

PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

The Afghan Taliban (current interim government) emerged in the early 1990s as a militant Islamist movement.

The relationship of Pakistan and Afghanistan has been shaped by a complex mix of historical, political and security factors. As said by Michael Kugelman, South Asian analyst that,

"The Afghanistan conflict has shown repeatedly that Pakistan and Afghanistan rise or fall together."

Issues such as border dispute, cross border militancy, refugee flows and regional rivalries have created persistent tension between the two countries. Among the challenges the rise of Taliban has fueled violence, insecurity and mistrust. Understanding these factors and exploring practical solutions such as dialogue, joint security mechanisms, trade cooperation, and humanitarian coordination is essential for fostering lasting peace and mutual trust in the region.

CAUSES OF TENSION BETWEEN PAK-AFGHAN

1) CROSS BORDER TERRORISM.

"The safe heavens in Afghanistan pose a serious threat to Pakistan's internal security and regional stability"

- Riaz Khan, Pakistani security analyst.

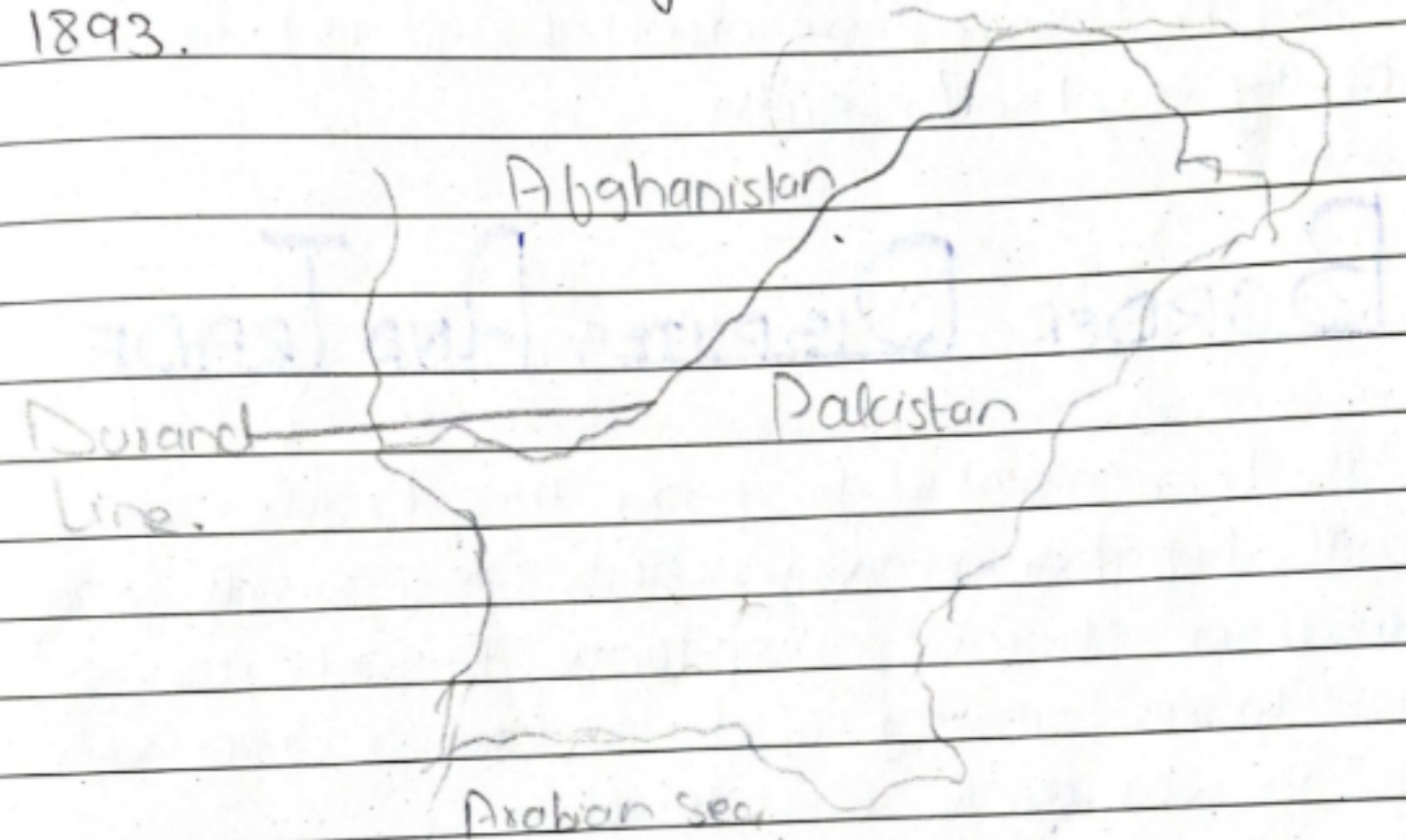
Pakistan is facing terrorism at peak due to some ^{major} factors such as TTP, IS-IL and other. Major attacks are done by TTP. Pakistan claim that Afghanistan is providing platform to these militant factors for terrorism against Pakistan. As said by Maleeha Lodhi, a former US, UK and UN ambassador that safe heavens of terrorist are ~~not~~ inside, not outside of Afghanistan. Current interim government of Afghanistan Taliban are providing support and protection to TTP. ~~TTP~~ ^{TTP} ~~box~~

TTP, a major ~~group~~ ^{group} infiltration in Pakistan's northern areas, is responsible for majority of attacks in Pakistan. They ^{mainly} target security personnel, check posts, Chinese personnel, government officials and civilians.

According to PIPS (Pakistan Institute for Peace Strategy) there were total 521 attacks in 2024 with more than 800 fatalities and several were injured. ~~Pakistan~~ ^{Pakistan} Additionally, in 2025 surge of terrorism related incidents is 81% increased compared to last year in same time period.

ii) LEGACY OF PAST.

During British Empire colonial division, both British and Soviet union divide Pakistan and Afghanistan by a line called Durand line as done by British diplomat ~~as~~ Henry Mortimer Durand in 1893.



After Pakistan's independence, Afghanistan refused to accept the Durand line ~~etc~~ claiming it as illegal border, although it is internationally recognized border. Afghanistan claim to include northern area where mostly Pushtuns lives. ~~They~~ Beside this, they brought the idea of Pushtunistan for ~~to~~ tribals living in northern areas. They ~~also~~ refused for membership of Pakistan in United Nation.

If they (Taliban) challenge the border, we will respond. The Durand line is our

bloodline, we did not draw it, but we will defend it. - Khawaja Asif (2024)
Pakistan Defence Minister

It is the ~~most~~ bone of contentious in Pakistan and Afghanistan relations. As said by Raghu Sharma, a South Asian expert that the Durand line remains the most contentious border in South Asia; unresolved borders feed insecurity on both sides.

iii) BORDER DISPUTES AND TRADE

Pakistan decided to fence the border ~~etc~~ with Afghanistan in 2005. As a result Afghanistan showed resistance. Despite its resistance fencing and infiltration of check points was ~~there~~ completed.

There has been various illegal activities across the border including smuggling of weapons, oil and others, ~~an~~ Additionally illegal infiltration of militant was also seen.

Due to ~~total~~ occasional cold relations, trade also affected leading drastic economic losses. Recent skirmishes along borders halt trade between both countries causing millions of losses. Currently \$1.3 billion trade total recorded in past year. ~~Although~~ However according to World Bank

report in 2022 Pakistan and Afghanistan has a ~~poten~~ trade potential of \$10bn.

iv) REFUGEE CONTENTION

The deportation of undocumented Afghans is not a refugee crisis of our making. It is a matter of legal compliance and national security... Our dialogue with the Afghan authorities continues, but our sovereign decision is non-negotiable.

- Usaid-ur-Rehman Nizami
(Pakistan Ambassador to Afghanistan)

Pakistan host million of ~~afghan~~ refugees who mostly flew after U.S. withdrawal. According to U.N reports approximately 3 million of refugees resided in Pakistan.

Pakistan announce deportation of refugees because of two significant reasons. First is that refugees are becoming economic burden in Pakistan as they avail opportunities and ~~leave~~ resources. Second is ~~comprised of~~ security threat. As surge in terrorist ^{and extremist} activities has been seen. Around 2.6 millions refugees have been deported. Although the procedure ~~is~~ should be more cautious as ~~these~~ ~~most~~ of refugees contain ~~gen~~ vulnerable population also. The refugee crisis has condemn by Afghan taliban as they claim it not according to law and non-humanitarian.

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v) HISTORICAL MISTRUST

"Decades of conflict have left Pakistan and Afghanistan in a cycle of suspicion which cannot be broken overnight"

- Barnett Rubin, Afghanistan Scholar

There has been political mistrust between both countries. Seeds were embedded during ~~the~~ Soviet union invasion when Pakistan backed Taliban with support of U.S against Soviet union. During U.S announcement of war on terror in 2001 Pakistan shake hands with America which ~~Taliban~~ seemed by taliban as betrayal. Furthermore, historical legacy of Durand line and Pashunistan issue ~~may~~ more widen the gap of mistrust.

As said by Dr. Rasool Badshah in his op-ed Tribune Express that ~~Badshah~~

As Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst said that Pakistan sits at the epicenter of global jihad, where regional conflicts, ideology and state policies intersect.

Any modification in foreign policy ~~may~~ change national interest of states which may not align and cause distortion.

vi) INFLUENCE OF REGIONAL ACTORS

India's presence in Afghanistan in form of development, aid and training is viewed by Pakistan as strategic encirclement.

Pakistan claims involvement of India in promoting supporting terrorist factors.

China's mediation due to CPEC port expansion is aligned with Pakistan. China wants to expand it to Afghanistan to connect ^{with} Central Asia. China role in deescalation helps transiently but it can not resolve mistrust rooted in decade of geopolitical competition.

IMPROVEMENTS IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN RELATION.

i) JOINT COUNTER TERRORISM.

"A Collaborative Security framework is the only sustainable solution to cross-border militancy."

- Michael Kogelman, Wilson Center.

The most prevailing and pertinent way forward is diplomacy through combined counter terrorism. ~~Military intervention~~
According to Amir Rana, a senior analyst of Pakistan report in Dawn newspaper that ~~militant~~ terrorist factors are based on ideologies, military interventions worsen these ~~the~~ condition also bring civilian loss. The only beneficial way is through diplomacy.

There have been diplomatic efforts with no fruitful ~~effort~~ results due to opaque intentions ~~Pakistan has~~

Border skirmishes in October also resulted ceasefire mediated by Qatar and Turkey. Efforts Further efforts are in process. With clarity of thoughts fruitful results will be achieved.

ii) DIALOGUE ON DURAND LINE

"Confidence-building measures at the borders are the first step toward lasting peace"

- Raghav Sharma, ORF

Official talks should be done about formal recognition of Durand line by Afghanistan. By Joint patrolling and movement should be followed. By this gradual political recognition can follow.

iii) STRENGTHENING TRADE AND CONNECTIVITY

Economic dependency can be used as path to peace. Both countries need to strengthen trade and connectivity. As this trade has potential of \$1.0billion (according to WB, 2024). As Afghanistan is landlocked country, Pakistan can provide more connection for Afghanistan to other ~~countries~~ countries.

Moreover, with China's interest to expand its economic connectivity both countries can get benefits. As BRI expand to central Asia through Afghanistan.

Development of special economic zones and corridor access will also enhance economy and development of both countries.

iv) REFUGEE MANAGEMENT.

"Refugees are human capital; coordinated management benefits both states"

Phillip Grandin, UNHCR

There should be ~~str~~ proper documentation of refugees as there are many Afghan who are living in Pakistan since generations. So, only deportation of refugee should be allowed. During this process there should be strict humanitarian standards follow up this will reduce political tensions.

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v) REGIONAL MEDIATORS

Regional framework will help to at least tensions. China, Iran has tendency to solve the issue. Also Pakistan can use SCO Platform although it is mainly security concern framework but it expands in other domains also.

vi) CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMACY

People to people contact and educational exchange create a resilience against political hostility -

Barnett Rubin.

Cultural exchange programs will reduce the political crisis as both countries nations are familiar with ~~one another~~ ~~the~~ culture.

Educational programs including scholarships, diploma and workshop will encourage mutual understanding and softens negative narratives

Cult & Socio cultural exchange through ~~the~~ media has also significant role in bringing positive roles.

CONCLUSION.

"Peace is ^{not} merely the absence of conflict but the presence of cooperation and understanding."
- Barack Obama.

Pakistan and Afghanistan relations are like weather sometimes hot and other time cold, which both are intolerable with severity. Tensions are arisen because of past legacy (Durand Line), US war on terror, lack of confidence in one another, terrorism, cross border smuggling. Currently ~~the~~ most significantly focused is terrorism although there may be water issue in future as well. These injuries in relation of Pakistan and Afghanistan can be ~~be~~ healed by joint counter terrorism, cross border joint patrolling, strengthening trade and encouraging ~~social~~ cultural and education programs. Moreover, China, ~~the~~ has played role but it was transient although it has potential to benefit both countries.