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Discuss the historical background and key dimensions of Pak-Afghan relations. What are the current challenges faced by both countries and how can they improve bilateral relations?

Introduction:

Pakistan - Afghanistan relations began after Pakistan came into being in 1947. The relationship between both countries was described by Afghanistan's former president Hamid Karzai as "inseparable brothers" due to religious, linguistic and historical connection that both countries share. The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan have always been complex due to different reasons of different times like demand line issue, Great Pashtunistan, Pakistan's alliance with the USA in war on terror and many others. After withdrawal of the USA in 2020, new challenges were faced by both countries from power vacuum to terrorism spike. All the challenges can be resolved by the bilateral cooperation and promoting connectivity between the both countries to counter terrorism and to enhance economic development from both sides.

Historical Development²

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghan from 1947 to till today are in complex situation as it shows as below timeline

Timelines

1947-1950

Major Events

- ◆ In 1947, when Pakistan came into being, The issue dispute over durand line started, on which Pakistan's stance was so clear that The agreement was done between Afghanistan and India and India being a mother state still exists, so as per "state succession" all the assets, liabilities belong to India.
- ◆ In 1947, Afghanistan was the only country who which voted against Pakistan in UN membership of Pakistan.
- ◆ In 1949, Afghanistan nullified the agreement of Durand line as they did not accept it

as international borders but Pakistan does.

1960s-1970s: ♦ In 1961, Pashtunistan narrative was created by Daud Khan.

The former prime minister of Afghanistan.

- ♦ In 1963, when he resigned, the situation got better a bit.

1970-1980s: ♦ In 1973, Daud Khan again came to power and the narrative of Pashtunistan once again was getting hype.

- ♦ In 1975, the bilateral meeting between Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Daud Khan was decided but it could not happen.

- ♦ In 1978, "Saur revolution" happened when a pro soviet government overthrew the government of Daud Khan and came into power.

1980s: ♦ In late 1970s, pro soviet government of Afghanistan called soviets to attack Afghanistan.

- ♦ In 1979, soviets attacked Afghanistan.

- ♦ Pakistan recruited Mujahideen from Madrasas who were trained by CIA came to Afghanistan.

- ◆ In the same time, Afghan missionaries also got involved in war and fought against Soviets.

- ◆ In 1989, Soviets left Afghanistan and there was a power vacuum left behind

1990s:

- ◆ To fulfill the power vacuum mujahideen were divided into three parts.
 - Gulbuddin Hekmatyar
 - Burhamduddin Rabbani
 - Abdul Rashid Dostam
- ◆ Abdul Rashid along with Ahmad Shah Mehsud got allied and made Northern alliance and went to north of Afghanistan.
- ◆ The centre (Kabul) where Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhamduddin Rabbani were fighting for power.
- ◆ Taliban came into power in centre by defeating these two groups in "1996" but could not defeat Northern alliance.
- ◆ In "1997" Pakistan was the first country that recognized Afghanistan Taliban's government.

2000 - 2010:

After 9/11, Al Qaeda became involved in 9/11. The USA claimed the leader of

Al Qaeda, Usama Bin Laden.

- ◆ Mullah Omar who was leading Taliban government refused this claim.
- ◆ The USA started "War on Terror" against it.
- ◆ Afghanistan and Pakistan allied with the USA.
- ◆ As a result, one group of Taliban turned against Pakistan.

2011 - 2020 :

- ◆ In 2014, Ashraf Ghani became president of Afghanistan but the relationship did not get better.
- ◆ In 2016, Afghanistan attacked "Turkhan" border and as a result, Pakistan wired the D entire "Durand Line".
- ◆ Afghanistan opposed but Pakistan continued.
- ◆ In 2019-2020, Pakistan mediated the peace talks between Afghanistan and the USA in Qatar successfully.
- ◆ In 2020, The US withdrew from Afghanistan.

2021 - 2025 :

- ◆ In Aug 2021, Taliban came into power in Afghanistan but still Afghan soil is being used against Pakistan.

- Pakistan blamed Afghan government for the supporting they providing to Taliban in Pakistan (TIP).

Current Challenges faced by Pakistan and Afghanistan:

i) Support to Taliban in Pakistan:

- Pakistan's main concern that Afghan Taliban support TIP and allowed them to attack on Pakistan and does not stop them.

ii) Afghan's soil is being used against Pakistan and for terrorism:

Afghan Taliban promised at time of peace talks in Qatar and they are not fulfilling as the soil of Afghanistan is being used by TIP to attack in Pakistan and other terrorist groups are threat to regional security as well.

iii) Durand line dispute:

Afghanistan still does not agree the Durand line and they don't recognize it as international border.

iv) Sending undocumented Refugees to Afghanistan:

One of the biggest challenges is the undocumented refugees in Pakistan who are sent by Pakistan's government back to Afghanistan so peaceful Afghanistan is in need of the house to accommodate their own people in their country.

v) Bilateral Transit Trade Agreement dispute:

In 2010, the agreement of Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement happened to promote the trade of Afghanistan by allowing the trade to India by using Karachi and Gwadar port but is not working due to security issues as political tension with India.

Strengthening Bilateral Cooperation:

i) By promoting dialogue:

By promoting dialogue at government level can bring betterment in relation between both the countries. Recently, Foreign minister of Pakistan Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and interior minister of Afghanistan Sirajuddin Haqqani met and talked

or bilateral cooperation on security issues.

ii) Increasing trade between both countries:

For the ^{economical} stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan there should be more opportunities to trade between both countries. Integrate Afghanistan into CPEC where possible to create mutual stakes.

iii) Refugees and humanitarian Cooperation:

There should be dignified return of refugees to Afghanistan and boost people to people ties in both countries.

iv) Diplomatic Engagement:

By using different platform (SCO, OIC) both countries diplomatically resolve their issues like durand line, terrorism, illegal smuggling etc.

v) Mediation by third party and regional support:

Third party includes China, Qatar, Turkey should mediate between both countries to resolve the issues by promoting table talks.

Conclusion:

As Pakistan and Afghanistan show many similarities but faced many ups and downs in their relationship but it is important to resolve all issues by promoting engagement. To get security and prosperity in both the countries and region as a whole, peace and stability in both countries is unavoidable.