels, these are mostly descriptive. The term used for ethnic groups in Afghanistan, *qawm*, is remarkably slippery: *qawm* can be used for both small numbers of people in a single mountain valley, Panjshiri for example, and national ethnic groups composed of millions of other similar people called Tajik. It constitutes a nested segmentary identity in which people who share a *qawm* identity in one context can also agree that they are members of different *qawms* in another. Robert Canfield provided an excellent example when he quoted from an overheard conversation in which one Hazara migrant to Kabul complained that he could not find any fellow *qawm* members (*qawmi*) in his neighborhood and was chided by his companion, "In Kabul all Hazaras are your *qawmi*."<sup>191</sup>

The sense of unity grows weaker at each level of expansion—the national applications of Tajik or Pashtun are almost always external because their groups have so many significant subdivisions that such a general term is rendered meaningless for any practical purpose. Pashtuns may be pitted against Tajiks as a category but Durrani Pashtuns from the south see sharp distinctions between themselves and Ghilzai Pashtuns from the east, just as a Tajik from Herat has little in common with one from the Panjshir other than a common language and Sunni faith. Some recent scholarly work on Afghanistan suggests that the lack of ethnic nationalism in Afghanistan, despite the history of violence and civil war, stems from strong sub-ethnic identities and shifting networks of solidarity and severe underdevelopment of the country.<sup>192</sup>

---

191. Canfield, *Faction and Conversion in a Plural Society: Religious Alignments in the Hindu Kush* (Published online by Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 37.

192. Anand Gopal, *Rents, Patronage, and Defection: State-building and Insurgency in Afghanistan*, <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D81G0RWX>

Any attempt at using ethnicity as a fixed category also faces a boundary problem because it is culturally rather than legally defined. The 2004 Constitution recognizes fourteen named ethnic groups plus “other tribes” (Article 1, chapter 4) but nowhere are the criteria for membership specifically defined. These are left to classic category-making by means of self-definition and definition by others where both criteria for membership and boundaries between one group and another are subject to change and manipulation.<sup>193</sup> More significantly ethnic groups in Afghanistan do not have exclusive control of specific territories and Afghan history is replete with designations of once powerful ethnic groups that later disappeared. Every part of Afghanistan is therefore better described by a diversity of the groups that inhabit them rather than by their internal uniformity. Even when groups can agree on a common definition, they split politically if that is advantageous.

The power of the state to define the nation remained limited and always in dialogue with the society as represented by elites, intellectuals, and ordinary Afghans. The historical conditions that characterized the development of state and sense of nation-ness in Afghanistan were in many ways unlike the ones Benedict Anderson described in his *Imagined Communities*. In particular, Afghan history unfolded under conditions in which state institutions served only sometimes as the key authors of the national narrative. Often, especially in recent history, they were either non-existent or too weak to promote national ideas and values. And yet, despite competing ideologies, foreign infiltration, the destruction of infrastructure, the migration of millions, and the total absence of strong state institutions, ideas about the nation proved remarkably stable as Afghans continued to imagine themselves as a people located in a territorially and culturally determinate space.

The opening of Afghanistan to the world, the effects of international presence, and the return of millions of Afghan refugees not only gave people a renewed sense of national attachment to the country but also gave them an opportunity to redefine “Afghan” more inclusively. This was reflected in the 2004 constitution where, besides naming Pashto and Persian Dari as the country’s official languages, many other languages (Uzbeki, Turkmeni and Baluchi and others) were also recognized, meaning that education could be conducted in them in their native regions. Fourteen specific ethnic groups were also listed, and Sunni and Shia legal systems were both given equal status for use in each community.

Less well appreciated in the wrangling over the installation of the new government was the definitive end it represented to a quarter century of rule by ideological

---

193. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (London: Waveland Pr. Inc., 1969), p.10.

states in Afghanistan. The communist PDPA and their Islamist mujahedin and their Taliban successors were all advocates of radical (if diametrically opposed) ideologies that they believed needed to be imposed on the Afghan people, by force if necessary. The new government had no overarching ideology it sought to implement. However, while the post 2001 government did reflect many new aspects of unity and did not seek to impose a unitary ideology on a diverse country, there was a new political division between Afghans who had lived through the wars in the country or been refugees in Pakistan and Iran and what many saw as a new ruling elite who had returned from the West after 2001.

Because of their superior education, language skills and familiarity with Western institutions, these people became the main partners of the international community in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Many were members of the old Kabuli elite, a predominantly Persianized group of elite Pashtuns, or came from professional classes who settled in the West after the Soviet invasion. Some of them returned to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime to either reclaim their property or join the newly formed government. In 2020, they still held the majority of government key positions and remained the most dominant group in the Afghan government.

Their influence had been critical even before the new government came to power in Kabul. Themselves proponents of the ethnic Macguffin, it was this returning elite that convinced the international community, with support from Pakistan, that only a Pashtun could lead Afghanistan and that the non-Pashtuns who made up the United Front were too heavily represented in the government and should be sidelined where possible.<sup>194</sup> For example at the Bonn conference in December 2001, the various Afghan political groups and parties had initially selected Satar Seerat, an Uzbek and close confidant of the former king Zahir Shah, as interim president. This Afghan selection was rejected by the international community, including its UN organizer Lakhtar Brahimi, on the grounds that the country must be Pashtun ruled. Instead, they pressed the Afghans to install Hamid Karzai who was not only a Pashtun but a Durrani Pashtun whose ancestors had founded the Afghan state.

In the years that followed, many members of the Afghan diaspora who still hold significant positions in the government have fostered what can only be called a romantic ethnic nationalism that has been particularly strong among its Pashtun members. For example, during the 2014 presidential election, Ashraf Ghani and his supporters initially embraced overt Pashtun ethnic nationalism as their political platform, although his international backers continued to see him as just a technocrat. But those expatriates may have applied their western

---

194. Gordon, "NATO after 11 September." <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330112331343145>

concepts of ethnicity and nationalism to a context in Afghanistan where it operated very differently. Ethnic groups in Afghanistan were always open to cross ethnic alliances and felt no obligatory solidarity with their co-ethnics at the national level. For them politics was approached like an arranged marriage, not a love match, so practicalities were more important than primordial affiliations which are key to ethnic nationalism.<sup>195</sup>

Despite efforts by some top political figures to ethnicize politics, this has not shaken the customary view of national attachment that takes pride in Afghanistan's long history as a unitary state. The Afghan example of national imagination makes clear that the sense of nation-ness does not necessarily proceed in a linear way nor along a steady evolution based on previous conceptions of belonging. Instead, understandings of the nation find expression as they overlap with other solidarities. They are generated, not only through state-led nation-building, but also through cultural practices and social and political interactions that exist beyond the grip of government. Ultimately, differences and conflicts about specifically imagined worlds are addressed, discussed and disputed, through the combined work of state initiatives and cultural practices defined by their practitioners, elite and ordinary alike.

---

195. Barfield, "Afghanistan's Ethnic Puzzle: Decentralizing Power Before the U.S. Withdrawal." [https://www.jstor.org/stable/23041776?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/23041776?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents)

# Cultural, Religious and Economic Integration: Future of Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

Ali Maisam Nazary

*Although I am a son of India  
My eyes flicker from the sacred  
dust of Bukhara, Kabul and Tabriz  
- Muhammad Iqbal*

Afghanistan and Pakistan have had a tumultuous and disruptive relationship since the latter's independence in 1947. The two neighboring countries share a 2,640-kilometer border with deep religious, cultural, and ethnic ties. However, the events that unfolded and many irrational decisions taken since 1947 have caused hostilities and a sense of mistrust to build on both sides. In reality, this betrayed the vision that Afghanistan and the Muslims of India had in relation to forming a partnership in the region once the British left the sub-continent. In the past 74 years, the policies adopted by Afghanistan and Pakistan have caused many golden opportunities for the development, stability, and prosperity of the two states to be squandered. After Pakistan's independence, Afghanistan's first act was to vote against its membership in the United Nations and fanned the flames of ethnic nationalism with its irredentist claims. Subsequently, Afghanistan's denial of an international border between the two states and its perpetual support for Pashtun and Baluch separatist groups sowed mistrust in Pakistan. Afghanistan's irrational policy towards Pakistan during the Cold War cost its neutral status by aligning itself with the Soviet Union and led to the rise of communism and the two coup d'états that destabilized Afghanistan and caused the current unending conflict.

Moreover, Afghanistan's malign policies towards Pakistan for the first thirty years caused Pakistan to undertake a harsher and retaliatory policy of Afghanistan's destabilization in the subsequent thirty years by supporting the radical and extremist elements of the conflict in Afghanistan and sought dominance through one particular group. Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s facilitated the radicalization of the refugee camps and supported extremist groups that helped

destabilize Afghanistan and cause the current chaos in the country. During the first half of the 1990s, Pakistan supported Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's war against the Mujahideen government that all parties supported, except Hekmatyar's Hezb-e Islami Party. The government led by the late Ahmad Shah Massoud and Professor Burhan al-din Rabbani, always stressed the need for better relations with Pakistan. They insisted that if the Pakistani establishment changes its policy, Afghanistan will do everything to create amity between the two states. Yet, after 1994, Pakistan helped the creation of the Taliban and assisted their war and destruction. Its malign policies towards Afghanistan after 1992, by assisting Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and the Taliban, has hurt both states' economy and has allowed radical Islamic views to flourish on both sides of the border. Both countries' current policies are not what the people of Afghanistan and the founders of Pakistan envisioned before 1947. Since 1947, both states have been unable to use their full potential, and one reason for this is the lack of genuine cooperation between the two states. Years of conflict and stagnant growth in Afghanistan and Pakistan have caused a decay in the two countries' common cultural identity, has fueled extremism, and has prevented their economies from growing and prospering. For a better future and to form a strategic partnership, both countries must work on cultural integration based on their shared history and civilization. The rise of extremism and the weakening of the Hanafi school is another area that both countries must partner to strengthen moderate Islam and to stop radicalization. Lastly, an area that both states must work to improve their relations is trade and commerce. Afghanistan and Pakistan's economies will only flourish, and actual development will only happen when favorable terms are granted to both states. This chapter will focus on how trust can return between Afghanistan and Pakistan and how both can form a strategic partnership through cultural, religious, and economic integration.

## **Historical Context**

After the War of Independence in 1857 and the Mughal Empire's dissolution, interaction between Afghanistan and the Muslims of India grew and led both to pursue a common cause. For the next ninety years, Kabul's rulers gave refuge to the courtiers of the Delhi Durbar, the Muslim intellectuals and scholars, and many royal bureaucrats, chefs, and skilled laborers. This wave of migration by the Muslims of India, after 1857, drastically influenced the state and society by incorporating many of the traditions of the Mughals into the high culture of Kabul and allowing the state to take full advantage of the amount of knowledge and wealth that entered the country. It is no surprise that Afghanistan's first endeavor towards modernization started during the reign of Sher Ali Khan,

just six years after the Mughal Dynasty's dissolution. The modern institutions such as the postal service, national army, and the press were greatly influenced by the Urdu-speaking migrants from the Indian sub-continent. Karim Bakhsh and Sardar Ghulam Bahadur Naqshband, two former Indian military instructors, trained Sher Ali Khan's professional army.<sup>196</sup> Many Lithographic printers were brought from India in 1873, which resulted in Afghanistan's first publication, the *Shams-ul Nahār*. Despite possessing the modern printing press, most scientific, religious, and literary resources still came from Peshawar, Lahore, and Delhi.<sup>197</sup> Without a doubt, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the model of modernization that the Muslims of India brought into Afghanistan was much more significant compared to the Turkish model pursued by Mahmoud Tarzi in the 1910s. During this period, Kabul's literate class traveled extensively to Peshawar, Lahore, and Karachi, and many pursued higher education at Muslim Indian Universities like Aligarh's Muslim University. Furthermore, besides Persian, the royals and the literate classes in society were exposed to Urdu publications and books. During these 90 years, after Persian, Kabul's second most spoken language was Urdu. Resources that introduced modern thoughts, industrialization, and technology to the people of Afghanistan were mostly in Urdu and were brought in by India's Muslims.<sup>198</sup> Mahmoud Tarzi, who is thought to have been only influenced by the model of modernization in the Ottoman Empire, wrote his first book *Majmu'a-ye Sanā'i*, or the *Industrial Compendium*, on modernity in Karachi in 1883, before his exile to Damascus. After the death of Abdur Rahman Khan in 1901, his son and successor accelerated the modernization of Afghanistan and extensively employed India's Muslim to implement his vision for the country. These migrants founded the Habibiyya College, the first modern school in Kabul based on the modern education system devised by the Muslims of India. The textbooks for this school were written by the same scholars and were published in Persian and Urdu in Lahore. Its most prominent teacher was Ghulam Rasul Khan, who taught for more than half a century. A.C. Jewett, an American who traveled to Afghanistan in 1905, wrote that the College was wholly made up of "Hindustani Mussulmans." Kabul's modern Nizami hospital was headed by Allahjuwayna Khan when Ubaydhullah Sindhi traveled to Kabul and wrote a travelogue in the 1910s and other Indian doctors such as Abdul Ghani possessed senior positions. Among other things, India's Muslims dominated the skilled workforce during this era. A.C. Jewett, in 1905 wrote: " The master mechanics

---

196. Johnson, Robert, *The Afghan Way of War: How and Why They Fight* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

197. Green, Nile. "The Trans-Border Traffic of Afghan Modernism: Afghanistan and the Indian 'UrduSphere'." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2011, p. 482.

198. Lee, Jonathan, *Afghanistan: a History from 1260 to the Present Day* (Reaktion Books, 2018), p. 408. Green, *ibid.*, p. 485.

and best workmen are imported from India".<sup>199</sup> The Indian Muslims, which the vast majority after 1947 became Pakistani, enriched Kabul's society and assisted Afghanistan's pursuit of modernization.

Concurrently, the government and rulers of Afghanistan during these ninety years of partnership immensely helped the Muslim activists look for a base to help their independence efforts in the British Raj. Afghanistan was looked up to as an example of an independent Muslim nation, and for both the religious and modernist camps amongst India's Muslims, served as a haven. The rulers of Afghanistan supported many political activists during the first half of the 20th century. Dissidents and activists who were against British rule or aspired to revive Muslim rule in the subcontinent flocked to Afghanistan, and many formed camps to launch campaigns against British India. During World War One, a group of Indian Muslim Mujahids created bases near the border and received support from Afghan officials and even from the monarch's son.<sup>200</sup> The most crucial support given to the Indian Muslim cause was when Amanullah Khan declared a Jihad against the British Raj, right after declaring Afghanistan's Independence. The war that he launched against the British Empire was not for the sake of Afghanistan's independence but for the liberation of the Muslims of India from the British Raj. The Casus Belli that Amanullah Khan used to declare war on British India was the Massacre of Muslims in Jallianwala Bagh, Punjab. He portrayed himself as the protector of India's Muslims and believed it was his duty to lead a Jihad or War of Retribution to liberate the oppressed Muslims.<sup>201</sup> Interestingly, during the Rawalpindi Conference that ended the war, Dr. Ghani, a Muslim from India, was part of Afghanistan's delegation. Furthermore, during the 1920s, Afghanistan was the leading center for the Khilafat Movement, and later the Hijrat movement caused the exodus of around 25,000-50,000 Muslims from India to Afghanistan. In 1920, Amanullah Khan delivered a speech on the anniversary of his father's assassination and invited any Muslim from the subcontinent to migrate to Afghanistan. His speech was printed in most Indian Muslim publications and announced during the Friday prayers in Mosques throughout India.<sup>202</sup> A colony was planned for the migrants in Jabal Saraj, and the Amir personally welcomed them there. For these migrants, Afghanistan was a promised land and the closest independent Muslim polity to them where they had kins and friends who integrated into that society with ease.<sup>203</sup> The

---

199. Green. *Ibid.*, pp. 491-94.

200. Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

201. Lee, *ibid.*, p. 455.

202. Reetz, Dietrich. *Hijrat: The Flight of the Faithful: A British File on the Exodus of Muslim Peasants from North India to Afghanistan in 1920* (Berlin: Verlag Das Arabische Buch, 1995), pp. 42-43.

203. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

most important source that shows how much Afghanistan inspired a Muslim from India as an independent Muslim kingdom is the accounts and poetry of Mohammad Iqbal during his trip to the country in 1933. The founder of the Idea of Pakistan took pride in Afghanistan and declared, "Kabul is a thousand times better than Delhi" in a poem that he recited while visiting the tomb of Babur.<sup>204</sup> Iqbal's fascination with Afghanistan during the 1920s and 1930s might have influenced him to propose an independent state for India's Muslims. Mohammad Iqbal, who was the first to propose an independent Muslim state in the subcontinent, is a symbol of Persianate culture and the last great link that the people of Afghanistan and the future Pakistanis had before partition. When Iqbal was sick, King Zahir Shah sent him gifts, and after his death, Afghanistan provided a tombstone made of lapis lazuli. The tombstone had one of Iqbal's Persian poems and a line that read, "Doctor Iqbal, the poet, and philosopher of the East, who opened the path and spirit of Islam to all."

The ninety years of cooperation, partnership, and exchanges were all gone when Pakistan gained its independence in 1947. Afghanistan's first move to vote against the newly created state that Mohammad Iqbal envisaged severed the two country's 90 years old ties. Ironically, less than a year after his accession to the throne in 1933, Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, outlined Afghanistan's foreign policy doctrine with three points. He stressed that Afghanistan would maintain friendly relations with all countries, live in peace and friendship with all neighboring countries and that Afghanistan will never cause difficulties and obstacles for other governments.<sup>205</sup> His government's decision in 1947 to adopt an unwelcoming policy went against all three points declared as Zahir Shah's foreign policy doctrine.

## Cultural Integration

One solution to pave a new trajectory in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations and undo the mistakes of the Post-1947 era is to adopt a policy of cultural integration. Both countries share a common civilization, history, and culture and are part of the Persianate World<sup>206</sup>. As a matter of fact, the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent have always been closer to the Iranian Plateau compared

---

204. Muhammad Iqbal, *Musafir: Sayahat'e Chand Roza'e Afghanistan* (Lahore: Kitab Khana-e-Tolo'e Islam, 1936), p. 12.

205. Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan; Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 375.

206. The Persianate World is a civilizational-cultural sphere that encompasses lands from the Balkans and Asia Minor in the West, up to India and Western China in the East. The culture, literature and language of the countries and people of the Persianate World is under direct Persian influence.

to other surrounding regions. Most North Indians' ancient ancestors originated from Central Asia and brought the Sanskrit language and the Vedic religion to the Indus Valley. Before the rise of Islam, Eastern Iran and Northern India were part of the Great Kushan Dynasty and were part of the Sarvastivada Buddhist school.<sup>207</sup>

The emergence of Islam in Medieval Khurasan and the start of the Turco-Persian conquests of India by Mahmoud of Ghazna, a new civilization based on Islam and the New Persian language and culture was given rise. The Ghaznavid and later Ghurid Dynasty laid the foundations of an era that deeply connected the Indian subcontinent with the Iranian world, creating a Persianate World based on a common Persian language and literature that lasted until the mid-19th century when the British East India Company brought an end to the Mughal Dynasty. This Persianate Age created a new identity for the Muslims of Greater Iran and the subcontinent of India, and exchanges of all sorts took place between the two regions.<sup>208</sup> With the 13th century's Mongol invasions, a vast exodus that could have exceeded millions migrated from the Iranian lands to the sub-continent and helped accelerate the cultural integration between the two regions.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, after the 15th century, with the decline of the Timurids and the rise of the Safavid Dynasty, the center of Persian literary and cultural production shifted from Khurasan and Western Iran to the Indian Sub-continent. From the 15th century till the late 19th century, more literary works and dictionaries were being published in Persian in the Indian Sub-continent than in any other region in the world. The population of literate Persian-speakers in India was thrice as much as the Iranian Plateau's Persian population during this era.<sup>210</sup> During this age, India became an integral part of the Persianate World and led to stability and prosperity before the arrival of the European colonialists. Whatever ethnicity the rulers belonged to, whether Tajik, Turkic, Afghan, or native Indians, they all adhered to this cultural identity and tradition and strengthened it throughout India. Whoever travels to India and Iran will recognize the similarities in architecture, literature, music, cuisine, and clothing between both regions' Muslims. Throughout this age, the Persian language profoundly influenced the native languages and allowed the adoption of Persian literature, terminology, and grammatical elements into the local vernaculars of

---

207. Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 60.

208. Muzaffar Alam, *The Language of Political Islam: India 1200 – 1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

209. Navina Najat Haidar and Sardar Marika, *Sultans of Deccan India: 1500-1700: Opulence and Fantasy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015), p 3.

210. Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Surrounding World Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), p 18.

northern and southern India. Most importantly, Urdu developed under heavy Persian influence and is, in fact, a virtual amalgam of Persian and Sanskrit. The rise of Urdu after 1835 had a profound influence over the Identity of India's Muslims and replaced Persian as the lingua franca of the Indian Muslims.

With a weakened Mughal Empire and the British East India Company's invasion, this age entered its waning. The British in 1835 removed Persian from bureaucracies and magistrates throughout India and replaced it with English and local languages.<sup>211</sup> The weakening of the Persian language came hand in hand with the marginalization of India's Muslims. Fortunately, the 19th and 20th century gave rise to Urdu, but with Persian's disappearance by the mid-20th century, especially after Pakistan's independence, ties between the Muslims of India and the rest of the Persianate World were severed. As a result of this, since 1947, Pakistan has experienced an identity crisis. On the one hand, it cannot culturally integrate with India because of its emphasis on the Hindutva Ideology and its drive to erase the subcontinent's Islamic and Persianate identities. On the other hand, a strict policy to re-integrate Pakistan into the Persianate World has never been adopted by any government in Islamabad.

Furthermore, Pakistan is not only to be blamed for this. Afghanistan's government sought to weaken its Persian identity beginning in the late 1930s, because of its official policy of promoting one ethnic group's identity and language, which went contrary to strengthening the region's common language, culture, and traditions. The adoption of irredentism instead of regional cooperation with Pakistan allowed hostilities to grow, and a call for such integration to never take root in both countries.

For the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan to move forward and to start a new relationship, they must abandon their ethnic nationalisms that have created rifts between the two countries since 1947. Pakistan, and not India, is the actual legatee of the millennium old Persianate age that lasted until the 19th century in the sub-continent. It has a responsibility to revive the Pakistani people's cultural and historical identity. Most Pakistanis are the descendants of the millions of Muslim Persians who migrated to the sub-continent from the 12th century onwards.<sup>212</sup> Their cuisine, dress, customs, and mannerisms are Persianate and originated from the migration of Muslims from Central Asia, the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire. Joint efforts to revive this shared cultural identity between Afghanistan and Pakistan will allow confidence to be rebuilt

---

211. Mana Kia. *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2020), p 18.

212. Nadeem Malik Shafiq. "The All India Muslim League and Central Asia." *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2/3, 1994, p 384.

amongst both people and will create a sense of mutual belonging that existed before 1947. Sir Abdul Rahim, a founder and prominent member of the All-India Muslim League, in one of his addresses stated:

“Any of us Indian Muslims traveling in Afghanistan, Persia, Central Asia, among Chinese Muslims, Arabs, and Turks would at once be made at home and would not find anything to which we are not accustomed. On the contrary in India, we find ourselves in all social matters aliens when we cross the street and enter that part of the town where our fellow townsmen live”<sup>213</sup>

With cultural integration, Persian and Urdu will re-establish their lost link once more, and other vernaculars will be free to flourish on both sides of the border. The founders of Pakistan believed that the Persianate World, especially Afghanistan, will serve as the defenders of an independent Muslim state in the subcontinent if threatened by others. If Pakistan does pursue cultural integration as an official policy, it will allow that dream to be realized. In 1940, a resolution to establish an independent Muslim state in the subcontinent was passed in Lahore by the All-India Muslim League. In his presidential speech, Pakistan's *Quaid-i Azam*, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, read out sections of a letter written by a Hindu extremist, Lala Lajpat Rai, to another Hindu nationalist. Rai wrote, “I am not afraid of the seven crores<sup>214</sup> of Mussulmans. But I think the seven crores in Hindustan plus the armed hosts of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Turkey will be irresistible. The founder of the state of Pakistan, in his first address to endorse the idea of Muslim independence in India, emphasized the idea of a common identity and heritage between the Muslims of India and Afghanistan and the strategic importance of Afghanistan and the rest of the Persianate world to protect the future state of Pakistan. The vision of a revived Persianate World by the Founders of Pakistan, such as Iqbal and Jinnah, should inspire contemporary Pakistani leaders to realize their dream.

## **Reviving Moderate Islam**

Radicalization is one problem that Afghanistan and Pakistan face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unfortunately, for the past half a century, extremist schools of thought have flourished along the Afghan-Pakistani border. Most Madrasas on both sides of the border have been funded by petrol dollars from the wealthy

---

213. S. M. Ikram, *Indian Muslims and Partition of India*. (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1995), p 308.

214. 70 million

Gulf States, and as a result, the moderate and rational Hanafi school has weakened.<sup>215</sup> The majority of the Muslims of Afghanistan and Pakistan adhere to Hanafi Islam, based on moderation and rationalism. Islam evolved in the Persianate World much differently than the rest of the Islamic World. The Islamic schools of thought that took shape in Central and South Asia were based on rationalism and mysticism instead of the traditionalism of the Arab World. The Sunni-Hanafis of this region for more than a millennium have been able to co-exist peacefully with the Shiite Muslims and the adherents of other religions based on the egalitarian teaching of its founder, Abu Hanifa. Islam allowed the advancement of the arts and sciences and gave rise to an Age of Enlightenment in the Persianate World that lasted for centuries.<sup>216</sup> Qawwali Music and the Swirling Sama Dance was performed in Mosques and lodges, and Madrasas became centers of learning and knowledge throughout Central and South Asia. The Madrasas of Bukhara and Balkh hosted students from India, while many canonical texts were produced and published in India for the rest of the Hanafi world.<sup>217</sup> With the Age of Colonialism, the ties that kept the scholarly communities of the Hanafis vibrant, from Istanbul to Lucknow, were weakened and gradually lost their prominence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the challenges that the Hanafis faced, Afghanistan kept its ties with the subcontinent's Islamic community, and most students from Afghanistan opted to attend religious training in British India and later Pakistan. The most critical Islamic text commissioned in the 20th century by Afghanistan's government was the Tafsir-i Kabuli, a Persian translation of Mahmoud Deobandi's Exegesis of the Qur'an, which was originally written in Urdu.<sup>218</sup>

Unfortunately, after 1978, millions of dollars in aid and donations came from the Persian Gulf states that adhered to the strict Salafist ideology. Most religious students from Afghanistan and Pakistan opted to attend the newly built Madrasas that emphasized an extreme version of Political Islam and Jihad. The radicalization of a generation of Islamic students gave rise to many extremist groups, such as the Taliban, and Al Qaeda. Since the 1980s, the Pakistani government has allowed these madrasas and groups to flourish throughout the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, without any restriction. The number of native Sufi

---

215. Rushda Siddiqui, "Madrasas in South Asia (India, Pakistan and Afghanistan): The Strategic Geopolitical Concern about Gulf Charities," in Lacey Robert and Benthall Jonathan (eds.), *Gulf Charities and Islamic Philanthropy in the "Age of Terror" and Beyond* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2014), pp. 313-34.

216. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment Central Asia's Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

217. James Pickett, *Polymaths of Islam: Power and Networks of Knowledge in Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

218. Bettina Gräf (eds.), *Ways of Knowing Muslim Cultures and Societies: Studies in Honour of Gudrun Krämer* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 292.

lodges and the moderate Hanafi Madrasas in Pakistan has drastically decreased and faces annihilation with the current trend. Sectarian conflicts among the Sunnis and Shiites of Pakistan have caused thousands of deaths in the past two decades, and the institutions of Pakistan are facing an existential threat with radical views of establishing a medieval-styled Emirate or Caliphate in the region. Since the mid-2000s, the Pakistani government has been attempting to reform the Madrasas and to bring the thousands of Madrasas that are un-registered under state control. For the past decade such efforts have been proven to be futile and lacks a clear strategy of how to de-radicalize the curriculum and inject Islamic rationalism into it.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, in the post-Taliban era, Afghanistan has not been able to counter the threat it faces from these extremist elements, threatening its existence from both sides of the border. Instead, Afghanistan has allowed extremist thoughts to be injected into the official curriculum of the Madrasas, and the subjects such as Persian literature and logic that prevented radicalism for generations have been removed.

The best option to counter extremism, of all fashion, is for Afghanistan and Pakistan to jointly cooperate to address this grave threat. Both countries must formulate a common strategy to counter extremism and revive Hanafi Islam among both countries' Sunni population. One option is to reform the curriculum of all registered Madrasas jointly. The Mughal government helped establish Farangi Mahal, a Hanafi Madrasa in Lucknow. Mulla Nizamuddin, a founding member of this Madrasa, institutionalized a new curriculum that included philosophy, logic, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy, besides the core Islamic disciplines and Persian literature. Around half of the disciplines and textbooks used for this curriculum were under the Ma'qulat or rational sciences category. This curriculum was adopted by almost all Hanafi Madrasas in the region and greatly influenced Muslim communities' intellectualism during the last two centuries of Mughal rule. This curriculum lost its prominence by the early 20th century when the Dar-ul Uloom Deoband abandoned the rational sciences and approach for the sake of religious disciplines such as Hadith. Deoband omitted subjects such as the Persian language and literature, philosophy, logic, and astronomy from its curriculum.<sup>220</sup> In addition, the Madrasas of Bukhara that had a similar curriculum, dating back to the 9th century, which included logic and philosophy, was uprooted with the Bolshevik invasion of the Emirate of Bukhara in 1920. The void that was created and the lack of interest by the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to preserve or reform the Dars-e

---

219. Mohsin Bashir and Shoaib Ul-Haq, "Why madrassah education reforms don't work in Pakistan." *Third World Quarterly*, No. 3, 2019.

220. al-Faarsiyah, Sabrina. *The Nizami Curriculum: A Historical Glimpse and Critical Proposals*. Darul 'Ilm Birmingham. (2020).

Nizami curriculum allowed fundamentalism to spread and to pave the way for more extremist thoughts to thrive. The study of the Persian literary works by Saadi, Rumi and Hafiz or the study of mathematics and logic made the Madrasas during the Dars-e Nizami period, rendered students hostile towards extremism. It produced many generations of open-minded and moderate scholars in the Sub-continent and Afghanistan. It will not be easy to contain extremism in Islamic institutions without cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. For this to materialize, a joint commission must be formed, and new Madrasas with a reformed curriculum must take shape to revive the intellectualism that existed in the Bukhara and Dars-i Nizami institutions. Moreover, external forces such as governments and charitable organizations that have been funding Madrasas and Mosques that proliferate extremist thoughts should be prevented from continuing their assistance.

Afghanistan and Pakistan face an existential threat by the extremist groups based on both sides of the border. The Westphalian order of respecting internationally recognized borders goes contrary to their ideology's core. They aim to unite the Muslim world under one polity, whether it is a regional emirate or a caliphate that encompasses the whole Islamic world. This ideology shared by all extremist groups will target the existence of states like Afghanistan and Pakistan, and all of them envisage the destruction of these modern states and institutions, regardless of who supports them. Exploiting them to wage proxy warfare might yield short-term results for the national interest of Afghanistan or Pakistan, but whichever one does prevail will plot to annihilate its patron for the sake of its ideology, i.e., for the ultimate goal of creating an Islamic State. Only with the annihilation of all these armed groups on both sides of the border can stability return, and without a close partnership and coordinated security operations, neither country can overcome these challenges posed by extremism.

## **Economic Cooperation**

Afghanistan and Pakistan can form an enduring partnership by adopting policies that create favorable conditions for both states' economic development. Trade barriers that both have created for one another have mutually prevented economic productivity and have allowed neither to use its full potential in stimulating growth and welfare. In the last 74 years, Afghanistan and Pakistan have not used one another's potential to foster economic growth, and they have neglected the construction of vital infrastructure to create connectivity. Today, the two countries lack a network of railroads and highways and enough entry points to increase bilateral trade and reach international markets.

The northern and southern regions of the Hindu Kush Mountains have been connected for millennia, and the thoroughfares between these mountain passes served as the jugular vein of the Great Silk Road that exported essential goods like spices and textiles from the sub-continent to China, the Middle East, and Europe. In fact, during the 16th century, Sher Shah Suri, who briefly ruled Delhi for five years, understood the strategic importance of connecting South Asia with Central Asia. He renovated and expanded the great road running from Bengal to Kabul and the Hindu Kush mountains.<sup>221</sup> The economic prosperity that existed during the Gunpowder era turned Kabul, Peshawar, and Kandahar into economic hubs, and the Iranian Plateau, Central Asian Steppes, and the Indian sub-continent were fully integrated economically.<sup>222</sup>

The first step in integrating Pakistan and Afghanistan's economies is to invest in infrastructural projects. An extensive network of highways and railroads between the cities of both countries is needed. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's rulers in the 19th and 20th century declined numerous British offers to construct railroads to connect Kabul with South Asia, but Abdur Rahman Khan and his son Habibullah Khan both turned down these offers throughout their reigns.<sup>223</sup> Many other attempts in the 1950s and 1960s never materialized. The United States International Cooperation Administration signed agreements with Pakistan and Afghanistan to improve connectivity between them through railways in 1958.<sup>224</sup> The Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) signed between the two countries in 1965 also committed to constructing railways to improve bilateral trade. For Afghanistan's economy to grow, it will need unrestricted access to international markets through Pakistan's seaports. The cost of connecting Kabul with Pakistan's seaports is much less than with any other neighboring state. Simultaneously, Pakistan's economy needs to have free passage to Central Asia through Afghanistan. With better infrastructure in Afghanistan, Pakistan will be able to access markets in Central Asia and import oil and gas from there to meet their demands.

To enhance commercial ties, Afghanistan and Pakistan will have to reach better accommodations to allow the free flow of goods and services on both sides of the border. Since 1965, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been continuously extending the Afghan Transit Trade Agreements without many implementations. In 2010, it was revised as the Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement and

---

221. Richard Eaton, *India in the Persianate Age: 1000-1765* (Canada: Penguin UK, 2020), p. 210.

222. Cagri Haksöz, *Managing Supply Chains on the Silk Road: Strategy, Performance, and Risk*. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), pp. 9-10.

223. Lee. "Afghanistan: A History from 1260 to the Present Day". 423.

224. Wolfgang Zingel, "The Economics of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Implications for the Region." *India Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 2014, p. 4.

had not improved the situation much. On top of this, both countries are part of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization. Both organizations aim to enhance economic ties and allow free trade, but neither state has fulfilled its commitments.<sup>225</sup> The APTTA in the future must allow better terms for both and allow the implementation of the entire agreement. Unfortunately, Afghans have been facing many hurdles with Pakistani authorities when they import or export from Pakistani ports.<sup>226</sup> Such restrictions impede the rapid flow of products needed to be imported by Afghanistan and will not allow Afghanistan to increase its exports through Pakistan. Afghanistan also must allow Pakistan free access to the Central Asian republics and should bring its policy of closing Central Asia to Pakistan to an end. The post-Taliban era allowed trade to increase between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan were increased to 400 million dollars.<sup>227</sup> Nevertheless, because of the political tensions between the two countries and trade restrictions that were imposed mutually, trade has drastically fallen. Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan have had a downward curve since 2012 and were at their all-time low in 2020.<sup>228</sup>

## Conclusion

It is imperative for Afghanistan and Pakistan to undo their past mistakes since 1947. The key to better relations is to give regionalism, instead of nationalism, a chance to form a new relationship based on the 90-year partnership between Afghanistan and India's Muslims, the vast majority who became Pakistani after 1947. The leaders of Afghanistan and the founders of Pakistan imagined a different relationship based on mutual trust and cooperation. Both countries' policymakers betrayed this vision and cost the region its tranquility and prosperity by adopting hostile policies. Today, both states are experiencing a myriad of daunting internal challenges, such as extremism and poverty. These challenges are interconnected with the issues both states have continuously avoided to address, and without partnering up and abandoning policies that antagonize the other, the current trajectory will not change for better either.

---

225. Zingel, *ibid.*, p. 7.

226. Shoaib Rahim Ahmad, "Afghanistan's Dependence on Pakistan: Trade, Transit, and the Cost of Being Landlocked." *Kardan Journal of Economics and Management Sciences*. 2018, p 12.

227. Razia Sultana, "Pakistan-Afghan Economic Relations: Issues and Prospects." *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 64, No. 1, 2011, p 23.

228. "Pakistan's Exports to Afghanistan Decrease by 13.98pc in Q1." *The Nation*. 1 November, 2020. Accessed on 10 February 2021. <https://nation.com.pk/02-Nov-2020/pakistan-s-exports-to-afghanistan-decrease-by-13-98pc-in-q1>.

The most crucial problem that has prevented a new chapter in the two countries' relations is the trust deficit that has been building since 1947. Without mutual trust, any sort of gesture of goodwill or positive rhetoric coming from them will not lead to cooperation and potentially a strategic partnership in the future. The best approach to start building trust between the states and societies of both countries is to pursue a policy of cultural integration. Both countries are an integral part of a civilizational-cultural sphere, known as the Persianate World. Pakistan and Afghanistan share a common cultural identity based on a shared history, religion, and culture. The past 74 years have caused both states to move away from this shared identity and neglect the hard work previous generations made to facilitate cultural, literary, and scientific cooperation. By giving the cultural and regional identity more prominence, ethnic nationalisms that have damaged the two states' relationship will be weakened, and an era of amity and comity in the region that Iqbal and his likes envisioned will be realized.

Second, cooperation to address extremism and to revive moderate Islam, that both states adhere to, will allow religious integration. Afghanistan and Pakistan face an existential threat by extremism that has been allowed to flourish for the past half a century on both sides of the border. Neither state can act against extremism independently, and both have to adopt a fair policy of countering all extremist groups regardless of their affiliation. Furthermore, they must reform their religious institutions and curriculum jointly and strive to revive Hanafi and Sufi Islam, which has tolerance and humanity embedded in their belief systems. Integrating their religious institutions under a joint regional body will allow moderate Muslim scholars from both countries to prevent external forces from infiltrating Afghanistan and Pakistan's Mosques and Madrasas. With such joint efforts, both states' fears along their border will be assuaged, and a common religious community that existed before 1947 will be formed.

Third, as a corollary of cultural and religious integration, genuine economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan hopefully will begin. Both countries have attempted to pursue policies to improve bilateral trade, yet, they have consistently failed to materialize. The reason that such economic cooperation has never taken place is because of the mistrust that exists. By culturally integrating both countries and creating a sense of solidarity among the people, confidence will return. It will allow for better economic relations that may pave the way for greater integration to happen in the broader region, which means adopting policies to guarantee the free flow of goods, services, knowledge, and people between Istanbul and Lahore. A strategic cooperative partnership between Afghanistan and Pakistan is the only win-win situation that can be achieved through cultural, religious, and economic integration and end the 74-year rift between the two states.

## **Pakistan-Afghanistan Economic Relations: Basis for Cooperation**

Vaqar Ahmed

I have always pitched a case for strengthening of trade and investment value chains between Pakistan and Afghanistan, liberal visa regime, and continued engagement which could allow Pakistan access to Central Asian economies via Afghanistan.<sup>229</sup> I also remain of the view that Pakistan can only optimize benefits from China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and envisaged Special Economic Zones (SEZs) if dividends of this economic corridor are offered to the neighboring countries including Afghanistan, India, and Iran.<sup>230</sup>

I have also firmly remained in the camp of those who believe that economic relations between countries need to be insulated from any downturn in political relations to the extent possible.<sup>231</sup> This chapter provides an analysis and understanding and discusses, options for enhancing transit trade via Pakistan including impact of possibly allowing Indian goods to reach Afghanistan through Wagah.<sup>232</sup>

The analysis is timely; President Biden in continuation with President Trump's policy on Afghanistan is standing by the peace deal with Taliban. Afghan President has shown flexibility and willingness to negotiate with Taliban. United States and Pakistan who grew distant after the 2014 attack on Army Public School in Peshawar and growing influence of China through CPEC, are once again approaching each other in the wake of Pakistan's relevance in helping to bring some elements of Taliban to the dialogue table.

The chapter argues that despite the availability of evidence on trade and transit measures required to promote welfare in the region, the actual progress on more liberal bilateral trade is only possible after deepening of political cooperation. Researchers who are able to produce timely and credible politically-informed economic analysis can shape the contours of bilateral political engagements. Hence evidence producers in future will need to think, work, and inform politically.

The next two sections update the potential gains from closer trade and transit ties. Section 3 discusses why Pakistan needs to move fast and expedite transit trade reforms if it wishes to protect its share in regional transit. One of the solutions

can also be opening up and modernizing new transit routes – something we discuss in Section 4. This however has both political and economic costs and benefits which beg a careful and often a real-time analysis.

The research is based on a survey of 400 firms in Pakistan and 300 firms in Afghanistan<sup>233</sup>. These enterprises are involved in bilateral trade or provide transit services. This survey was facilitated by Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI). I also travelled to Kabul and had the opportunity to interview officials including H.E. Abdullah Abdullah, the head of High Council for National Reconciliation in Afghanistan. Finally, some findings have been drawn from focus group discussions hosted by Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) and Regional Peace Institute (RPI).

## **Overview of Bilateral Economic Cooperation**

Afghanistan with a population of 38 million (2018), out of which 52.8 percent are youth, presents significant trade and investment opportunities for Pakistan and the region. Geographically a landlocked country, Afghanistan is gradually moving towards a high economic growth trajectory. While most of the development is driven by public investment, there is a growing private sector which is gradually starting to contribute to higher levels of savings and investment. Over the past two decades, there has been a conscious effort by the Afghan government and development partners to invest in improving trade and logistics infrastructure. Despite internal security issues, the country has put in place mechanisms that allow safeguarding of merchandise and reconciliation of trade-related flows.<sup>234</sup>

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a land border of 2670 km. The latter's seaports allow the former to route its imports and exports from Karachi and Gwadar to Pakistani border cities including Chaman and Torkham. It is now believed that Pakistan will also open more land trade routes through Angoor Adda, Kharlachi and Ghulam Khan Khel border terminals.<sup>235</sup>

In 2018-19 the total value of transit goods passing through Pakistan was 4.3 billion dollars out of which 4.1 billion was transit from Pakistan (i.e., imports of Afghanistan from the world which pass through Pakistan) and 0.13 billion was

---

233. The research was carried out in 2013.

234. "How can Trade Accelerate Afghanistan's Growth." *World Bank Group*, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/publication/trade-as-a-vehicle-for-growth-in-afghanistan>, accessed on 18 September 2019.

235. "NLC to Build New Border Terminal at Angoor Adda," <https://nation.com.pk/04-Jan-2018/nlc-to-build-new-border-terminal-at-angoor-adda>, accessed on 15 April 2020.

reverse transit (i.e., exports of Afghanistan to the world which pass through Pakistan). This cooperation in transit trade is apart from the bilateral trade of 1.9 billion dollar between the two countries – out of which 1.34 billion dollars was export of Pakistan to Afghanistan, and 0.51 billion was import of Pakistan from Afghanistan for 2018.

There are three main mechanisms which govern Pakistan's cooperation in bilateral and transit trade with Afghanistan. First, the Joint Economic Council allows both countries to discuss medium to longer term economic cooperation avenues and also follow up any revisions to Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) and draft preferential trade agreement (PTA).

Second, to streamline issues related to transit, Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority (APTTCA) was set up. Finally, both countries also have a ministerial process where commerce ministers meet to discuss issues related to bilateral and transit trade. Besides these three arrangements, there are working committees at the border with members from the customs and other border control authorities.

In 2018, both countries agreed to the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS).<sup>236</sup> This process sought inputs from five joint working groups on issues related to politico-diplomatic, military, intelligence, economic and trade, and refugees' issues. In August 2019 a Technical Working Group of Afghan officials met with Pakistan's Adviser to Prime Minister on Commerce to exchange their concerns and proposals. At the time of writing this text the Advisor was expected to visit Afghanistan once COVID-19 related lock downs are eased, to continue this process.

The 2019 visit of President Ashraf Ghani to Islamabad rekindled hopes of a revised APTTA (as the grace period under the agreement matures in 2020), and PTA between both countries. In his meeting with Pakistan's Prime Minister, the Afghan President also discussed expediting transboundary cooperation projects including the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA 1000) electricity transmission line and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. This process will strengthen further if US dialogue with Taliban succeeds overtime.<sup>237</sup>

At a business-to-business level, both countries have allowed PAJCCI to represent the private sector and discuss issues faced by the trading community. With offices in both Karachi and Kabul, this chamber is now also a part of most

---

236. "Ghani, Abbasi Agree to 7 Key Principles for Action Plan," <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/7-principles-agreed-afghanistan-pakistan-action-plan>, accessed on 27 November 2019.

237. Samad, (2020).

government-led or track-II dialogues between the two countries. This forum continues to push for expediting negotiations towards revised APTTA and PTA to boost transit and bilateral trade volumes.

The track-II dialogues continued to pave way for enhancing mutual understanding around economic cooperation even during times when government to government dialogue had stalled. CRSS, in collaboration with its Afghan partners, continues to undertake Pakistan-Afghanistan track-1.5 and track-2 initiative called “Beyond Boundaries.” This initiative started in October 2015 as part of the center’s efforts to help improve relations between the two countries and enhance people to people contacts.

Pakistan’s Regional Peace Institute also undertakes a track-II initiative with the aim to take an appraisal of the ongoing reconciliation process in Afghanistan; strengthening economic engagement, academic exchanges and social linkages – integral to expanding bilateral connectivity for development, and post-reconciliation Afghanistan; and institutional mechanisms to ensure peace and stability. In 2018, Afghanistan’s total exports stood at 875 million dollars out of which 458 million was export to Pakistan. Major export items include edible fruits and vegetables, mineral fuels and products, carpets, cotton and raw hides. While Pakistan topped the list of countries where Afghanistan was able to export, the other major countries include: India, China, Turkey, Iran, and UAE. Most of these countries have also provided some sort of preferences to Afghan traders enabling easy entry of their goods.

In the same year, Afghanistan’s total imports from the world stood at 7.4 billion dollars out of which 2.1 billion were imports from Pakistan. Key items imported from Pakistan include milled products, cement, cereals, sugar and sugar confectionary, animal or vegetable fats and oils, wood products, and pharmaceutical items. Pakistan is no more the leading country for sourcing imports by Afghan traders. In 2018, Iran was the leading country from where Afghanistan imported 2.5 billion dollar worth of merchandise followed by China and Pakistan. The other major countries supplying to Afghanistan include Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Japan, Turkmenistan, and India.<sup>238</sup>

On the import side, Iran has been the top buyer of Afghan goods since 2014. The financial embargo on Iran has prompted a higher reliance on trade in barter terms which is equally preferred by the Afghan traders, particularly those operating near the Afghanistan-Iran border. Apart from Iran and Pakistan, the only other country which has a significant share in imports from Afghanistan

---

238. Recent literature advocates a large untapped potential for Pakistan. For example, see: “Pakistan Trade with Regional Partners – India, Iran & Afghanistan.” *Pakistan Business Council*, 2018.

is India due to: a) lower tariff rates allowed under South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) to least developed countries, and b) recently opened route for India's imports from Afghanistan through Chabahar port of Iran.<sup>239</sup>

Literature on Afghanistan's comparative advantage is now starting to emerge in scientific studies. It has been explained that Afghanistan has comparative advantage in exporting animal and vegetable materials.<sup>240</sup> The potential to improve comparative advantage exists in product groups which include vegetables and fruits, tea, spices, feeding stuff for animals, and made-up textile articles.<sup>241</sup>

Recent literature also indicates that signing of bilateral PTA could help Afghanistan boost its exports to Pakistan. Other operational issues which require attention include rules related to quarantine, product certifications, and frequent changes in tariffs and para-tariffs which ultimately cause uncertainty regarding terms-of-trade. The rules around inspection and quarantine were cited to be more strictly applied by Afghanistan's neighbors during food exporting months. In the case of several exports of Afghanistan the overall duties charged are more than the SAFTA rates owing to regulatory duties, levied by neighboring countries.<sup>242</sup>

The Ministry of Commerce in Pakistan informed that the draft of the PTA was shared with Afghanistan in 2014 after latter's request during the 10th Afghanistan Pakistan Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting. At that point the Afghan team assured of early response on the draft however it was only in January 2020 that a formal communication was received from the Afghan side on this subject. The Afghan side has provided its comments and requests for changes in the draft to Ministry of Commerce in Pakistan. The reasons for such delay seem to be weak political engagement at official level during these years.

According to the Afghan traders, the reasons for this lack of interest from Kabul could be due to the lack of trust, which weakened in the aftermath of arbitrary regulatory duties by Pakistan and abrupt border closures and Iran's increased capacity to provide substitutes of Pakistani goods.

---

239. "Afghanistan Sends First Exports To India Via Iran's Chabahar Port." <https://www.rferl.org/a/afghanistan-first-exports-india-chabahar-iran/29787862.html>, accessed on 29 November 2019.

240. Wani, Nassir Ul Haq, "Trade Compatibility between Afghanistan and India: An Empirical Evaluation." [https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/86432/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_86432.pdf](https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/86432/1/MPRA_paper_86432.pdf), accessed on 17 September 2019.

241. Vaqar Ahmed, Saad Shabbir, Saad, "Trade & Transit Cooperation with Afghanistan: Results from a Firm-level survey from Pakistan." *Sustainable Development Policy Institute*. <http://hdl.handle.net/11540/6693>.

242. See proceedings from the meeting organized by Center for Research & Security Studies, <https://crss.pk/beyond-boundaries/beyond-boundaries-iii/pak-afghan-youth-dialogues-2/better-trade-relations-between-pakistan-afghanistan-can-help-reduce-poverty-concludes-crss-8th-pak-afghan-youth-dialogue/>, accessed on 29 November, 2019.

The respondents in a survey conducted in 2019 informed that a reduction in trade taxes and border related charges could help in reducing incidence of informal and illegal trade. The lack of mutual recognition of product standards also increases transaction costs faced by Afghan traders. These traders even if in possession of certificate from Afghanistan are asked to produce certificate from Pakistan's Department of Plant Protection.

The respondents from Pakistan's Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) informed that several such issues would get resolved once the National Single Window (NSW) facility is ready and the Electronic Data Interchange (as seen in the case of transit trade) is available for bilateral commercial trade. This will allow sharing and reconciliation of trade data in real time on both sides. NSW will also be expected to streamline and possibly merge the multiple guarantees desired by Pakistani authorities, namely, financial insurance, transport operator, cross border certificates, and tracking devices.<sup>243</sup>

The respondents also explained that visa and travel regime in Pakistan is unwelcoming for Afghan business persons. A regime of business friendly, long term multiple entry visas may be allowed on reciprocal basis. The relevant provincial government departments in Quetta and Peshawar need to address accommodation issues faced by Afghan business persons. In 2019 there have been refusal by Pakistani hotels to host Afghan guests. It is also due to these reasons that established Afghan business persons who previously use to base themselves in Peshawar for operating in the region, have now moved and opened branch offices in UAE.

The issue of rationalizing trade taxes comes up often during interactions with Afghan government or traders. They believe that the export of primary goods or raw materials from Pakistan is usually tax free if bound for any other country except Afghanistan. This in turn increases the cost of production in Afghanistan's manufacturing sector. Similar requests for tariff rationalization are forwarded by Pakistani traders. For example, it was noticed that higher tariffs have been levied on several Pakistani exports including cement, plastic materials, pharmaceuticals, PVC pipes and beverages. However, such high levels of tariffs are not seen in the case of imports from India, Iran, Turkey or other Asian economies.

Regular communications on both sides need to be encouraged as currently there are frequent changes in customs duty rates by both governments; mostly without the knowledge of business community. There remains uncertainty

---

243. See draft of 'The Pakistan Single Window Act, 2019'. [http://download1.fbr.gov.pk/Docs/2019721571628176FirstDraftPSWAct-2ndJuly,2019\(1\).pdf](http://download1.fbr.gov.pk/Docs/2019721571628176FirstDraftPSWAct-2ndJuly,2019(1).pdf), accessed on 29 November 2019.

around the negative list on both sides. Such lists have not been recently updated and hence leave room for discretion by border officials.<sup>244</sup>

The team at PAJCCI also cited several illegal payments faced by Afghans while trading with Pakistan.<sup>245</sup> Table 1 presents estimates of these payments.

**Table 1: Unauthorized payments faced by Afghan traders (2018)**

Service	Place & Department	Figures in Pakistani Rupees
Political representative	Political representatives authorized in the tribal area	4200
Municipality fee for export of goods from Pakistan	PDA Hayatabad	2000
From Afghan border to Wagah border/ other cities	Charged at every check post	8000
Transporters		2500
Gate pass fee for Afghan exports	Border police	5000
Machini check post	Local militia/police	2200
Illegal charges by the security on Afghan export and import	Hayatabad	1750
Road fee on cargo from Lahore to Kabul	Municipality of Lahore	3000
Weight assessment fee (Actual = PKR 700)	Torkham	2500

Source: PAJCCI

With a renewed focus on Afghanistan peace and reconciliation process, US along with Afghan government and Taliban have been engaging in dialogue lately. There has not been a significant break though, however due to several factors including, US trying to push the peace agenda, and challenges imposed by COVID-19 may trigger a reconfiguration of local political economy which could prompt success of reconciliation dialogue.

The survey reveals that Pakistan's role in these recent peace dialogues has increased trust between the two neighbors – a prerequisite for moving towards

244. The APTTA document only provides a list of banned items.

245. Sayed Waqar Hussain, "The Impact of Afghan Transit Trade on NWFP's Economy." Also see Adil Khan Miankhel, "Channelizing Afghanistan to Pakistan Informal Trade into Formal Channels."

increased levels of bilateral trade. A key lesson that I advocate, keeping in view the above-mentioned ups and downs in bilateral trade ties, relates to embedding participatory evaluation methods while implementing such reforms which can trigger economic cooperation. Such an approach will involve the stakeholders, including firms on both sides, in a regular evaluation process. I would also go a step further to suggest that participatory evaluation should take place at every stage - design of the bilateral trade, transit, or tariff policy, collection and analysis of pre and post-change statistics on trade flows, and the reporting of findings before any policy or procedural changes are made.

### Transit Trade: Some Emerging Developments

Afghanistan borders with six countries namely China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. However Kabul being one of the largest and populous cities, and having proximity to Torkham, allows Pakistan the geographical and cost advantage over other countries (see Table 2). The other three priority routes including, Turkeministan-Azerbaijan-Georgia (Poti Port), Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-Russia-Latvia (Riga Port), and transit route via Iran are longer in distance as compared with Karachi-Torkham-Kabul or Karachi-Chaman-Kandahar. However, as Afghan exports grow and the country is allowed preferential market access by advanced economies, the most lucrative markets will be in the European Union region, for which Iran and Turkmenistan remain the most efficient route.

**Table 2: Afghanistan’s Main Trade Transport Routes**

Transit Country	Transit Port	Transit Route		Destination
Pakistan	Karachi	• Peshawar	• Torkham	• Kabul
		• Quetta	• Spin Boldak	• Kandahar Herat
Pakistan	Gwadar	• Chaman	• Spin Boldak	• Herat • Kabul Kandahar
Iran	Bandar Abbas	• Islam Qala	• Herat	• Kabul • Kandahar
Iran	Chabahar	• Zahedan	• Zaranj	• Kabul Herat

Updated from: World Bank (2004)<sup>246</sup>

246. "Trade and Regional Cooperation between Afghanistan and its Neighbors" *Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit. World Bank Group, Report No. 26769, 2004.*

The efficiency of various routes also depends upon regional arrangements towards trade facilitation. For example, a landlocked economy like Afghanistan stands to gain significantly if there is further accession to Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA)<sup>247</sup> multilateral agreement Programme which was initiated by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Iran has recently joined this arrangement. Second, the arrangements under Central Asia Regional Economic Corridor (CAREC) could open up new transit possibilities for Afghanistan. CAREC corridors 5 and 6 aim to rehabilitate and upgrade the Salang Corridor – a viable land route linking the north and south of Afghanistan.<sup>248</sup>

Some bilateral projects could also materialize in the medium term, which could enhance the transit trade possibilities for Afghanistan. These include Afghanistan - Uzbekistan 75 kilometer railways link that ends at Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan. Most of the transit arrangements on the western side are rail based, while in the case of eastern borders these are road based arrangements. For further development of rail roads, pledges have been offered by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and for road sector development portfolio is being supported by World Bank Group (WBG).<sup>249</sup>

Afghanistan is also actively working on implementation of Cross Border Transport Agreement (CBTA) between Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. If trade related documentation is harmonized, and Transport and Trade Facilitation committee of CBTA recommends, there could be an extension of APTTA to include Tajikistan. Afghanistan is now also a member of TIR – convention dealing with internal road transport. The TIR regulations have been drafted and capacity building of concerned custom officers at the border for the implementation of TIR and green lanes at border crossing points is under way.<sup>250</sup> In our consultations we were informed that APTTA and TIR can complement each other in future.<sup>251</sup>

---

247. TRACECA programme is aimed at strengthening of economic relations, trade and transport communication in the regions of the Black Sea basin, South Caucasus and Central Asia owing to active work based on political will and common aspirations of all member-states.

248. CAREC has mobilized more than \$34.5 billion investments that have helped establish multimodal transportation networks, increased energy trade and security, facilitated free movement of people and freight, and laid the groundwork for economic corridor development.

249. See "World Bank to Help Build Peshawar Kabul Highway." <https://www.dawn.com/news/1328851>, accessed on 29 November 2019.

250. MoCI, "Afghanistan and Regional Trade Arrangements, Presentation at World Trade Organisation." [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/acc\\_e/3\\_afganrta\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/acc_e/3_afganrta_e.pdf), accessed on 17 September 2019.

251. The Ministry of Commerce in Pakistan has also conducted a research exercise to compare the legal regimes governing APTTA and TIR. The support to conduct this exercise was provided by Pakistan Regional Economic Integration Activity (PREIA) project.

Other important agreement is the Lapis Lazuli Trade and Transit Agreement.<sup>252</sup> This will allow Afghanistan access to black sea and Europe. The route opened in 2018 linking Afghanistan to Turkey via Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The corridor begins at Torghundi in the Herat Province of Afghanistan, and enters Türkmenbaşy - the port on the Caspian Sea in Turkmenistan. The route then continues on to Baku in Azerbaijan, and connects onward to Tbilisi in Georgia. Here access to the Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi is also possible. In its final leg, the corridor connects with cities of Kars and Istanbul in Turkey.

In 2016, China also initiated a rail link with the Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. This is a weekly service that completes the 7500 kilometers journey in 15 days – half of the time required by maritime option. This rail link is expected to be connected with future rail roads planned to reach Herat. Partial funding for these plans is expected through the ADB supported programme - CAREC Corridor 3 and CAREC Corridor 6.

In the coming days the possibility of Chabahar being the key competitor to Karachi and Gwadar ports for Afghan transits will continue to remain slim due to the financial embargo on Iran and straining of Iran-US and Iran-Saudi Arabia ties. The promised Indian investment for Iran's port and railways also has not materialized at the pace desired by Tehran.<sup>253</sup> At the time of writing this paper, there is a talk regarding possible attack of US and NATO forces on Iran. Iran's diplomats in Pakistan have emphasized to look into possibilities where Chabahar and Gwadar ports can complement each other.<sup>254</sup>

While several factors determine a landlocked country's preference to route its imports via any transit destination, however in the longer term the decisions are based on factors which comprise logistics performance index (LPI). A key reason why Iran was able to attract a large part of Afghanistan bound cargo away from Pakistan's Karachi port was due to better LPI ranking – 44 compared with Pakistan's 122 out of 160 countries in 2018.<sup>255</sup>

---

252. <https://tolonews.com/business/five-nations-sign-lapis-lazuli-corridor-agreement>

253. "Iranian move Frustrates India's Regional Ambitions," *Asia Times*, July 16, 2020. <https://asiatimes.com/2020/07/iranian-move-frustrates-indias-regional-ambitions/>, accessed on 9 August 2020.

254. "Chabahar not a Rival to Gwadar, Iranian Envoy Tells Pakistan," *DAWN*, May 27, 2016. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1261006>, accessed on 16 April 16, 2020.

255. For details and updates: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/LP.LPI.OVRL.XQ?locations=PK>

## **Pakistan's Transit Trade with Afghanistan**

In 2017 the number of twenty-foot containers coming to Pakistan under APTTA was 72821 out of which 70311 containers were commercial while remaining were non-commercial. A decline in transit via Pakistan was seen after 2016. This decrease in the value of cargo passing through Pakistan is seen for both commercial and non-commercial goods. This period also marked strained political relations between the two neighbors.

We also observe the emergence of new countries which have recently become suppliers to Afghan markets. While China continues to lead this list, Malaysia, India, and Indonesia are witnessing growing shares. Given Afghanistan's growing demand for consumer goods, the major items coming through APTTA arrangement include food products, pharmaceuticals, and electronic items for household use. In 2019 top imports through APTTA included fabrics, photosensitive semi-conductor devices, vegetable oils, sugar, palm olein, armoured vehicles, and weapons.

According to the survey and assessment, the key factors responsible for declining levels of Afghan transit via Pakistan (over the recent past) include overall rising costs associated with transportation via Pakistan, shipping detention fees, complex scanning and examination process at sea and land ports, guarantees related to insurance, and often cited unauthorized payments. Apart from these process-related issues, there remain some structural issues which weaken the certainty related to timeliness and safety of Afghan transit.<sup>256</sup>

Afghan traders interviewed as part of this exercise explain how in the past, unanticipated border closures by Pakistan, unnecessary delays at ports and border trading points, delays in opening up new transit routes, demurrage charges, and lack of promised transit trade facilitation at Karachi port, had prompted them to consider alternative transit routes.

To expedite the redressal of above-mentioned grievances, respondents were of the view that APTTCA process may be restored and regular meetings should be undertaken by both sides. A key issue preventing APTTCA process is Afghanistan's desire to allow its trucks to go all the way to Wagah – Attari border instead of the current arrangement where these trucks can only go up to Peshawar. From Peshawar, Pakistani trucks take their cargo up to Wagah border. Views from Pakistan's customs was that there are no restrictions on Afghan

---

256. See "Trade- low Hanging Fruit in Af-Pak ties." <https://dailytimes.com.pk/10035/trade-low-hanging-fruit-in-af-pak-ties-i/>, accessed on 27 November 2019.

trucks to go all the way to Wagah, however it does not make economic sense as their trucks will not be allowed to carry back Indian goods to Afghanistan.

Additionally, Afghanistan wants that once allowed access to Attari, then on the way back these trucks may be allowed to bring India's exports to Afghanistan. The Afghan authorities have offered that if Pakistan obliges to such an arrangement, the former can consider Pakistan's request to allow its merchandise to reach Central Asian states. On this point, the Pakistani officials informed that they needed to conduct an assessment to see if Indian merchandise also reaches Central Asian states via Attari, and how it would impact Pakistan's competitiveness.<sup>257</sup>

We were also informed that India on its own may not be interested in APTTA as no official request had ever been received from New Delhi. According to some, India understands that if it officially demands access to Afghanistan via Pakistan, it will have to reciprocate when Pakistan requests for access to India's eastern neighbors. The official's from Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) were of the view that the issue of allowing Afghan trucks to pick Indian goods at Attari could be discussed once APTTCA meetings are resumed, however it may not be economically feasible for Afghan trucks to go all the way to Karachi.

The respondents lamented that despite sophisticated trade clearance software on both sides, there were recurrent issues related to data reconciliation. The real-time reconciliation of data related to transit trade could over time reduce the incidence of informal trade, under invoicing, and smuggling.

Due to the frequent changes in rules governing APTTA, it was emphasized during our meetings with stakeholders that regular joint outreach activities to create awareness regarding rules and regulations may be organized by both sides. This will also allow officials from both sides to meet in an informal setting and strengthen trust which in turn could help future reform. The low number of each country's bank branches across the border also pose increased information and transaction costs related to settling trade payments.

The Afghan traders in our interviews did complain regarding the diminishing price competitiveness of transit via Pakistan. For example, we were informed, handling charges incurred during arrival to and exist from sea port amount to approximately USD 200 to 270 depending upon the container size. These charges are exclusive of customs in the case of bilateral trade (Table 3) and higher than other transit options available to Afghanistan.

---

257. The business associations in Pakistan also haven't produced such research to our knowledge.

**Table 3: Costs incurred during arrival to and exit from seaport (2018)**

Destination	Payments	
	20 ft container	40 ft container
Karachi Port	200-250 USD	250-270 USD*
Port Qasim	Same	Same

*\*Exclusive of custom duties; source: PAJCCI*

While Karachi port is preferred because of quick custom clearance process and ability to handle more containers effectively, however in the case of heavy load on this port, it is the discretion of port authorities to divert the traffic to other ports, which in turn can increase time related uncertainties for Afghan importers. The operation timings could also differ depending upon the port, for example, vehicles can go from Karachi port only at night but at Port Qasim, day and night operations are available. As per the current practice, mostly non-commercial items come through Port Qasim. There are varying cost estimates for transporting containers from Karachi port, port Qasim, and Wagah to Chaman and Torkham (Table 4).

**Table 4: Transit costs from seaport to land border and port exit (Rs.) 2018**

Routes	Payments	
	20 ft	40 ft
Karachi port – Torkham	180-190 K	270-290 K
Karachi port - Chaman	20-25% more than Torkham due to security-related costs	
Port Qasim – Torkham	Almost 10K less than Karachi port	
Port Qasim – Chaman		
Wahga – Torkham	90 K	108-110K
Wahga – Chaman		

**Source:** PAJCCI

The high security and detention charges and other fee by shipping companies have also encouraged Afghan importers to look for alternate countries. For example, in 2018, Afghan importers were paying a security deposit of PKR 300,000 (on average) for 20 ft and PKR 600,000 (on average) for 40 ft container. The shipping lines usually promise to refund security deposits upon return of empty containers, however, these refunds materialize with significant time delays. These responses have been endorsed by Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce and according to the ministry's own estimates, security deposit

at Bandar Abbas (Iran) is USD 300 for 40ft and USD 150 for 20ft container compared to USD 5000 and USD 3000 respectively in Karachi. Besides these there are some unauthorized charges explained in Table 5. The unauthorized costs as percentage of total transit cost were 10.1% as per 2018-19 estimates.

**Table 5: Transit costs faced by Afghan Cargo (2018-19)**

	<b>Transit Stage</b>	<b>Unauthorized charges (PKR)</b>	<b>Authorized Cost 20ft (PKR)</b>
Karachi	Terminal Operator Charges charged by the Shipping Line		12,000
	Port Handling Charges charged by the Port		14,312
	Excess payment to transporter - Costs incurred due to scanning / examination of containers	10,000	
	Clearing Agent Fee		10000
	Demurrage		
	Insurance Cost (average)		7000
	Tracking on container		5600
	Unexplained charges in relations to above steps	2700	
Enroute	Toll tax	1000	8000
Torkham	Bonded Carrier Freight (Khi to Torkham/Jalalabad)		125,000
	Customs	1200	
	Clearing charges		8000
	Khasadars (local police)	1900	
	NHA		610
	NLC		2500
	Peshawar Development Authority		500
	Unexplained charges in relations to above steps	4900	
Total		21,700	193,522
Unauthorized cost (% of cumulative)			10.1

**Source:** PAJCCI and Ministry of Commerce, Government of Pakistan

The monopolistic powers available with the bonded carriers also need to be regulated. The inland freight charges for Afghan cargo are much higher than cargo bound for Pakistan's own use. Sufficient bonded trucks are not available in Karachi due to which on several occasions containers are stuck at the port with traders having to pay increased rents and port demurrages.

The physical examination and scanning of Afghan cargo still remains complex and subject to discretion of officials at Karachi port. APPTA allows scanning 5 percent of container consignment based on risk management profile, however lately the norm has been to check 80 percent of cargo which in the case of perishable items had led to loss of quality. Consequently, the traders end up paying destuffing and restuffing of container charges at the port.

Delays in the processing of cargo are also taking place due to lack of capacity of scanners installed at the Karachi port. The scan report reaches the officials after more than the allowed three-day limit. Even Pakistani transporters have complained of the frequent breakdown of scanners at the Karachi port which in turn could take up to 2-3 days of repair time.

The APTTA document highlights items which are banned from movement under transit trade. However, to protect Pakistan's local markets from being flooded through smuggled goods, some further items have been curtailed outside of APTTA. These include consumer household products, tires, tiles, electronics (LED and mobiles), poultry, yarn, auto parts, steel, clothes, and footwear items. The Afghan side sees these measures as a violation of APTTA.

As per the interviews conducted, occasionally there are incidents where items in transit get leaked or come back to Pakistan after unpacking in Afghanistan. Such incidents are on a decline due to the fencing at the border. Causes of leakages include occasional hike in trade taxes in Pakistan, porous border, smuggling, and informal trade.<sup>258</sup> Leakages of these products affect adversely the domestic industry of Pakistan and preventive measures in this regard are needed to be taken to lessen the leakage. Border fencing on Afghanistan-Pakistan border could help some aspects of smuggling, however, leakages within the boundary of Pakistan still need administrative controls. At the same time, there is a need for an independent evaluation of the currently existing tracker system for both transit and reverse transit.

---

258. Vaqar and Saad, *op. cit.*

In a survey conducted in fall 2019 the items reported by PAJJCI members as being leaked included tiles, electronic items i.e., LED, mobile phones etc., poultry, yarn and clothes, tires, vehicles and parts thereof, steel, footwear, cement, used items and raw material with high regulatory duties. Total value of reported leaked items was approximately 215 million dollars as per responses compiled from the interviews and latter validated through cross-check with a different group of respondents.

## **Opening New Transit Trade Routes**

This section provides details regarding emerging transit possibilities for Afghanistan. It also discusses impacts in the event route via Wagah is allowed for imports and exports by Afghanistan from India. It is widely assumed that for Punjab-based traders and exporters from India, movement via Wagah could result in dividends originating from transport and location economies.<sup>259</sup> This is the most economical route through which Indian cargo can reach Kabul.

There are other competing routes which pose higher direct and indirect transport, logistics, warehousing and insurance costs. However, studies argue that such transport related advantages to countries like Pakistan and Iran could be offset if Afghanistan with support from development partners is able to expedite the investments under Afghanistan Transport Sector Masterplan 2036.<sup>260</sup> The new routes such as the rail links between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan's city of Mazar-e-Sharif and road links between Chabahar port of Iran and Zaranj in Afghanistan have received attention in recent literature and could prove to be competition for other routes.

To help support efficiency improvements, a multi-modal approach has been adopted by Afghanistan, its neighbours and development partners. The recently approved or under preparation projects indicate urgency of governments in the region to improve their domestic road networks and consider trans-boundary connectivity via air, road and rail linkages (Table 6).

---

259. The route from Wagah to Chaman has not been discussed for the time being given the relatively low trade volumes expected to pass through Balochistan in current times.

260. See ADB Afghanistan transport sector master plan update (2017–2036) Mandaluyong City, Philippines: *Asian Development Bank*, 2017.

**Table 6: Recently Approved Interventions by Development Partners**

Link	Section	Cost (\$m)	Financing Source	Current Status
Tajikistan - Afghanistan	Dushanbe - Shir-Khan Bandar	150	World Bank	Under preparation
Afghanistan	Baghlan - Bamyan	136.3	World Bank	Under construction
	Salang road and tunnel	60	World Bank	Under construction
Afghanistan - Pakistan	Kabul – Jalalabad	140	ADB	Under construction
	Jalalabad – Torkham	125	Govt of Pakistan	Completed
	Torkham Border Transit	ADB is financing upgrade of cross-border infrastructure.		
Pakistan	Peshawar-Torkham (KPEC)	402.75	World Bank	Pending ECNEC approval  World Bank approved 2018

Source: World Bank, 2019<sup>261</sup>

The Asian Development Bank is also supporting efforts under the CAREC program which allows four of its transport corridors to pass through Afghanistan (Table 7). These will connect Afghanistan with China through Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

**Table 7: CAREC**

Corridor	Route
CAREC 1	Europe-East Asia (KAZ, KGZ, and XUAR)
CAREC 2	Mediterranean-East Asia (AFG, KAZ, KGZ, TAJ, TKM, UZB, and XUAR)
CAREC 3	Russian Federation-Middle East and South Asia (AFG, KAZ, KGZ, TAJ, TKM, and UZB)
CAREC 4	Russian Federation-East Asia (MON, IMAR, and UXAR)
CAREC 5	East Asia-Middle East and South Asia (AFG, KGZ, PAK, TAJ, and XUAR)
CAREC 6	Europe-Middle East and South Asia (AFG, KAZ, PAK, TAJ, TKM, and UZB)

261. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2019/10/01/khyber-pass-economic-corridor-kpec>

AFG: Afghanistan; KAZ: Kazakhstan; KGZ: Kyrgyzstan; TAJ: Tajikistan; UZB: Uzbekistan; TKM: Turkmenistan; XUAR: Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China; PAK: Pakistan; MON: Mongolia; IMAR: Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of People's Republic of China

Source: CAREC Secretariat

Alongside the above mentioned efforts Afghanistan National Railway's Plan has received encouraging attention from the development partners. With a total estimated cost of USD 11 billion, the plan aims to bring efficiency in both passenger and cargo traffic – connecting various major cities of Afghanistan with vital border points (Table 8 and Table 9).

**Table 8: Afghanistan National Railway Plan Investment Program, 2017-2036**

Railway	Kilometers	Cost per Kilometer (\$ million)	Total Cost (\$ million)
Herat-Qala I Naw-Marmana-Sheberghan-Mazar-e-Sharif-Khunduz	1,105	1.9	2,100
Torkham-Jalalabad-Kabul-Parwan-Bamyan-Baghlan-Kunduz-Mazar-e-Sharif	772	1.9	1,467
Kunduz-Sherkhan border	88	1.9	167
Sheberghan-Andkhoy-Aqina	100	1.9	190
Kushk-Torghondi	47	1.9	89
Herat-Ghoryan-Chah Sorkh	149	1.9	283
Kunduz-Takhar-Badakhshan-Wakhan	700	1.9	1,330
Herat-Ghor-Bamyan Railway	550	1.9	1,045
Herat-Farah-Delaram-Kandahar-Kabul	1,141	1.9	2,168
Kandahar-Spin Boldak	96	1.9	182
Delaram-Zarang	222	1.9	422
Gereshk-Baram Chah	385	1.9	732
Contingencies (15%)			1,001
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,355</b>		<b>11,176</b>

Source: AFRA 2016. Afghanistan National Railway Plan, Kabul

**Table 9: Investment Priorities for Railways**

Rank	Projects	Project Cost (\$ million)	Comments
1	Kushk-Toghondi	89	Vital border connector
2	Kunduz-Sherkhan border	167	Vital border connector
3	Herat-Qala I Naw-Marmana-Sheberghan-Mazar-e-Sharif-Kunduz	2,100	High-priority Northern Line with best prospects for viability
4	Herat-Ghoryan-Chah Sorkh (Iran)	283	Vital border connector
5	Delaram-Zaranj	422	Mineral resources; regional integration; link to Chabahar Port
6	Sheberghan-Angkhoy-Anqina	190	Important border connector
7	Kandahar-Spin Boldak	182	Important border connector
8	Herat-Farah-Delaram-Kandahar-Kabul	2,168	Important southwest section of the rail ring with access to border crossing points
9	Torkham- Jalalabad-Kabul-Parwan-Bamyan-Baghlan-Kunduz-Mazar-e-Shairf	1,467	Western ring section of dubious viability; low Afghanistan Railway Authority (AFRA) priority
10	Kunduz-Takhar-Badakhshan-Wakhan	1,330	Potentially important link to the People's Republic of China; dubious viability, low AFRA priority
11	Herat-Ghor-Bamyan Railway	1,045	Link not essential and unlikely viable; low priority also accorded by AFRA
12	Gereshk-Baram Chah	732	Parallel north-south link
	Contingencies	1,001	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,176</b>	

**Source:** Asian Development Bank

A research was conducted in 2019 to look into gains for Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan if transit trade between Afghanistan and India was allowed through Wagah-Attari border. For ease of simulation exercise, data of top 22 export items of India comprising more than 75 percent of total Indian exports to Afghanistan was used. For the ease in interpreting the results only transport and

port clearance costs were considered while assuming other costs constant i.e. road fee, gate charges, weight assessment fee, informal payments, municipality fee and any other charges in erstwhile FATA region inside Pakistan. As the cost incurred by Indian exporters falls due to shorter transit route so a favourable net welfare effect is expected.

The cost to Indian exporter per 20ft container will decrease by 931 dollars and for 40ft container the same cost will decrease by 1,339 dollars.<sup>262</sup> The estimated annual total number of expected containers from India is 27,442 for 20ft and 41,170 for 40ft specification during 2019. Therefore, the annual total cost of Indian exporters will decrease by 25.55 million dollars for 20ft containerized cargo and 55.13 million dollars for 40ft containerized cargo.

The main export categories from India which stand to gain include gents clothing, shawls and scarves, medicaments, sportswear, synthetic woven fabric, sugar, wheat, and made-up textiles.

In 2018-19 India's total exports to Afghanistan stand at 709 million dollars out of which 514 million go through APPTA while the remaining 195 million dollars go through other routes, most notably Iran. Once the route via Wagah is allowed there is a possibility that a large chunk of USD 195 million (particularly those items falling under the agriculture and livestock categories) could pass through Pakistan (i.e., Wagah). Afghanistan's total exports to India currently stand at 719 million dollars out of which 252 million go through APPTA while the remaining 467 million dollars go through other routes, most notably Iran. Once the route via Wagah is allowed there is a possibility that a large chunk of 467-million-dollar worth of commodities could pass through Pakistan.

It is more likely that most of the agricultural goods from India like vegetables, animal meat, dairy produce, live trees and plants, raw hides and crop will go to Afghanistan through Wagah to Torkham. Major share of these agriculture related produce comes from the Indian Punjab that shares the Wagah border with Pakistan. The total exports of India to Afghanistan under these categories are around 65 million dollars. These are the potential exports in which India's comparative advantage could enhance, if routed from Wagah.

Currently, the Indian exports, transiting through Pakistan, majorly follow the route of Pune, Karachi and Torkham; only small quantities in sporadic frequency pass through Gwadar-Chaman route. Export route via land-sea-land cost also

---

262. Currently the total cost of 20ft container is USD 1396 and for 40ft container the same cost is USD 1955. For 20ft container if we split the overall cost, then port and misc. charges stand at USD 225 and transport (including octroi) is USD 1171.

involves multiple guarantees including land and sea insurance. A comparison is provided of transportation cost of 20ft and 40ft container from Karachi port to Torkham and from Wagah to Torkham. The 20ft standard size container has a maximum load capacity of 22 tons whereas the 40ft standard size container has max capacity of 26.6 tons. The estimated cost savings may be seen in table 10. Major gainers are textile, pharmaceuticals, sugar and construction material.

**Table 10: Magnitude of cost saving for India<sup>263</sup>**

Container Size	20 ft	40 ft
Total number of containers (Afghan imports) <sup>264</sup>	27,447	41,171
Per container USD cost (Karachi to Torkham) <sup>265</sup>	1396	1955
Total cost (Karachi to Torkham- million USD)	38.32	80.49
Per container cost in USD (Wagah to Torkham)	465	616
Total cost (Wagah to Torkham- million USD)	12.76	25.36
Cost saving (million USD)	25.55	55.13

**Source:** Calculation based on data provided by DG Transit Trade office; price estimates by PAJCCI.

Time saving is an additional advantage for India if it starts exporting from Wagah to Afghanistan. These calculations are based on two-rounds of interview with PAJCCI members. If transit via Wagah is allowed Indian export consignments saves 1 and a half day while going to Torkham. The route to Chaman is longer from Wagah in comparison to Karachi and therefore will involve an additional half a day.

We also look in to the implications of containerization via railways and reduction in cost of transit. Based on the review of cost of transit cargo train from Karachi to Peshawar, the average km per ton transport cost is estimated for the cargo train (Table 11). It is also assessed how much cost will be saved if this facilitation for transit trade is initiated by Pakistan.

263. The analysis for cost savings is done for the top 22 export items of India to Afghanistan as it comprises more than 75% of total exports of India. Hence, the results can only be generalized for the other exported products also.

264. Estimation of number of 20ft and 40ft containers is made based on the information provided by transporters.

265. A 20ft container is allowed 22 tonnes. Per tonne price from Karachi is USD 63.4. Per tonne price from Lahore (Wagah) is USD 21.14 per tonne.

**Table-11: Estimates of Transit Trade Cost through Railway from Karachi to Peshawar<sup>266</sup>**

a.	Per km cost for 1 ton Railway load (USD) <sup>267</sup>	0.007
b.	Transport cost of road container (per km of 1 ton load) <sup>268</sup>	0.036
c.	Karachi to Peshawar distance (km)	1590
d.	Transport cost on railway from Karachi port to Peshawar (per km of 1 ton load); [d=a*c]	11.01
e.	Peshawar to Torkham distance (km)	52.6
f.	Transport cost of road container from Peshawar to Torkham (per km 1 ton load) [f=b*e]	1.894
g.	Total load transported during transit (ton) <sup>269</sup>	1667413
h.	Total cost of transit through railway (1 ton load per km) [h=d+f]	12.902
i.	Total cost of transit through railway for Indian goods landing in Karachi (Million USD) [i=g*h]	21.513

**Source:** Calculation based on data provided by DG Transit Trade office; price estimates by PAJCCI.

Table 11 exhibits that the total cost incurred after operationalizing the railway option from Karachi to Peshawar for Indian exporters is 21.51 million dollars per year. This estimate will apply to non-India exports as well and only includes transport cost. The cost of transit from Karachi to Torkham through railway for one ton load is 12.9 dollars while for road is 57.26 dollars. The cost saving, if railway route is operationalized, will be USD 44.36 per one ton load.

Economic logic demands that it should allow Afghan trucks to pick up Indian goods at Attari. In my opinion, this arrangement is akin to allowing India access to Afghanistan and beyond even if India’s own trucks do not pass through Pakistan. Such an arrangement will be feasible for Pakistan once, (a) India is also willing to allow Indian trucks to carry Pakistani goods to India’s other neighbors, and (b) Pakistan’s agriculture exporters to Afghanistan are provided same facilitation as seen in Indian Punjab. Opening up to foreign competition at the

266. The analysis transit trade cost is done for the top 22 exports of India to Afghanistan as it comprises more than 75% of total exports of India. These results can be generalized for the other products also.

267. Taken from Pakistan Railway website

268. SDPI Survey Unit

269. Data from DG Transit Trade Office

end of the day is a political decision. Hence researchers in this space will need to think and work politically while assessing even the pure economic gains.

## **Issues for Future Engagement**

It goes without saying that more frequent meetings between Afghan and Pakistani trade officials is need of the hour. As per the 2019 survey, this was a major suggestion by the business community on both sides. Several issues including faster customs clearance processes; insurance of transport vehicles, containers and consignments; tracking and monitoring of consignments; role of Special Regional Offices (SROs) hurting bilateral trade; credit facility for traders; currency swaps and several non-tariff barriers (NTBs) require continued engagement in the interest of ease in conducting trade. Ministry of Commerce in Pakistan and FBR should revisit obsolete SROs that are acting as NTBs and hurting the bilateral trade. Several of these SROs are now obsolete however continue to burden the traders and often times restrict trade. Better trade dispute resolution mechanisms can be envisaged through inputs from PAJCCI.

The Ministries of Commerce in both countries should institutionalize a dedicated Afghanistan-Pakistan desk with research, monitoring and evaluation capabilities. This unit will: a) coordinate the implementation of decisions undertaken at various government forums, and b) undertake specific research tasks related to Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral trade and investment cooperation. This will also regularly allow both sides to update current assessment on the missing facilities curtailing cross border transit and commercial trade. Weak border-related trade infrastructure was pointed out as a key constraint in our survey.

Transit reforms related to transportation, customs and border controls will also have a quick impact in terms of increasing formal bilateral trade. Pakistan railways had initiated test runs to carry goods in transit. An evaluation may be undertaken if this measure has led to anticipated gains. Timely completion and effective management of Torkham-Jalalabad dual carriageway and Chamman-Kandahar rail link can also slash the transit costs.

Pakistan with help of development partners should continue improving automation of trade flows at border points. Afghanistan may be supported by FBR for putting Weboc-like systems at new border points where trade is being allowed. Where automation and conventional trade-related infrastructure may not be possible, both sides could consider establishing 'border haats' which have been successful in the case of several Asian economies.

Expediting work on ongoing road and railways projects linking the various cities across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border should remain a medium to long term agenda. Likewise, air cargo and passenger flight options for business community need to be increased. Business persons on both sides may be allowed visa-on-arrival facility. This is also expected to help boost bilateral trade-in-services. For example, Pakistan's private hospitals and diagnostic centers have immensely benefited from providing timely and quality service to Afghan patients. This can be scaled up in future.

The banking channels between the two countries should be expanded to curtail informal trade flows, illegal flow of money and related transactions. This will also be important from the view point of recent demands put forward by Financial Action Task Force (FATF). For Afghanistan it is difficult to transfer foreign currency abroad particularly in larger amounts. This issue can be addressed if both countries accept each other's currency for trading purposes. Bilateral Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) cooperation may also be facilitated through easing of foreign exchange controls by State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), particularly with a viewpoint to enhance investment cooperation with Afghanistan. An additional measure required from both sides is to allow investors cross-border investment through both government and automatic route.

The civil society organizations and think tanks working on Afghanistan-Pakistan trade cooperation should be strengthened by the governments and development partners. They should independently hold annual Afghanistan-Pakistan economic summits which also benefit from the presence of investors and business community of both sides. Cooperation between media outfits is need of the hour. Television channels on both sides could partner for airing evidence-based talk shows which explore and exhibit the trade and investment cooperation potential. This will also enable people on both sides to see stories of success resulting from closer business to business relations. The relevant sports board on both sides could also look into the potential of 'cricket diplomacy' in bringing the two sides closer.

Apart from the civil service on both sides, interaction on trade cooperation should also be prioritized during parliamentary engagements. The parliamentary committees on commerce and trade on both sides may like to increase frequency of their dialogue. For effective promotion of 'make-in-Pakistan', Trade Development Authority of Pakistan could collaborate with PAJCCI to increase frequency of export goods exhibitions inside Afghanistan.

The planned trans-boundary cooperation projects in the Central Asian region should go beyond the currently ongoing work on CASA-1000, TAPI and some road sector projects. A high-powered working group comprising of experts from Afghanistan, Pakistan and select Central Asian countries should be facilitated to meet regularly so that an inventory of projects can be planned. Such projects will strengthen economic and political interdependencies in the region

The scholarships allowed to Afghan students can be scaled up with the help of private sector universities in Pakistan which have better academia-industry linkages not just in Pakistan but also across the region and beyond. Also, business schools in both countries could partner and arrange study trips for faculty and students enabling each other to see how business partnerships can be strengthened.

Both countries must come together to push for normalization of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process and regular meetings of SAARC Heads of State Summit in which several important transport and energy cooperation agreements are expected. Countries which are part of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can be asked to help in putting SAARC process back on track. Ultimately connectivity in South Asia is bound to help other economic blocs in the region.

I also observe that economic cooperation with Afghanistan is a subject which is spread across various ministries in Pakistan. Economic Aid Division (EAD) leads the Joint Economic Commission meetings. MoC conducts bilateral and transit trade dialogue. There is no active investment cooperation process. There were occasions when heads of both central banks also met. Perhaps there is a need now to have a dedicated desk which keeps track of various decisions and meetings between both sides.

To end this chapter on a positive note, I would recall an anecdote that I presented at the Seventh Round of Afghanistan Pakistan Bilateral Dialogue on Strengthening Economic Engagement by Regional Peace Institute.

“After several months of decline in Afghanistan Pakistan trade, we finally started to see an uptick during late-2018. Afghanistan was once again among the top export destinations for Pakistan in the fourth quarter of 2019. We asked the authorities what had changed. There was still no progress on JEC, APTTA and PTA. To explore this further we were asked to sit with the border control authorities and customs department officials on both sides. To the pleasant surprise of most of us,

this increase actually came about due to the cooperation of a few customs officials on both sides who were willing to walk over and discuss with each other every time some formality, truck permit, container specification, and tracker requirements were found missing. Their personal working relationship and sense of responsibility towards achieving higher trade traffic on both sides made this happen. This for us was a lesson in leadership. Many a times we await decisions from the higher political authorities whereas the solution lies in the hands of those who are able to exercise their own job description in the most loyal manner. It is in this anecdote we find reasons to attach greater importance to people-to-people cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan.”

## Proxy Politics – Working Towards Dead End

Mushtaq Muhammad Rahim

Zama de kor lambo ta ma tawdega  
Dewal sharik laleya oor ba wakhley  
Biya ba ye pe chal de mar kedo poh ne she  
Te be yaw zay wazhney kho nor ba wakhley  
Ke shwal khware zama de oor baseree  
Oor khar pe khar aw kor pe kor ba wakhley

*Don't aspire to be warmed by the flames of my burning abode;  
My immediate neighbor;  
It may reach you and the firefighting may render you helpless in overcoming it;  
It finally may overwhelm you by spreading in length and breadth*

### **(A poem by late Hedayatullah Hijran – a victim of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan)**

In the words of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the late Pakistani Prime Minister, Afghanistan and Pakistan had too much in common to permit any problem that could permanently mar the natural development of close and good neighborly relations between them. Objectively speaking, no other country has as much in common as Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>270</sup> The two nations have a lot of commonalities and shared history that could bring them closer, while the complementary potential for the economic development of the two sides has been so lucrative that it could create a sense of cooperation between them. However, the gravity of history has not allowed Afghanistan and Pakistan to build good neighbourly relations since the establishment of Pakistan as an independent state in 1947. In contrast, the two states have been engaged to undermine the other's sovereignty and solidarity which has continually contributed to the deterioration of the relations. Over the years, the two sides have employed proxy politics, of varying scope, against each other that has infused insecurity and instability with a catastrophic effect on Afghanistan. However, none of the two could permanently subdue the other, regardless of the amount of destruction inflicted upon the opposite sides, and their envisioned objectives remain as elusive as those were at the outset. Hence, there is a need for a thorough review of the issues causing

acrimony between the two neighbours; explore possible solutions for helping their breakup with the past and look for a future that is built on mutual respect to sovereignty, geared towards cooperation, promotion of peace and harmony in the region. Afghanistan and Pakistan have been at loggerheads since the independence of Pakistan. The trust required for smooth diplomatic ties was not developed from the beginning. Hence, despite so many connecting factors, the two states have had tense bilateral relations. Several issues strained relations between the two countries, instigating the employment of proxy politics.

## **Territorial Dispute**

Afghanistan lost a share of its territory to the Imperial British after the Durand Line Agreement. The agreement was signed between the Afghan monarch Abulrahman Khan and British India on 12 November 1893.<sup>271</sup> Thus, a line divided a vast Pashtun region, conceding Afghan land to British India. While Afghanistan also accepted British suzerainty. The agreement was concluded after two Anglo-Afghan Wars<sup>272</sup> that had caused massive loss of lives and destruction for the conflicting parties.<sup>273</sup> This agreement helped create a buffer zone between Imperial Britain and Tsar Russia, who were engaged in the Great Game<sup>274</sup>, regional political manoeuvres as part of their expansionist agenda. However, Afghanistan won its sovereignty back after the Third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919, but the Durand Line remained intact.<sup>275</sup>

Since the drawing of the Line, the Afghan governments and people have been adamant about their revanchist motives causing tensions between the governments on the two sides. After greater India's independence, Afghanistan maintained its claim. Whereas Pakistan, since its establishment, has declared it as an international border. One may argue that after the British departure, the line does not hold validity and as such Afghan claim in this regard is invalid. However, there are historical reminders that both parties recognise the dispute, even though Pakistan has downplayed its legitimacy. The first of those reminders is that the Afghan royal government raised the Pashtun self-determination issue

---

271. Rajiv Dogra, *Durand's Curse: A Line across the Pathan Heart* (New Delhi, India: Rupa, 2017).

272. First: (1839–1842); Second: (1878–1880)

273. Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *The Anglo-Afghan Wars 1839-1919* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2009).

274. A political term used for the political maneuvers of 19th and early 20th century between the British India and Tsar Russia for exerting influence over Afghanistan and adjacent geographical areas.

275. Rhea T Stewart, *Fire in Afghanistan 1914-1929: Faith, Hope and the British Empire* (New York: Doubleday, 1973).

at the UN at the time of admission of Pakistan as a member.<sup>276</sup> Secondly, the Khudai Khidmatgar movement of Bacha Khan boycotted the plebiscite meant to decide the fate of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).<sup>277</sup> The questionnaire included only two choices; the Pashtun region had to choose between India and Pakistan for joining, whereas another option that is the choice of independent state should have been added.<sup>278</sup> Again, Pakistan wanted to have the Durand Line recognised as an international border in the Geneva accords<sup>279</sup>, which was not accepted by the Afghan side.<sup>280</sup> Pakistan tried to influence Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar to recognise the Durand Line as a settled deal which was rejected.<sup>281</sup> During the Afghanistan-Pakistan negotiation, the former Pakistani army chief, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, asked Afghan ex-President Hamid Karzai that he wanted the Afghan Pashtuns to look towards Kabul and the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to follow the lead of Islamabad. It meant that he wanted Afghanistan to accept the demarcation as permanent.<sup>282</sup> While Afghanistan never doubted that there was a territorial dispute between the two states, the Pakistani actions confirm that regardless of the official narrative, the state had it deep down that it was an outstanding issue between the two neighbours.

## Afghanistan-India Relation Paranoia

Afghanistan and United India had close ties throughout history. The famous Silk Road had always been a route of overland connection between the two ancient geographies. Although the establishment of Pakistan physically detached Afghanistan and India, the two nations could maintain their diplomatic ties and state to state relations. As part of the process, the two countries signed a treaty of friendship in 1950 that further strengthened their relations.<sup>283</sup> India has been since contributing to the development of Afghanistan through investing in infrastructure projects and providing in-kind support. The Indian support

---

276. Abubakar Siddique, *The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key to the Future of Pakistan and Afghanistan* (London: Hurst & Company, 2014).

277. The Pashtun dominated geography was named by the British Indian Government.

278. Abdul Wali, *Facts Are Facts: The Untold Story of India's Partition* (New Delhi: Vikas Pub. House, 1987).

279. Geneva accord was a collective of four agreements signed among Afghanistan, Pakistan, USA and USSR on 14 April 1988 for ending conflict and withdrawal of the Russian forces from Afghanistan.

280. Riaz M. Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal* (Durham and London: Duke University, 1991).

281. Ibid.

282. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, *Afghan Politics: An Insider's Account {Dar:Siyaset Afghanistan; Riwayate Az Daroon}*(Kabul: Aazem and Paryniyan Publishers, 2018).

283. Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy* (C Hurst & Co Pub Ltd, 2017).

was of significant importance for the war-ravaged Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction that started in 2001 after the US invasion of the Country.<sup>284</sup>

On the other hand, India and Pakistan soon got positioned as enemy states after their independence over Kashmir where the newly emancipated countries went to war in 1948.<sup>285</sup> Since then, the two nations have fought conventional wars and used proxy politics for undermining the other side. They continue to engage in proxy and adversarial politics over Kashmir. In the backdrop of these inherited issues by region from the British Raj, Pakistan always viewed the Afghan-India relations from the prism of its relations with India. Pakistan securitised Indo-Afghan relations and reacted to diplomatic proximity in the light of securitisation theory.<sup>286</sup> The *raison d'être* for India may be aligned with Mandala theory that believes that the enemy of the neighboring enemy is friend and ally.<sup>287</sup> However, Afghanistan's relations with India have not been based on the mentioned theory. Rather, the size of the Indian economy attracts Afghans in search of potential markets and investments, and in this regards, the Indian willingness to facilitate both had also played an important role in further strengthening the bilateral ties. In addition, India has been a willing partner in Afghanistan's development and has generously contributed to this effect over the years.

Nevertheless, throughout the last 73 years, Afghanistan has remained neutral on the issues between India and Pakistan regardless of Kabul's territorial dispute with Islamabad. During the 1965 India-Pakistan war, Afghanistan exercised neutrality which enabled Islamabad to fully concentrate on its war with India and worry less about the security of its Western border.<sup>288</sup> Afghanistan didn't discourage tribal Pashtuns from joining forces in the war against India albeit Kabul's leverage over the tribal areas.<sup>289</sup>

---

284. Mushtaq Rahim, "The Role of Education Exchange in Strengthening Afghanistan-India Relations Article," *Kardan Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2020, pp. 33–46, <https://kardan.edu.af/data/public/files/KJSSH-3.1-2020-0228062020023509.pdf>.

285. Victoria Schofield, *KASHMIR in CONFLICT: India, Pakistan and the Unending War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2003).

286. Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security a New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, Colo. Lynne Rienner, 1998).

287. L. N. Rangarajan, *Kautilya: The Arthshastra* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992).

288. Rifaat Hussain, "Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan: Continuity and Change," *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2002, pp. 43–75.

289. Arwin Rahi, "Afghanistan and Pakistan's Oft-Ignored History – 1947-1978," *The Express Tribune*, September 10, 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/article/97165/afghanistan-and-pakistans-oft-ignored-history-1947-1978>.

## Pakistan in Search of “Strategic Depth”

An enduring component of Pakistan Army's strategic behavior has been its belief that it requires strategic depth in Afghanistan.<sup>290</sup> In pursuance of “Strategic Depth”<sup>291</sup>, the Pakistani establishment started to look for working towards an Afghanistan under total influence and hegemony of Pakistan. As Marvin Weinbaum explains, the Pakistani establishment wanted to have a friendly regime, expectedly an Islamist one, in Kabul that would enable Pakistan to avoid traditional insecurity or neutralize its western tribal borderlands and avoid future Afghan governments, with links to New Delhi. He furthers, President Zia felt that, by assuming the position of a front-line state, Pakistan had won the right to a regime of its choice in Kabul.<sup>292</sup>

Under the shadows of Afghanistan's territorial claims and Indo-Afghan relations paranoia, Pakistan started cautiously and covertly supporting the guerilla resistance against the Afghan governments during the mid-1970s; support to the guerrilla warfare was expanded upon the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which infused a widespread conflict in the country. At the beginning of the Afghan conflict, the Pakistani establishment has a dedicated goal, defying Russians and making them roll back their expansionist agenda. However, as the resistance movement gained momentum and the Afghan state started showing signs of weariness, Pakistan expanded its ambitions.

In the post-Geneva Accords scenario, Pakistan continued to support the resistance movement to purge the communist elements from Afghanistan and establish a government of their liking. Pakistan wanted to get rid of any voices raising the Durand Line issue but also needed the assurance to have Afghanistan as Pakistan's backyard. Some Pakistani politicians and policymakers even declared Afghanistan as their fifth province. In addition, the changing geo-economic and geopolitics of Central Asia post-USSR collapse offered new markets where Pakistan had to pass through Afghanistan. A favorable government in Kabul has been expected to make the passage easy. Ahmad Rashid puts connection with

---

290. C Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

291. A military term broadly refers to the distances between the front lines and a country's industrial nucleus, population centers, heartlands and locations of its military industry. In the case of Afghanistan, the Pakistani military doctrine behind the concept of strategic depth suggests transforming Afghanistan into a client or subservient state that is beholden to the Pakistani security establishment.

292. Marvin G. Weinbaum, “Pakistan and Afghanistan: The Strategic Relationship,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 6, June 1991, pp. 496–511, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645079>.

Central Asia as the motivating factor for Pakistan's support to the Taliban.<sup>293</sup> Further, Pakistan relies on the Kabul River for its water needs as a low riparian country. The relative stability achieved since 2001 has allowed Afghanistan to manage its water resources by building multi-purpose dams in different parts of the country, meaning an extension of the effort may leave Pakistan struggling to meet its water needs.<sup>294</sup> In Pakistan's view, a friendly Kabul government would ensure the uninterrupted flow of Afghan waters to Pakistan.

Afghanistan and Pakistan shares a long demarcation line between the two countries. The Pakistani establishment assessed that a hostile Afghanistan could only be curtailed with large military deployment alongside the demarcation line to avoid Afghan infiltration or aggression. Considering that Pakistan has to protect its eastern borders against India due to the protracted animosity between the two countries, there is a need for large military deployments at all times. Hence, Pakistani resources will be stretched significantly, which might not be affordable for the economically struggling Pakistan. Therefore, the Pakistani establishment tried to turn Afghanistan into its client territory and save its military resources from overstretching. The strategic depth has also been based on the paranoia among the Pakistani establishment vis a vis Indo-Afghan relations. An under Pakistani hegemony Afghanistan, presumably, would give up its relations with India, and Pakistan would not be encircled by India in the region

## **Anatomy of the Af-Pak Proxy Politics**

Afghanistan and Pakistan have not faced each other in a traditional warfare, except for a few skirmishes and international crises, ever since the independence of Pakistan.<sup>295</sup> However, the nations have supported disgruntled outfits with varying magnitude that emerged to engage in militancy or sabotage activities against their national governments. In order to make use of the resentful groups, the countries have offered sanctuaries for employing them as their proxies against the other.

---

293. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Limited, 2013).

294. Elizabeth Hessami, "Afghanistan's Rivers Could Be India's Next Weapon against Pakistan," *Foreign Policy*, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/13/afghanistans-rivers-could-be-indias-next-weapon-against-pakistan-water-wars-hydropower-hydrodiplomacy/>.

295. Michael Brecher, *A Century of Crisis and Conflict in the International System Theory and Evidence: Intellectual Odyssey III* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

## ***Afghanistan's Exploitation of Political Cleavages***

### ***Engagement with Alienated Ethnic Brethren***

Pakistan experienced a political divide right after its establishment as an independent state. The Pashtuns of the North-West Frontier under the leadership of Khudai Khidmatgar movement leader Abdul Ghafar Khan, known as Bacha Khan, demonstrated opposition to the plebiscite on the future of the region. Since then, the movement, which later amalgamated into National Awami Party for its political activities, engaged in opposition politics with a struggle for autonomous Pashtun land.

The Pakistani state and the nationalist movement of Bacha Khan remained engaged in opposition politics through most of the 1950s-80s. Attempting to squeeze the nationalist movement, the Pakistani state jailed most of the Pashtun leadership, including Bacha Khan, from time to time, for long.<sup>296</sup> To avoid the wrath of the state, several Pashtun leaders moved to Afghanistan and stayed in Kabul while pursuing their nationalist agenda.<sup>297</sup> In addition, it is also likely that young men aspiring to engage in guerilla warfare.

In addition, Kabul maintained its relations with the leadership and communities of the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA).<sup>298</sup> The residents of the FATA region were provided special privileges by Kabul including, travel passes and placement in the academic institutions and liberty to settle in any part of their liking in Afghanistan. The relations were built on the special status of the FATA residents that they enjoyed as independent tribes with the liberty to engage with their communities divided by the Durand Line.

The Pashtun tribal areas residing alongside Durand Line were titled FATA by the British Government. The areas, governed under Frontier Regulation Act in 1867, were merged to the Provincially Administrated Tribal Areas (PATA) in 2018, to get rid of the regulation act and assimilate FATA into the provincial governance structure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

---

296. Abdul Ghafar Khan, *My Life and Struggle {Pashto: Zama Jwand Ao Jadojehad}* (Peshawar: Afghanistan Cultural Association, 2008).

297. J. K. Sufi, *Unrewarding Struggle {Pashto: Daramsal La Khatey}* (Rawalpindi: Sufi Publications, 2014).

298. The Pashtun tribal areas residing alongside Durand Line were titled FATA by the British Government while the area was governed under Frontier Regulation Act since 1867. The areas were merged to the regular areas called Provincially Administrated Tribal Areas (PATA) in a bid to get rid of the regulation act and allow FATA get assimilated in the provincial governance structure of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018.

Afghanistan engaged with Pashtuns living under the Pakistani administration whose blood relatives were lost to the politics. The Afghans have always maintained the position that the Durand Line was an imposed arrangement dividing communities because of a political need of a tyrant colonial power to avoid the potential threat from the western side of the Indian part of their empire. Now that the British had left, the Durand Line did not maintain the necessity, and the communities should have been rejoined to eliminate the decades-long split. However, the British left the region without resolving the issue, the choice of self-determination was also not granted to the people of Pashtun land. In the meantime, FATA areas remained mostly independent in their conduct as they engaged with their brethren on purpose. Afghanistan restricted its support only to the separated brethren (Pashtun and Baluch-discussed in the following section) and abstained from engaging in wider interference in Pakistan. For example, President Daoud Khan government declined to support GM Sayed of the Sindhu Desh separatist movement, reasoning that Afghanistan was not after the disintegration of Pakistan but to take back its lost territory.<sup>299</sup>

### ***Baloch Nationalist Movement***

Balochistan region, a tribal setting, was an independent State of Kalat since the initial state-building effort of Mir Chakar Rind in the late 15th century.<sup>300</sup> After numerous battles with Moghuls and British India, the state maintained its relative independence. Following the announcement of India's partition plans, the sovereignty of the State of Kalat was recognised by the British representatives, after a series of meetings on the future would-be Pakistani government and the Kalat government.<sup>301</sup>

On August 15, one day after the creation of Pakistan, the Khan of Kalat declared the state's independence and offered to negotiate a special relationship with Pakistan. The Pakistani leadership rejected to negotiate, touching off a nine-month diplomatic tug of war that came to a climax in the forcible annexation of Kalat.<sup>302</sup>

As a result of the forced annexation of Baluchistan, a group of Baluch nationalists opted for militant confrontation with the Pakistani military under the leadership of Prince Abdul Karim, the brother of Khan of Kalat.<sup>303</sup> Based on the state-

---

299. Ibid

300. Selig S Harrison, *In Afghanistan's Shadow: Baluch Nationalism and Soviet Temptations* (Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment For International Peace, 1981).

301. Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizanjo et al., *In Search of Solution : An Autobiography of Mir Ghaus Bakhsh Bizanjo* (Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre University Of Karachi, 2009).

302. Ibid.

303. Ibid.

centric Pakistani narrative, it blamed that Prince Karim received substantial Afghan support, while the Baloch nationalist denied such charges and instead said that Afghanistan had denied supporting them since Afghans favoured the inclusion of Baluchistan in Afghanistan rather than as an independent country.<sup>304</sup>

### ***Al-Zulfiqar Dissent***

The imprisonment and subsequent prosecution of the deposed Prime Minister of Pakistan and leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, following a coups d'état in 1977 by the then army chief Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq caused dissent among the political community of Pakistan. Many Bhutto followers, under the leadership of his son Mir Murtaza Bhutto, chose to engage in militancy against the Zia regime. The dissidents formed a militant organisation named People's Liberation Army which gained fame as Al-Zulfiqar, that engaged in guerrilla-style warfare against the regime. The Afghan support, however, was limited to provision of sanctuaries as the group received military and financial support from Libya, Syria and Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) where Tripoli hosted training camps, Damascus offered sanctuaries and PLO arms.

The group engaged in militant and sabotage activities in rural Sindh province of Pakistan and performed a number of militant activities. However, the most significant of the operations was the hijacking of a Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) which was taken hostage at the Kabul airport. The plane was later flown to Damascus, Syria where hostage exchange took place between the militant group and the Pakistani Government.

Afghanistan housed the Al-Zulfiqar at a time when Pakistan was actively engaged in harboring Afghan Islamist. It was more a tit for tat kind of attitude on the part of the Afghan communist regime. Given the limited capacity of the Al-Zulfiqar, the group could not penetrate in the Pakistani society and abandoned the movement after 17 years of struggle. Mir Murtaza Bhutto, the master mind of the movement, moved to Europe and stayed there until his return to Pakistan in 1993.

### ***Safe-haven for Radical Islamists***

The Royal Afghan state embarked on political reforms during the 1960s, famously known as the decade of democracy. The royal regime legitimated party politics, which resulted in mushrooming of several ideological groups, including Leninist-Communists, Maoists, ethno-nationalists and Islamists. These groups started mobilising their followership through political activism with a vision to

---

304. Ibid.

replace the royal regime. Among the political activists was the movement of the Islamists influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood during their student life at Al-Azher University in Cairo, Egypt.

The decade of 1970s was a period of turmoil for Afghanistan. While Daoud Khan, a member of the royal family, dethroned King Zaher Shah, the different political movements were after challenging President Daoud. The Islamists led the way in a bid to replace Daoud and establish an Islamic state system. The Government started a crackdown against the Islamists. A number of the activist were either jailed or killed, while a handful of them escaped to Pakistan.

The ones escaping to Pakistan were embraced by the Pakistani intelligence agencies and groomed for military intervention in Afghanistan. This initial engagement of the radical Islamist was the seeding of a long term extremist drive that turned into a strong resistance movement against the state after the communist takeover of power and subsequent Russian intervention.

### ***Promoting Political Unrest***

Daoud Khan faced stiff challenges from different opposition groups. One such effort of the coup by the erstwhile Prime Minister Hashem Maiwandwal. However, the plot was prematurely exposed; the Afghan Government, based on the letters exchanged between culprits and Pakistani authorities, claimed that Pakistan supported the group. The government faced agitation in different parts of the country, and in Kandahar, certain elements wanted to revolt. The Afghan Government acknowledged Islamabad's covert support.

### ***Patronising the Afghan Jihad***

Afghanistan was plunged into turmoil after Russia invaded the country in December 1979 with a simultaneous coup by the Parcham faction of the leftist movement.<sup>305</sup> A widespread national opposition mobilised against the invasion by foreign forces, and people stood to resist the state and invaders. Scores of Afghans chose to migrate to the neighboring countries; hundreds of thousands moved to Pakistan.

The arrival of Russians had already prompted an insurgency inside Afghanistan as people started sporadic attacks against the invading forces. In the meantime, the Afghan refugees also started getting organised to resist the Moscow backed regime and the occupying forces. Pakistan seized the opportunity and positioned

---

305. Syed Shabbir Hussain, Abdul Hamid Alvi, and Absar Hussain Rizvi, *Afghanistan under Soviet Occupation* (Islamabad: Barqsons Printers Ltd, 1980).

the radical Islamists, sheltered during the Daoud era, as resistance leaders. These Pakistan-based figureheads of the Islamist movement were joined by the ones released from the prison in the aftermath of the Parcham takeover.

The Russian invasion of Afghanistan also prompted the western liberal democrat world to explore options of halting the communist juggernaut in Afghanistan. At the time, Pakistan facilitated the organisation of the Afghan Islamists and positioned them as a potential force to confront the Russian's in Afghanistan.<sup>306</sup> The US was joined Saudi Arabia in a bid to invest in the Afghan resistance movement to challenge the Russians.<sup>307</sup> Pakistan became the intermediary between the western world and the Afghan resistance groups that later chose to operate as seven stand-alone organisation. As part of the strategy, the radicals among the groups were highly supported to engage in an asymmetric war against the Afghan and Russian military while moderate groups were subdued.<sup>308</sup> The nationalist groups such as Afghan National Democrats (famously known as Afghan Millat) that were anti-communist but did not follow the Pakistani lead were purged by the Pakistani intelligence sources.

The Afghan resistance, widely known as Jihad, caused havoc among the ranks of the Afghan and Russian forces thanks to the zealous warfare by the immature Afghan guerrilla fighters and arms supply of their international backers.<sup>309</sup> The widespread militancy badly damaged the Afghan infrastructure and prepared ground for the collapse of the state system.<sup>310</sup> Nevertheless, the asymmetric war was paralleled with a diplomatic effort to resolve the Afghan conflict through a negotiated settlement. The most prominent track of diplomacy was the UN-led Geneva process, where Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia and the US engaged in finding a solution to resolve the Afghan conflict.<sup>311</sup>

Pakistan was the de facto representative of the resistance movement on the negotiation table at Geneva. The process consumed circa eight years before all parties involved in the negotiation reached an agreement on the Geneva accords. One of the key agreements between Afghanistan and Pakistan was the commitment to non-interference. However, Pakistan continued to back the resistance movement in the sheer breach of the Geneva accords and supported

---

306. S K Datta, *Inside ISI : The Story and Involvement of the ISI, Afghan Jihad, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, 9/11, Osama Bin Laden, 26/11 and the Future of Al-Qaeda* (New Delhi: Vij Books India Private Limited, 2014).

307. Steve Coll, *Ghost War: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

308. Ibid.

309. Ibid.

310. Mohammad Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story* (London: Cooper, 1992).

311. Ibid.

the resistance movement's quest for toppling the state. Consequently, the Afghan state collapsed, anarchy prevailed, producing the catastrophe of civil war that wracked havoc in Afghanistan.

One can argue to support the resistance movement that it was a self-motivated and spontaneous uprising of the Afghans against the regime and its backers that engaged in asymmetric warfare. In addition, the Pakistani military establishment always justified their covert support to the militancy as their effort to avoid a potential Russian invasion of Pakistan after stabilisation in Afghanistan.

It cannot be ignored that Pakistan's support to the resistance movement was rooted in its longstanding proxy politics focused on soaking the Afghan state's capacity for pursuing a revanchist agenda vis a vis the Durand Line. The "strategic depth" agenda mainly focused on turning Afghanistan into a sphere of influence of Pakistan. Consequently, the Pakistani establishment substituted the reconciliation agenda with the promotion of de facto suzerainty.

## **Promoting Taliban**

The ouster of Najibulla, the President of Afghanistan, in 1992 ignited a bloody civil war among the resistance groups. The country slid into full-scale civil war, causing death and destruction. The hopes that the Geneva Accords generated were decimated. Pakistan remained connected to its favourites among the resistance groups at the expense of other of its protégés; the association built in the early 1970s was curtailed to a limited number of leaders.

The chaos and calamity in Afghanistan prompted a group of religious people to take arms and challenge the ruthless warlords. The ragtag group hailing from religious schools locally known as "Madrassah" was named Taliban. It is widely believed that the group emerged spontaneously amidst the mayhem, yet; there is a school of thought with a staunch belief that the Pakistani establishment brought the movement to the main fray. Nasirullah Babar, interior Minister of Pakistan at the time of the Taliban's rise, took credit for their success, telling journalists privately that the Taliban were 'our boys'.<sup>312</sup> No matter what narrative one adopts, there is little doubt that after the initial burst of Taliban, Pakistan patronised the group and supported its quest for becoming the unchallenged authority in Afghanistan.

Pakistan supported the Taliban from the outset by providing military assistance on the ground and political lobbying on the international stage and; played a

---

312. Ibid.

pivotal role in making KSA and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) recognise the Taliban as a legitimate Afghan authority. Islamabad also engaged with the USA to promote the Taliban and culminate favourable feelings among the Clinton administration.

Pakistan promoted the Taliban after the failure of its favoured resistance movement elements accession to power in Afghanistan. In the meantime, resistance movement leaders' loss of appeal and adversarial attitude of some towards Pakistan impelled Islamabad to look for alternatives. Besides, Pakistan's strategic depth agenda stretched beyond Pashtunistan as the country desired to reach Central Asia for product export and energy import. A favourable state authority would make Pakistan's worries lay to rest and allow its economic ambitions to flourish.

## Playing the Double Game

Pakistan actively supported the Taliban during their reign until the US was jolted by 9/11. As the Taliban were playing host to the Al-Qaida leadership, recognised as the perpetrators of the incident, the American's asked for the handover of Osama Bin Laden and other alleged members of the group or the US will directly intervene in Afghanistan. <sup>313</sup> The latter took place as the US attacked Afghanistan, which changed the complexion of the whole Central and South Asian region. The US asked Pakistan for explicit support to their Operation Enduring Freedom, or they were to be treated as an enemy. As a result, Pakistan provided land and air passage that saw the Taliban regime crumble within days.

The Pakistani administration vowed to support the US in its pursuit of eliminating terrorism. US used the country's land routes for the US logistical and military supplies. However, covertly, Islamabad continued to pursue its proxy politics against the newly established government of Afghanistan. Pakistan offered sanctuaries to the Taliban, similar to that of the 1970s-80s along the Durand Line. It allowed them to relaunch militancy across Afghanistan. <sup>314</sup> During the first two decades of the 2000s, Pakistan, while overtly pretending to support peace and stability in Afghanistan, have been giving comfortable operation space to the Taliban to battle the Afghan and international forces.

The Taliban have mainly been operating from the FATA region throughout their post 9/11 asymmetric struggle. However, their leadership and high ranking

---

313. Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2006).

314. Carlotta Gall, *The Wrong Enemy: America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014* (Boston: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).

commanders have been moving through the Pakistani cities of Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta. The US-funded Pakistan used drones to target the Taliban operating from the region to curtail their mobility. Pakistan even lent a base to the Americans for operating their drones. The Pakistan army too deployed its forces in a bid to eliminate the safe havens of the Taliban. However, the targeting was biased as only those groups or individuals that challenged the Pakistani government's policies were targeted. Even the international community realised the negative role that Pakistan was playing in the Afghan peace process as the US government tried to engage with the Taliban in peace talks in 2010 without informing the Pakistani establishment.<sup>315</sup>

## **Blocking the Trade Routes**

Afghanistan is a landlocked country and dependent on Pakistan for its access to the seashores. Exploiting Afghanistan's Achilles heels, Pakistan has frequently blocked or created hurdles for the Afghan transit trade as and when it found the political environment unfavourable. The incidents of border closure and/ transit trade disruptions took place in 1947, 1951, 1955, and 1961- 1963.

Afghanistan used Pakistan as transit through bilateral agreements signed between the two countries. However, despite the agreements, Pakistan has always exploited Afghanistan's transit trade vulnerabilities. At times, the transit routes have been fully blocked. Most of the time, arbitrary actions have caused delays in import and export, inflicting economic damages to Afghanistan.

## ***Restricting Cross Demarcation Line Public Movement***

Communities living across the Durand Line largely enjoyed free movement around and across the demarcation line. However, lately, Pakistan has adopted approaches that have curtailed the free movement of tribes and communities. Most recently, under the pretext of containing the militants, Pakistan fenced the Durand Line that has hindered commuting and movement of the communities. A number of families living close to the Durand Line were reported to have been split by the fence wall. However, as was expected, it has hardly affected the security situation as the militants have been able to infiltrate Afghanistan through other means available to them.

---

315. Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

## Implications

The two neighboring countries have tried to achieve their end goals through employing proxy politics. No stone has been left unturned by each side to sabotage the other to achieve their geopolitical and geo-economic ambitions. However, none of the two states has been able to reach anywhere close to their desired results. Instead, the development, prosperity and stability of vast geography have been hindered. While there could be other factors involved in the failures of the two states in achieving the level of advancement the people of the two nations deserved, proxy politics, nevertheless, has been the main stalling factor.

The proxy politics has hurt Afghanistan the most between the two. Once a buzzing and budding society in the heart of Asia, the country faced a total state collapse, destruction of its social and physical infrastructure, which also caused millions of deaths of the Afghans. A civil war saw Afghanistan become a failed state during the decade of 1990s. After the 9/11 debacle, Afghanistan found another chance of reconciliation, reconstruction, stability and prosperity. However, after almost two decades, instability, insecurity and perils of state collapse are glaring at the war-ravaged Afghanistan, mainly due to the proxy politics played by Pakistan. The country is consistently hovering among the top five countries worst impacted by terrorism since 2005.<sup>316</sup> As a result, Afghanistan was the least peaceful country, as per the 2020 Global Peace Index.<sup>317</sup>

While Pakistan did not experience the calamity of the magnitude that hit Afghanistan, a country with potential for development is faced with extremism, intolerance and sectarian violence caused by religious extremism as a state security policy. The nuisance of extremism has penetrated its security and military institutions, posing threats to the mere existence of the nation. Pakistan was ranked 7th worst terrorism impacted country in 2020, a slight improvement from being in the top five brackets since 2006.<sup>318</sup> The country's Global Peace Index position is at the tail end: placed at 152 out of 163 countries.<sup>319</sup> In other words, the menace of extremism and radicalism used against Afghanistan has turned its face towards Pakistan.

---

316. The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), "Global Peace Index 2020: Measuring Peace in a Complex World," 2020, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/resources/global-peace-index-2020/>.

317. Ibid.

318. Ibid.

319. Ibid.

Consequently, Pakistan's standing on Human Development Index is unhealthy as it is ranked 154th among 189 countries, quite low compared to India-131 and Bangladesh-133 and not far from unstable and conflict-ravaged Afghanistan-169 (UNDP, 2020).<sup>320</sup> In addition, Pakistan has been hanging by a thread as it remains under the scanner of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) since its placement on the grey list in 2008 due to the proliferation of terror financing in the country. A recent report estimates that grey-listing may have resulted in cumulative GDP losses of approximately USD 38 billion since 2008, a huge loss for economically-struggling Pakistan.<sup>321</sup>

Beyond numbers and indices, the two countries have also suffered in terms of social cohesion, tolerance, sense of coexistence and social development. Afghan society faces ethnic divide, political instability, radicalism and extremism. The Taliban continue to struggle for replacing a democratic and progressive Afghanistan with the version of governance they practised during their reign in the mid-90s. The so-called Islamic State-Khurasan, on the other hand, threatens the safety and security of the state and citizenry. In addition, regional extremist outfits have found shelter in Afghanistan due to the reinvigorated violent conflict since the mid-2000s.<sup>322</sup>

Pakistan, on the other hand, has also experienced violence waged by the Pakistani Taliban; the Sunni Shia divide has widened. Tolerance towards minorities has been on the decline. There have been attacks against groups such as Ahmadis and Christians, a sign of the spreading radicalism. The Murder of the former Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer, by his bodyguard and celebration of the act is a strong indicator of the level of intolerance in the country. The unrest in Baluchistan remains a threat to the greater scheme of affairs. In the meantime, the political dissent among Pashtuns in KP, displayed through Pashtun Tahafuz Movement, has been quite vibrant, seeking a halt to the use of the areas close to the Durand Line as a breeding ground for extremist outfits. In other words, the use of extremism against Afghanistan as a proxy element has backfired for Pakistan.

People to people relations between the two nations have historically been very positive for centuries. The religious, economic and cultural connectors have been the mainstay of the relations between the two nations. The relations, regardless

---

320. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report*, <http://hdr.undp.org/>.

321. Dr Naafey Sardar, "Bearing the Cost of Global Politics," *Understanding Change*, 24 February 2021, <https://tabadlab.com/bearing-the-cost-of-global-politics/>.

322. Mariam Mufti, "Religion and Militancy in Pakistan and Afghanistan a Literature Review Charting Our Future," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2012, [https://www.csis.org/files/publication/120709\\_Mufti\\_ReligionMilitancy\\_Web.pdf](https://www.csis.org/files/publication/120709_Mufti_ReligionMilitancy_Web.pdf).

of Pakistan's proxy politics in Afghanistan, further strengthened as during 1980-90s Afghan refugees intermingled with the Pakistani communities. Inter-community marriages took place, a generation built an emotional attachment to the land of their refuge. It was confirmed by the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in an interview with a private Pakistani TV channel confirming that if Pakistan was attacked by either of Afghanistan's friends, India and the US, Kabul would side with Islamabad.<sup>323</sup> However, obsessive pursuance of the strategic depth agenda and continuous support to the anti-government elements at the cost of the Afghan state has resulted in constant evaporation of Afghan's positive posture towards Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan has conceded the goodwill of a huge neighbouring community.

Afghanistan and Pakistan have been at loggerheads since the independence of Pakistan. The trust required for smooth diplomatic ties was not developed from the beginning. Hence, despite so many connecting factors, the two states have had tense bilateral relations. Several issues strained relations between the two countries, instigating the employment of proxy politics.

## **The Way Forward**

The Afghan president Ashraf Ghani after being elected in 2014, despite strong domestic criticism, took some bold actions to create space for healthy bilateral relations. He chose Pakistan as the destination of his first visit in the region, reached out to the Pakistani military apparatus, cancelled an arms deal with India as part of positive messaging towards Pakistan, proposed intelligence cooperation for bilateral security and dismantled sanctuaries of military outfits operating against Pakistan from Afghanistan, all for trust-building and regional cooperation. However, a lack of reciprocation eroded the initiative. Similarly, former Afghan President Hamid Karzai made over 20 visits to Pakistan to no avail as the Pakistani agenda of achieving strategic depth overwhelmed the search for viable alternatives (Presidential Palace, 2014). Lack of reciprocation has overpowered the recent bold initiatives and continuous efforts of the Afghan leadership.

Both the countries need a fresh thought process and bold decision making on Durand Line. However, traditional thinking and lingering of the problem can only add to the bitterness, hurting not only the two countries but also the region. However, accepting that the territorial dispute is genuine and the main obstacle impeding good relations between the two nations could be a

---

323. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YDFggTzQQlg&t=194s>, accessed on 22 February 2021.

breakthrough. The possibility of agreeing on a modus-vivendi on Durand Line could pave the way for exploring alternative options besides Afghanistan's rejection to recognise it as a border and Pakistan's claim of considering it as a settled international border. Identifying a feasible solution for the Durand Line warrants far greater discussion and wider consultation, one must not be afraid of floating initial ideas. One such idea is thinking of easing movement for the people of the two sides. At a time of greater economic, social and even political integration experienced around the globe, the two sides could consider free, may be controlled, movement of the people on the two sides of the Line. Improvement of contact between the people may eliminate the sense of divide and alienation and allow them to concentrate on strengthening economic and social ties. The trust-building measures might be a stepping stone for the nations towards extending the free movement for the entire region. There is a lot that can be learnt from the European Union where enemies were able to forge partnerships that exponentially increased the development of the entire continent. Also, lessons can be drawn from the talk of the possibility of establishing a confederation discussed between Bhutto-King Zaher Shah and Bhutto- Daoud.

The regional integration and free movement could be backed by the serious implementation of the regional mega projects. The needs of the regional countries can become a source of discourse for cooperation which may ultimately pave the way for dealing with political constraints that have been causing animosity among the neighbours. If resources and complementarities have not been able to arouse a sense of cooperation and finding ways for greater regional cooperation, the needs should easily do. The dwindling Pakistani economy may get a boost by reaching the Central Asian Republics (CARs) through Afghanistan, the shortest and the most accessible route between Pakistan and CARs. Landlocked Afghanistan's access to the sea through Pakistan should also be a stimulator for a constructive dialogue. The Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India (TAPI) gas pipeline is another such initiative that can foster a sense of integration and cooperation among energy starving countries of the region.

The Central Asia South Asia (CASA) electric supply project, bidding to resolve Pakistan's acute energy needs, is another need-driven initiative that can promote cooperation. The Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan railway project is an initiative that, if materialised, can change the economic landscape of the region.

The two nations must realise and acknowledge that after decades of proxy politics, they have not been able to achieve anything close to their objectives. In contrast, they have experienced destruction and catastrophes of different

scales derailing their quest for joining the developed world. Since both sides have used all of their resources for three-quarters of a century, the writing on the wall should prompt them to look for direct diplomatic engagement in a state to state relation with an honest gesture towards finding solutions for the problems. Illusions on the part of any of the two states should be laid to rest after such a prolonged ungainful effort of proxy politics. The experiences should have enough power to mobilise the advocates of peace and stability, or the calamity of proxy politics between Afghanistan and Pakistan will continue to challenge the peace and stability of the entire region.



## Politics of Proxy Wars and Terrorism

Rahimullah Yusufzai

Afghanistan has been described as the “gateway to Central and South Asia” situated on the “highway of conquest” and arguably this is the reason it has suffered perpetual wars. Apart from Afghanistan, no other country has been affected more than Pakistan by the 42-year old Afghan conflict. Militancy, terrorism, gun-running, drug-trafficking and the influx of Afghan refugees are among the negative fallouts of the conflict on Pakistan. Its politics, economy and society have been deeply impacted by the unending war next door. Still, it was blamed for the failure of the US-led NATO forces to win the war or stabilize Afghanistan because it allowed the Afghan Taliban leaders to hide in Pakistan after losing power. There is no guarantee that Afghanistan would have durable peace in the near future even though the present efforts to make the war-ravaged country peaceful and stable have never been so serious and sustained.

The Pak-Afghan relations have seldom been friendly, but there have been periods of cordiality like the 1965 India-Pakistan war when the Afghan King Zahir Shah reportedly assured President Ayub Khan not to worry about the western border with Afghanistan and instead concentrate on the eastern border with India. In the 1971 war with India following the Bangladesh crisis, Pakistan again didn't have to worry about its border with Afghanistan at a time when its forces were stretched thin in East Pakistan and on the eastern border with India and the Line of Control in Kashmir.

Such is the intensity of mistrust between Islamabad and Kabul that President Ashraf Ghani as recently as April 18, 2021 offered Pakistan a stark choice – choose friendship or enmity with Afghanistan.<sup>324</sup> The statement came out of the blue as there had been no blame-game in recent months between the two neighbouring Islamic countries. In fact, there was a growing feeling that the usually fraught Pak-Afghan relations were on the mend due to Islamabad's sustained efforts to activate the stalemated peace process in Afghanistan. As has often been the case, Pakistan opted to ignore Ghani's warning. The issue also wasn't discussed in the Pakistani media and the parliament.

---

324. “Pakistan Should Either Choose Friendship or Enmity with Afghanistan: President Ashraf Ghani,” *South Asia Monitor*, 2021, <https://www.southasiamonitor.org/region/pakistan-should-either-choose-friendship-or-enmity-afghanistan-president-ashraf-ghani>.

One reason could be the belief that Ghani is used to issuing such provocative statements. In the past, he blamed Pakistan for all of Afghanistan's troubles and argued that Islamabad was in a state of undeclared war with Kabul. He also commented that Afghanistan and Pakistan weren't really brotherly countries, but were two neighbours trying to have normal relations.

Hamid Karzai, who remained Afghanistan's president for 14 long years after the fall of Taliban regime in December 2001 as a result of the post-9/11 US invasion, was more circumspect while criticizing Pakistan. He once described Pakistan as a brother and India a friend of Afghanistan. He referred to Afghanistan and Pakistan as 'conjoined twins' that were inseparable. However, Karzai also kept complaining about existence of safe havens of Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network in Pakistan and lack of support by Islamabad to persuade Taliban to hold peace talks with his government. He termed the Durand Line border as a line of hatred between two brothers. He claimed Pakistani rulers asked him every time during his more than 20 visits to Pakistan that Afghanistan should recognize the Durand Line as an international border.

Pakistan is generally disliked by the Afghan ruling elite even though many of them migrated and enjoyed Pakistani hospitality for years. The most strident in his opposition to Pakistan is Amrullah Saleh, the former Afghan intelligence chief who is presently Afghanistan's 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President. He once described Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as Afghanistan's "enemy number one".<sup>325</sup>

On the Pakistan side, such hostile opinions aren't publicly expressed even if there are complaints galore against Afghanistan's unfriendly policy towards it. Pakistani politicians and media persons aren't obsessed with Afghanistan the way their Afghan counterparts are. Many Pakistanis, particularly the secularists, progressives and nationalists, sympathize with and defend Kabul's policy towards Pakistan. When he was in the opposition, Imran Khan angered the Afghan government when he justified the resistance being offered by the Afghan Taliban to foreign forces as a "jihad" (holy war) as they were fighting for their freedom. When he later became the prime minister, he faced strong criticism from President Ghani's government for his "brotherly advice" that an interim government be formed to move the Afghan peace process forward.

Many Pakistani religious scholars have described the Afghan Taliban as freedom-fighters fighting for the glory of Islam and liberation of their homeland from foreign occupation. General Ziaul Haq preferred the more fundamentalist

---

325. Moeed Yusuf and Scott Smith, "Ashraf Ghani's Pakistan Outreach: Fighting against the Odds," *UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE*, 2015, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR376-Ashraf-Ghani-Pakistan-Outreach-Fighting-against-the-Odds.pdf>.

Afghan mujahideen groups fighting the Soviet occupying forces compared to the moderate nationalists. General Pervez Musharraf alienated the Afghan ethnic minorities by publicly declaring that Pakistan's policy in context of Afghanistan was pro-Pashtun. Many Afghans also express anger when Pakistan objects to close ties between Kabul and New Delhi as they believe this violates their sovereignty and it was time Islamabad started treating Afghanistan as an independent state.

It won't be wrong to say that it is the failure of the foreign policy of both Afghanistan and Pakistan that the two neighbours with so much to share have been unable to have normal relations. It is often said that other countries have interests in Afghanistan but Pakistan has high stakes. The same holds true for Afghanistan. The two countries are so near physically and yet far away politically.

The unfriendly nature of Pak-Afghan relationship hasn't gone out of control to risk a war. There have been border clashes occasionally, though the hostility every time was short-lived and the crisis triggered by it remained manageable. Pakistan's embassy in Kabul and consulates in Herat, Jalalabad and Kandahar came under attack and a few staffers were killed and injured, but Afghanistan's diplomatic missions in Pakistan were well-protected and never attacked.

Afghanistan cannot escape the responsibility that it fired the first salvo which introduced the bitterness in its relations with the newly independent state of Pakistan after the end of British colonial rule. Being the only country in the world to oppose Pakistan's membership in the United Nations in September 1947, Afghanistan laid the foundation of a distrustful relationship that continues to haunt them to-date. Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the internationally recognized Durand Line border has been a major stumbling block in improving the relationship even though it hasn't raised the issue at the United Nations, International Court of Justice or any other world forum because it is unsure of international support for its cause. Pakistan's decision to fence the border at a huge human and material cost was opposed by the Afghan government as it felt Islamabad was trying to put facts on the ground to unilaterally resolve the Durand Line issue once for all.

Linked to the Durand Line issue was Afghanistan's decision to highlight the Pashtunistan issue and champion the cause of the Pakistani Pashtuns and the Baloch. It declared August 31 as Pashtunistan Day, hosted dissident Pashtun and Baloch leaders on more than one occasion and assisted the tribal elders from the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in a bid to destabilize Pakistan. In a tit-for-tat response, Pakistan finally started offering sanctuaries to Afghan dissident Islamists in the mid-1970s. Subsequently, Islamabad backed

the Afghan mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet occupying forces and the Afghan communist regime and later allowed the Afghan Taliban leaders to shift to Pakistan after losing power in late 2001. Kabul reacted by allowing the Pakistani Taliban fleeing the military action in the former FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Malakand division to seek refuge in Afghanistan. Pakistani Baloch separatists too have been harboured by the Afghan authorities. The policy to host each other's enemies is still in place and unless it is brought to an end there cannot be a breakthrough in improving the relations.

One issue that earned Pakistan strong criticism was the unwise and unwarranted statement by the former Pakistan Army chief General Mirza Aslam Beg that Afghanistan could provide "strategic depth" to Pakistan in case of another war with India. It hasn't been the official policy, but it refuses to go away as Pakistan's past pro-Afghan mujahideen and pro-Taliban policies are seen as a manifestation of its wish to find "strategic depth" in Afghanistan through its proxies. Some even unjustifiably accuse Pakistan of conspiring to make Afghanistan its fifth province even though this is something impossible because no outside power, including three superpowers Great Britain, USSR and US, has been able to occupy and rule the country for long. Pakistani rulers have to be too naïve to even consider such a possibility.

The Afghan rulers too have made statements that vitiated the atmosphere. Pakistan protested President Ghani's insensitive remarks that his government had "serious concerns about the violence perpetrated against peaceful protestors and civil activists in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" when he referred to a protest sit-in staged by the ultra-nationalist Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) after the death of one of its activists in Loralai in Balochistan.<sup>326</sup> Pakistan's security officials have been claiming that the PTM, which is critical of the military, was being backed by the Afghan government. In fact, the PTM issue has become yet another irritant in the already uneasy and uncertain Pak-Afghan relations.

Over the years, Pakistan's foreign policy with regard to Afghanistan was shaped primarily by security issues. The world powers such as the erstwhile Soviet Union and currently the US as the sole superpower forced Pakistan's hand to become involved in Afghanistan's affairs and suffer the consequences. In particular, the latter tempted Pakistan to first host, train and equip the Afghan mujahideen to fight the Soviet Red Army troops in Afghanistan and then arm-twisted it post-9/11 to go after the same breed of militants who subsequently morphed into the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State, or Daesh.

---

326. "Gross Interference: FM Qureshi Rejects Afghan President's Statement on Protests in KP, Balochistan," *Dawn*, 7 February 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1462390>.

However, Islamabad cannot absolve itself of the blame as some of its rulers, particularly the military dictators General Ziaul Haq and General Pervez Musharraf, got the country badly involved in the Afghan conflict and then failed to control its negative fallout on Pakistan. It became increasingly difficult to decide whether to adopt a hands-off policy towards Afghanistan or rebalance its interaction with the various players in present-day Afghanistan as siding with one antagonized the others.

India's big entry into the game post-Taliban rule and the rise of its influence in Afghanistan made the situation even more complex for Pakistan. It didn't want to allow India a free hand in its neighbourhood, but was unable to match its \$3 billion reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan coupled with the supply of heavy weapons and training of hundreds of Afghan military officers yearly in Indian military institutions. It was worried the Afghan officers trained in India would return with pro-India views just like those who received training earlier in the Soviet Union and brought home communist ideas. Pakistan announced provision of \$1 billion for Afghanistan's reconstruction in education, healthcare, communications and other sectors despite its own economic troubles, but its contribution unlike India's wasn't properly acknowledged or publicized. Unlike India's, no Pakistan-funded project was inaugurated by presidents Karzai or Ghani and, therefore, never received the kind of importance and publicity it deserved.

Pakistan has always been concerned about facing the two-front threat. The eastern border with India and the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir had been hostile since independence in 1947 but tensions rose on the western border with Afghanistan first due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and then even more after the US military intervention in October 2001.

Lately, the Indian factor has increasingly come to determine Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan. With Afghanistan moving closer to India and taking sides in the India-Pakistan disputes, Islamabad is at its wits end trying to salvage its relationship with Kabul and prevent further Indian inroads into its neighbourhood. The Afghan government boycotted the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in Islamabad in November 2016 by following in the footsteps of India. The summit was cancelled and has yet to be held, paralyzing the SAARC.

Islamabad is of the view that Kabul doesn't realize its sensitivity to New Delhi's growing role in Afghanistan. So wide is the gap between the perceptions about India's role in Afghanistan that Pakistan considers it destabilizing while the Afghan and the US governments believe it is a stabilizing factor. Due to

the never-ending India-Pakistan hostilities, both try to befriend Afghanistan, which may benefit but also suffer whenever it takes sides. India and Pakistan have backed different sides in the Afghan conflict. New Delhi first supported the communist regime in Kabul and then the Northern Alliance while Pakistan backed the Afghan mujahideen and then Taliban. Many Afghans are wary of the proxy wars being played out in Afghanistan and some members of the Afghan intelligentsia have been discussing if it would be possible to keep their country neutral even if it seems unviable at this point in time to avoid the fallout of the inimical relations between their two nuclear-armed neighbours. Afghanistan, it may be recalled, was among the early members of the now defunct Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Pakistan tried and failed to persuade Afghanistan in 2011 to sign a strategic partnership agreement with it not long after Kabul signed such an accord with New Delhi. Karzai set humiliating conditions for signing an agreement, forcing Islamabad not to press it any further. Pakistan even offered to train and equip a brigade of the Afghan National Army that would obviously have fought the Taliban, but its offer had no takers in Kabul. After painstaking efforts, it got President Ghani to send six Afghan cadets to train at the Pakistan Military Academy at Kakul, Abbottabad, but this turned out to be a one-time move as Ghani argued there was domestic opposition to his decision.<sup>327</sup> Islamabad generously offered to open the doors of its military and civil training institutions for Afghan soldiers, cops, diplomats, teachers, healthcare staff, but not many were sent to train in Pakistan due to the poor state of the relationship.

An argument often advanced by Afghan officials is that an overwhelming number of Afghans don't want to undergo training Pakistan. This argument is hard to believe as thousands of Afghans received education in Pakistan and subsequently landed well-paid jobs in the Afghan government and international organizations. The majority of Afghans needing medical treatment abroad come to Pakistan due to affordable transport and medical costs. There has also been a constant rise in the number of Afghan students sitting for competitive examinations organized by Pakistan's diplomatic mission in Afghanistan annually to seek admission in Pakistani universities and professional educational institutions to avail the 6,000 fully-funded scholarships.

Due to the presence of US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan even after the drawdown of the bulk of the coalition troops post-December 2014, the West's policy has clearly been pro-Kabul in respect of the disputes between Islamabad and Kabul. The international opinion too is largely sympathetic to the long-suffering Afghans and in favour of Afghanistan as a state under attack by militants

---

327. Jon Boone, "Afghan Cadets Arrive for First Training in Pakistan," *The Guardian*, 6 February, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/06/afghan-cadets-pakistan-training>.

of every hue and colour. There has been a consensus internationally despite the high levels of corruption by the Afghan ruling circles and poor governance that the country is in need of help to rebuild its war-battered infrastructure. Pakistan is continuously asked to 'do more' in terms of fighting the US-led war on terror and facilitating the Afghan peace process and this demand is unlikely to end until Afghanistan by some miracle becomes peaceful and stable again.

Certain policy decisions by Pakistan contributed to the rise in distrust in Afghanistan with regard to Islamabad's motives. The border management initiated by Islamabad to make it difficult for Afghans, as well as Pakistanis, to cross the 2,640 kilometres long Durand Line without visa and the fencing of the border is seen by Afghans as a move to force Kabul to formally recognize the Durand Line as an international border. The brief police crackdown in Peshawar against Afghan refugees to repatriate after the horrendous December 16, 2014 terrorist attack on the Army Public School in which 147 persons, including 132 schoolchildren, were martyred by Afghanistan-based Pakistani militants was seen by Afghan officials as an attempt to put burden on their government and paralyze its working. There are numerous examples of how the Afghans continue to blame Pakistan for all their problems without being able to substantiate the allegations.

To its credit, Pakistan showed patience and refrained from making counter-allegations despite the provocative statements coming from Afghanistan. It was careful not to antagonize Afghanistan further and push it deeper into India's corner. However, Ghani has taken Afghanistan so close to India that there could now be no turning back as long as he is in power even if Pakistan tries hard and long. Islamabad should have no objection to New Delhi's reconstruction and development assistance to Afghanistan, but it is concerned about the defence and security ties that have allegedly enabled India to use the Afghan soil to destabilize Pakistan through the Pakistani Taliban militants and the Baloch separatists. Many common Pakistanis, however, consider the Afghans generally ungrateful and recount how their country hosted so many Afghan refugees for over four decades and allowed them free movement instead of confining them to refugee camps. They feel President Ghani's insensitive statements are due to his government's growing friendship with Pakistan's arch-rival, India.

The fact that thousands of Pakistani workers, mostly skilled, are working in Afghanistan is evidence enough that the people-to-people relations are friendly. It is also a fact that Pakistan issues more visas to Afghans, all free, than rest of the world combined. The continued presence of 2.7 million Afghan refugees, including an estimated 1.4 million unregistered, in Pakistan is a testament to Islamabad's policy to let them stay until they decide to repatriate voluntarily. This

is despite the fact that Pakistan isn't a signatory to the Geneva protocols about refugees. About 74 percent of Afghan refugees were born in Pakistan and Prime Minister Imran Khan even mooted a proposal to grant them citizenship. That the proposal didn't make any headway was due to the fact that no proper consultation was held with the security establishment, the provincial governments and ethnic groups that feared getting outnumbered in case the Afghan refugees were granted Pakistani citizenship.

An argument given by Pakistan for repatriation of Afghan refugees, who started coming after the communist Saur revolution and later in bigger numbers when Soviet forces invaded Afghanistan, is that militants are able to live and hide among them. The Afghan government doesn't agree with this argument and is now pointing out that Pakistanis too became refugees in Afghanistan after the military operations in erstwhile Fata. Ghani during his earlier visit to Islamabad in June 2019 mentioned seemingly high figures of 350,000 to 500,000 Pakistani refugees in Afghanistan and termed the issue as an "unintended consequence" of Pakistan's military operations.<sup>328</sup>

In September 2020, Islamabad announced "confidence building measures" by offering long-term visas to facilitate Afghans visiting Pakistan for business activities, education and medical treatment in place of traditional one-time, short duration entry visas. It also put into operation more border terminals and extended the timings of crossing the Torkham border 24 hours offering day-night services instead of from sunrise to sunset to boost bilateral and transit trade activities.

A slight improvement in relations was seen since early 2018 when Kabul accepted Islamabad's initiative to set up the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace & Solidarity (APAPPS) with five working groups to focus on solution of critical issues concerning security, cooperation in fighting terrorism, border management, removing impediments in bilateral and Afghan transit trade and repatriation of Afghan refugees. Though the working groups have met only twice in Kabul and Islamabad, the initiative holds promises and provides a framework to discuss issues and mutual complaints.

After many delays, the two governments have lately been trying to resolve issues of bilateral and transit trade as part of their "shared prosperity, peace agenda". There is now hope that the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) would finally be renewed and a Preferential Trade Agreement too would be signed. If this materializes, both countries would benefit and so would

---

328. "Ghani Thunders, Swaraj Diplomatic at 'Heart of Asia' Conference in Capital," *Dawn*, 9 December 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1225210>.

Afghan and Pakistani traders. Though Ghani has been making efforts to reduce dependence on Pakistan by opening new trade routes, establishing air corridors and use Iran's Chabahar seaport on the Arabian Sea with Indian investment to Pakistan, the fact remains that the Pakistani route is the shortest and least expensive. Pakistan's decision to keep the Torkham border open 24 hours instead of opening it at sunrise and closing it at sunset would increase trade, but the potential cannot be utilized fully if the Afghan government doesn't cooperate.

The Pak-Afghan trade has been on the decline, though Pakistan is still Afghanistan's biggest trade partner. The bilateral trade has been falling until it came down from \$2.5b to \$1.2b in 2019 due to poor relations, border closures and drawdown of Nato forces. Pakistan was affected more as the trade was largely in its favour. Pakistani brands have been popular in Afghanistan, more so among Afghans who lived in Pakistan as refugees. In fact, the Pakistani rupee despite the ban is still used in parts of the Afghan provinces bordering Pakistan. The prices of Pakistani products have always been competitive, though Iranian, Chinese and Indian goods are now increasingly competing with those from Pakistan.

Big projects like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and the CASA-1000 to bring electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan despite the slow progress have created hope to strengthen regional connectivity and serve as a catalyst to improve Pak-Afghan relations. The possible extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) from Pakistan to Afghanistan once the latter becomes peaceful would also bind the interests of the two countries along with that of China and improve connectivity. This would also benefit the under-developed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including ex-Fata, and Balochistan as the CPEC extension to Afghanistan would be undertaken through the two provinces.

The burden of history has continued to haunt the Pak-Afghan relations. It is no secret that Pakistani political dissidents, including the leaders of the erstwhile National Awami Party (NAP) such as Ajmal Khattak, Azam Hoti, Afrasiab Khattak, Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, Sardar Attaullah Mengal, Sher Mohammad Marri (Sherrof), Wali Khan Kukikhel, etc were welcomed and hosted by the Afghan government in the past. The Al-Zulfikar group's founders Murtaza Bhutto and his brother Shahnawaz Bhutto, sons of late Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, also found refuge in Afghanistan after their men hijacked a PIA passenger plane to Kabul and killed an army officer on board. Some of these elements fought against the state of Pakistan and alleged terrorist attacks.<sup>329</sup>

---

329. Shaikh Aziz, "A Leaf from History — Enter: Al-Zulfikar," *Dawn*, May 10, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1180690>.

There is no denying the fact that many Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network leaders have been residing in Pakistan with their families and this was publicly acknowledged by Sartaj Aziz, the foreign affairs advisor to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, during a visit to the US in March 2016. He said it is through these Pakistan-based Afghan Taliban leaders that Islamabad exercised some influence on the group. However, Pakistan government functionaries, the latest being Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, have been arguing that claims about Pakistan's influence on the Taliban is "exaggerated."<sup>330</sup>

A fact not mentioned is that for more than a decade now, Pakistani Taliban and their allies and Baloch separatists have been enabled to have sanctuaries in Afghanistan and plan attacks against Pakistan. Though many global militant groups such as Al-Qaeda, the ISIS Khorasan, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Jihad Union, East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) too have found refuge in Afghanistan, those focusing on Pakistan are the highest in number. Among them are Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), its splinter groups Jamaatul Ahrar and Hezbul Ahrar which recently reunited with the TTP, the Lashkar-i-Islam whose head Mangal Bagh was killed in a bomb explosion in Nangarhar, Afghanistan in March 2021, the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and certain smaller militant factions. Some of the global terrorist groups, particularly ISIS, also have Pakistani militants as members and were based in Pakistan's erstwhile FATA before being evicted as a result of a massive military action. They too want to avenge their losses by targeting Pakistan.

A recent report by a UN monitoring team which tracks terrorist groups estimated that from 6,000 to 6,500 Pakistani militants were posing a threat to Pakistan from their bases in Afghanistan.<sup>331</sup> The numbers could be higher if one were to include the Baloch separatists and other smaller groups. In the past, every Afghan government was in a state of denial about presence of Pakistani militants in Afghanistan as it weakened its position that Pakistan was harbouring Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network, which is part and parcel of the Taliban but has a history of raising donations and undertaking operations independently since the days of the Afghan "*jihad*" against the Soviet occupying forces. President Ghani finally conceded the presence of Pakistani militants in Afghanistan during a visit to Islamabad in June 2018 when he claimed that his forces had carried out 40 operations against the Pakistani Taliban, including TTP head Maulana Fazlullah. It was no longer possible to deny their presence when senior Pakistani

---

330. "Pak Influence on Afghan Taliban Exaggerated: FM," *The Express Tribune*, 24 April, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2296478/pak-influence-on-afghan-taliban-exaggerated-fm>.

331. United Nations Security Council, "The Eleventh Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team," 2020, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2020\\_415\\_e.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_415_e.pdf).

militant figures such as Maulana Fazlullah, Khan Said Sajna, Mangal Bagh, Army Public School, Peshawar attack mastermind Khalifa Omar Mansoor, and the founder of ISIS Khorasan Hafiz Saeed Khan Orakzai were killed in US drone strikes or military action in Afghanistan.

The last ISIS Khorasan head Aslam Farooqi aka Abdullah Orakzai was captured by the Afghan forces along with his men in Nangarhar province in April 2020 and a year later Kabul offered to deliver him to Pakistan in exchange for one or two Afghan Taliban leaders said to be in Pakistan's custody. Islamabad had earlier asked the Afghan government to hand over him over to Pakistan as he was a Pakistani national and was a wanted man. However, Pakistan is unlikely to hand over any Afghan Taliban leader at this critical stage of the Afghan peace process to Kabul even though it had done so in some cases in the past. Pakistan cannot afford to cause resentment among the Afghan Taliban and make it even more difficult for it to persuade the group to remain committed to the peace process and agree to a ceasefire.

Also, the Afghan government recently released another Pakistani militant, Maulana Faqir Mohammad, who was once the deputy leader of the TTP, and two of his aides after keeping them in custody for eight years at the Bagram prison. The presence of the ISIS Khorasan head Aslam Farooqi and TTP's Maulana Faqir Mohammad was yet another evidence that Pakistani militants were present in significant numbers in Afghanistan.

The ongoing Afghan peace process is arguably the best opportunity not only to make Afghanistan stable and peaceful again, but also serve as a catalyst for improving Pak-Afghan relations. In fact, the fate of the intra-Afghan peace talks would determine the future of relations between the two countries. When Prime Minister Imran Khan paid his first-ever visit to Afghanistan in November 2020, hopes were raised when he and President talked about starting a new era in their relations and a document "Shared vision to support peace and stability in both countries and the wider region" was signed. However, the decisions with timelines taken during the visit have yet to be implemented. By December 2020, they had agreed to re-energise joint intelligence service-led work on analyzing, mapping and cooperating against the "enemies of peace and those undermining the peace process". By January 1, 2021, the two sides had also decided to finalize joint proposals for refugees' return and promoting regional connectivity. The Afghan president was to visit Pakistan in first quarter of 2021, but this too hasn't happened.

In the Afghan peace process, Pakistan's role is of a peacemaker, or facilitator to be precise. It arranged the first direct talks between the Taliban and Afghan

government in July 2015 in Islamabad and Murree before the process was disrupted by the news that Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar had died two years ago. Before that, Pakistan played a key role with Chinese cooperation to arrange a meeting between the Taliban and Afghan government. Pakistan helped facilitate the Taliban-US talks in Doha that continued for 18 months and culminated in the peace deal on February 29, 2020. When President Trump scrapped the peace talks with the Taliban in September 2019, Pakistan stepped in the very next month to revive the negotiations by arranging a meeting of Taliban deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar with Zalmay Khalilzad, the US special envoy for Afghanistan Reconciliation, in Islamabad.

In a way, Pakistan's role is of a trouble-shooter due to its old contacts with Taliban and this will continue in the more challenging intra-Afghan negotiations that began on September 12, 2020 in Doha and have made little progress until now. However, Pakistan alone cannot make things happen and it has to be a shared responsibility with the US, China, Russia, Qatar and some other countries playing their role to persuade the two sides to show flexibility in the talks. Due to its distrustful relations with the Afghan government, Pakistan often faces a dilemma whether to play a visible or discreet role in peacemaking as Kabul continues to be suspicious of Islamabad's intentions. Pakistan also has to be wary of 'spoilers' which in its view include India, which in the past didn't want peace talks with Taliban and the group's inclusion in any future government set-up in Afghanistan, and non-state actors such as ISIS Khorasan, Al-Qaeda, TTP, Baloch separatist militant groups. Islamabad is aware that return of peace in Afghanistan would benefit it, but it is keen that any negotiated political settlement should ensure that action is taken against anti-Pakistan militant groups that have sanctuaries in Afghanistan and that the Afghan soil isn't used by India's RAW with the cooperation of the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) to destabilize Pakistan. Another important objective for Islamabad is the repatriation of Afghan refugees after having stayed for four decades in Pakistan.

As they say, you can change friends but not neighbours. Beyond their geographical closeness, Afghanistan and Pakistan also share history, religion, culture and certain races and languages. They have had a troubled relationship at times, but have nevertheless managed to maintain uninterrupted political, diplomatic, trade and cultural ties. The way forward can be explored and progress achieved if there is sincerity of purpose and realization by both sides that they have to co-exist.

## Exploring the Way Forward – Pakistan’s Perspective

- 1) As the past cannot be buried and issues such as the Durand Line border, Pakhtunistan, Pakistan’s support for Afghan mujahideen and Afghan Taliban and safe havens for Pakistani militants in Afghanistan continue to negatively affect relations and haunt the future, Islamabad and Kabul need to make an effort to resolve both the less and more contentious matters in terms of priority to ensure improvement in relations.
- 2) The blame-game, which mostly originates from Afghanistan, ought to be halted by agreeing to a ceasefire of statements. It helped in the past and is necessary not to vitiate the atmosphere. Instead of doing diplomacy through the media, the two sides should use the relevant forums such as the APAPPS to lodge and discuss complaints.
- 3) Afghanistan and Pakistan have to interact bilaterally, not through other countries as it is too important a relationship to be hyphenated by bringing other countries into the equation. There is a need to separate Pak-Afghan relations as far as possible from relations with the US, India, others.
- 4) Though security issues (safe havens for militants, lack of cooperation in fighting terrorism) are the most important and need greater effort to be resolved, progress could be made on less contentious issues. Bilateral and transit trade issues ought to be resolved as these would benefit both. The water sharing issue concerning River Kabul needs to be tackled before it becomes intractable. The long-standing Afghan refugees issue has to be resolved on humanitarian basis.
- 5) Pakistan has to continue using whatever influence it has on Afghan Taliban to make a success of the peace process. The issue of safe havens has to be tackled head-on following agreement on steps to be taken on reciprocal basis.
- 6) Any agreements that are made should be implemented and timelines specified. There is a need for clarity in terms of agreements so that these aren’t differently interpreted.
- 7) Islamabad and Kabul should allow and enable the media to work in the two countries and facilitate exchange of newspapers and periodicals. TV channels should be allowed landing rights through special, easier terms and conditions and the ban on Pakistani newspapers imposed by Afghan government since 2012 should be lifted.
- 8) A number of Track II dialogues are taking place even if they have slowed down, but these need to be regularized and their recommendations given importance by the respective governments. Also, joint security and trade core groups could be formed at the level of Track II.

- 9) Afghanistan has been arguing that Pakistan has to accept it as an independent and sovereign state. Pakistan must give the assurances that Afghanistan is seeking to make this happen.
- 10) Overcoming distrust is a major challenge. The mistrust is mutual so both sides will have to do their part of the job to overcome it.
- 11) Defeating ISIS (Daesh) Khorasan chapter is a common cause as it has been threatening both countries. Suspicions about ISIS and its sponsors exist. To start with, Afghanistan and Pakistan could cooperate to tackle ISIS. Other countries threatened by Daesh may also join this grand alliance against ISIS. There is some cooperation in polio eradication as Afghanistan and Pakistan are the only countries in the world that are still reporting polio cases. They should also cooperate in tackling the narcotics issue.
- 12) It would be mutually beneficial to strengthen the plus points in the otherwise uneasy relationship. The plus points are good people-to-people contacts, growing medical tourism, long stay of Afghan refugees in Pakistan without causing any riots, inter-marriages, soft power in the fields of sports (cricket, other games), culture, literature, shared languages, music, poetry.
- 13) The scholarships for Afghan students have been raised to 6,000 and Pakistan is capable of offering more. Afghans educated in Pakistan should be treated so well that they carry good memories and become its ambassadors in Afghanistan.
- 14) The exact number of Pakistanis working in Afghanistan has been a matter of debate, but at one point earlier the total was stated to be nearly 100,000. They are mostly skilled, are much in demand and have found gainful employment.
- 15) Pakistan has funded a number of projects in Afghanistan in education, healthcare, communication. Not much is known about these projects such as schools, different faculties in universities, hospitals, roads, trainings, etc. It will be a nice gesture if the Afghan President inaugurated a few of these projects to raise their profile and acknowledge Pakistan's contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction.
- 16) Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) was a promising framework when it was set up in 2018 with five working groups focused on key issues. It was a Pakistani initiative and Afghanistan readily agreed to give it a try. However, the working groups have met twice only and have yet to make any real contribution to improve relations.
- 17) Islamabad tried hard to get Ghani to make a visit as he had been to Pakistan once in November 2014 within two months after his installation as President and then in December 2015 to attend the Heart of Asia conference on

Afghanistan in Islamabad. He finally paid his third visit in June 2019, though all the friendly talk and promise by the two sides to start a new era in their relations didn't materialize. Abdullah Abdullah was invited on numerous occasions, but he stayed away until agreeing to come in late 2020 after a gap of 12 long years. The high-profile visits may not have achieved the desired results, but the interaction kept hopes alive and showed that the two sides were keen to mend ties.

- 18) Islamabad did the right thing by inviting Afghan politicians from almost all ethnic groups and regions and belonging to different parties to visit Pakistan to dilute the impression that it was unquestionably pro-Taliban. Apart from Ghani and Abdullah, others who visited Pakistan in 2020 were Gulbaddin Hekmatyar, the Hazara Shiite leaders Mohammad Mohaqiq and Karim Khalili, Wolesi Jirga (National Assembly) Speaker Mir Rahman Rahmani with a large delegation of members of parliament, and others. This should continue and will have a positive impact in Afghanistan as Pakistan's recent policy has been critical of Taliban as it has been calling for a ceasefire, asking the group to attend the proposed Istanbul peace conference instead of boycotting it and opposing return of Taliban's Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.
- 19) Prime Minister Imran Khan paid his first-ever visit to Afghanistan in November 2020 and hopes were raised when it was announced that the two governments would start intelligence cooperation by December 15, 2020 to combat terrorism. It didn't happen as was the case in 2011 when even a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for intelligence cooperation between the ISI and NDS was signed. This could be given another try even if its chances of success aren't bright.
- 20) Pakistan should seek friendship with all Afghans, not only with Pashtuns, and with all groups, not Taliban alone. As a principle, Pakistan should recognize and work with the government in Kabul only.
- 21) Even now after 20 years of conflict in Afghanistan in the post-Taliban period, many Afghans keep asking as to what Pakistan wants in Afghanistan. Some Pakistanis ask the same question about Afghanistan. It is time it is clearly stated in believable terms as to what do they really want.



## Afghanistan Peace Process: Missed Opportunities

Maleeha Lodhi

Winston Churchill once said that the Americans can be counted on to do the right thing after they have tried everything else.<sup>332</sup> This is especially apt in describing America's experience in Afghanistan. After the 9/11 attacks on the US, its political leaders tried 'everything else' – invading Afghanistan, military surge, counter-insurgency, and of course, expending much blood and treasure on a project that also aimed at remaking Afghanistan.

Twenty years later, President Joe Biden in a landmark address on April 14 2021, announced that it was time to end the 'forever war'– America's longest.<sup>333</sup> It was a bold and frank admission of the fact that nothing more could be achieved by retaining US troops in the country and they would all be pulled out by September 11, the twentieth anniversary of the attacks on America. He said once Al Qaeda had been degraded and Osama bin Laden killed a decade earlier, the US objective was achieved but its presence continued in Afghanistan for the next decade for reasons that were increasingly unclear. Overruling the Pentagon's advice for a gradual conditions-based drawdown, Biden said: "We cannot continue the cycle of extending or expanding our military presence in Afghanistan hoping to create the ideal conditions for our withdrawal, expecting a different result."<sup>334</sup>

That announcement marks the closing of an era of US military intervention in Afghanistan. In looking back at the tumultuous developments following 9/11 it would be instructive to recall where Pakistan stood then and what advice it gave to Washington, where I was Pakistan's Ambassador at that time. We conveyed three key messages at the highest level. One, that war would not solve anything as there was no military solution and instead a diplomatic path should

---

332. Scott Horsely, "A Churchill 'Quote' That U.S. Politicians Will Never Surrender," NPR, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2013/10/28/241295755/a-churchill-quote-that-u-s-politicians-will-never-surrender>.

333. Steve Holland and Phil Stewart, "'Time to End the Forever War: Biden to Start U.S. Afghanistan Pullout on 1 May 1,'" *Reuters*, 14 April 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/biden-ready-announce-us-withdrawal-even-peace-eludes-afghanistan-2021-04-14/>.

334. *Ibid.*

be pursued. Two, if the US was bent upon taking military action in Afghanistan it should take the form of a “short, surgical strike” and not morph into what the local population would come to see as an occupation. And three, the US should draw a distinction between Al Qaeda and the Taliban, as the latter would have to be engaged in negotiations. None of this advice was obviously taken and as they say, the rest is history. A decade and a half later the US came to accept the fact that there could only be a negotiated end to the war and that the US military presence in Afghanistan was a source of the problem and not the solution. But till Washington reached that conclusion the reliance on military means to deal with the situation not only continued but kept intensifying at great cost to the region’s peace and stability and to America itself.

Even as Pakistan became a frontline state in the US/NATO campaign to defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan it continued to convey to the US as well as its Western allies the need to institute a diplomatic track to explore the possibility of finding a path to a political solution to the conflict. Having suffered the multidimensional blowback from its involvement in the previous long war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, Islamabad was all too familiar with the destabilizing consequences of another conflict in its neighborhood and the deleterious impact it would have especially on its border, frontier region. Other than Afghanistan it was Pakistan that had suffered the most from conflict there. For decades, war and strife in Afghanistan produced grave consequences for Pakistan’s security, stability and economic development. Pakistan also became a major victim of terrorism originating from Afghanistan. The establishment of peace and stability was therefore a vital interest for Pakistan and drove its consistent efforts to persuade the US and other stake holders to consider a policy of seeking a political solution.

As US involvement deepened in Afghanistan after 2001 Pakistan came under constant pressure to ‘do more’ to help international forces defeat the Taliban. But Islamabad never shied away from its view that a military solution would prove elusive so the sooner political and diplomatic means were adopted to promote a negotiated settlement the better. There could only be a political solution to the war and that required engaging the Taliban. But again, this view did not find favour in Washington and a number of opportunities were squandered along the way to explore or pursue this option. The greatest lost opportunity was at the Bonn conference in 2001 which excluded the Taliban in what the UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi later described as the ‘original sin’<sup>335</sup> in the international effort to chart a new course for Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban government.

---

335. D. Parvaz, “Is Bonn Doomed to Fail?,” [www.aljazeera.com](http://www.aljazeera.com), 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2011/12/5/bonn-talks-on-afghanistan-doomed-to-fail>.

This doomed the US-led western effort from the very start.

The US did not come around to accepting that a political solution had to be sought until it saw the futility of the military surge ordered by President Barack Obama in 2009. Years later Washington began to talk of a diplomatic surge to supplement the military campaign. But even when the White House began to consider the possibility of opening a channel of communication with the Taliban, the talk-and-fight strategy favoured by the Pentagon continued in Afghanistan. This sharply circumscribed the space for any meaningful 'diplomatic surge'. A European diplomat once depicted this stance rather graphically: "the U.S. military only wants to talk with their boots on the Taliban's neck."<sup>336</sup>

For years even when American political leaders and diplomats acknowledged the need to speak to the Taliban the Pentagon resisted the notion of talks with Taliban leaders. They embraced a policy of "reintegration," aimed at splitting and weakening the Taliban – which was to fail – and not "reconciliation"<sup>337</sup> which meant negotiating with them. The first indication of change in the US stance came in a speech by the then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in February 2011 when she declared U.S. readiness to "reconcile with an adversary," Ms. Clinton spelled out three "red lines for reconciliation" with the Taliban: "They must renounce violence ... abandon their alliance with Al Qaeda, and abide by the Constitution." The crucial shift in the US position was: the three redlines were no longer deemed as pre-conditions but as objectives — as "necessary outcomes of any negotiation."<sup>338</sup>

But US policy remained riddled with contradictions. Mounting US pressure on Pakistan to take military action against Taliban leaders – at the same time that the US sought to engage the Taliban – left Islamabad wondering whether Washington wanted to target or talk to Taliban leaders. Pakistan's then Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani urged an inclusive Afghan peace process that did not exclude anyone willing to talk. He also told his US interlocutors that Pakistan should not be pushed in a direction that the Americans will not eventually take themselves – prescient advice. And he continued to press US officials to pursue a serious path of negotiations in an unambiguous and not half-serious way.<sup>339</sup>

---

336. Anatol Lieven and Maleeha Lodhi, "Opinion Bring in the Taliban," *The New York Times*, 22 April 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/23/opinion/23iht-edlieven23.html>.

337. Scott Smith and Colin Cookman, "State-Strengthening in Afghanistan 2001–2014: Learning from the Past to Inform the Future," *United States Institute of Peace*, 2015..

338. Anatol Lieven and Maleeha Lodhi, "Opinion | Bring in the Taliban," *The New York Times*, 22 April 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/23/opinion/23iht-edlieven23.html>.

339. Maleeha Lodhi, "Time for Peace Talks," *Atlantic Council*, 31 May 2011, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/time-for-peace-talks/>.

Eventually secret US contacts got underway while the Taliban increasingly signaled their interest in a negotiated settlement. In 2012 during a visit to Kabul, President Obama offered an open door for dialogue to the Taliban and called for a negotiated peace. Many members of the Taliban, he said, “have indicated an interest in reconciliation” so “a path of peace is now set before them.”<sup>340</sup> The acknowledgement that his administration was in “direct discussions” with the Taliban marked the first time that the US took public ownership at the highest level of the secret contacts in the previous year with Taliban representatives aimed at establishing a peace process. Ultimately, US-Taliban contacts led to the opening of the Taliban office in Doha in June 2013 despite the many delays caused by Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s opposition. Pakistan played a quiet but key role in facilitating this important development.<sup>341</sup>

The US agreed to the Taliban office opening in exchange for a statement that Taliban representatives read out at its inauguration of disavowing any links with Al Qaeda. Pakistan played an important role in the exchange and finalization of drafts of this statement between the US and Taliban leaders. But this promising start was aborted when Karzai threw a fit over the symbols used by the Taliban at the office. This led to its abrupt closure and to the Americans abandoning a nascent dialogue aimed at finding a negotiated end to the war. Furious at being shut out of secret contacts between American officials and Taliban representatives during the course of 2011 and 2012 this was Karzai’s way of striking back. Although the diplomatic fracas over the office was widely ascribed to misunderstandings created by Qatar’s handling of the arrangements, Karzai used this to halt the process. For their part US representatives held back on direct talks that were to take place with the Taliban.

Valuable time was lost and an opportunity to install a peace process was squandered. While violence continued in Afghanistan the diplomatic momentum dissipated and the peace effort was put in cold storage by subsequent foot dragging by Kabul. The problem with Washington’s peace efforts was that these took place hesitantly, in fits and starts, and more often than not, became hostage to the Afghan government’s prevarication and procrastination. While Pakistan continued to persuade the US to restart the Doha process this did not happen.

Talks ground to a halt not least because of the Obama administration’s inability to put its weight behind its own policy of seeking a peaceful end to the war. He was unable to stand up to his military which had little if any interest in

---

340. Matt Compton, “President Obama on Ending the War in Afghanistan,” 01 May 2012, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2012/05/01/president-obama-ending-war-afghanistan>.

341. <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/30/754409450/the-key-role-pakistan-is-playing-in-u-s-taliban-talks>

negotiating with the Taliban and kept giving a rosy picture of how the war effort was going, which were far from being grounded in reality.

Pakistan's efforts to promote an intra-Afghan dialogue yielded an important outcome in July 2015. At President Ashraf Ghani's request, Pakistan facilitated a dialogue between representatives of the Afghan government and the Taliban. Islamabad's sole aim was to establish direct contact between the Taliban and the Unity Government that had failed thus far to materialise by US attempts. As in the past, Islamabad was convinced that talks between Kabul and the Taliban were the only way to end Afghanistan's long night of tragedy and suffering. The first round of intra-Afghan talks was held in Murree on July 5, 2015, which both sides characterised as encouraging. Pakistan's foreign secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry acted as 'mediator' as the two sides stated their positions. It was an acrimonious exchange but the very fact that they were in the same room represented an advance. The meeting was also attended by US and Chinese representatives as observers. But plans to build upon this never materialized. A few days before the second round whose date was set for July 31, 2015, untimely revelations about the death of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban derailed the whole process. It was never revived.<sup>342</sup>

Fast forward to the advent of the Trump administration in 2017: The new US president had made an election pledge to bring American troops home and often stated the intention to end America's long involvement in a war that had cost the US so much in blood and treasure. His long-held view was that Afghanistan was a quagmire from which an exit, not staying on, was the best course. Trump's clear and firm views drove US efforts to pursue a peace process to enable a US departure from Afghanistan. These efforts picked up momentum in late 2018. With a US pullout as the main goal, talks proceeded with the Taliban in Doha through his special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad who had been appointed in September 2018.<sup>343</sup>

Direct talks between the US and the Taliban for over a year finally yielded the historic Doha accord in February 2020. Again, Pakistan played an important role in helping to bring this about. The crux of the Doha agreement lay in Washington's commitment to a total but phased withdrawal in return for the Taliban's commitment to prevent Afghanistan's soil from being used by terrorists and agreeing to intra-Afghan talks. The rest consisted of aspirational goals and

---

342. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

343. James Cunningham et al., "The Way Forward in Afghanistan: How Biden Can Achieve Sustainable Peace and US Security," *Atlantic Council*, 13 January 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-way-forward-in-afghanistan-how-biden-can-achieve-sustainable-peace-and-us-security/>.

timelines, with the Afghan parties left with the responsibility to negotiate a ceasefire and a political settlement to end the war. The agreement called for intra-Afghan talks to begin following ten days of the agreement on 10 March 2020. Reduction of violence and a “permanent and comprehensive ceasefire” were regarded as a top agenda item in intra-Afghan negotiations according to part four of the Doha Agreement.

The joint declaration between the US and Afghan government, announced along with the Doha agreement in February 2020, envisaged a ‘framework agreement’ to emerge from intra-Afghan talks. This involved settling contentious issues of provisional power sharing, Constitution and human rights, and equally vexed matters relating to demobilization of Taliban forces and their reintegration once the talks got going.

On 10 March 2020 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution welcoming the US-Taliban agreement as a significant step “towards ending the war and opening the door to intra-Afghan negotiations”. This marked an important development as it conferred international legitimacy to the Doha agreement. But other developments proved far more consequential for the future of the peace process.<sup>344</sup>

It was never going to be simple or easy. But impediments encountered every step of the way to launch intra-Afghan talks were far more challenging than anticipated. This not only delayed a process that was planned to begin in March but also underlined the long and grinding road that lay ahead for the parties to reach any semblance of agreement on the country’s future once negotiations began. The principal hurdle that emerged was on the issue of prisoners. Under the Doha deal the Afghan government was committed to release up to 5,000 Taliban prisoners. But deeming this as leverage Kabul began releasing them in tranches and way short of 5,000. From the outset the Taliban’s condition to join intra-Afghan talks was the release of all 5,000 prisoners.

Despite US pressure President Ashraf Ghani dragged his feet on the prisoners issue arguing that many of them were dangerous militants or guilty of serious human rights abuses. The Taliban regarded this as just a pretext to delay the talks and the impasse continued for months, which meant valuable time was lost at an important juncture when Presidential elections were looming in America. In fact, there was media speculation at the time that the Afghan government was deliberately delaying the talks until the US election. The aim was to try, if Biden won, to persuade his administration to change course or to at least slow down

---

344. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s-res-2513.php>

the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, which under the Doha agreement was continuing apace and was in fact proceeding ahead of schedule.

Washington stepped up diplomatic efforts to urge the Afghan parties to show flexibility to break the stalemate over the prisoner swap. This saw intense pressure on Kabul and engagement at the highest US level – a phone call by President Trump to the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and visit by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Kabul. Pakistan's help was also sought in meetings in April 2020 between Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa and Khalilzad who was accompanied by General Austin Miller, US and NATO forces commander in Afghanistan. It took months for these efforts to bear fruit.

Finally, after a protracted delay, the intra-Afghan dialogue kicked off in Qatar on 12 September 2020. In his statement at the opening ceremony of the talks, Pompeo said that the Doha agreement had set the stage for the intra-Afghan negotiations and it was now up to the Afghans to “seize the moment.” Although the negotiations were shrouded in secrecy what was apparent was that the two sides were engaged in ‘talks about talks’. A ‘contact group’ of half a dozen negotiators from each side met almost daily to work out the rules or TORs (terms of reference) to govern the talks and an agenda for substantive negotiations. Progress was exceedingly slow as fundamental issues were at stake in even setting an agenda.<sup>345</sup>

Although the talks were principally about agenda setting, discussions were also reported to have touched on the two big issues: a ceasefire and some form of transitional arrangement, the first a priority for Kabul and the latter for the Taliban. The Afghan government insisted on at least a ‘humanitarian’ ceasefire but the Taliban made it clear that agreement on a reduction of violence or permanent ceasefire could only emerge during the talks when there was an understanding on a political settlement and not at the outset of negotiations.

On a transitional government, their positions could not have been more divergent. The Doha agreement left it ambiguous whether an interim government would be needed to pave the way for what the accord called the “new post settlement Afghan Islamic government”. The deliberately vague formulations were aimed to create space for the Afghan parties to determine their own future political arrangements. Kabul dismissed the possibility of any interim or provisional government arguing that this was inconsistent with the Constitution. The

---

345. Maleeha Lodhi, “Moment of Opportunity,” *Dawn*, 28 September 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1582056>.

Taliban however seemed unlikely to accept power sharing without a transitional political arrangement being installed.

On the Constitution too, the positions of the two parties were as far apart as they could be, even though these issues were to come up for discussion later in substantive negotiations. Once the Constitution was included as an agenda item in the talks as part of the 'political framework' that had to be eventually agreed, it would obviously open it up for changes that President Ghani was loath to accept. The Taliban's demand for Afghanistan to be declared an emirate or shariah state was obviously resisted by Kabul, which instead insisted that the country should remain a 'republic' as provided by the Constitution.

The Doha talks moved slowly while in Afghanistan there was an uptick in violence which vitiated the atmosphere for the talks. Reports from time to time that the parties were nearing agreement over procedures and TORs for negotiations never really materialized. Then with the US poll intervening the Doha process ground to a halt. After Biden's election victory the new administration announced it would review Afghan policy and revisit the Doha accord. This put the talks on hold as both parties adopted a wait-and-see approach.

Prior to the Biden announcement and completion of its policy review, a letter was leaked written by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to President Ghani. This set out a peace plan whose details were also shared with the Afghan parties by American diplomats. The US diplomatic initiative – according to the leaked letter – had four elements. One, a meeting convened by the UN representatives of Russia, US, Pakistan, Iran and India to forge regional consensus to support the peace plan. Two, a draft peace agreement to expedite negotiations on a settlement and ceasefire. Its key proposals included setting up a transitional government once agreement was reached. Three, for Turkey to host a meeting between the two sides to seal a peace deal. And four, a 90-day reduction in violence to avert an offensive by the Taliban.<sup>346</sup>

By clearly communicating that a political settlement was a priority in this letter – not just the military withdrawal, as it was for President Trump – a path to secure this was outlined. An eight- page draft peace agreement drawn up by the US stated that it was intended to jumpstart peace talks. This set out "principles for governance, security, and rule of law" and offered options for power sharing. It was claimed that the draft reflected a variety of ideas and priorities of both Afghan parties and was intended to focus the negotiators on some of the most fundamental issues they would need to address. That the US itself came up with this draft showed its exasperation with the lack of movement in the Doha

---

346. <https://www.vox.com/2021/3/8/22319420/afghanistan-blinken-letter-leak-peace-plan>

talks but also that it was in a hurry and sought therefore to force the pace of the peace process. But it ran the risk of overprescribing the elements of an agreement – drafting one itself rather than letting it emerge from negotiations. The US said it was not seeking to dictate terms and that its peace agreement was a discussion draft. But it remained an open question whether this would really help the intra-Afghan talks.<sup>347</sup>

A few weeks later came the most consequential development – President Biden’s announcement of a complete military pullout from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. The US President had long been of the view that retaining troops in Afghanistan was not only untenable but lost any rationale once the Al Qaeda threat had been degraded. That is how he framed it in his much-anticipated April 14, 2021 address. He added another compelling reason for his decision – new strategic challenges that Washington needed to focus on.

With this announcement the US started pulling out its forces from 1 May 2021 and is expected to complete the drawdown by September 11, a date of symbolic significance. Where will this leave the peace process? At the time of writing, plans were in train for the UN and Turkey to convene the ‘Istanbul Conference on the Afghan Peace Process’ at the behest of Washington. Its aim was to accelerate the intra-Afghan dialogue and take it forward from where it was left off in Doha in November 2020. The UN described the Istanbul conference as an “important opportunity to put in place a concrete plan to end the war”.<sup>348</sup>

Whether the announcement that the Americans would finally leave will force the Afghan parties towards accommodation, as some hope, is yet to be seen. At the UN-led peace summit talks between the Afghan government and Taliban will be preceded by a meeting of foreign ministers and representatives of regional states, which is expected to evolve a ‘unified approach’ in support of an inclusive peace process and call for a reduction of violence.

Pakistan’s interest lies in the success of intra-Afghan talks that can produce a negotiated end to the war and a lasting settlement preferably before the full withdrawal of US forces. That is what Islamabad has meant by its repeated calls for a “responsible withdrawal.” It does not want its neighbor to descend into political chaos or see a replay of the brutal civil war of the 1990s. It regards an inclusive post-settlement government in Kabul as the best way to ensure peace and stability. It also sought assurances that Afghan territory will not be used

---

347. Maleeha Lodhi, “Challenging Roadmap to Peace,” *Dawn*, 22 March 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1613932>.

348. Maleeha Lodhi, “The End of America’s Forever War,” *Arab News PK*, 19 April 2021, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1845126>.

against Pakistan and remains ready to do what it can to help the peace process. But it will be up to the Afghan parties to make the difficult compromises needed to secure a peace settlement.

Three scenarios can be envisioned for what might happen in Afghanistan as the withdrawal of US/ NATO forces speeds up. In scenario one, the exit of foreign troops compels the war-weary Afghan parties to negotiate and they are able to reach some kind of modus vivendi with incentives from the international community of economic assistance without which the Afghan economy would collapse. This leads to an interim government being installed followed by a more permanent and inclusive arrangement under a revised Constitution. In the second scenario the peace talks fail or do not even get off the ground. The Taliban calculate that negotiations are of no use as they make a bid to expand their control, strike deals with local strongmen and eventually overrun Kabul and assume power. But taking over Kabul doesn't mean the Taliban secure the entire country. Opposition to their rule emerges and fighting continues possibly sucking in regional powers into the Afghan conflict.

In the third scenario the power vacuum left by the US and its allies is filled by different groups who establish their sway over different regions with the Taliban controlling much of the countryside but not Kabul or other cities and some regions. This leads to chaos, revival of civil strife and the de-facto fragmentation of the country with destabilizing consequences for Afghanistan as indeed for Pakistan and the entire region.

The best-case scenario is obviously the first. But the risk of other scenarios materializing may be higher, in which the road map laid out at Istanbul could be upended by the collapse of intra-Afghan negotiations or the failure of talks to resolve core issues even if the dialogue somehow gets going. The third scenario can then kick in with devastating consequences for Afghanistan. Much as Pakistan, like other stake holders, would hope and work for the first scenario it would have to prepare itself to deal with the fallout of the less hopeful ones. If Afghanistan's 'forever war' continues the repercussions for Pakistan will be serious and far reaching. For Afghanistan it would further prolong the agony and suffering of its people who have already been through so much trial and tribulation. That is why it is imperative for the Afghans to win the peace even though that is always much harder than waging war.

## Afghanistan Peace Talks: Envisioning a Political Settlement

Shabnum Nasimi

Two decades ago, the UN, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the United States, alongside at least seventy five donor or troop-contributing states, went into Afghanistan to oust the Taliban, who were harbouring Osama bin Laden and other al-Qaeda figures linked to the 9/11 attacks and to fund reconstruction efforts. Today the world portrays Afghanistan as an “endless war.” Since 2001, Afghanistan and its partners have tried to implement successive policies of counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and reconciliation; none of which has succeeded in ending terrorist attacks carried out by the Taliban and their allies. The people of Afghanistan have been the main victims of a war that has dragged on, virtually without any interruption, since 1978.

The international community and Afghanistan allies have invested heavily both militarily and civilian, to training the police and army,<sup>349</sup> disarm and demobilise illegal militias; justice reform and human rights monitoring; programs to train female entrepreneurs; officials, and police leaders, education, schools, and curriculum development; constitutional reform and elections; and national programs to revive the rural economy. The United States, the European Union, UK and countless others made major contributions to end Taliban insurgency, to feed, educate and stabilise the country, and to help develop a government that is accountable, transparent and can protect its citizens. But despite all these efforts, the war to rid the country of the Taliban never stopped, instead violence continued.

In a mission to end the forty-two years of war, a sustained and comprehensive peace negotiating process involving the conflict parties began in September 2019.<sup>350</sup> However, the parties’ visions of a political settlement remain obscure, underdeveloped and staggering under the weight of daily explosions, brutal

---

349. “Afghanistan: The London Conference. Communiqué.” European Parliament, 28 January 28 2010. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/d-af/dw/af-london\\_conf\\_jan10/af-london\\_conf\\_jan10en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-af/dw/af-london_conf_jan10/af-london_conf_jan10en.pdf).

350. In 2018, the war in Afghanistan was the world’s deadliest conflict. Roudabeh Kishi and Melissa Pavlik, *ACLEDA 2018: The Year in Review*, Madison, Wisc.: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, 11 January 2019

assassinations, and rising violence. Gains towards empowerment of women and girls as journalists, legislators, entrepreneurs, and police officers, are now under threat. Whilst there is no military solution to Afghanistan, a rushed and hasty political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government could result in the Taliban overrunning most of Afghanistan within two or three years if the US troops leave before a power-sharing deal is reached. Such a takeover potentially would allow Al-Qaeda to rebuild in Afghanistan. This also means constitutional reform is essential to build support for a sustainable settlement. The current political system is fundamentally out of step with the diverse nature of a multi-ethnic society in Afghanistan and at odds with the need to reconcile improved governance with local self-determination as well as broad access to the levers of power and justice. Imbalances among the executive, legislature and judiciary, plus the need for devolution of power from Kabul to the provinces must be addressed. Change of this sort cannot be implemented under the impetus of any single, decisive conference. A half-baked power-sharing arrangement between the Kabul administration and the Taliban through a one-off consultative Loya Jirga (Grand Council) or under the aegis of yet another U.S.-led and externally manufactured international gathering will never adequately address the current anomalies in the constitution. This chapter will draw on the challenges of peacebuilding in Afghanistan, and why no one has yet succeeded in developing an approach that speaks for all groups in Afghanistan. The discourse will identify lessons that need to be considered that the international community, the Afghan government, and Afghan civil society should consider in order to ensure a more comprehensive, successful, and sustainable peace process.

## **Reviving Afghanistan Together**

There was a time, not long ago, when all eyes were on Afghanistan. On September 11, 2001, Al-Qaeda operatives carried out the most lethal attack on the US mainland since the war of 1812. They planned it from Afghanistan, where they enjoyed safe haven under the protection of the Taliban. Less than one month after the 9/11 attacks, the US Air Force began to bomb Al-Qaeda and Taliban targets in Afghanistan. Ten days later, the CIA and Special Forces were on the ground in the country. Just two months after the 9/11 attacks, on November 12, 2001, Kabul fell to opposition forces. The Taliban and its terrorist allies had seemingly been consigned to the dustbin of history.

Here was an opportunity, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, to remake a country flattened by a quarter century of war. The circumstances were tragic: the 9/11 attacks had killed nearly 3000 people. But Afghanistan – by almost

every indicator, one of the world's poorest and least developed countries – was now to be a deserving beneficiary of concerted international action. After all, it had been the battlefield in the 1980s that had sent the Red Army into retreat, feeding and amplifying new thinking that had led to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union in 1991. A closed, highly repressed and isolated society under the Taliban was now accessible to the world.

A closed, highly repressed and isolated society under the Taliban was now accessible to the world. Into this under governed space streamed an influx of well-meaning humanitarians, a returning Afghan diaspora, including the then future presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, as well as countless experienced professionals across almost every field. In only a few years, five million returning refugees poured into Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran – the largest post-conflict repatriation since the Second World War.<sup>351</sup>

This was never an occupation nor an invasion: it was an exercise in restoring the legitimacy of Afghan institutions, backed by the full weight of Afghan sovereignty, democratic consent, and international law. The whole world wanted Afghanistan to succeed. Afghans were rightly impatient to enjoy peace for the first time in a generation. At conference after conference, usually under UN auspices, Afghanistan's neighbours and partners repeatedly and unanimously pledged their support for peace.

## **Another Bonn-style Conference and a New Plan to 'fix' the War'**

The Bonn Agreement has set the tone and trajectory for much of Afghanistan's political transition since 2001. The parameters of the Bonn talks were largely determined by the US' overriding post-9/11 concern of denying Afghan territory to terrorists – al-Qaeda and their Taliban hosts. The political logic of the Bonn process, to negotiate a stable polity, was subordinate to the military, to remove the terrorist threat. In November 2001, when 25 Afghan delegations, UN advisors and a large number of foreign diplomats assembled just outside Bonn, the defining feature was the dominant role of the US.

Given such widespread and comprehensive support, Afghanistan's prospects were in principle excellent – except for one factor: the Taliban, who were excluded from the Bonn talks. The post-2001 phase of Afghanistan's long war has been one of the bloodiest of the early twentieth century. With Pakistan's

---

351. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/02/13/pakistan-coercion-un-complicity/mass-forced-return-afghan-refugees>

support, from 2003 to 2020, the Taliban resumed its war in Afghanistan.<sup>352</sup> Since 2006, on an average 1000 plus Afghan national police or army members have been killed every year.

Since February 2020 – heinous acts of targeting journalists, and media workers, civil society members, civil servants, religious scholars, intellectuals, students, including women have impeded prospects of peace. It has also undermined civil space, freedom of expression. According to a recent report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, the overall number of civilian casualties in 2020 was 8,820<sup>353</sup> – this does not include the unreported cases.

The two and a half years of a floundering peace process that started in July 2018 culminated into a three-day ceasefire and resulted in the Doha agreement on 29 February 2021. for bringing peace to Afghanistan. At the same time, representatives of the US and the Afghan government signed the similarly titled but less discussed “Joint Declaration.”<sup>354</sup> At the beginning of this process, there were high hopes for an end of the 42-year Afghan war, however trust in its viability is now almost at zero, with many expressing a clear-cut rejection of the Doha agreement that primarily catered to US and Taliban interests. Unfortunately, the vagueness of the agreement and little to no consultation with the people of Afghanistan has meant the Taliban have had the upper hand over the Afghan government. After the first round ended on 14 December 2020, they now seem at a standstill. A second round of talks that was due to commence on 5 January 2021, began a month later than expected and has yet to produce any concrete plans.

In March 2021, a special letter from the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken was sent to President Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR), which called on them “speed up the peace process and build an internal consensus to negotiate with the Taliban on a new level.”<sup>355</sup> Zalmay Khalilzad also floated the possibility of a ‘new Bonn’ conference that could cancel or sideline the intra-Afghan peace talks in Doha. The new plan seems inspired by the desire to meet the short, albeit formally conditional, timeline that was established by the year-old US-Taliban agreement for the withdrawal of US and other troops by May 2021.

---

352. Chris Alexander, *The Long Way Back: Afghanistan's Path to Peace*. (Canada: HarperCollins, 2011).

353. [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/23\\_february\\_2021\\_\\_surge\\_in\\_civilian\\_casualties\\_following\\_afghanistan\\_peace\\_negotiations\\_start\\_-\\_un\\_report\\_english.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/23_february_2021__surge_in_civilian_casualties_following_afghanistan_peace_negotiations_start_-_un_report_english.pdf)

354. “Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan.” 29 February 2020.

355. <https://avapress.com/en/220933/A-new-plan-to-fix-the-war-with-a-Bonn-style-conference-AAN-report>.

It is interesting that Khalilzad chose to frame his plan as a ‘Bonn-style’ agreement, deliberately suggesting that it is possible to turn back history, press the restart button, deal the cards again – largely with the same factions, in some cases even the same individuals, but this time, with the Taliban at the table too. According to the sources<sup>356</sup>, the US envoy told the Afghan politicians that the peace talks in Doha will be side-lined and that a Bonn Conference-style meeting will be held at the international level to discuss the prospect of a participatory government that would include the Taliban. “A grand international conference that will be similar to the Bonn Conference will be held, in which the Taliban and the republic side will participate at the leadership level. At the same time, the international community, including the United States and the regional countries, will reach a political agreement that will take its legitimacy from the international community. However, the national legitimacy (agreement of the potential conference) would take its authority from the traditional Loya Jirga.

Yet any new power-sharing agreement reached as a ‘quick fix’ to the conflict would be inherently risky, including of it breaking down and conflict renewing, with the loss of whatever stability and systems Afghanistan now enjoys. However, the situation in Afghanistan in 2021 is so very different from those in 2001 that calling for a Bonn 2 conference to resolve the conflict is disingenuous.

The proposal includes a handover of power from the current government to a transitional one, after “agreement on basic issues” in Ankara and in the presence of US and NATO military forces “in order to maintain political stability.” The transitional government could include leaders from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IROA) – which encompasses the current government and the domestic political opposition – and the Taliban. It is not clear how the transitional administration would become a permanent government. A “traditional Loya Jirga” would potentially have to confirm the deal but as we have reported before such bodies are no panacea to conflict, or necessarily represent consensus. However, this proposed meeting is also stalled now.

The concern, many in Afghanistan and outside have expressed, has been seeing the same faces of men who have been involved in past wars, particularly the very men who sat around the table at the Bonn Conference in 2001, will once again twenty years later represent Afghanistan at an international stage. Creating a lasting peace takes a lot more than negotiating a deal with elites. It must be an inclusive national endeavour where all are represented and heard.

I last visited Afghanistan in 2015, where I worked to deliver a UK International Development funded project in Kabul aimed at supporting youth in employment

---

356. <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-170400>

and business. In one of the workshops, I asked a young girl if she thought the west had lost the war in Afghanistan – I received an emphatic ‘no’. They were given opportunities that never existed in Afghanistan which they grabbed instantly. Today’s Afghan youth are the first generation in thirty years to have aspirations beyond struggle, death and martyrdom – impatient for change.

In this supposedly traditional Afghan society, male and female students now mix in a relaxed way, with many owing their education and life changes to the western aid programmes that had begun to transform universities and schools. Those university graduates, lucky enough to get a job, can expect to move into a modern flat, in a gated community, with manicured lawns, playgrounds, shopping malls and reliable electricity. Some even live together without getting married—something previously unthinkable. Independent media is another success: with women working as presenters, journalists and producers in the 200 local and international television channels in Afghanistan.<sup>357</sup>

On every patch of open ground young men play football and cricket in enormous, sprawling games in which it is hard to tell where one sport ends and the other begins. The Afghan cricket team is a source of huge national pleasure and pride. Aided by two English coaches, Afghanistan has fought its way up into the sport’s international elite, competing at the 2019 World Cup. And traditional pursuits banned by the Taliban are also back with an exuberance all of their own. On Thursdays and Fridays throughout the winter, horsemen compete on a plain north of Kabul in games of *buzkashi*—the most macho sport in the world, which involves fighting for possession of a calf’s carcass.

There is poetry everywhere—in the mouths of illiterate youths on street corners, in patriotic couplets solemnly intoned at military ceremonies, on radio stations, in public competitions that draw huge crowds, even in the province of Helmand, and in a secret culture of longing among veiled women in the conservative Pashtun south. Beyond the mess, dust, mud, poverty and insecurity, this is a nation that has taken its soul back from the bandits and the Taliban and is revelling in the experience.

Across Kabul, there is a building boom of glass palaces and shopping malls, glittering in the brash bling of a newly confident nation. Bazaars stay open late, and there are new swimming pools and sports centres. On Friday afternoons, family’s picnic in the shade of trees in the restored gardens around the tomb of Babur, the first Mughal emperor—young children roll on the banks, while teenagers wearing leggings show off. Leisure is a precious thing, and its presence

---

357. “Suspects Sentenced to Death for Killing Journalist in Kandahar,” TOLO news, 16 April 2019, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan/suspects-sentenced-death-killing-journalist-kandahar>.

shows a level of security and stability that the country has not known since the 1970s. If the Taliban walk into Kabul tomorrow, they will not recognise the city.

Despite the continuing conflict, corruption, ethnic conflict and the misuse of international aid, western involvement has had some positive results. According to a recent Chatham House report, the ambitious targets set at the 2001 United Nations conference on the future of Afghanistan, held in Bonn, have mostly been achieved:<sup>358</sup> inflation has been contained; the currency is stable; growth over this period has averaged around 9 per cent; and roads, mobile phones and the internet have transformed commerce. Maternal and infant mortality, school enrolment and life expectancy are all moving in the right direction. Too much has changed. Every single one of these factors makes it impossible to replicate Bonn 1 in 2021.

Though in recent years, under Ashraf Ghani's reign in Afghanistan— ethnic discrimination and conflict has increased. Struggling to find a way for Afghanistan to develop its own economy, functioning independent government institutions, job opportunities and security, the country is now at the brink of returning to the Taliban. Afghanistan has received more money than Europe did under the Marshall Plan, but has so much less to show for it. The graph of aid donations—high at the beginning and tapering down—is in opposite of what the country needed. In theory, best practice would have been to increase aid funding as Afghanistan was able to spend it more wisely. But in the real-world donors are most likely to fund countries when they are in the news, and Afghanistan's moment came after the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

US also pushed Afghanistan towards elections, believing that freedom would somehow deliver virtue in the absence of the sorts of checks and balances built into the US system. In a reversal of the founding principle of the American revolution, no taxation without representation, in Afghanistan they imposed representation without taxation. As in Iraq, elections were held without the democratic architecture of a functioning state, neither government institutions nor political parties, entrenching the power of an unaccountable elite.

The economy faces severe challenges as international troops leave and aid is reduced. But the leadership that is urgently needed in a variety of areas is wanting, as the elite squabble over jobs in marble halls, with bodyguards and armoured vehicles paid for by foreign taxpayers, insulated from the profound challenges of the country. They represent the same conservative interests that have always been a block on progress in Afghanistan. The years of aid being

---

358. [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field\\_document/20140731\\_AfghanistanWhoWantsWhat.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20140731_AfghanistanWhoWantsWhat.pdf)

disbursed in an unaccountable way had the profoundly damaging consequence of reinforcing the position of traditional tribal leaders, many of them warlords. It has diminished the chance of normal politics taking root and has dampened the hopes of the vast majority of the population, especially the young. Afghanistan now faces a combination of challenges: weak government institutions; poor revenue collection, hampered by corruption; and a predatory elite that extracts rents from aid.

## **Afghan Led and Afghan Owned Peace Process**

The United States, United Kingdom, European Union and international community have for the past three years touted a pitch for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. But, the peace talks in Doha have not truly been an inclusive process where a group of elite men continue to decide the fate of the country. However, this concept has been abandoned by the Biden administration with its recent proposal for an interim government in Afghanistan to drive the country's stalled peace process forward, amid frustration at little progress in Taliban and Afghan government talks.

The Afghan government has, however, stated that if a peace agreement is agreed in the UN-led conference in Turkey with the Taliban, it will need to be endorsed by Afghan representatives in a Loya Jirga. The Loya Jirga – or grand assembly – has been used as a political instrument by almost every Afghan king and president for the last century, with the first held arguably in 1915 and the last, for now, in August 2020. These Jirgas typically bring together hundreds, sometimes thousands of delegates from the various ethnic and social groups from across the country. In recent times, they have been convened to discuss the contentious issue of making peace with the Taleban.<sup>359</sup>

The Loya Jirga gatherings have been held to discuss a controversial Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US in 2013 and, most recently, in August 2020, whether to release 400 Taliban prisoners deemed especially dangerous. In the August 2020 jirga, delegates were given a stark choice: release the prisoners or face continuing war with little information about the prisoners – and they failed to question the terms of the task they were assigned. This and other examples

---

359. Loya Jirgas have their roots in Pashtun culture where jirgas are a conflict resolution mechanism. The term is a combination of the words 'Loya' (great or large) and 'Jirga' (assembly or council). Some historians claim the first Loya Jirga was held in 1747 and selected Ahmad Shad Durrani as king. Loya Jirgas were then institutionalised by the reformer-king Amanullah who, in 1921 for example, convened a jirga that led to the country's first quasi-constitution. Later on, the loya jirga became a quasi-parliamentary body. Today, it is enshrined in the constitution as "the highest manifestation of the [will of the] people of Afghanistan," convened in order to "take decisions on the issues related to independence, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and supreme interests of the country."

raise the question of whether Loya Jirgas are a democratic mechanism. All too often, the outcome of Jirgas is “designed in advance, making them essentially rubber stamp bodies with a bit of (tribal-)democratic window-dressing.”<sup>360</sup>

In his 29 July speech, Ghani did not explain why exactly he was not able to decide on the release of these 400 prisoners himself. Rather, he flagged that it was the constitution and the penal code that did not give him the authority to order their release. His comments suggest that these prisoners were in a different category from the more than 5,000 who have already been released, after receiving the necessary presidential pardon since March. It is in this respect notable that more than 5,000 prisoners have already been pardoned, without apparent legal difficulty. Three senior members of the Haqqani network<sup>361</sup> were also pardoned and released<sup>362</sup> in exchange for two kidnapped professors from the American University of Kabul in November 2019.

There exists another legal problem with the particular form of Loya Jirga which President Ghani has called. A ‘consultative Loya Jirga’ does not exist in the Afghan legal system. It is not mentioned in the constitution and has not been enshrined in law. This has been a problem with most of the loya jirgas called in recent years, by both presidents, Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani. Even if the gathering could be considered a referendum – based on a generous reading of article 65 of the constitution<sup>363</sup> – the constitution makes no mention of calling a referendum on judicial affairs. Releasing Taleban prisoners is a judicial affair. Thirdly, the gathering is also not the parliament and nor does it have the parliament’s legislative authority, as described in articles 81-83 of the constitution, as the highest legislative organ in the country. The parliament could define a legal mechanism which could give the president the power, based on article 64 of the constitution, to pardon prisoners.

---

360. Actually, all of the Loya Jirgas convened since the introduction of the constitution in 2004 have been unconstitutional. The constitution prescribes who must attend a Loya Jirga and they include members of district councils, elections for which have never been held. Probably because of this, all the gatherings held since 2010 have been called ‘consultative’, ‘peace’ or ‘traditional’ Loya Jirgas – another indication of their actual lack of authority. As one analyst wrote, “For the time being, the government... must limit itself to convening quasi-Loya Jirgas.” Often, these gatherings have provided the government with political cover for difficult decisions. Very occasionally, such as the jirga called to scrutinise the BSA, delegates have come to a different conclusion than the president had planned. Either way, however, their resolutions can be heeded or ignored by the president at will. Even though the government of Afghanistan was not bound by any commitments in the US-Taliban agreement, they released 4600 Taliban prisoners from the list, provided by the group, to set the stage for beginning of peace negotiations.

361. Anas Haqqani, Mali Khan and Hafiz Rashid

362. <https://www.rferl.org/a/reports-taliban-commanders-land-in-qatar-as-part-of-prisoner-swap-for-western-hostages/30279695.html>

363. [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Afghanistan\\_2004.pdf?lang=en](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Afghanistan_2004.pdf?lang=en)

According to the Lower House of the Afghan Parliament's media office, organising a consultative loya jirga in the presence of the people's "true representatives" in the two houses of parliament was illegal. As an alternative, it was proposed that the president "organise a joint and consultative meeting with members of the Parliament" on the swapping of the 400 Taliban prisoners, the intra-Afghan peace talks and other important national topics.

## **Bringing the State Closer to the People**

As the people of Afghanistan and government manoeuvre through peace negotiations with the Taliban many old and new ideas are being discussed. Let's have a look at the age-old question about how much power should be placed in the hands of the national government in the republic system, versus the costs and benefits of placing more power in the hands of the provincial and city leaders and ultimately the citizens of those areas.

There are no easy answers to an adjustment like this, but a civil conversation should be taking place among Afghan citizens and their government about how best to share powers. One of the most glaring over-centralized power topics is the President's power to appoint governors to the provinces instead of allowing the citizens of the provinces to elect their own leaders. The 2004 Afghan constitution invests the president with more powers than former Afghan kings had. Among them is the power to appoint all government officials, political and professional, from the cabinet to the district levels. This extreme appointment power opens any president up to charges of ancestral and familial nepotism. Democracy suffers when parties out of power feel that only friends of the president are getting rewarded and makes it easier for anti-government forces to make claims of corruption against the government.

The mere exercise of presidential rights to appoint all government officials, in an ethnically divided and tribal society, can be fraught with charges of monopolising power, bias, and discrimination. There are possible costs for turning over more power to the citizens to elect their provincial and local leaders. Corruption and king-making at these lower levels of government are also possible in Afghanistan. Taking away the power of the President to remove corrupt or abusive governors can further weaken democracy in Afghanistan. But the chance to decrease some or much of the ethnic strife by some simple adjustments to the democratic process could be a prelude to overall peace and security in Afghanistan. By holding more provincial and local elections and sharing more power with the citizens Afghans may be able to build more nationalism from its variety of ancestries, cultures, languages, and traditions.

More than half of the land mass of the world is ruled by governments which have more decentralized systems. Since 1973, the Afghan state has been a kingdom, a republic, a people's democratic republic, again a republic, an Islamic state, an Islamic emirate, an interim administration, a transitional Islamic state, and an Islamic republic, averaging a change of regime almost once every six years. Nothing seems to have brought peace and stability, why not give these simple adjustments a try?

Placing the responsibility of policing cities more firmly in the hands of the city mayors is another way that Afghans can decentralize responsibly. Right now, the Minister of Interior Affairs has an outsized responsibility to maintain security in areas he can hardly be expected to understand fully. From his/her seat in Kabul no single person can ably control the kidnappings, petty crime, car thefts, and murders. By handing over more responsibility to the city mayors across the country security and accountability could improve.

Whilst there is a provision in the Afghan constitution requiring mayors to be elected, it has never been put into practice. Appointments to these posts are filled by Afghanistan's interior ministry, subject to presidential approval. A mayor is currently only accountable to the President, and this generates corruption and allows officials to be selected through personal connections and bribery rather than merit. The municipalities have very limited authority. They have no control over electricity, water and police and canalization. If mayors are elected by the people, they will be more accountable to the public and will therefore perform better.

In the end this might be a shift worth making, as this gets citizens to take more ownership in their local security. Right now, citizens can simply blame the far-away government in Kabul for their security problems. If instead they could petition the mayor to take stronger and more proactive measures, mayors would (or should) react more quickly and forcefully.

Decentralization of the current presidential powers should not be about breaking the country apart or causing partition – it should be a discussion about some practical solutions to the endless violence and war that has made living in Afghanistan a nightmare for too many citizens. Putting too much power in one person's hands can lead to injustices and inequalities in even the most stable nations.

The current violence in Afghanistan could drag on for years and the outbreak of another multi-party civil war could break-up the country into tribal or ethnic enclaves of many sizes. A possible solution to create more support for

the national government and trust in the provincial and local system is more decentralization of certain powers.

If operationalized, it has the power to spread more democracy and human rights; it can allow the people of the country to become the masters of their political destiny within their provinces. Too often various tribes and ethnicities do not see their culture reflected in their national and local leaders. This situation does not help instil nationalism and faith in the government. Even the smallest decisions by the government in the current system can lead to claims of abuse of power at the expense of various ancestral groups.

Many having this debate worry that the unity and integrity of the country could be at risk if any power was pushed down to the people. Some argue that the nation is too fragmented, that state institutions are weak, and insecurity problems demand a strong, centralised government. But there is already an inability of the centralized system to deliver services to meet the needs of 37 million population. Maybe giving more power to citizens and more responsibility to local leaders that delivery of service can improve. At a minimum election of various leaders will make those leaders more accountable to their local constituents.

These ideas should be of value to the Islamic Republic peace negotiation delegates and leaders across Afghanistan. The Afghan people have developed a stronger sense of nationalism since the 2001 overthrow of the internationally unrecognized Taliban regime. Making a handful of adjustments now to empower the citizens to have more ownership in the security situation, and to get more voters to support local and national governance could be a wise move. Afghans, like so many other citizens who believe in the ideals of democracy, deeply hold freedom as a core belief. Liberty for the nation and at the individual level can be further engrained by some modest decentralization of power.

## **Conclusion**

A well-crafted peace deal that the Afghan government and the Taliban, is able to work out could help end the war and produce a more stable Afghanistan. But it must be handled very carefully. The wrong deal could do more harm than good. Adequate procedures are not yet in place to ensure a positive outcome. Independent polling and other means to engage the voices and views of the broader Afghan population are not present. As for the Taliban leadership, despite much speculation, they still show little interest in a genuine reconciliation process since the signing of the US-Taliban agreement in February 2020.

That said, if it goes forward, the reconciliation issue is fraught with dangers. The flawed deal with the Taliban could allow key militias legitimacy—and a sanctuary—on Afghanistan’s soil that they could later abuse to seek to challenge the Afghan government, after US and NATO draw down their troop presence.

The Afghan parliament should play a major role in approving any peace deal, whether the current constitution is read as requiring that approval or not. Nor should a simple majority approval be viewed as adequate. Indeed, every major ethnic group in the country should probably have effective veto power over the deal. This is the only way to minimize the risks of civil war that the flawed deal could produce. Peace deals require broad confidence-building and ownership.

The plan to hold new “Bonn-style conference” prioritises US interests and timelines even more than the Doha agreement did. Even if the Taliban agreed to a ‘Bonn 2 formula’, this would leave the causes of conflict unaddressed. It would hand the implementation of an agreement to parties who so far and to varying degrees have not been willing to seriously negotiate with each other or share power. To only have armed factions at the negotiating table would again undercut the principle of broad participation, including of women’s organisations and other civil society groups.

The process needs to be multilateral. The cluster of China, Iran, Russia, the United States and European Union may not get along, but they all fundamentally want to see a stable Afghanistan. The process also needs Pakistan and Iran to be on board as facilitators and cultivators of peace in Afghanistan. It also requires a broker; a role UN can play.



## **Afghanistan Peace Process and Involvement of Outside Powers**

Zahid Hussain

A land-locked country, Afghanistan shares borders with six countries, all of which have a history of involvement in the country. It has long been the epicenter of great power and regional rivalries. Proxy violence has exacted a heavy toll on Afghan stability and state formation. Particularly, Pakistan with 1500 mile long borders with Afghanistan and the war spilling over into its territory has had much deeper links there and remains key to the resolution to Afghan crisis. But other surrounding nations like Iran, China, Central Asia, Russia, and India are also important to achieving a sustainable peace in the region. These countries may have varying interests and regard the actions of others suspiciously, but they each have a huge stake in Afghanistan's stability. The external dimension of the war is as critical as the internal. Outside interference from Afghanistan's neighbors could spoil prospects for a comprehensive peace.

The withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan and the prospect of ending a two-decade long war will have a huge impact on regional geopolitics. The shifting dynamics carry within its fold the seeds of potential conflict as well as the hope for regional security, greater economic cooperation, and connectivity among the regional countries. The complexities of an exit plan have been further compounded by the competing interests among the surrounding countries and their divergent strategic priorities. There may be a consensus among the surrounding nations and regional players to help the NATO forces leave Afghanistan, but there is a huge division over the mechanism to use.

Afghanistan has become entangled in this regional contest. The most consequential competition is the contest between India and Pakistan. A major concern is that the American military withdrawal could lead Afghanistan to further descend into chaos fuelling a full-scale civil war with India, Russia and Iran backing different factions and dragging Pakistan into a protracted conflict. The spillover effects of spiraling instability and conflict in Afghanistan could be disastrous.

Without a sustainable agreement among surrounding countries guaranteeing Afghanistan's security and its neutrality, the country may turn into a center of a bloody proxy war, with different actors each supporting rival factions across ethnic and sectarian lines. Such an agreement is also critical to prevent Afghanistan from reverting to a hub of global jihad. A negotiated political settlement intertwined with a regional approach is the only endgame. Five neighboring and surrounding countries-Pakistan, India, Iran, China and Russia - are important for a regional solution for Afghanistan's peace.

## **Pakistan**

Stability in Afghanistan is critical for peace in the region, but much more so for Pakistan which has been directly affected by the two decades long war spilling over its territory. Pakistan's role is perhaps the most critical in determining the course of Afghan endgame. Its cooperation is key to the winding down of the war. A political settlement in Afghanistan could also help Pakistan deal with its problem of militancy.

Pakistan has played a critical role in bringing warring sides to the negotiating table. For Pakistan the Doha agreement between the United States and the Taliban is seen as vindication of its consistent position on the need for a negotiated political settlement of the Afghan crisis. A complete Taliban takeover is neither possible nor is in the interest of Pakistan. Taliban control across the Durand Line would give an immense boost to the Islamic militancy movement in Pakistan.<sup>364</sup>

It was another war in Afghanistan that became the pivot around which the new US-Pakistan partnership was built following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. In fact the alliance was more out of expediency and compulsion. Although it was projected as a strategic partnership in reality it had been a transactional relationship from the outset. The two countries had pursued divergent agenda in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Pakistan's backing for the Taliban regime was the major source of tension between Washington and Islamabad. But it all changed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on America. After a decade of estrangement the two countries were back together as allies.

The Post 9/11 US-Pakistan partnership, however, remained paradoxical and full of ironies. While cooperation was extremely critical in order to fight global terrorism, the US and Pakistani security agencies followed their divergent agendas in Afghanistan. Pakistan remained hesitant in taking action against

---

364. Author's conversation with senior security officials

the Taliban leadership and fighters who had fled to Pakistan after the American invasion of Afghanistan and the fall of Islamic Emirate. Most of the Afghan Taliban leaders fleeing from Afghanistan with their families settled in various cities of Pakistan, mainly in Quetta and Peshawar, where many of them had stayed during the 1980s when they fled the Soviet occupation. They had no problem in assimilating with the local Pashtun population. Many of them found sanctuary in Pakistan's biggest city Karachi. <sup>365</sup> Scores of madrasas in Pakistan, close to the Afghan borders, became the main recruitment centers for Taliban insurgents. Afghan refugee camps set up during the Afghan resistance war against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s spread across Baluchistan and in northern Pakistan too became the center of Taliban activities. They provided shelter to the fighters and in some areas they also served as training camps. Pakistani security authorities looked the other way, even if they were not directly helping them. <sup>366</sup>

The two decades of war in Afghanistan has had devastating effects on Pakistan, turning the country into a new battleground for al Qaeda linked militants. Thousands of Pakistani civilians and military personnel have been killed in the wave of terrorist attacks and in the fighting against the insurgents in the country's northwestern areas. The economic and political cost of the war has also been huge, threatening to completely destabilize the country with catastrophic consequences for global security.

The insurgent safe havens along Pakistan's western borders had provided the Taliban strategic depth in the country. That also gave impetus to Islamic militancy in Pakistan's tribal regions. The horizontal and vertical fragmentation of society along political, religious, and ethnic lines, which had intensified since 9/11, posed the most serious problem for Pakistan.

That underlying tension caused by Pakistan's inaction cast a huge shadow over the US war against the Taliban in Afghanistan. It was an association largely built on expediency and marked by mutual distrust. The two supposed allies could not figure out whether they were friends or enemies despite a nearly two decade-long partnership. Pakistan's backing of the Taliban and the insurgent leadership operating from its soil had also been a major reason for strained relations with the Kabul government and other Afghan factions opposed to the Taliban.

---

365. Zahid Hussain, *No Win War: The Paradox of US-Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan's Shadow* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 40.

366. *Ibid.*

Notwithstanding their close ties the Taliban leadership also had misgivings over some of Pakistan's policies towards the insurgents. There was a limit to Pakistan's leverage over the group when it came to intra-Afghan talks. Pakistan's influence over the Taliban leadership also waned over the years with the opening of its Doha office in 2013, and the growing international recognition of the insurgent group.

While Pakistan was accused of "double game" its support was also deemed critical to enable the exit of American forces from Afghanistan. Ironically, while the Afghan war may have been the basic cause of the tension between Pakistan and the US, it had also been a reason for the two estranged allies to stay together. A complete breakup was not an option for either country. For the US, Pakistan's support is critical for its exit from Afghanistan. But it is also in Pakistan's interest to help stabilize the situation in Afghanistan.

While being a critical ally in the war on terror, Pakistan has also been described as an epicenter of Islamic militancy and jihadi terrorism causing serious threat to regional and global security. Pakistan served as the major logistical line for NATO forces in Afghanistan,<sup>367</sup> but its lawless tribal regions provide safe havens for the Taliban insurgency and its logistical supply lines.<sup>368</sup> That placed Pakistan in a unique situation of having strong leverage over both sides of the war, despite this dichotomy having also been a major cause of conflict between the US-led coalition forces and Islamabad. Mired in this mutual mistrust, the two sides had substantial differences of opinion about the appropriate strategy in Afghanistan and how to deal with the wider insurgency.

For Pakistan, the Taliban remained a useful hedge against an uncertain outcome in Afghanistan. The deep reluctance to take action against the Haqqani network, the most powerful Taliban faction, was a reflection of Pakistan's worries about the events that would transpire after the eventual pullout of foreign forces from Afghanistan. Pakistani military establishment was convinced that a renewed civil war would break out if NATO forces left Afghanistan without a negotiated political settlement.<sup>369</sup> Under that scenario, the Pashtun-dominated Afghan Taliban could be used again by Pakistan as a proxy force for exercising control over Afghan government and countering Indian influence in Afghanistan.

## **India-Pakistan Rivalry: The Battle for Influence**

What has been widely perceived as a rapidly diminishing commitment of the West to the Afghan war had also intensified Pakistan's long-standing struggle

---

367. More than 75 percent of the supplies to the coalition forces went through Pakistan

368. Zahid Hussain, *op.cit.*, p. 184.

369. Conversation with senior security officials

with India for supremacy of influence in Afghanistan. The resolution of the Afghan war became entangled in the prolonged rivalry between Islamabad and New Delhi. The Pakistani military establishment views the expanding Indian presence in its “backyard” as a serious threat to their country’s own security.

Historically, India has shared close cultural and political ties with Afghanistan and maintained cordial relations with successive governments in Kabul until the emergence of Taliban rule in 1996. Like most countries, India never recognized the Islamic emirates and had actively backed anti-Taliban resistance, and the Northern Alliance comprising Tajik, Uzbeks, and other non-Pashtun ethnic groups.

The US-led military action following the 9/11 terrorist attacks led to the India-Afghanistan alliance, which opened up massive opportunity for India to rebuild its influence in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Indian cultural influence in Afghanistan is very deep-rooted and has become its greatest asset boosting its “soft” power.

Since 2001, India has moved aggressively - and successfully - to expand its political and economic influence in Afghanistan. It has ploughed billions of dollars in economic and military assistance to successive Afghan governments, making it one of the largest regional donors to the country. The trade between the two countries has also increased many folds since 2001.<sup>370</sup> Indian companies have been involved in building highways and other important infrastructure projects, and have implemented several development projects, including a highway to Iran and transmission line to Uzbekistan. There are thousands of Indian workers and security personnel working on scores of high-profile development projects across Afghanistan.<sup>371</sup> For India, Afghanistan is also a potential route to access Central Asian markets and to meet its increasing energy demand. Afghanistan’s strategic partnership agreement with India in October 2011, involving New Delhi in the training of Afghan security forces, has reinforced Pakistan’s apprehension. It is the first time Kabul has signed such a pact with another country.

India’s involvement in Afghanistan is, however, extremely sensitive, because of its delicate - and often deadly - power game in South Asia. India’s interest in Afghanistan has not only been just to help rebuild the war torn country, but also to counter Pakistan’s ambition to gain influence there. Islamabad’s sensitivities over expanding influence of its arch foe’s on the country’s western borders therefore does not come as a surprise.

---

370. Zahid Hussain. “Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective”. *CIDOB POLICY RESEARCH PROJECT*, [https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication\\_series/project\\_papers/stap\\_rp/policy\\_research\\_papers/sources\\_of\\_tension\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_and\\_pakistan\\_a\\_regional\\_perspective](https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/project_papers/stap_rp/policy_research_papers/sources_of_tension_in_afghanistan_and_pakistan_a_regional_perspective)

371. *Ibid.*

Since their inception as separate, independent countries seven decades ago, the two South Asian rivals have fought directly or indirectly for influence in Kabul. Pakistan actively supported Afghan Mujahedeen resistance against the Soviet occupation and then supported the Taliban in the quest for a strategic depth in Afghanistan. Pakistan's policy has therefore been to help establish a friendly Pashtun Islamic regime in Afghanistan that counter Indian influence.

The expanding Indian presence in Afghanistan has been seen by the Pakistani security establishment as a strategic defeat and has compounded Islamabad's fears of being encircled. A major worry for Pakistan therefore is how to defend both its eastern and western borders as India and Afghanistan come increasingly close.

Some of Pakistan's security concerns are legitimate, but the fears of encirclement verge on paranoia. This has resulted in Pakistan's continuing patronage of some Afghan Taliban factions, such as the Haqqani network, which it considers a vital tool for countering Indian influence, even at the risk of Islamabad's strategic relationship with Washington.

For a long time, Pakistan's accusations of India using its consulate offices in Afghanistan's border cities for espionage and of stirring up separatist insurgency in the western province of Baluchistan are now validated. Many of the Baluch insurgency leaders operated from sanctuaries in Afghanistan, causing tension between Islamabad and Kabul. India has a vital interest in Afghanistan and seeks to prevent it from reverting to Taliban rule. India favors an arrangement that would protect its interests after the withdrawal of US-led coalition forces.

Increasing US tilt towards India had added to Islamabad's worries that may be one of the reasons for the Pakistani security agencies for not acting against the Taliban safe havens on its soil and fully cooperating with the coalition forces. The struggle for influence had also escalated into a wider regional conflict, with Afghanistan becoming center of a new "Great Game" with Pakistan, India, and Iran vying for influence in the strife-torn country.

For a sustainable resolution of the Afghan crisis, it is thus imperative to address Pakistan's legitimate security concerns. But asking for India to leave Afghanistan or to exclude it from a regional agreement may not be acceptable to either the US or Afghanistan. India shares various Afghan factions' antipathy towards the return of Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Measures are also needed to prevent Afghanistan becoming the center of a new proxy war between India and Pakistan. For resolution of their competing security interests, the two South Asian countries need to engage seriously on a

bilateral basis. The international community should also play their role in conflict resolution. Improvement in Pakistan-India relations would have the most positive influence on the Afghan peace efforts.

Pakistan's legitimate security concerns have to be addressed for an orderly transition in Afghanistan. Islamabad also has dispelled the impression that it is pushing for installation of a "Pakistan-friendly" government in Kabul. Pakistan has a critical role in helping reconciliation in Afghanistan, but it cannot and should not be expected to talk on behalf of any insurgent group. Pakistan can play the role of facilitator for talks between the Taliban and Afghan government, but it would be a grave mistake on its part to become a party to the ethnic divide in Afghanistan.

## Iran

Iran too has its relevance as a major regional player in Afghanistan. The country shares a 560-miles long border with western Afghanistan and has historical business and cultural ties with the people there. Tehran maintained cordial relations with successive post-Taliban governments in Afghanistan but longstanding hostility between Iran and the United States remains a major problem in the way of a regional accord. More important for Iran, however, is that stability in a war-torn country would make it easier for foreign forces to leave Afghanistan.

Iran views Afghanistan important to its national security. The strong cultural and religious ties between the two nations provide Tehran with a substantial amount of political leverage in Afghanistan. Dari, one of Afghanistan's two official languages, spoken by roughly 50 percent of the population, is closely related to Persian, Iran's official language. Moreover, millions of other Afghans, including many members of the educated elite, have lived and studied in Iran and are very familiar with the Persian language. Iran has maintained close ties with Afghanistan's Tajik and Hazara populations. It has more Afghan refugees than any other country after Pakistan.<sup>372</sup>

The 2001 U.S. invasion provided Iran with an opportunity to expand its influence in Afghanistan. The swift overthrow of the Taliban by American forces rid Tehran of an implacable foe. Despite their overt adversarial relations, Washington and Tehran shared common interests in Afghanistan. Tehran had hostile relations with the Taliban regime that ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. For that reason, Iran tacitly supported the US invasion for removal of the radical Sunni

---

372. Ibid

Islamic regime of the Taliban.<sup>373</sup> For Tehran, the rise of a Sunni fundamentalist regime, which had also been recognized by its archrivals - Saudi Arabia and the UAE - was a threat to its interest in the region. Iran had actively supported the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance against the Taliban regime. The ouster of the Taliban was politically advantageous to Iran's regional interests.

America leveraged the mutual US-Iranian interests in the negotiations among various anti-Taliban Afghan factions at Bonn conference in December 2001. Iranians, who had been deeply involved in the Afghan civil war, had more influence on the Afghan groups. Tehran used its influence over the Northern Alliance helped cobbled together a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan headed by Hamid Karzai. The major reason for Iran's support for the new American backed Afghan dispensation was sheer pragmatism. The US overthrow of the Taliban benefited Iranian interests. But with the American forces getting bogged down in an unwinnable war and growing hostility between the two countries Tehran also developed contacts with the Taliban. Taliban and Iran shared a common foe, the United States. Tehran also realizes that the Taliban would be a major political force in Afghanistan after the American exit. Therefore, Iran is hedging its bets and not entirely relying on its traditional Shia and Tajik partners. Even if the Taliban comes to power,

Although Iran views the Tajik and Hazara as being its best interlocutors in Afghanistan, it nevertheless views the Pashtun and the Taliban as important to its overall strategy. There may be recognition in Iran that today's Taliban, although not friendly toward Iranian interests, is nevertheless not the zealous and fanatic group of the 1990s.

Many insurgent leaders made Iran their residence. Mullah Mansour, who succeeded Mullah Omar as the Taliban Amir had also moved his family to Afghanistan. He was killed by a US drone strike when he was returning from Iran and travelling on a Pakistani passport, which raised some serious questions about the Taliban's Iran connections.

The reports that Iranian Revolutionary Guard secretly facilitated the stay of Taliban leaders shed new light on the movement's complicated relationship with Tehran. Iran had also provided weapons, cash, and sanctuary to the Taliban. Despite the deep ideological antipathy between a hardline Sunni group and a cleric-run Shia state, the two sides are quite willing to cooperate against mutual enemies and in the pursuit of shared interests.

---

373. Zahid Hussain, *op. cit.*

Tehran has not allowed religious and ideological issues to interfere with political expediency. It's hedging its bets in order to be prepared for a variety of outcomes following the US withdrawal. Tehran's main objective is to maintain its political influence and protect its interests. The extent of engagement between the two sides would depend on the Taliban's posture toward Iran and its treatment of the Afghan Shia population.

Although Tehran has maintained contacts with the Taliban for years, it has become more active in Afghan affairs since the signing of the peace deal between the US and the Taliban. Iran has rejected the agreement because it believes that it should be left to the Taliban and the Afghan government to decide the future political setup in Afghanistan. The Iranian government has also separately engaged with Taliban representatives as part of Iranian-sponsored peace talks.

Iran continues to build soft influence in Afghanistan, especially in the realms of education and the media. Iranian government has built and financed many schools, mosques, and media centers mostly in northern Afghanistan and Kabul. These schools use Iranian books. However, Iran also faces challenges as it tries to consolidate its political influence in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns remain wary of the Iranians. Meanwhile, many of the Shia Hazara do not subscribe to Iran's system of governance and would not like to be known as Iranian proxies.

There has also been some apprehension about Iranian motives and its deep involvement in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Tehran has often been accused of supporting some political groups and warlords at the cost of derailing Afghan state institutions. It reportedly provided financial support to some political leaders in Afghan elections. Iran had also been accused of recruiting Afghans to fight its proxy wars in Syria and some other Middle Eastern countries. According to some reports, Afghan refugees are often forced to join the Fatemiyoun militia organized by the Quds Force, the branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) responsible for overseas operations, which the US and many other countries consider a 'terrorist' organization.<sup>374</sup> The network has reportedly recruited thousands of Shia fighters from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some Iranian government officials have suggested that the Fatemiyoun brigade could also be used to fight Daesh in Afghanistan.<sup>375</sup>

---

374. Tobias Schneider, "The Fatemiyoun Division Afghan Fighters in the Syrian Civil War." *The Middle East Institute*, POLICY PAPER 2018-9, October 2018. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/fatemiyoun-division-afghan-fighters-syrian-civil-war>

375. "Iran's Foreign Minister arouses Afghan Anger," *Arab News*, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1780371/world>

Meanwhile, the discriminatory treatment of Afghan refugees in Iran has also become a highly politicized issue. With the worsening economic conditions in the country Afghan refugees have come to be seen by many as a burden and have been subjected to discrimination and abuse at the hands of the Iranian government.<sup>376</sup> Furthermore, Iranian authorities have also been accused of using the threat of mass deportation of Afghans to pressurize the Kabul government.

The hostility between Iran and the United States, and Iran's reservations about peace talks with the Taliban are other complicated faultlines acting as "spoilers" for regional stability. Tehran is reluctant to support any political solution in which its interests are not protected. It is opposed to restoration of Taliban rule and wants an inclusive system of government in Afghanistan.<sup>377</sup> Iran's inclusion in regional process is imperative for political stability in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of foreign forces.

## **China**

China is another country which has a huge stake in Afghanistan's peace and stability. Of all the neighboring countries, China has the least direct influence on Afghanistan, but its national security concerns make it an important stakeholder in the Afghan peace process. China had, for some time, been actively involved in the Afghan reconciliation efforts along with the United States and Pakistan. It has maintained good relations with both the Afghan government and the Taliban giving it a special role in negotiations between the two sides. Starting in 2014, Taliban delegations began to publicly and regularly visit China, culminating in secret talks that China facilitated between Kabul and the Taliban in Urumqi in 2015.<sup>378</sup>

Beijing takes pride in its relative neutrality in Afghanistan. Unlike other regional countries China has not been directly or indirectly involved in the internal conflict in Afghanistan that would undermine its current advantageous hedging position with both the Taliban and Kabul.

The US military presence in Afghanistan after 9/11 presented China with a serious dilemma. While the fall of Taliban rule helped curtail the Uighur militant

---

376. "Iran's Influence in Afghanistan: Implications for the U.S. Drawdown," *The RAND Corporation*, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR600/RR616/RAND\\_RR616.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR600/RR616/RAND_RR616.pdf).

377. Ibid.

378. Edward Wong and Mujib Mashal, "China facilitated between Kabul and the Taliban in Urumqi in 2015," *New York Times*, 25 May 2015.

sanctuaries in Afghanistan, Beijing saw the presence of American forces in the region as a serious strategic threat.<sup>379</sup>

China supports withdrawal of American forces but with an inclusive political set up in place. For it, a chaotic vacuum of power in Afghanistan could have serious implications for regional security. For that reason, Beijing encourages intra Afghan accord for a peaceful and smooth transition after America's exit. Basically, China wants the security threat contained, but is hesitant to get directly involved in the Afghan domestic politics.<sup>380</sup>

China's main concern is that chaos in Afghanistan would stoke Islamic fundamentalism that threatens domestic security in the country. Beijing is principally interested in preventing the destabilization of the troubled Xinjiang Province that has a large Muslim population. For China, continued instability in Afghanistan could foster radicalization of Muslims in the region and directly contribute to the unrest in China's northwest Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.<sup>381</sup> Beijing has consistently supported political inclusiveness and the reconciliation in Afghanistan. It differentiates among factions that are fighting the occupation forces and factions that promote Islamic radicalization. The existing relations between China and the Taliban are largely transactional.<sup>382</sup> While China needs the Taliban to deny Uighur militant's safe havens, the Taliban require China to play some advocacy role on its behalf. Although China does not support return of Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan as it could pose a direct challenge to China's control of its Muslim population, it does observe that the Taliban's political ideology has shown signs of moderation.

Meanwhile, China has maintained close counter terrorism cooperation with Afghan government primarily targeting at organizations associated with the East Turkestan Islamic Movement and the Daesh. China has also helped Kabul build its military mountain brigade in the Wakhan Corridor near Afghanistan's northern Badakhshan province with the primary goal of preventing infiltration by the Daesh into China. According to some reports China provided more than \$70 million in military aid to the Afghan government from 2016 to 2018.<sup>383</sup> Afghanistan's natural resources are estimated to be worth around \$1 trillion,

---

379. Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan: China's Stance, Interests and Perspectives, *CSIS March 2012*, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/120322\\_Zhao\\_ChinaAfghan\\_web.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghan_web.pdf)

380. Ibid.

381. Yun Sun, "China's Strategic Assessment of Afghanistan." <https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/chinas-strategic-assessment-of-afghanistan/>

382. Ibid.

383. Ibid.

and Chinese companies have shown interest. For instance, in 2008, the Chinese Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) and the Jiangxi Copper Company Limited (JLC) consortium won a 30-year lease to extract the second largest copper deposit in the world (valued at least 50 dollars billion) for 3.4 dollars billion. In 2011, the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) won a 400 million dollars bid to drill three oil fields for 25 years, containing roughly 87 million barrels of oil.<sup>384</sup> However, the development of the mine and oil fields have not progressed at all. Indeed, some Chinese companies were involved in the Aynak copper mine in 2008 and the Amu Darya oil exploration in 2011. But there have not been any major Chinese investments in Afghanistan.

China's flagship BRI project, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), could be expanded to Afghanistan to further connect the Central Asian republics under a Chinese umbrella. Notwithstanding the official narrative portraying Afghanistan as an important link for the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese investment in Afghanistan has been minimal, totaling 2.2 million dollars in 2016 and a mere 400 million dollars in all investment stocks by the end of 2017.<sup>385</sup> Deteriorating security situation forced other projects to stop. The primary reason Chinese investment in Afghanistan has been sluggish is due to intense instability and American presence, but those key aspects may suddenly change in the coming future. Future Chinese investments in Afghanistan would depend on stability in the country. China, like other regional countries will face the inevitable spillover effects of continuing instability in Afghanistan in the event of a new civil war after the withdrawal of foreign forces from the country. China advocates a multilateral approach to prevent Afghanistan descending further into chaos.

The formation of Shanghai Cooperation Organization has enhanced China's role in Afghanistan. Founded by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in 2001, SCO is a regional forum dedicated to security issues. India and Pakistan both joined as formal members in 2017. The grouping that now comprises almost all regional stakeholders could play an important role in Afghan peace. The SCO has taken on a strong mandate of ensuring regional peace and stability. China will support the incorporation of Afghanistan into the forum's security mechanisms and framework after formation of an inclusive political setup in Kabul.

---

384. Ibid.

385. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and New Industrial Policies, 2018.

## Russia and Central Asian Republics (CARs)

Although Russia is not a fresh entrant on the Afghan scene, its initiative to build a regional alliance pointed to a new alignment of forces in a changing geo-political landscape. Russia's relationship with Afghanistan is a complex one. While it fears for the situation in Central Asia, the standoff with the United States has also been the reason for Moscow's growing concerns.

This Russian assertiveness is driven by the anticipation of withdrawal of American forces and ensuing political uncertainty in Afghanistan. That had also provided Moscow an opportunity to initiate what is described as "Moscow format" of dialogue among various Afghan factions and the Taliban in an effort to break the deadlock in the diplomatic efforts to find a political solution to the Afghan conflict.<sup>386</sup> Moscow has serious concern over the deteriorating situation in proximity of its borders. It does not enjoy good relations with Afghan government, which it considers not autonomous.<sup>387</sup> Moscow has tried to strike a balance between all the different forces at play in Afghanistan in order to retain its influence if one of those forces collapse. That explains Russia's growing contacts with the Taliban.

Another Russian worry is the expanding footprint of the Daesh in Afghanistan. The increasing activities of the Daesh in northern Afghanistan, close to the borders of the Central Asian countries, have particularly been alarming for Russia. There is also a growing fear in Moscow of the militant group making inroads in the Muslim population in those countries, especially as the Chechens form one of the largest foreign contingents in the Daesh war in Iraq and in Syria. That had also been the reason for Russia strengthening its ties with the Taliban and providing the group weapons and financial support in order to fight the Daesh.<sup>388</sup>

Whilst the Central Asian Republics formerly parts of now dissolved Soviet Union, may not have the power to influence development in Afghanistan, their mutual historical linkages and ethnic and cultural proximity makes them important regional players. The historic ties between Central Asia and Afghanistan are strong. Their shared history and cultural heritage are a testament to the connection between Afghanistan and the region. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have also been important routes for supplies to the NATO forces in Afghanistan. As

---

386. Zahid Hussain. The 'Moscow format,' *Dawn*, 14 November 2018.

387. "Why Russia is Hedging its Bets in Afghanistan," *Carnegie Moscow Centre*, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84070>

388. *Ibid.*

compared to Pakistan and Iran, the Central Asian nations remain – at this point - peripheral, but their security is also threatened by the instability in Afghanistan.

Russia and Central Asian countries have supported the February 2020 peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban that has paved the way for the American exit from Afghanistan.<sup>389</sup> But there are strong apprehensions over instability in Afghanistan without an intra Afghan agreement on future political setup. The Central Asian countries have been closely involved with developments in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been Afghanistan's key economic partners. Afghanistan is already a top 10 trading partner of Uzbekistan.<sup>390</sup>

A peaceful Afghanistan would serve as a bridge between Central and South Asia, and ultimately the rest of the world. Opportunities for collaboration are abundant. Afghanistan could become an important bridge connecting Central Asia with the enormous market of South Asia and beyond. The prospects of sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably linked with the achievement of peace in neighboring Afghanistan.

---

389. Adam Gallagher, "Afghanistan: Can Central Asia Help Spur Peace with the Taliban?," *United States Institute for Peace*, July 2020.

390. *Ibid.*

## Conflict Management Mechanisms in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Moonis Ahmar

Since the inception of Pakistan as a new state on August 14, 1947 till today, there is a dearth of friendly and conflict free ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan<sup>391</sup>. There is also a long history of discord in the form of mistrust<sup>392</sup>, ill-will and suspicion which impacted on relations engulfing ties between the two neighboring Muslim countries sharing common history, culture, religion and a border of 2,640 kilometers. As a landlocked state, Afghanistan has “depended on this fellow Muslim state for access to the sea and world trade”<sup>393</sup> and Pakistan has not exploited Kabul’s geographical vulnerability to its own advantage.

Amin Saikal, a renowned political scientist, rightly narrated the historical realities of Afghanistan: “Rare in the country that has sustained so many blows, and such *hard* blows, as has Afghanistan since its foundation as a distinct political unit in 1747. Yet the country has managed to survive and to retain some form of sovereignty and territorial integrity, despite numerous wars and invasions and swings between extremist ideological dispositions, ranging from tribalist, value-systems to Marxism-Leninism and Islamic medievalism”.<sup>394</sup> Afghanistan is almost 200 years older than Pakistan and has had an enormous impact on Pakistan’s history, politics, culture and security. A noted American authority on Afghan affairs, Barnett R. Rubin vividly explains the unfortunate state of Afghanistan by arguing that:

---

391. Afghanistan was the only country which opposed Pakistan’s membership to the UN in 1947. For further information see, Chris Alexander, “Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Strategy for Peace” 1 November 2010, <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/afghanistan/afghanistan-and-pakistan-a-strategy-for-peace/> accessed on 29 December 2020.

392. “Resetting Pakistan’s Relations with Afghanistan” / *Report 262Asia*, International Crisis Group (Brussels), 28 October 2014.

393. , Eden Naby and R. N. Frye, “The Afghan Neighborhood and Future Stability: A Regional Approach,” in John D. Montgomery and Dennis A. Rondinelli (eds.), *Beyond Reconstruction in Afghanistan Lessons from Development Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan).

394. Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan A History of Struggle and Survival* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2004), p.1.

Afghanistan became, in the lingo of the time, a failed state, where Afghans suffered from a humanitarian emergency. For the United States and other major powers, Afghanistan became an object of charity and neglect, not necessarily in that order. Regional powers, especially Pakistan, but also private networks, smugglers, drug dealers and terrorists treated it as an open field for manipulation provided ample time and opportunity for malign forces to exploit the situation.<sup>395</sup>

Yet, an unstable, chaotic, crisis and violent ridden Afghanistan is both a challenge and an opportunity for Pakistan and for its neighbors because instability in that war torn country will continue to destabilize peace in Central, West and South Asia. Absence of peace in Afghanistan will block the launching of Pakistan-Afghanistan-Turkmenistan and India (TAPI) gas pipeline and Central-South Asia (CASA) energy corridor. Nevertheless, peaceful and conflict free Pak-Afghan relations are imperative for regional peace and security.

If there is political will, determination, and wisdom on the part of Pakistan and Afghanistan to move on and create conditions for viable peace and management of their conflicts, one can expect stability in their ties in the years to come.

This chapter will examine following questions:

- 1) How and *why* peace in Afghanistan is central to Pakistan's existence and security?
- 2) What are the prospects of a *viable* Afghan peace process and how Pakistan as a vital neighbor of Afghanistan can play a meaningful role for a positive conflict transformation in that country?
- 3) How mistrust, suspicions and paranoia which continue to shape and influence Pak-Afghan relations since long can be alleviated and what are the *impediments* for normal and cordial relations between Islamabad and Kabul?
- 4) How to establish mechanism of conflict management and peace in Pak-Afghan relations and what are the obstacles in this regard?

Furthermore, the chapter will dwell at length on issues faced by Afghanistan since 9/11 and how Pakistan has a legitimate stake for peace in its western neighbor. The implications of foreign military withdrawal from Afghanistan on Pakistan's security and the scope of intra-Afghan dialogue for a viable peace process in that war torn country will also be examined in this paper. According to an Indian writer, "General Musharraf like a good Military commander took

---

395. Bennett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan State Formation and Collapse into International System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. X.

the risk and decided in favor of the more difficult option of supporting the Americans. He analyzed the pros and cons of such a decision and chose the option, which served the strategic interests of Pakistan better.”<sup>396</sup> Former President of Pakistan Pervaiz Musharraf in his biography *In the Line of Fire* vividly explains how he dealt with the U.S after 9/11 and the launching of attack over Afghanistan in October 2001. According to him, “I made a dispassionate, military-style analysis of our options, weighing the pros and cons. Emotion is all very well in drawing room, newspaper editorial and movie, but it cannot be relied on for decisions like this. My decision was based on the well-being of my people and the best interests of my country – Pakistan always comes first.”<sup>397</sup> But, critics argue that Musharraf’s decision to side with America’s war on terror focusing on Afghanistan was counter-productive because violence and terrorism permeated into Pakistani society to an extent that since 9/11 till today more than 80,000 Pakistanis have been killed in suicide attacks and other acts of terrorism having a direct linkage with events taking place in Afghanistan.

## Peace Dynamics in Afghanistan

Peace in Afghanistan is central to stability and peace in the Central, West and South Asia. Likewise, peace between Pakistan and Afghanistan is essential for taking the Afghan peace process to its logical conclusion. Since the ‘Saur revolution’ of April 1978 which toppled the regime of Sardar Daud by the military supportive of pro-left People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) till today, Afghanistan is in turmoil. Forty-three years of instability, violence and war in Afghanistan caused enormous damage to the country’s society, infrastructure, and economy. From April 1978 till December 1979, PDPA tried to transform Afghanistan as a progressive and modern state but the religious clergy and those who resisted reforms challenged what the pro-Moscow Kabul regime was striving for. As a result, civil war and bloodshed along with exodus of refugees to Pakistan destabilized Afghanistan till the time 100,000 Soviet forces militarily intervened in order to prevent that country falling into enemy’s camp.

The 1979 Soviet intervention in Afghanistan deepened internal polarization and resulted in a war between those fighting for Afghan sovereignty, Soviet forces and their allies. The post-Soviet withdrawal period has witnessed civil war between Mujahideen groups for the control of Kabul. the rise of Taliban and their control over Kabul in September 1996 followed by their overthrow

---

396. Major General Samay Ram, *The New Afghanistan Pawn of America?* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004), p. 147. He further said that “Pakistan neutralized India by gatecrashing into the U.S South Asia radar screen that earlier showed as Indian image only.” *Ibid.*, p. 150

397. Pervaiz Musharraf, *In The Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 201.

by the U.S led coalition in the aftermath of 9/11 and the transformed of the Afghan conflict. Millions of Afghans were uprooted since 1978 and hundreds and thousands of them killed and injured during more than four decades of violence and war in that unfortunate country.

Furthermore, Afghanistan is a competing ground of the world in modern times which has experienced attack and occupation of three major foreign powers: Great Britain, Soviet Union and the United States. It has prompted and lured world powers to intervene and occupy that country and then face internal resistance and revolt.

Certainly, Afghanistan is a unique state not only because of its landlocked geographical setting but as stated by Stephen Tanner that, "the uniqueness of Afghanistan lies not just with its location at the hub of disparate empires. Afghanistan's continuously violent history is due in equal measure to the nature of its territory, which has in turn influenced the nature of its people. Among Afghanistan's more remote mountainous regions are tribes, still governed as a feudal basis, that have never been conquered. Neither have they ever been fully subjugated by domestic government."<sup>398</sup> One can figure out four main reasons why peace has remained fragile in Afghanistan and how it can find space for peace in that violent and conflict-ridden country. First, although Afghanistan is 200 years older than Pakistan as the Afghan kingdom was formed by Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1747, it has not been able to settle down as a nation state. Until there was a monarchy which ended with King Zahir Shah at the helm of affairs till 1973, Afghanistan was relatively peaceful with periodic phases of armed conflicts like the three Anglo-Afghan wars of 1839-42, 1878-80 and 1919. According to Rubin, "The Anglo-Afghan wars incorporated Afghanistan into the new international state system. The system was approaching Afghanistan not only from India, but also from the north, where the Russians were subduing the peoples of Central Asia. In fact, both wars arose from British concerns about Russian advances."<sup>399</sup>

Transformation of Afghanistan from medieval to modern times is aptly examined by Amin Saikal as follows:

For most of its modern history, Afghanistan has lived dangerously between the jaws of major or regional powers in one form or another. This time, it is landed between being once again very

---

398. Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.

399. Burnett R Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

weak and vulnerable nationally and the USA's geostrategic pre-eminence which recognizes no limitation when it comes to America's interests as the greatest and most powerful actor ever to have existed on earth. The biggest challenge of all confronting the Afghans is how to steer their way out of this situation and ensure the development of Afghanistan as an independent and viable state for the new millennium.<sup>400</sup>

According to one school of thought, monarchy in Afghanistan despite its fault lines was a buffer between the emerging left-wing groups or the socialists and the religious right. But, as a result of the dismantling of monarchy and a coup of July 1973 under the patronage of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan, the first cousin of King Zahir Shah and Prime Minister of Afghanistan from 1953-63, Afghanistan plunged into political violence in which PDPA was not only pitted against Islamist groups but also strived to gain power. During the era of King Zahir Shah, religious fanaticism was largely controlled, and at least Kabul boasted an emerging educated class and political elites with modern way of life. Afghanistan during under the monarchy witnessed a relative period of peace and security. Second, Afghanistan is still a tribal society where tribal feuds, ethnic diversification and religious groups pose a serious challenge to peace. After 9/11 and overthrow of Taliban regime, the U.S. led coalition forces selected a moderate and westernized Pashtun Hamid Karzai as the President of Afghanistan with a task to transform his country from tribal, backward ultra-conservative and religiously inclined to modern and democratic state. For that purpose, the West poured billions of dollars into Afghanistan to launch projects for reforming and modernizing the Afghan state by rebuilding the Afghan military, police, bureaucracy, justice system, educational system and the empowerment of women<sup>401</sup>. It was expected that by reforming the Afghan state and society with the assistance of the West and other supportive countries having stakes for peace and stability in Afghanistan, the country will never revert back to fanaticism, terrorism, violence and war lordism.

There cannot be any way that tribal and conservative way of life in Afghanistan can be changed within a short span of time because earlier efforts to transform the country by the PDPA regime as a progressive, egalitarian, enlightened and modern state had failed. Following the Saur revolution, PDPA regime tried to eradicate the influence of clergy and feudal aristocracy but failed because of

---

400. Amin Saikal, op. cit., p. 240.

401. Andreas Rieck, "Warlordism, the Disarmament Program and the Rebuilding of the Afghan National Army" in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *The Challenge of Rebuilding Afghanistan* (Karachi: Program on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi and the Hanns Seidal Foundation, Islamabad, 2006, Second edition), pp. 27-34.

the culture of Afghanistan which has an inbuilt resistance to social and political change. Third, the absence of viable structures for political stability and peace in Afghanistan tends to sustain the process of violence. Unfortunately, no regime in Afghanistan in retrospect and in present times has been able to focus on social and human development which would have ensured human security and peace. In a situation when rule of law and justice system in Afghanistan is in shambles, one cannot expect peace and tranquility. After the overthrow of Taliban regime, the U.S. supported government of President Hamid Karzai embarked on an ambitious plan to restructure state organs like military, police, bureaucracy and judiciary to establish peace, order and stability in Afghanistan. But, such an uphill task was not accomplished because it contradicted with the dynamics of Afghan culture which remained under the influence of corruption, nepotism and lack of professionalism.

In his speech before the UN General Assembly in September 2002, the then Afghan President Hamid Karzai pointed out that “the implementation of Bonn Agreement and the peace process was completely on track. Despite such achievements however, Afghanistan was realistic about countless challenges and problems it would have to confront, foremost of which was security. He appealed to the donor countries to follow up on their pledges for rebuilding the country, noting that actual contribution fell short of \$ 4.5 billion promised in Tokyo”.<sup>402</sup> He shared his vision for Afghanistan in the following words:

My vision of Afghanistan is of a modern state that builds on our Islamic values promoting justice, rule of law, human rights and freedom of commerce, and forming bridges between cultures and civilizations; a model of tolerance and prosperity based on the rich heritage of the Islamic civilization.<sup>403</sup>

Around twenty years down the road when the Taliban regime was overthrown by the U.S led attack, the situation on the ground is as dismal as it was earlier. In a situation when Taliban and Islamic State (IS) are involved in violent and terrorist activities and target innocent people by launching suicide attacks, it becomes quite difficult to establish peace and stability. When Taliban refuse to become part of a political process; renounce violence and participate in elections, how can one expect peace in Afghanistan? Finally, unless there is ownership among the people of Afghanistan and their leaders about their country, its present and future, the very task to establish peace is unattainable. Rampant corruption, nepotism and lack of professionalism have taken the toll of Afghan state and

---

402. Apratim Mukarji, *Afghanistan From Terror to Freedom* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishing Private Limited, 2003), p. 14.

403. Ibid.

society to the extent that Afghanistan is still dependent on foreign funding in order to meet its yearly budgetary needs. A country which since long is unable to ensure good governance, sustainable economy and the rule of law cannot establish peace, order and stability in the near future. Likewise, societal conflicts which cause violence in Afghanistan still remain unresolved.

No other country in the Central, South and West Asia is in dire need of peace than Afghanistan. It is high time that the people of Afghanistan need a break because enormous damage has been done to Afghan state and society and millions have been rendered homeless whereas hundreds and thousands have been killed and injured. The fragmentation of Afghan society on ethnic and sectarian lines is another tragic reality of how leaders of that country failed to provide relief to people suffering from decades of turmoil and civil war.

All the stakeholders in Afghanistan require working on a strategy to establish peace. Afghan state, political parties, Taliban groups and civil society, are the ones who must get together for a meaningful discourse in order to manage and resolve conflicts. Inter and intra-Afghan talks which got an impetus as a result of Doha agreement between Taliban and the United States in February 2020 provide some hope<sup>404</sup>. But, what is required on the part of the stakeholders of Afghanistan for peace in their conflict and violence ridden country is a mechanism for the management of conflicts. One can figure out five major requirements for a viable and successful peace and conflict management mechanism in Afghanistan.

- 1) Political will and determination among the parties to conflict in Afghanistan
- 2) Understanding and an agreement to renounce violence and use of force
- 3) The readiness on the part of Taliban to join the political process by accepting the constitution
- 4) Broad-based dialogue open to all stakeholders inclusive of everything that ill Afghan state and society
- 5) Some sort of mediation mechanisms between and among antagonistic parties<sup>405</sup>

---

404. See news item, "Kabul team in Doha as Taliban accused of stalling dialogue," *Daily Dawn* (Karachi) January 6, 2021. The second round of talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government began in Doha on January 6. Mr. Ahmad Zia Siraj, Afghanistan's spy chief, told the Afghan parliament on January 4 that "we believe the Taliban are planning to drag the talks (out) until the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan in the month of May." On the hand, the US special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad called for increased pace to talks and that "both sides must demonstrate they are acting in the best interest of the Afghan people by making real compromises and negotiating an agreement on a political settlement as soon as possible." See *Ibid.*,

405. Moonis Ahmar, "Afghanistan after 9/11" in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *The Challenge of Rebuilding Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 24.

## **Pakistan and Peace Prospects in Afghanistan**

It is beyond any shadow of doubt that chaos, disorder, violence and instability in Afghanistan is a direct threat to the security of Pakistan. Therefore, one cannot deny the fact that “despite shared geography, ethnicity and faith, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have never been smooth. With the sole exception of four years of Taliban rule over Afghanistan, successive governments in Kabul have displayed varying degrees of disaffection towards Islamabad. While the principal historical cause of this disaffection has been the unresolved issue of the Durand line, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have emanated from their divergent strategic outlook and dissimilar ethos.”<sup>406</sup> Border, a point of commonality is also a source of friction. It is both contested and porous, and straddled by sizeable ethnic Pashtun and Baloch communities. Although the violence and instability in Afghanistan adversely impacts Pakistan’s domestic politics and security, Pakistan’s interventionist policies towards Afghanistan have also contributed in complicating Pakistan’s domestic political and security matrix.<sup>407</sup>

Critics argue that Pakistan’s Afghan policy from the 1980s till 2001 remained interventionist and counter-productive as it generated enormous ill-will in a segment of Afghan population against Islamabad. Jeffrey J. Roberts argues, Pakistan’s mistakes did not stop with Hekmetyar. Pakistan essentially served as midwife to the Taliban, fostering the group’s existence and helping bring the radical regime to power. Pakistan continued to support them long after every other nation, even Saudi Arabia, had condemned their atrocities. Apparently Pakistani intelligence believed that it could use the Taliban, but Mullah Omer proved nobody’s puppet.<sup>408</sup> Yet Roberts raises the question that, what is harder to understand is why the Pakistanis funneled the bulk of the foreign aid to the most reactionary of Mujahideen groups, Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbadin Hekmetyar. Perhaps it was sheer inertia, as Pakistan had supported conservative resistance against Daud’s regime since 1973. Perhaps, Pakistani intelligence believed that the Pan-Islamist Hekmatyar would be less likely to revive Pashtunistan agitation.<sup>409</sup> It is the past which still haunts Pakistani military and security establishment and the bitter fact that the fall of Taliban regime led to resurgence of India’s role in Afghanistan in a big way. Even if Islamabad is in a denial mode about its

---

406. Rifaat Hussain, J. N. Dixit, Julie Sirrs (et.al) *The Anatomy of a Conflict Afghanistan and 9/11* (New Delhi: Lotus Collection, 2002), p. 19.

407. Rahul Roy Chaudhry, “Pakistan” in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman (eds.), *Afghanistan to 2015 and beyond* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2011), p. 16.

408. Jeffrey J. Roberts, *The Origins of Conflict in Afghanistan* (London: Prager, 2003), p. 236.

409. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

so-called theory of 'strategic depth' and installing a friendly regime in Kabul, a wide section of non-Pashtun and even some Pashtun Afghans do not trust Pakistan that it wants peace and stability in that war torn country.

It will take Pakistan a lot of time and effort to transform the negative impact about Islamabad in Afghanistan into a positive one. On the flip side, Islamabad is now pursuing a consistent approach to facilitate intra-Afghan talks and it also played a positive role for a path breaking February 2020 agreement between the United States and the Taliban for the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan by May 2021. The positive impact of geo-politics of Afghanistan, according to Prof. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, "has been more than obvious on Pakistan's state, society and economy. More than quarter of a century of war has pushed millions of refugees on to Pakistan in some areas causing serious demographic imbalance. Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan's war in support of the Mujahideen factions and the Taliban has made Pakistani society more porous to extremist religious influences, promoted a culture of armed struggle, creating dangerous regional networks that work against the stability, of all states. From the point of view of national security and national interests of Pakistan, occupation of Afghanistan by a hostile power, conditions of civil war or use of its territory as a platform against Pakistan would provide a proactive response. This is the kind of thinking that has kept Pakistan in Afghanistan's politics and security."<sup>410</sup> The new thought process in Pakistan about Afghanistan reflects rejection of its earlier approach which was pursued since the days of President Zia till 9/11 but even then, there are circles who term the former northern alliance having tilt towards India and hold the view that only the Pashtun Islamists can be trusted to have a pro-Pakistan leaning.

For Pakistan, a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in its interest because of three main reasons. First, if Afghanistan remains chaotic, crisis and violent ridden, Pakistan will continue to face influx of refugees who will take shelter in its eastern neighbor as had done in earlier phases of armed conflicts. And there is a history as far as Afghan refugees sneaking into Pakistan is concerned. Even after the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan majority of three million Afghan refugees who took asylum in Pakistan did not return to their country of origin. The erection of fence along Pak-Afghan border will be breached in the event there is fresh outbreak of armed conflict in Afghanistan and fresh spell of Afghan refugees may pour into Pakistan.

The perception that if foreign forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan and if they remain in that country in both cases, Pakistan will have serious issues holds

---

410. Rasul Bakhsh Rais, "Pakistan's Relations with the Post-Taliban Afghanistan" in Moonis Ahmar (ed.), *The Challenge of Rebuilding Afghanistan*, op. cit., p. 194.

some merit because of two main reasons. In case of the withdrawal, one can expect the outbreak of civil war in Afghanistan and the fresh influx of refugees into Pakistan. And if foreign forces remain in Afghanistan, the country will continue to face attacks by Taliban targeting foreign and Afghan forces leading to more and more violence. Second, if Afghanistan is not peaceful and continue to experience violence and external interference, Pakistan will not be able to get access to Central Asia.

A win-win situation in Pak-Afghan relations may occur if Afghanistan is included in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched by China which can ensure enormous investment and infrastructure development in Afghanistan leading to economic development and progress.

Likewise, the future of SAARC and ECO also depends on peaceful Afghanistan as it would remain a major destabilizing factor in the three Asias i.e., Central, South and West. Projects like TAPI and CASA-1000 energy corridor would remain not functional because of the absence of peace in Afghanistan. Third, peace in Afghanistan will also save Pakistan from the alleged Indian network using that country to destabilize particularly in its province of Balochistan. India's role in Afghanistan in the post-9/11 era is certainly a source of concern for Pakistan because of what it perceives as New Delhi's intervention its province of Balochistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan by using its network. After the dismantling of Taliban regime India managed to re-enter Afghanistan with the support of Northern alliance. During his meeting with the Afghan ambassador Najibullah Ali Khel in Islamabad on November 26, 2020, Special Assistant to Prime Minister on National Security Dr. Moeed Yusuf discussed dossier against India for destabilizing Pakistan by using the Afghan soil. The Afghan ambassador assured him that his country's soil would not be used against Pakistan.<sup>411</sup> Based on the above facts, Pakistan's stake for a durable peace in Afghanistan is fundamental and pivotal. Much depends on the outcome of several rounds of Doha talks and how Pakistan can play a pivotal role for augmenting the Afghan peace process.

## **Peace and Conflict Management Mechanism**

If peace is the end, conflict management is a means to accomplish that end. The ideal of peace between Pakistan and Afghanistan must be backed by a realist assumption of establishing conflict management mechanism. What should be the pros and cons of that mechanism and what are the impediments in this

---

411. "Dossier against India discussed with the Afghan envoy" *Daily Dawn* (Karachi) 27 November 2020.

regard needs to be examined from three angles. First, the age-old conflict of Durand Line which was perceived by Afghanistan as a major stumbling block and Pakistan as an irritant on Kabul's refusal to recognize Pak-Afghan border has reached the stage of management. Till the regime of Sardar Daud Khan, Durand Line was used by Afghanistan as a ploy and a contentious issue but after his overthrow in April 1978 by a coup launched by PDPA, no Afghan government has seriously raised that conflict because of changed internal dynamics. On these grounds it seems, the Durand Line conflict has been managed because of Pakistan's consistent approach based on political realism and denying Kabul's exercising strategic restraints to Kabul's provocative stance on that issue during 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Second, conflict management mechanism in Pak-Afghan relations for peace and stability got an impetus when in May 2018, the two countries decided to establish Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS). The purpose of APAPPS is to "provide a comprehensive and structured framework for institutional bilateral engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan in diverse areas of cooperation. The mechanism works through five working groups namely: politico-diplomatic, military-to-military coordination; intelligence cooperation; economic and refugees."<sup>412</sup>

The inaugural session of APAPPS was held on July 22, 2018. According to a joint statement issued by the Foreign Office, Islamabad, in the inaugural joint meeting of the working groups, "the Afghan and Pakistani side assessed prospects for the APAPPS forum that covers all areas of mutual interest including counter terrorism and security, peace and reconciliation, bilateral trade and connectivity, Afghan refugees' repatriation and promoting people to people contacts."<sup>413</sup> During the visit of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on April 6, 2018 to Kabul, "Pakistan reaffirmed its support to the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. At the same time both countries committed to deny use of their respective territory by any country, network, group or individuals for anti-state activities against either country. The two countries also committed to avoid territorial and aerial violations of each other's territory."<sup>414</sup>

Another arrangement to promote peace and trade cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). Addressing the opening session of the 8<sup>th</sup> round of three-day APTTA meeting held in Islamabad in December 2020, Advisor to the Prime Minister

---

412. Khaled Mahmood, "Pak-Afghan Huddle today to review Action Plan" in *The Express Tribune* (Karachi), 10 June 2019.

413. *Ibid.*,

414. *Ibid.*,

on Commerce and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood stated that, "in recent trade dialogue, Pakistan and Afghanistan mainly focused on transit, bilateral and informal trade issues through the agenda of shared prosperity and peace. Smooth transit trade will enhance connectivity with Central Asian states, linking regional trade with Gwader Port and finalization of APTTA and Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) with Afghanistan in February 2021."<sup>415</sup> In the earlier round of APTTA the two countries had agreed in a comprehensive document entitled, "A Shared Vision" between Afghanistan and Pakistan to support peace and stability in the two countries for promoting a comprehensive regional interest. Mr. Razak Dawood made it clear that, "both countries had agreed to keep the shared vision, its commitments under a regional review to ensure measurable, clear and irreversible steps towards more productive economic and trade relations between them."<sup>416</sup> With the expansion of trade and commerce between Afghanistan and Pakistan at the government and non-governmental level, one can expect peaceful management of their contentious issues. But what is required is positive transformation of conflicts in Afghanistan so that human resource, particularly of youth in that violence ridden country is used for social and human development. Peace through development in Afghanistan will have a positive impact on its relations with neighbors.

A number of cooperation mechanisms between and among the regional states will go a long way in strengthening peace process in Afghanistan with the support and cooperation of Pakistan.<sup>417</sup> The role of viable and purposeful institutions in building blocks for peace, security and stability in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations will give an impetus for the management of conflicts between the two neighboring countries.

According to the International Crisis Group report, "Pakistan's interventionist policies are also undermining the peace at home. The Afghan insurgents are aligned with home-grown Pakistani tribal extremists, who in turn are part of a syndicate of sectarian, regional and transnational jihadi groups".<sup>418</sup> Getting

---

415. "Pak-Afghan Trade to Boost Regional Integration: Razak," *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), 29 December 2020.

416. *Ibid.*, He further pointed out on the occasion of 8th round of APTTA dialogue that, "there was a huge potential of bilateral and transit trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan and both sides were negotiating the common agenda of peace, prosperity and regional harmony." *Ibid.*

417. These initiatives include APAPPS and APTTA, Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Committee Groups along with Kabul Process-1&II, Moscow Format on Afghanistan, SCO Contact Group on Afghanistan, International Contact Group on Afghanistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Business Council, Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) along with its declarations for stabilization the process of regional economic cooperation between Central and South Asia and the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process for Peace, Partnership and Prosperity in Afghanistan and its neighbors

418. "Resetting Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan," *op. cit.*

over the past polemics in Pak-Afghan relations and Kabul's reservations about Islamabad's meddling in its internal affairs may be the right kind of approach but till the time Afghanistan is unable to prevent groups who are accused of carrying out violent and terrorist activities in Pakistan, the level of trust and confidence would remain low. Despite possessing limited space Pakistan can help intra-Afghan peace dialogue process by not tilting in favor of any group and urging upon Afghan stakeholders to keep the future of their country in mind instead of their parochial interests. Pakistan will certainly benefit if intra-Afghan peace talks succeed as it would have a direct impact on its short and long-term interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia.



# Chronology of Afghanistan Conflict & Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations 2001 to 2021

Wajahat Rehan

The war in Afghanistan started when the Soviet Union intervened in support of the Afghan communist government in its conflict with anti-communist factions. The Afghan resistance to the Soviets—locally called the Mujahedeen—were armed and funded by the United States and Saudi Arabia along with other Muslim countries. The Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, but civil war between the Soviet-backed Afghan government and the Mujahedeen continued, until the fall of Kabul to various rebel groups which included the newly rebellious government troops, in 1992. Another Afghan civil war started among the different Mujahedeen factions; this ended when the Taliban (one of the Mujahedeen factions) supported by Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia took control of Kabul in 1996. The Taliban were opposed by the Northern Alliance formed by key political leaders, particularly President Burhanuddin Rabbani and former Defense Minister Ahmad Shah Masoud. After seizing control of Kabul, the Taliban remained in control of almost the entire country.

## 2001

On 9 September, the leader of the Northern Alliance,<sup>419</sup> Ahmed Shah Massoud was assassinated.

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center in New York in the United States was attacked. In October, the United States declared its “war on terror” on Afghanistan. The US government brought pressure on General Pervez Musharraf to break off relations with the Taliban regime and to join the coalition led by the United States.

Pakistan tried to pressurize the Taliban and other Al-Qaeda members to hand over Osama bin Laden to American authorities but failed. Pakistan then allowed

---

419. Northern Alliance was a united military front formed in 1996 after Taliban took over Kabul and named Afghanistan the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

the American army to use its military bases for launching attacks on Afghan soil. The US government lifted all sanctions against Pakistan that had been imposed under the Pressler and Glenn amendments.

In October, the Northern Alliance Forces entered Kabul. By November, the Taliban had started retreating.

In November, the UN Security Council, through a resolution, called for international peacekeeping forces to establish a transitional administration leading to the formation of a new government, to promote stability and aid delivery in Afghanistan. Thus, NATO forces took control of security in Kabul.

In December, major Afghan factions (including the Northern Alliance, but not Taliban) signed an agreement in Bonn, Germany, called the Bonn Agreement and formed a 30-member interim government with Hamid Shah Karzai as its head.

Pakistan recognized Hamid Karzai's government, offered aid, and expressed a desire for establishing friendly relations.

## **2002**

In January, the first contingent of foreign peacekeepers—the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—was deployed in Afghanistan, and this became the start of the protracted war against the Taliban.

In March, Pakistan increased the presence of military forces in North and South Waziristan to target militants fleeing the US-led Operation Anaconda in Southeast Afghanistan. The local Taliban were asked by Pakistan's intelligence agencies to surrender foreign militants.

## **2003**

In May, President George W. Bush announced the end of "major combat operations" in Afghanistan.

In July, Pakistan officially accused India of setting up terrorist training camps along borders inside Afghanistan.

In August, Pakistan told Kabul that two Indian Consulates (Jalalabad and Kandahar) were being used by New Delhi's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW; India's intelligence network) for anti-Pakistan activities, and asked for a halt to

this. Kabul reassured Pakistan that it would not allow any anti-Pakistani activities on its soil, but this failed to satisfy Pakistan.

Bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan grew significantly in 2003-04.

## **2004**

Pakistan's Prime Minister visited Afghanistan and pledged cooperation to improve the countries' relations in everything from improving trade to the elimination of terrorism.

US army began drone strikes in northwest Pakistan. Pakistan wanted these strikes to be under Pakistan control, but the United States was against it. Thus, Pakistan saw these strikes as undermining its sovereignty.

In March, Pakistan started the South Waziristan Operation called Operation Kalosha II. This was a search-and-destroy operation to clear the area of foreign militants.

In April, the Pakistan military negotiated a ceasefire peace deal with militants, but this deal fell apart after the militant leader Nek Muhammad was killed in an airstrike.

In June, US President George Bush officially declared Pakistan as a non-NATO ally, granting it the authority to purchase strategic and advanced military equipment.

Pakistan provided full support for the peaceful conduct of presidential and parliamentary polls in October 2004 and September 2005 in Afghanistan by sealing its border to guard against any incursions to disrupt the election process. Hamid Karzai won the elections and remained president of Afghanistan.

In November, President Musharraf was the first Head of State to visit Afghanistan after the successful completion of presidential elections in Afghanistan.

## **2005**

In February, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (led by Baitullah Mehsud) and the Pakistan Army reached a ceasefire deal in South Waziristan. Mehsud agreed to end anti-government activities, stop supporting foreign fighters and international terrorists, and end cross-border attacks in Afghanistan in exchange for the withdrawal of Pakistan military troops from areas under Mehsud's control.

Taliban re-emerged in Afghanistan, better equipped and financed. According to the US Department of Defense, 66 US troops were killed in combat in Afghanistan in 2005, more than in the previous 4 years combined.

Pakistan and Afghanistan both blamed each other for interfering in their domestic affairs. Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai claimed that Pakistan was training militants and sending them across the border. Pakistan blamed Afghanistan for supporting Baloch guerrillas and for violence in Waziristan.

In September, parliamentary elections were held in Afghanistan; many women won seats set aside for them. Most of the general seats were won by various warlords and strong men. Pakistan, again, fully supported these elections.

NATO took control of ISAF in Afghanistan, thereby expanding its operations from Kabul to all of Afghanistan.

Trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan reached US \$1.1 billion.

## **2006**

Amid continuing fighting among Taliban, Al-Qaida and the Afghan government forces, NATO expanded its peacekeeping operation to the southern portion of the country. After the NATO forces took over from American-led troops, Taliban fighters launched a bloody wave of suicide attacks and raids against the international troops.

In March, Pakistan proposed fencing the Afghan border and even land-mining it to stop the infiltration of foreigners on both sides of the border.

In July, the SAFTA Agreement was enforced for the first time, and the Trade Liberalization Program commenced.

## **2007**

In January, Afghans captured Taliban Spokesman Muhammad Hanif who, in a video, claimed that a leader of the former Taliban regime was living in Pakistan under the protection of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Pakistan denied the claim.

In May, Taliban military commander, Mullah Dadullah, was killed in a joint operation by Afghanistan, the United States, and NATO forces in the south of Afghanistan

In August, according to a UN report, opium production soared to a record high in Afghanistan.

In December, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was formed, and swore fealty to Mullah Omar, the Taliban commander of Afghanistan.

In September, Pakistan was accused of using the aid money provided by the United States in exchange for Pakistan's cooperation on the war on terror for strengthening its defense against India. President Musharraf admitted that the money was indeed used to equip the troops who moved with their equipment from the western side (Afghan border) to the east (Indian border) based on a perceived threat.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the British proposed talks with the Taliban, but the United States and the insurgent groups, including the Taliban, refused to participate. The Taliban said it will not talk to the Afghan "puppet" government.

In December, TTP Swat District NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) was formed, and declared war on the Pakistan Army and the government; they took complete control of the valley.

## **2008**

In June, President Karzai warned Pakistan to take action against militants or Afghanistan would send troops to Pakistan.

A US Army airstrike killed 11 Pakistani Para Military soldiers of Army Frontier Corps, and an army major, along with 8 Taliban. The airstrike and resulting deaths instigated a fierce reaction from Pakistani command.

In July, a suicide bombing killed more than 50 people in Kabul.

In September, US President George Bush sent an extra 4,500 US troops to Afghanistan, in a move he described as a "quiet surge."

In October, a suicide bombing in Marriott Hotel Islamabad killed 54 people and injured 266 people.

Terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan rose from 1,471 in 2006 to 3,598 in 2007 and 6,715 in 2008. They peaked at 11,704 in 2009.

## **2009**

In February, NATO countries pledged to increase military and other commitments in Afghanistan.

In March, the United States announced a new American strategy, the core goal of which was “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda and its safe havens in Pakistan, and to prevent their return to Pakistan or Afghanistan.” An extra 4,000 US personnel started training the Afghan army and the police in order to provide support to the civilian government.

Pakistan continued to host about 1.7 million Afghan refugees.

In April, TTP Fazlullah group took control of Buner, Lower Dir, and Shangla districts of the then NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Pakistan launched Operation Black Thunderstorm to re-take these districts from the TTP.

In May, Pakistan and Afghanistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), under which Afghanistan was given access to three entry points: Port Qasim, Karachi Port, and Gawadar Port. The two countries agreed, in principle, to give access to a third border crossing point, Gulam Khan, in addition to previously agreed Torkham and Chaman borders. This crossing point provided Afghanistan access to China.

In June, Operation Black Thunderstorm concluded, with Pakistan taking back control of all districts.

In August, the leader of TTP, Baitullah Mehsud, was killed in a US drone attack in South Waziristan. He was succeeded by Hakimullah Mehsud.

In October, Mr. Hamid Karzai was declared winner of Afghanistan’s August presidential elections.

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations came to an all-time low, with both governments blaming the other for providing training grounds for terrorist groups.

The Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act/Bill for Aid to Pakistan passed in the US Congress. This Bill authorized release of \$1.5 billion per year to the Government of Pakistan as non-military aid from the period of 2010 to 2014.

A suicide bombing killed 120 people in Peshawar. TTP claimed responsibility.

An Al-Qaeda double agent killed 7 CIA Agents in a suicide attack on a base in Khost (Afghanistan).

US President Obama set 2011 as the start of the withdrawal of troops.

## **2010**

In February NATO-led forces launch a major offensive named Operation Mushtarak in a bid to secure government control of southern Helmand province.

The Pakistan Army, in joint operation with US Intelligence Agencies, captured Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a Taliban commander from the area then called the tribal belt of Pakistan. The success of the operation was hailed, and Pakistan was appreciated for its cooperation.

In April NWFP was renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

In July a MoU was reached between Pakistan and Afghanistan for the Afghan-Pak Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). The two states also signed another MoU for the construction of railway tracks in Afghanistan, to connect with Pakistan Railways (PR).

In October the APTTA Agreement was signed by the Commerce Ministers of Pakistan and Afghanistan in the presence of US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan; a number of foreign ambassadors, Afghan parliamentarians, and senior officials were also present. This agreement allowed Afghan trucks access to certain areas in Pakistan, allowing them to reach the Wagah border and also go south to the port cities of Karachi and Gwadar.

In November at a summit in Lisbon, NATO forces signed an agreement called Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan; NATO resolved to hand control of security to Afghan forces by end of 2014.

The United States increased drone strikes in Pakistan; these peaked at 118 drone strikes in just 2010.

A Joint Chamber of Commerce was formed between Afghanistan and Pakistan to expand trade relations and solve trade problems for both states.

Direct contact between the US and the Taliban was initiated with the help of Pakistan. US officials met Tayyab Agha, a representative of Mullah Omar in Munich. The then secretive talks were brokered by German officials and the Qatari royal family.

## **2011**

In January Raymond Davis (acting head of CIA in Pakistan) killed 2 men in Lahore, claiming they had come to rob him. He was later cleared of all charges and sent back to the United States.

In May Osama bin Laden was killed in an operation conducted by US Navy Seals in Abbottabad, Pakistan. The United States claimed that information was not shared with Pakistan but ISI claimed that the operation was joint; a claim denied by President Zardari. The United States withheld aid to Pakistan worth \$800 million.

Pakistan-Afghanistan skirmishes intensified. Many large-scale attacks occurred across Afghanistan. ISAF blamed the Pakistan-based Haqqani network.

In June President Obama addressed his nation and declared that 10,000 troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by the end of 2011. Obama also confirmed that the United States was holding talks with the Taliban leadership with reconciliation in mind.

The Afghan president came to Pakistan for a two-day visit. Karzai said in an interview on Geo TV (Pakistani news channel) that in case of any war between Pakistan and India, Afghanistan would side with Pakistan. He then put his hand on his heart and described Pakistan as a brother country.

US Secretary of State launched the New Silk Road initiative, aimed at stabilizing Afghanistan and its immediate neighbourhood by promoting the integration of the Central and South Asian economies.

In August two rounds of preliminary meetings between US Officials and Taliban leaders were held in Doha and in Germany. These were mainly about the prisoner exchange. These talks failed, purportedly because the Taliban refused to certify that the released prisoners will not return to fighting.

In September former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated in Afghanistan; Pakistan was held responsible by the Afghan government but solid proof was not presented; Pakistan in turn blamed Afghan refugees.

In October Afghanistan signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement with India; this made provisions for economic and developmental aid to Afghanistan including military assistance —training of Afghan security personnel, among others. Pakistan viewed this deal as detrimental to its own interests.

On 26 November NATO forces attacked two Pakistani check posts along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Later both sides claimed that the other side fired first. NATO helicopters, gunships, and fighter jets entered Pakistan's territory in the border area of Salala in Mohmand Agency (now Mohmand district). They came from across Afghanistan, and fired on and killed 28 Pakistani soldiers, wounding 12 others. Pakistan reacted by closing the NATO supply lines and evacuating the Shamsi airbase.

Pakistan refused to attend the Bonn (Germany) Conference on Afghanistan, after the Salala incident.

President Karzai won the endorsement of tribal elders to negotiate a 10-year military partnership with the United States at a Loya Jirga (traditional assembly.) The proposed pact allowed US troops to remain in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

## **2012**

In January, Taliban officially opened an office in Doha as a move towards peace talks with the United States and the Afghan government.

In May a US soldier killed 16 Afghan civilians inside their homes; President Hamid Karzai called for American forces to leave Afghan villages and pull back to their bases.

The NATO summit endorsed the plan to withdraw foreign combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.

In July, Afghanistan and Pakistan extended APTTA to include Tajikistan and establish a North-South trade corridor. This agreement provided facilities to Tajikistan to use Pakistan's Gwadar and Karachi ports for its imports and exports and allow Pakistan to trade with Tajikistan under terms similar to the transit arrangement with Afghanistan.

US Secretary of State officially apologized for the losses suffered by the Pakistan Military. Pakistan restored the NATO supply lines.

In November the Afghan foreign minister, Dr. Zalmay Rasul visited Pakistan and was handed a draft Strategic Partnership Agreement by Pakistan Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar.

In December Pakistan first released nine, and then eight, Taliban detainees, including two former ministers who had served under the Taliban regime, in a bid to facilitate peace talks between insurgents and the Afghan government.

## **2013**

In January during a meeting between the Afghan Defense Minister and Pakistan Military Chief an agreement was reached to explore the possibility of military training exchanges. Pakistan Military Chief told the Afghan defense minister that Pakistan would make all-out efforts for a “peaceful, stable and united Afghanistan.”

In February Afghan President Karzai and Pakistan’s Premier Zardari agreed to work towards an Afghan peace deal. Both leaders supported opening of an Afghan office in Doha and urged the Taliban to do the same so that peace talks could take place.

In June the Afghan army took control of all military and security operations from NATO forces.

Taliban officially opened its office in Dubai, but this was shut down as Afghanistan objected to Taliban flying the flag of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

In November the Haqqani Network leader Nasiruddin Haqqani was killed in Pakistan.

Fazlullah was appointed the leader of TTP after Hakimullah Mehsud was killed in a US drone attack.

President Karzai suspended security talks with the United States after Washington announced its plans to hold direct talks with the Taliban. Afghanistan insisted on conducting the talks with the Taliban in Qatar.

Pakistan Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Islamabad established a separate directorate known as Directorate General based in Karachi for facilitating transit trade with Afghanistan. The Directorate General had regional directorates working at Quetta, Peshawar, and Karachi.

In December Mullah Fazlullah, the leader of TTP, took refuge in Afghanistan.

## **2014**

In January Taliban attacked a restaurant in Kabul’s diplomatic quarter, the worst suicide attack on foreign civilians since 2001. The 13 foreign victims included International Monetary Fund’s country head among others.

In April presidential elections were held in Afghanistan but were inconclusive; another round of presidential elections was held in June but was marred with violence. After an audit of all votes, a National Unity Government with Ashraf Ghani as president was formed.

In May Pakistan and Russia signed a Defense Cooperation agreement which made provisions for exchange of information on politico-military issues among other peacekeeping operations, including strengthening collaboration in military fields, education, medicine, history, topography, hydrography, and culture as well as sharing experiences in peacekeeping operations.

In September Pakistani President Mamnoon Husain attended the oath-taking ceremony of President Elect Ashraf Ghani to try and normalize relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In November during a meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, Pakistan's Military Chief Raheel Shareef offered "full range" of training courses and facilities in Pakistan to Afghan security forces. Ashraf Ghani also expressed his government's interest in "bolstering security and defense ties with Pakistan, including cooperation in training and border management."

In December the United States and Britain decided to end combat operations in Afghanistan. The United States decide to keep a part of its forces in Afghanistan beyond 2014 under mission Resolute Support—a two-year program to train Afghan security forces.

2014 was the bloodiest year in Afghanistan since 2001.

Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar was attacked and 150 people including 132 children were murdered. Pakistan Army Chief General Raheel Sharif visited Kabul and shared intelligence details with Afghan officials regarding the terrorists masterminding the APS attack and living in Afghanistan. During this visit, he asked for Afghan authorities' help in expelling the TTP Chief Mullah Fazalullah.

Afghan forces launched an operation in the areas hosting TTP terrorists. Within a day the commanders of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the ISAF in Afghanistan visited Pakistan and reaffirmed their commitment to the elimination of terror sanctuaries on Afghan soil.

A 16-member delegation of Afghan parliamentarians visited Islamabad and met Pakistani officials including Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Both sides showed

their commitment to rooting out terrorism and increasing bilateral cooperation on various issues.

## **2015**

Bilateral trade between the two countries dropped to its lowest levels in 2015.

In January NATO began mission Resolute Support; 12,000 NATO personnel started providing training and support for Afghan security forces.

Islamic State (IS) group was formed with former TTP militant as its leader and former Afghan Taliban commander as deputy leader. Both these leaders were later killed in drone attacks. IS group captured a large strip of Taliban land in Nangarhar province.

Afghan forces launched an operation and arrested five perpetrators of the APS attack. This was done on the strength of information shared by the ISI. Later, six Afghan cadets were sent to Pakistan for military training.

In March following a request from Afghan President Ghani, the United States announced a delay in US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In April Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa visited Kabul and discussed the matter of illegal Afghan refugees' return to Afghanistan

In May Pakistan's ISI and Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS) signed a landmark deal for cooperation in counterterrorism operations. Pakistan was to also train and equip NDS.

Pakistan Army launched an operation to save the life of an Afghan soldier injured in a clash with the militants on the Afghanistan side of the Pakistan-Afghan border. He was evacuated and sent to Pakistan for treatment, and after recovery, sent back to Afghanistan.

Taliban representatives and Afghan officials held informal peace talks in Qatar. The Taliban insisted on continuing fighting until all foreign troops left the country.

In June Afghan Parliament was attacked and Afghanistan blamed the Haqqani network and an ISI officer; Pakistan denied ISI's involvement and the relations between the two countries deteriorated.

In July a check post in Waziristan was attacked by ANA.

Pakistan was able to get Taliban representatives to take part in peace talks in Murree, Pakistan. The representatives of both the Afghan and Pakistan governments participated in these talks. The United States and China were present as observers. The meeting stalled when it was announced that Mullah Omar had been killed.

In September Pakistan Foreign Minister met Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Afghan Foreign Minister at the Regional Economic Conference 2015 and asked them to stop anti-Pakistan propaganda in Afghan media and press.

In the same meeting, the Afghan government was provided with documentary proof of Indian terrorist activities in Balochistan utilizing channels through Afghanistan. Pakistan Foreign Minister expressed hope that the Pak-China Economic Corridor (CPEC) would be useful to all countries of Asia.

Bilateral transit trade talks between Pakistan and Afghanistan stalled when Afghanistan insisted on including India in the talks.

In October Taliban captured Kunduz. This was their first major victory since 2001. Pakistan was again blamed for supporting the Taliban. Afghan forces retook the city three days later.

Pakistan decided to let Afghan refugees extend their stay in Pakistan till December 2015.

In November the Afghan president announced that Afghanistan would hold talks with Pakistan on all issues including trade only if India was involved. This was not acceptable to Pakistan.

In December NATO extended its Resolute Support follow-on mission by 12 months, to the end of 2016.

Pakistan Premier met his Afghan counterpart during the Environmental Conference in France and discussed matters of mutual interest. The Afghan president later visited Pakistan to inaugurate the Heart of Asia conference in Islamabad.

Pakistani Army Chief paid a one-day visit to Kabul to meet with the Afghan president and Army Chief. It was decided that both countries would not allow the territory of their respective countries to target each other. Pakistan Army Chief said he would try and get the Taliban to establish dialogue with Kabul.

The construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas pipeline commenced in December.

## **2016**

In January a meeting of the Afghanistan-Pakistan-US-China Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) was held in Islamabad. The group reiterated the commitment of their countries for mutual efforts to facilitate an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process with a view to achieving lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. It was also decided that the next meeting would be held on 18 January 2016 in Kabul.

Between January and May heavy US air strikes reversed IS gains in the east, and the group was cornered in a few districts in Nangarhar province.

In February Pakistan offered the aid of \$500 million to Afghan infrastructure development.

The US government promised \$860 million in aid for Pakistan during the 2016-17 fiscal year including \$265 million for military hardware in addition to counterinsurgency funds.

In April Taliban attacked a government intelligence building in Afghanistan resulting in 70 deaths and 347 injuries.

In May Taliban leader Mullah Mansour was killed in a US drone attack in Pakistan's Balochistan province.

In June Pakistan initiated the construction of a gate at Torkham border to facilitate and check cross-border movement and stop militants from crossing into Pakistan.

Pakistan's Foreign Office stated that although Afghan authorities had been informed about Pakistan's initiatives at Torkham, they still resorted to unprovoked firing which resulted in the death of a Pakistani Major and an Afghan soldier. On public demand, Pakistan and Afghanistan decided to stop the blame-game and an agreement was reached on 21 June to discuss matters related to border management and security in order to prevent the recurrence of border skirmishes.

In July US President Barack Obama announced that 8,400 US troops would remain in Afghanistan till 2017 in light of the "precarious security situation." NATO also agreed to maintain troop numbers and reiterated a funding pledge for local security forces until 2020.

After Pakistani military destroyed the militants' infrastructure in the Tribal Areas

of Pakistan, the Afghan president reiterated that Pakistan acted as a sanctuary for terrorists. Pakistan refuted this by saying that Afghan refugee camps provided safety to terrorists arriving from across the border.

Pakistan-Afghanistan trade volume declined significantly.

In August Pakistan closed Wesh (Spin Boldak)-Chaman Border crossing point after a group of Afghans attacked the Friendship Gate at Wesh-Chaman border and set the Pakistani flag on fire.

The Taliban advanced towards Lashkar Gah (capital of Helmand province), Kunduz, and Tarinkot and took control temporarily.

In September the Afghan government signed a peace deal with the militant group Hezb-e-Islami and granted immunity to the group's leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The deal included the condition that the United States would remove him from the list of Global terrorists.

A suicide bombing killed at least 36 people at a mosque during Friday prayers in the Mohmand district (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan). Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) and TTP claimed responsibility for the attack.

The United States paid \$1.2 million to the family of an Italian aid worker killed by a US drone strike in Pakistan in a landmark deal.

Over one million Afghan refugees were repatriated from Pakistan with the help of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR) during 2016 according to *Country Partnership Strategy Oct 2017* by Asian Development Bank (ADB).

In October Afghan forces pushed Taliban out of Lashkar Gah, Helmand province after fighting for several hours.

Pakistan pressurized fugitive Taliban leaders (who were refusing to take part in the peace talks) to relocate from Pakistan.

In December representatives of Russia, China, and Pakistan met in Moscow to discuss the security issue in Afghanistan. All three states agreed to adopt flexible measures to remove the names of certain Taliban members from the sanctions lists in order to encourage peace talks between Kabul and Taliban. The Kabul government and parliamentarians felt it to be a direct interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

## **2017**

In January valid visa restrictions were imposed for both Afghans and Pakistanis moving across the border by Pakistan.

A bomb attack in Kandahar killed six UAE Diplomats.

In February the rise in IS activities were reported in a number of northern and southern provinces of Afghanistan.

The IS group took responsibility for a suicide bombing at a major Sufi shrine in Sehwan, Sindh, Pakistan, which killed nearly 90 people. Pakistan closed its border with Afghanistan.

Pakistan Army carried out targeted attacks on JuA and TTP hideouts located across the border in Afghanistan chiefly in Nangahar and Kunar. Pakistan also launched strikes on militant bases in Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

In March after 32 days, Pakistan reopened the border as a goodwill gesture towards Afghanistan.

Pakistan started fencing selected parts of its border with Afghanistan. In the first phase, the border along Bajaur, Mohmand, and Khyber was to be fenced.

In May during an Arab-Islamic summit in Riyadh, President Trump said India had suffered due to terrorism but failed to acknowledge Pakistan's role in anti-terrorism and its sacrifices. In the same summit he avoided meeting the Pakistani Premier but held a one-on-one meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. This created sentiments of resentment among Pakistani media personnel.

A Pakistani census team collecting population data in Chaman was attacked by Afghan forces who opened fire on them and the troops escorting them. In retaliation, Pakistan forces attacked the Afghan forces. Pakistan claimed that it destroyed at least 5 Afghan check points and killed 50 Afghan security personnel. Afghanistan refuted these claims. In addition, a number of civilians were killed and wounded on both sides of the border.

Pakistan also closed the Wesh-Chaman border.

Afghanistan reacted strongly to the fencing of the border and threatened military action against Pakistan.

In June IS militants captured Tora Bora in Nangarhar Province. Tora Bora had been used as a base by the late Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden.

Pakistan told the UN that terrorist safe havens existed in Afghanistan.

India and Afghanistan established a direct air freight corridor connecting Kabul to New Delhi. This decision was taken in September 2016 in a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. Later, this corridor was extended to Kandahar-New Delhi sector, thus reducing Afghanistan's dependency on access to Pakistan's routes soil for its exports.

In July a tripartite meeting between heads of state/governments of Pakistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan was held in Dushambe; the economic and security challenges being faced by the region due to poor connectivity and infrastructure were discussed. All three governments resolved to work together to promote regional cooperation and connectivity for shared prosperity.

Pakistan Army launched operation Khyber-4 in Khyber Agency (now district) to target terrorist hideouts.

In August US President Trump accused Pakistan of providing a safe haven to terrorists. Moreover, he urged India to play a larger role. He also pledged additional troops for Afghanistan bringing the total to 14,000-15,000 troops to fight a resurgent Taliban. This gave rise to anti-American sentiments in Pakistan and protests against Trump were held across the country.

Pakistan rejected Trump's allegations of terrorist safe havens in Pakistan.

In October the United States closed its offices of the Special Representative Afghanistan-Pakistan (SRAP) in Washington

In December Afghanistan announced its willingness to allow the Taliban to open a political office in Kabul to start peace negotiations and asked Taliban for a "mechanism" for talks. The Taliban refused to open an office in Kabul stating that the Qatar office was the only structure from where they would hold talks.

## **2018**

In January, a bomb-laden ambulance exploded in Kabul, killing more than 100 people. It was attributed to the Taliban.

US President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of harboring the Taliban and of inaction. In a tweet he said, "Pakistan's government has played the United States for 'fools' and US has received nothing but 'lies & deceit' in return for \$33 billion in aid over the last 15 years."

Pakistan Premier Imran Khan responded by tweeting “(Trump) needs to be informed about historical facts.” Khan, in another tweet, said, “US aid to Pakistan was a ‘miniscule’ \$20 billion, while the country lost 75,000 people and more than \$123 billion fighting the ‘US War on Terror.’” He also pointed to the supply routes Pakistan continues to provide to American forces: “Can Mr. Trump name another ally that gave such sacrifices?”

Later, security assistance to Pakistan, including \$255 million in military aid, was suspended.

Afghan refugees were granted their 6th extension for their stay in Pakistan.

In February the Taliban called for talks with the US, saying “It must now be established by America and its Allies that the Afghan issue cannot be solved militarily. America must henceforth focus on a peaceful strategy for Afghanistan instead of war.”

The Afghan president proposed unconditional peace talks with the Taliban, offering them recognition as a legal political party and release of their prisoners. In return, the government asked Taliban to recognize the Afghan government and respect the rule of law. The Taliban refused talks with Kabul until a US-Taliban deal was signed.

The construction of the Afghanistan-Pakistan section of the TAPI project commenced.

In March Pakistan hailed the Afghan president’s peace offer to Taliban.

Voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees was resumed with the help of UNCHR.

In May the 25th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan Bill was passed by the Parliament of Pakistan and the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), merging the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into the Province of KP.

In June Pakistan’s army chief visited Kabul to meet the Afghan president; he held talks with him on bilateral issues and matters related to Afghan peace-making efforts.

The United States asked for Pakistan’s assistance in facilitating a peace process but this time Pakistan’s own core security concerns and interests were also taken into account.

The call for peace, which started in Kabul in March, finally resulted in a cease fire deal between Kabul and the Taliban. During this ceasefire, Taliban members

came into Kabul to meet and communicate with locals and State Security Forces. Civilians called for the ceasefire to be made permanent; Taliban rejected an extension to the ceasefire and resumed fighting after the ceasefire ended on 18 June.

Pakistan once again offered to help start talks between the Kabul Government and the Taliban, but Taliban again refused to talk to the US-installed Kabul regime.

In July in various meetings held between Pakistani Prime Minister and the US President, the United States realized the importance of Pakistan's role in bringing about an amicable peace talk.

The United States entered secretly into direct negotiations with Taliban, reversing the long-standing US position prioritizing an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process."

General elections in Pakistan were held and Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (PTI) emerged as the winner.

In August Imran Khan of PTI was sworn in as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

In September the USA canceled \$300 million in aid to Pakistan over claims that Pakistan was not doing enough to combat militants in the Afghan-Pakistan border region.

US President Donald Trump terminated Pakistan's participation in America's International Military Education Program.

The US administration appointed Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-born former US Ambassador to Afghanistan, as Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation to assist in the long-standing US position prioritizing an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned reconciliation process." Khalilzad held continuous series of meetings with Taliban officials, as well as the Afghan and Pakistani governments in Doha.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister visited Afghanistan, strengthening bilateral relations of amity between both countries.

The October 2018 Report by Special Inspector General Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) showed that nearly 12% of Afghanistan districts is still under full control of the insurgents and an additional 66% of the country maintained an active presence of the Taliban.

Taliban targeted and killed Kandahar province police chief and the provincial head of National Intelligence and Security Services of Afghanistan. Two American soldiers were also wounded in the attack.

US Envoy visited Pakistan for official delegation-level talks between the two countries. The Envoy also visited Taliban offices in Doha and held pre-negotiation talks with them.

Pakistan released a former Taliban deputy leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar after nearly 9 years of detention, in an attempt to restart the peace process. Soon after, the Taliban appointed Baradar to lead peace talks in Doha.

In November three US troop members were killed and three wounded in an IED blast near Ghazni, Afghanistan.

Pak-Afghan bilateral trade was at its highest during the financial year 2017-18

Russia hosted a separate peace talk between the Taliban and officials from Afghanistan's High Peace Council; the delegations from Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were also present. The Taliban reiterated their stance of not holding direct talks with Kabul.

Pakistan and China proposed an extension of the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) to include Afghanistan and the Afghan government expressed interest in the proposal.

In December Zalmay Khalilzad, US representative for Afghanistan-Pakistan, left for an 8 country tour to discuss negotiating with the Taliban. He traveled to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Russia, and United Arab Emirates among others, and spoke multiple times with senior Taliban officials.

US President Donald Trump ordered the US military to withdraw 7,000 troops; this would take months.

US President wrote a letter to Pakistan Prime Minister requesting Islamabad's help in bringing the Afghan Taliban to the negotiating table.

Pakistan helped Taliban and the United States to hold and conclude two-day peace talks in the United Arab Emirates. Both parties promised to meet again for another round of talks "to complete the Afghanistan reconciliation process."

Pakistan's development assistance to Afghanistan reached \$1 billion, mostly geared towards investment in infrastructure, education, health, agriculture, and capacity-building of Afghan professionals.

## 2019

In January the US Army Chief of Staff visited Kabul, and held meetings with the Afghan president to discuss ways to end the war.

US Senator Linsey Graham visited Pakistan and met with Pakistani Prime Minister to talk about “reconciliation with the Taliban.”

The Afghan president reassured his people that the human rights they’ve gained since the United States invaded the country would not be jeopardized in any peace deal with the Taliban; he urged Taliban and other insurgents to hold direct talks with his government.

In February the Afghan Taliban and the United States started bilateral negotiations in Doha, agreeing to discuss US/NATO military withdrawal, counterterrorism, intra-Afghan talks, and a ceasefire. Pakistan was not part of this meeting.

Talks were again held in the offices of the Taliban in Qatar. These talks included the Taliban leader Baradar. A draft of the Peace Agreement between the United States and Taliban was approved. The agreement included the withdrawal of US and international troops from Afghanistan in return for which the Taliban would not allow other jihadist groups to operate within the country.

Pakistan arranged and hosted the Taliban and US Peace Talks in Islamabad to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan.

In March Pakistan applied “unprecedented pressure” on the Taliban to open talks with the Afghan government.<sup>420</sup>

In April the first attempt for talks between the Taliban, United States, and the Afghan government delegations in Doha had to be postponed as the Taliban objected to the size of the Afghan delegation.

Pakistan handed over the fully constructed Jinnah Hospital in Kabul to the Government of Afghanistan. This project was funded by Pakistan.

In June a conference of Afghan Political leaders, religious leaders and the Pakistani delegation headed by the Foreign Minister of Pakistan was held in Lahore, Pakistan. The Taliban representatives were not present. The meeting covered topics like trade, economy, health, and the repatriation of Afghan refugees.

---

420. Pakistan is ready for stability in Afghanistan; Yelena Biberman and Jared Schwartz, Skidmore College March 2019 (Website of East Asia Forum)

The Afghan president visited Pakistan and held delegation-level meetings with Pakistani Prime Minister to discuss strengthening the mutual cooperation in a number of areas, including politics, trade, economy, security, as well as peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan. The Taliban were not present at these meetings.

President Xi of China reaffirmed China's interest in playing an active role in bringing stability to Afghanistan through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the extension of CPEC.

In July after a 3-year hiatus, Pakistan and Afghanistan resumed talks to pave a favorable way for the Pak-Afghan Transit Treaty. Both delegates agreed to increase bilateral trade through mutual cooperation by addressing all issues. A joint commission to resolve issues including transit trade was formed.

The Pakistani Premier visited the US White house on July 22; in a joint press conference, US President Trump said, "I think Pakistan is going to help us to extricate ourselves."

Pakistan started exerting pressure on the Taliban to hold talks with the Afghan government and persuaded the Taliban to announce their willingness to hold talks with Kabul.

Pakistan and Afghanistan resumed talks on a bilateral Trade Agreement. These talks had initially stalled in September 2015, when Afghanistan had insisted on including India in the trade talks.

In August the Pakistan-Afghan Transit Trade agreement was amended to control smuggling by enhancing the number of goods on the negative list, allowing a quota for certain products, and collecting duty at Pakistani ports which was to be refunded on transit out.

The United States and Taliban held another round of peace talks and the *Washington Post* reported that the United States would withdraw 5,000 troops from Afghanistan.

In September Pakistan hosted China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministers' conference. It was agreed unanimously to fight terrorism by improving intelligence sharing and law enforcement cooperation, and to fight terrorist groups. It was also agreed that trilateral cooperation should be extended to enhance connectivity through extending the CPEC to Afghanistan and by jointly building a highway linking Kabul and Peshawar with international partners. The three countries also agreed to implement projects in the social-economic sector.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Special Envoy to Afghanistan announced that an agreement had been reached between the United States and the Taliban, pending approval by President Trump. However, less than a week later, Trump canceled the peace talks in response to an attack in Kabul that killed an American soldier and 11 other people. On 18 September the Taliban announced their willingness to resume talks.

On the request of Afghan Ministry of Defense, Pakistan opened major border crossing terminals to facilitate the movement of Afghan citizens across the Pakistan-Afghan border.

In October the Khyber Pass Economic Corridor (KPEC) was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC). This is an infrastructure project that aims to expand Pakistan's economic connectivity with Afghanistan, and by extension Central Asia, via the Khyber Pass.

In December Pakistan accepted and welcomed the Afghanistan election result in which president Ashraf Ghani scored over 50% votes, thereby retaining his presidency for another 5 years.

## **2020**

In January the first ship containing cargo destined for Afghanistan docked at the Gwadar seaport in Pakistan, marking the beginning of Afghan Transit Trade through Pakistan.

After two mortar shells were fired from Afghan territory into Pakistan, Pakistan closed its Torkham border.

During a telephonic conversation between Pakistani Foreign Minister and his Afghan counterpart, it was decided to open "border sustenance markets" in the two countries.

Work on the construction of the Torkham-Nowshera portion of the Central Asia-South Asia Regional Trade and Transmission Project (CASA-1000) started. CASA-1000 is an Electricity Transmission System connecting Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan, and is being funded by the World Bank.

On 29 February the peace deal between the Taliban, Kabul and the United States was signed to end the long war in Afghanistan. The agreement called for the removal of United States and Coalition forces from Afghanistan in exchange for the promise that the Taliban would not allow terrorist groups to operate on

Afghan soil against the United States and its allies. The rights of women (to education etc.) are also part of the agreement.

The agreement required that by 10 March, 2020, the Afghan government would release 5,000 Taliban prisoners in exchange for 1,000 Afghan prisoners to be released by the Taliban. Since the Afghan government was not a signatory to this agreement, it refused to release the 5,000 prisoners.

The Election Commission of Afghanistan announced Ashraf Ghani as the winner, but his rival Abdullah Abdullah did not accept this decision, and both candidates took the presidential oath in their respective Palaces.

In March the Afghan president Ashraf Ghani announced the release of 1,500 Taliban prisoners, on the condition that they sign a document that they would not return to fighting. Taliban refused to accept this.

One of the clauses of the Doha Peace Deal stated that the United States should act as a mediator between Afghanistan and Pakistan to ensure neither country's security is threatened by actions from the territory of the other side. But Pakistan refused to accept this, saying that any issue Afghanistan has should be directly addressed to Islamabad and the United States should not be involved.

In April Pakistan asked Afghanistan to hand over the IS Khorasan leader to Pakistan, since he was involved in anti-Pakistan activities in Afghanistan.

In May Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah reached an agreement and Abdullah Abdullah was placed in charge of peace talks with the Taliban and given the right to appoint half the cabinet.

The Taliban announced an Eid al-Fitr ceasefire and the Afghan government reciprocated. Meanwhile, the prisoner exchange progressed slowly, delaying intra-Afghan talks. Two months later, another brief ceasefire was declared for Eid al-Adha, from 24 May to 31 July, 2020.

A ship carrying 16,400 tons of fertilizer from Australia destined for Afghanistan docked in the Gwadar port. This was the first time that the port was used for the import of urea by the Afghan government.

In July the third round of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue was held via video link. It was agreed that the return of Afghan refugees should be part of the peace and reconciliation process and the international community should help make a road map for a time-bound and well-resourced return of Afghan refugees.

Private sector representatives of both Afghanistan and Pakistan met virtually to try and boost prosperity and create jobs in both countries. This was a US government-facilitated event and addressed a range of trade issues between the two countries.

In August China pushed Pakistan to open its 5 key border crossings with Afghanistan to allow bilateral and transit trade, and the resumption of Afghan exports to India. These crossing points had been closed by Pakistan in March to limit the spread of COVID-19.

President Ghani declared that he lacked the authority to release 400 specific Taliban prisoners and called for a Loya Jirga, or traditional national assembly, to decide the matter. The assembly approved the release, potentially clearing the way for talks.

In September a trade terminal in Balochistan's Kila Saifulah district at the Pak-Afghan border was opened to enhance trade.

Representatives of Taliban, the Afghan government and the United States arrived in Doha, Qatar, to commence peace talks. Both sides expressed eagerness to bring peace to Afghanistan and establish a framework for Afghan society after the withdrawal of US troops. The government pushed for a cease fire, while the Taliban reiterated their call for the country to be governed through an Islamic system. The talks ended in a deadlock.

The Chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, Abdullah Abdullah visited Pakistan and lauded the role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process. During a meeting, Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, said "We [meaning Pakistan] have fulfilled our responsibility, now Afghanistan has to move forward and play its part and hopefully the talks would be a success, Pakistan had done whatever it could to facilitate and will continue to do it."

In October Pakistan held a 2-day Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Forum 2020, in Islamabad. This forum aimed at discussing key areas of Pak-Afghan trade: transit trade, bilateral trade and informal trade, with a view to discover further avenues of cooperation in contemporary fields.

In November the United States announced a reduction in US troops in Afghanistan to 2,500 by mid-January 2021.

In December the peace talks that had started in September 2020 between Kabul and the Taliban stalled, since the Taliban wanted the US deal to be the basis for talks, while Kabul said that even though the US-Taliban deal/agreement was

relevant, it could not be made the sole priority, as the sovereignty and rights of the Afghan government to negotiate could not be compromised. Later the two sides agreed on the rules which would govern future talks so that more substantive issues of the agenda for talks—including how and when to talk, a reduction in violence and future political arrangements—could be discussed.

A Taliban delegation arrived in Islamabad and was welcomed by Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. The minister reiterated Pakistan's desire for a reduction in violence and ceasefire in Afghanistan and going forward with the peace process.

In a telephonic discussion with Afghan president Ashraf Ghani, Pakistan Prime Minister also discussed the progress made in the peace talks.

The next round of intra-Afghan peace talks are to be held on January 05, 2021.

## **2021**

In February the US signed agreements with Afghan government and the Taliban for bringing peace in Afghanistan.

In March — after the U.S. proposes a draft peace plan, Moscow hosts a one-day peace conference between the rival Afghan sides. Attempts at a resumption of talks fail.

In April, President Joe Biden says the remaining 2,500-3,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan would be withdrawn by 11 September to end America's "forever war."

Ashraf Ghani called a public mobilization, arming local volunteers to fight the Taliban.

July

The United States vacated Bagram Airfield. The transfer of Bagram, the heart of the U.S. military's presence in Afghanistan throughout the war, signaled that the complete pullout of American troops is imminent.

Taliban gains on the ground accelerated. Afghan government appears too weak to control the situation. Peace talks are being hosted by many countries. No breakthrough is visible.

## August

Taliban took over almost all the major provinces and border entries of Afghanistan.

President Ashraf Ghani fled to Abu Dhabi later saying he left to avoid a "flood of bloodshed". He admits the "Taliban have won".

In the following days, tens of thousands of terrified Afghans and foreigners rush to Kabul airport to escape Taliban rule.

On 15 August Taliban took control of Kabul.

On 26 August IS-K attacked the Kabul airport. 200 Afghan civilians and 13 US soldiers' casualties were reported.

Subsequent US drone attack to dismantle IS-K network, killed several civilians including children in Kabul.

On 30 August US forces withdrawal completed from Afghanistan

Taliban celebrated victory.



## Editors



**Huma Baqai** is an Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts and former Associate Dean at Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi. She was formerly associated with Department of International Relations, University of Karachi. Her teaching and research experience spans over a period of 25 years. She is a member Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs, member Advisory Committee on Status of Women, Government of Sindh and Vice Chairperson, Karachi Council on Foreign Relations. She has been a

part of Track-II and Track 1.5 diplomacy between Pakistan and Afghanistan. She is associated with PTV, Radio Pakistan and Voice of America as a political and foreign affairs analyst.



**Nausheen Wasi** is Assistant Professor and Director, Program on South Asia Studies at the Department of International Relations, University of Karachi. She has 22 years of experience in research and teaching. She is visiting faculty at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), and a visiting fellow at National Institute of Image Management (NIM) and at the Air War College, Karachi. She is a recipient of many research awards and Member, Advisory and Editorial Board of several research journals in Pakistan. She has also served at Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, Karachi.



## Contributors

---



**Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry** is Director General of Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. He has served Pakistan foreign Services for 37 years, rising to the rank of the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan for over three years from December 2013 to March 2017. He was Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States and the Netherlands. He also served as a Foreign Office spokesman, and deputy permanent representative of Pakistan to the United Nations. He is author of a book: Pakistan Mirrored to Dutch Eyes.

---



**Ali Maisam Nazary** is a senior advisor to Ahmad Massoud, the son of the late Ahmad Shah Massoud, in Afghanistan. He is a historian and a researcher. He specializes in the history of Islam, Central and South Asia. Nationalism, nation-building and Ethnic conflicts are also his research interests. He served as a Research Assistant at UCLA's Political Science Department in 2012.

---



**Bettina Robotka** is a historian by profession and a former Professor of South Asian Studies at the Institute of Asian and African Studies of Humboldt University, Berlin. She joined the HEC foreign faculty programme from 2005-2013. She has remained associated as faculty with Institute of Business Administration (IBA) and Institute of Business Management (IoBM) Karachi. She co-authored the book: Blood over Different Shades of Green.

---



**Hameed Hakimi** is a Research Associate at the Asia-Pacific Programme and Europe Programme in Chatham House, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, London. He specializes in the politics of Afghanistan, Pakistan, regional connectivity between South and Central Asia, migration and Muslims in Europe. He has also served at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Between 2014 and 2015, Hameed was an International Advisor for policy and capacity development working under a USAID-funded programme in Kabul to support international efforts during Afghanistan's political transition. In addition, Hameed is a member of Magdalene College and the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge where his doctoral research has focused on the reconceptualisation and expansive understandings of security.

---



**Maleeha Lodhi** is a journalist and a former diplomat. She has served as Pakistan's Ambassador at the UN and to US and UK(2003-2008). She is a recipient of the President's award of Hilal-e-Imtiaz for Public Service in Pakistan. Lodhi has also received an Honorary Fellowship from the London School of Economics in 2004 and an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from London's Metropolitan University in 2005.

---



**Moonis Ahmar** is Meritorious Professor of International Relations and former Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi. He is recipient of several academic and research awards and has served with distinction nationally and internationally. He has authored several books including Superpower Rivalry in the Indian Ocean Since the withdrawal of Great Britain, The Soviet Role in South Asia: 1969-87 and The World After September 11: Challenges and Opportunities. He is both an academian par excellence and public policy expert.

---

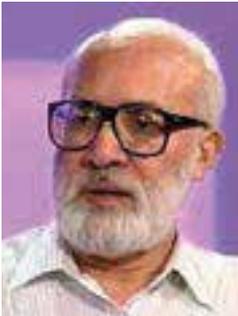


**Mushtaq Muhammad Rahim** is a conflict, peace and security expert with practical experience in post conflict reconstruction and development. He has worked for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Afghanistan and Syria. He has also served as Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Presidents' Executive Secretariat for Peace and Reconciliation. He has been a visiting faculty at the Department of Humanities, Kardan University in Kabul, Afghanistan. He has been a regular contributor to the print and electronic media on Afghan conflict, peace and security issues, and regional geopolitics.



**Omar Sharifi** is an Assistant Professor of Social Sciences and Humanities at the American University of Afghanistan and a Country Director of American Institute of Afghanistan Studies.

He is a part of several Track-II diplomacy initiatives between Pakistan and Afghanistan.



**Rahimullah Yusufzai** was a Pakistani journalist and a war correspondent. He was one of the most sought after political and security analysts on Afghanistan. He was a Resident Editor of The News International, Peshawar and correspondent BBC World Service. He was the first to interview Taliban founder Mullah Mohammad Omar and interviewed Osama Bin Laden twice. He has also served as Time's Pakistan correspondent.

***He was long-time friend and partner to FES an inspiration and mentor for all journalists and media workers in Pakistan. He will forever remain in the hearts and minds of FES Pakistan.***



**Shabnam Nasimi** is a British Afghan political and social activist. She is the Executive Director of the Conservative Friends of Afghanistan. Shabnam has over 10 years of experience working in the UK on issues related to gender, human rights, civil society development, rule of law, governance and democracy. Her experience includes serving on management positions under large programs in Afghanistan, evaluation of UKAid gender and democracy and governance programming, and training and mentoring Afghan civil society and government candidates. She has widely published on democracy, governance and women's rights in Afghanistan

---



**Wajahat Rehan** has extensive working experience as a Contract/ Documentation Engineer and Environmental Specialist at A.A. Associates; Planners and Consulting Engineers. She has prepared reports for various multinational and international organizations including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. This work required extensive data research and analyses in addition to report writing.

---



**Vaqar Ahmed** is a former civil servant and currently Joint Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI). Earlier, he has served as Advisor UNDP, and has undertaken assignments with Asian Development Bank, World Bank Group, and Ministries of Finance, Planning and Commerce in Pakistan. He is also the honorary Research Fellow at Partnership for Economic Policy, Canada. He has authored the book: Pakistan's Agenda for Economic Reforms. He has also served on various boards and committees including Fauji Foundation, Government of Punjab, National Skills University, and Pakistan Institute of Development Economics.

---



**Zahid Hussain** is an award winning journalist and author. He is a former correspondent for The Times of London and The Wall Street Journal. He has covered Pakistan and Afghanistan for several other international publications, including Newsweek, Associated Press and The Economist. He is regular columnist for Dawn. He was Pakistan scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Centre. He has also been a visiting fellow at Wolfson College, University of Cambridge and at Henry Stimson Center. His latest book on Afghanistan: No-Win War: The Paradox of US Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan's Shadow that came out in 2021 is making waves.

---



**Zalmay Nishat** is a senior policy expert working with GIZ, a service provider in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development and international education in Afghanistan. He has extensive experience in policy analysis and policy advice. He is a former senior public policy advisor in the government of Afghanistan. He also holds a Senior Fellow role at the Afghanistan Institute of Strategic Studies (AISS). His research interests include the politics and processes of post-colonial state-formation, and the emergence of nation-states in the non-European contexts.

---



## Endorsements

### **Magnus Marsden**

Professor of Social Anthropology  
Director of Sussex Asia Centre  
Department of Anthropology  
School of Global Studies  
University of Sussex

Now more than ever before there is an urgent need for careful and informed discussion and analysis of the political, cultural and economic aspects of the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan's polities and societies. This fascinating book brings together insightful essays by scholars and policy makers who have played a leading role in understanding the complex nature of the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship. The book goes beyond simplistic analysis driven by inter-state relations and questions of security and instead explores the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship in the context of multiple historical contexts and political events. Introducing readers to a diverse range of perspectives, positions and arguments, the book is critical reading for anyone interested in the region's fraught and complex dynamics.

### **Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed**

Chairman, Senate Defence Committee

No country has had such a direct bearing on Pakistan's foreign and domestic policies than Afghanistan for the last 40 years. Peace, security and stability are inextricably intertwined between these two neighbours who share not only a 2640 km border but ties of history, heritage, religion and ethnicity. The quest for lasting peace is, therefore, paramount for both.

This timely work by a diverse group of academics, opinion leaders, journalists and diplomats is somewhat unique since it brings together voices of reason on a common intellectual platform in a polemic-free highly readable study. Ultimately, as the US military exit shows, it is the Afghan people and their leadership that must decide on determining their national destiny. In this regard, they have to

move forward by not repeating old mistakes, which led to a debilitating civil war at the close of the 20th century.

Pakistan, having learnt its lessons the hard way, has reversed wrongs on its flawed Afghan policy and is seeking to play its part in promoting peace in Afghanistan while not “playing favourites” as was done in the past.

Pakistan has played a model host providing succour and support for the largest number of refugees for the longest period in history in a largely friction-free interaction between the Afghans living in Pakistan and their Pakistani hosts.

This book offers a useful way forward offering solutions and policy prescriptions that are doable and can be the building blocks for durable peace in Afghanistan which would translate into a better tomorrow for both neighbours, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

### **Michael Kugelman**

Writer of Foreign Policy’s weekly South Asia Brief  
Asia Program Deputy Director &  
Senior Associate for South Asia at the Wilson Centre

This new book is a critical and timely addition to the literature on international relations. The Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship is one of the most complex and volatile relationships in South Asia, though it is often overshadowed by the region’s other troubled relationship, that of Pakistan and India.

Afghanistan-Pakistan tensions and mistrust have contributed to the obstacles in forging peace in Afghanistan. It’s no small matter that U.S. officials, in recent years, had sought a new agreement between Kabul and Islamabad to breath momentum into a struggling Afghan peace process.

Now, with the Taliban having taken power in Kabul, the relationship moves into a completely new phase. This could entail more cooperation in diplomacy and trade, but also more challenges such as the issue of the Afghanistan-based Pakistani Taliban. This impeccably curated edited volume, with its careful and nuanced assessment of Afghanistan-Pakistan ties, provides essential new context on the relationship at one of its most pivotal moments in recent memory.

**Tehmina Janjua**

Pakistan's former Foreign Secretary

The book offers invaluable insights into past Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, as well as prospects for the future.

There is too often a tendency to analyze the Afghan-Pakistan relationship in impressionistic terms, influenced by developments that maybe taking place at a given time. An ahistorical perspective prevails, and there is little appreciation of context and the deeper factors influencing Afghan-Pakistan relations. This has, once again, been evident in much of the analysis that we have seen on the recent dramatic developments in Afghanistan and their bearing on the relationship between the two countries. This book is a very useful corrective against the usual superficial analysis.

A key strength of the book is that academics, journalists and policy makers from both Afghanistan and Pakistan have come together to help enrich our understanding of a relationship which has an immense bearing on the entire region and even beyond.

Another great strength of the book is the multi-disciplinary nature of the contributions. The historical and anthropological perspectives brought to bear in analyzing the relations between the two countries are especially invaluable. These help in gaining a more objective understanding of the challenges that have been faced in managing this relationship. More important, these point to the abiding commonalities- cultural and economic- on the basis of which a more robust relationship can be built. The reality that the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan occupy a common cultural space- shared also with Iran, Turkey and the Central Asian Republics- comes out clearly. Prospects of peace, stability and economic growth in the region become more tangible when such commonalities are built upon.

This book will greatly benefit policy and opinion makers in both countries to not only better understand a complex and important relationship, but also put it on to a trajectory which benefits the people of the two countries

**Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili**

Director of the Center for Governance and Markets &  
Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs  
University of Pittsburgh.

*Author of Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan*

This book is a stellar and foundational contribution to our understanding of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan at a critical juncture in history. This book brings together the most important voices from the region, giving the reader a vital first-person perspective of one of the most diplomatic relationships in the world. This book will serve as an important guide for policy makers who are charting regional policies as well as scholars who are looking to understand the biggest questions facing the region.

## Recent FES Publications

### **Charter of the Economy**

Agenda for Economic Reforms in Pakistan

Hafiz A. Pasha

Islamabad, 2021

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **Labour and Employment in Pakistan (Urdu)**

Dr. Hafiz A. Pasha

Islamabad, 2021

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **Changing Patterns of Political Dynamics in Pakistan**

Exploring Grassroots Social and Political Realities

Nazeer Mahar and Tarik Malik

Islamabad, 2021

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **Charter of Democracy and Beyond**

The Way Forward for Institutional Reforms

Nazeer Mahar, Tarik Malik and Usama Bakhtiar

Islamabad, 2021

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **Labour and Employment in Pakistan**

Dr. Hafiz A. Pasha

Islamabad, 2021

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/17993.pdf>

### **Strengthening Governance in Pakistan**

Assessing the National Action Plan to Counter Terrorism  
and Extremism

Islamabad, 2021

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/18096.pdf>

### **Defining Terrorism in Pakistan**

The Supreme Court s judgment - a way forward for Parliament  
Muhammad Amir Rana

Islamabad, 2021

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/18094.pdf>

### **Defining Terrorism in Pakistan (Urdu)**

The Supreme Court s judgment - a way forward for Parliament  
Muhammad Amir Rana

Islamabad, 2021

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **Contradictions and Ambiguities of Feminism in Pakistan**

Exploring the Fourth Wave

Dr. Rubina Saigol

Islamabad, 2021

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/17334.pdf>

### **Journalism in the Age of COVID-19**

Perspectives from Pakistan

Afia Salam

Islamabad, 2020

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/15952.pdf>

### **Training Module on Civic Education**

Zafarullah Khan

Islamabad, 2021

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/17233.pdf>

### **Changed by a Virus?**

The Medium and Long-range Impact of the Corona Crises on Pakistan

Nazish Brohi

Islamabad, 2020

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/16577.pdf>

### **Changed by a Virus? (Urdu)**

The Medium and Long-range Impact of the Corona Crises on Pakistan

Nazish Brohi

Islamabad, 2020

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **The Global Bearing of Corona**

How the Pandemic is Changing the World

Jochen Hippler

Islamabad, 2020

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/16578.pdf>

### **The Global Bearing of Corona (Urdu)**

How the Pandemic is Changing the World

Jochen Hippler

Islamabad, 2020

<https://pakistan.fes.de/publications>

### **Building Regional Connectivity for Pakistan**

Rabia Akhtar

Islamabad, 2020

<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/pakistan/15952.pdf>

To order publication:

[info@fes-pakistan.org](mailto:info@fes-pakistan.org)

Phone: +92 51 2803391-4



## Imprint

© 2021 Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES),  
Pakistan Office  
1st Floor, 66-W, Junaid Plaza, Jinnah Avenue,  
Blue Area, P.O Box 1289, Islamabad, Pakistan

Phone: +92 51 2803391-4

Fax: +92 51 2803395

Website: <http://pakistan.fes.de>

Facebook: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Pakistan

Twitter: @FES\_PAK

To order publication:  
[info@fes-pakistan.org](mailto:info@fes-pakistan.org)

Responsible:

**Dr. Jochen Hippler** | Country Director  
**Hamayoun Khan** | Programme Coordinator

**The views expressed in this publication  
are not necessarily those of the  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.**

Commercial use of all media published by the  
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted  
without the written consent of the FES.

**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES)** is the oldest political foundation in Germany. The foundation is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected president of Germany.

FES Islamabad Office was established in 1990, through the cooperation with national institutions of Pakistan had already commenced during the middle of the 1980s. Based on its commitment to the basic values of social democracy including peace and social justice, FES-Pakistan formed partnerships to carry out activities for promoting dialogue involving state institutions, political parties, social partners, civil society actors, opinion leaders and citizens.

ISBN: 978-969-9675-30-0

[www.pakistan.fes.de](http://www.pakistan.fes.de)

