

Q#1 Challenges to Pak-Afghan Relations and Way for Smooth and Beneficial Relations.

(1) Introduction:

Since Pakistan's inception, Pakistan and Afghanistan relations have faced so many ups and downs. But this time the relations has stopped at downs. Pak-Afghan relations has been strained after Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. Some challenges that Pakistan and Afghanistan relations are facing include terrorism, Durand Line, India's increasing engagement in Afghanistan and the challenges go on. However, the countries can have some mutual interests and problems as well for instance trade cooperation, cross-border cultural ties etc.

(2) Challenges to Pak-Afghan Relations:

(a) Increase in terrorist attacks in Pakistan:

At the time of victory of Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, Pakistan celebrated their victory and even then Prime Minister of Pakistan said that Taliban had broken the chains of Slavery, however, it seems that Pakistan is paying for its celebration. According to Muhammad Amir Rana, the director of PIPS, Taliban's victory emboldened Islamic militants. This is evident from a report by PIPS in May 2023 that since Taliban takeover, Pakistan has seen phenomenal increase of 73% in first 21 months. If the situation goes on like this then there are chances that relations between the two deteriorate more.

b) Durand Line: A bone of contention:
Durand Line is another challenge to Pak-Afghan relations. It is this border that has been a concern for Pakistan, because it causes terrorism and drug trafficking like problems in Pakistan. To discard this problem, according to United States Institute of Peace (USIP) Pakistan has spent \$532

\$532 million don the project of demarcation of the border. However, Taliban's non-acceptance resulted into the clashes between the arms of the countries at Chaman or Spino Boldak crossing known as 'Freindship Gate'. If this continues then may result in more consequences for the two countries.

(c) India's increasing ties with Pak Afghanistan:

India, a major enemy of Pakistan is increasing its ties with Afghanistan which is a concern for Pakistan internal security and interests in Afghanistan. Dr Farooq writes in Margalla Papers that Indian think tanks had supported policy to gain the favor of Afghans and use them Pakistan and prompt Anti-Pakistan sentiments over Durand Line and to counter Pakistan's influence in the region. India is also providing economic and military assistance to Afghanistan. Recently India allocated \$25 million for development package for Afghanistan

in its 23-24 Indian Union budget. It also has trained Afghan army in its military academies. This would result in challenges in Pak-Afghan relations i.e. Kabul river, more threats from TTP etc.

(d) Threats from Afghan refugees:

Humanitarian crisis due to the freezing of Afghan assets around 57 billion dollars and ~~san~~ no humanitarian aid has pushed the Afghans to flee to neighboring countries like Pakistan. According to some reports Pakistan has received 600,000 refugees both registered and unregistered since 2021. Since these refugees are unemployed ~~and~~ has nothing to eat, they will indulge themselves in terrorist activities and other crimes that will cause Pakistan to experience more terrorism and crimes which it had eliminated by doing operations like Raddul Fasad and Zarb-e-Azb.

(3) Areas of Cooperation:

(a) Trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan:

Apart from the challenges Pakistan and Afghanistan have some areas of cooperation as well and trade is one of them. In May 2022 Pakistan and Afghanistan signed an agreement to improve bilateral trade, combat terrorism and boost bilateral ties.

According to Afghanistan Central Afghanistan Statistics Organization (CSO) During FY 2018 Pak - Afghan bilateral trade remained highest around US \$ 1,437m which is more than with China and Iran. It shows that since Pakistan is the largest trade partner of Afghanistan. ~~both can take~~ ^{and both} have an area of cooperation.

(b) Cross-border cultural ties:

Cross-border cultural ties is another area of cooperation between the two countries. Both share common religion, cultural heritage especially among Pakhtun communities, linguistic and historical. All invaders, merchants and visitors would come through Afghanistan into the sub-continent. Both the

countries had been a single ^{geographical} unit under Ahmad Shah Durrani Empire (1747-1826). Since history plays important role in most historical, cultural and linguistic similarities plays a significant role in moulding people's psyche, it is an area of cooperation between the two countries.

(C) Long shared border:

Both the countries share around 2,500 km border. Through this border people-to-people contact, trade and economic interactions worth of 2 billion dollars take place. Hence, peace and stability on one side will affect another side. Therefore both can work together to resolve the issue of Durand line. In this regard Pakistan has made efforts to demarcate the border and spent around \$532 million. However, Afghan forces uprooted the fence.

(4) Solutions or Way Forward for Better and Smooth Relations:

(a) Including influential representatives

of Pashtuns from both sides:

Since both the countries share common culture, language and history which an opportunity, Pakistan can take advantage of it by involving influential Pashtun representatives in negotiations. For instance, the government can include PTI members from KP province. These participants will facilitate cross-border ties and ~~undermining~~ anti-Pakistan sentiments within Afghanistan and anti-separatists activities within Pakistan.

(b) Focusing and working together on areas of cooperation:

To normalize the situation and build momentum for negotiations, both countries can work together on areas of cooperation like economic trade, narcotic trade, Afghan refugees etc. These areas do not hold any threat to sovereignty of any of the state. This will help in return of Afghan refugees, enhancing economic trade and minimizing narcotic trade. Above all it will develop

momentum for further talks on greater issues like terrorism and Durand Line.

(c) Exploring border management options:

Durand Line is considered as third rail in Pak-Afghan relations that if raised, would shut the dialogues. To resolve this problem, Afghanistan will have to accept the border line officially. However, Pakistan will have to also ensure to Afghanistan that it will not support any proxies and will not provide any basis to any other state against Afghanistan. This will reduce the tensions between the two states.

(d) Military and security exercise:

Pakistan like India can also train Afghan service members in its academies and staff colleges. This will help in enhancing military to military engagement more via training programs and exercises. This will ultimately reduce the concerns of security and terrorism that has

hit Pakistan badly after 2021.

(5) **Conclusion:**

Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighboring countries that have some challenges which are halting their relations to progress and get better. However, apart from these challenges in their relations, Kabul and Islamabad also share some common areas to cooperate. These strained relations can be smooth and beneficial for both if steps are taken to better them.