

Date: 4/9/66-Sahar Fatima-086

Q: How Pakistan's geopolitical location has made it a battleground for proxy wars since cold war era?

Ans:

1) Introduction:

Pakistan is present at the crossroads of South Asia, Middle East and Central Asia. Its geopolitical location has given it significance in global politics. Alongwith, it made Pakistan prone to interests of major world powers. Since its development, it has been a battleground for proxy wars. It has been exploited in US-Soviet war in Afghanistan, War on terror, Saudi-Iran sectarian rivalry and Indian proxies in Pakistan.

2) Geopolitical Location of Pakistan:

Pakistan is a gateway to central Asia which has great

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trade potential. It also links Middle East to South Asia which have oil rich resources. Its strategic position has given it advantage to play in world politics. It has China in North which is new emerging power. It can benefit from project like BRI to connect major trade routes. It can boost its economic growth and by utilizing its rich natural resources to become a developed state.

An American Political Scientist Stephen Philip Cohen said:

"While history has been unkind to Pakistan, its geography has its greatest benefit. It is resource rich in north west and people rich in northeast."

2) Pakistan - A Battleground for Proxy wars:

Since its development, Pakistan

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was economically unstable. This led to make it a victim of foreign interests. It has been a battleground for proxy wars ^{which were fought through interstate means and indirect representation of other countries} which are as follows:-

2.1) Anti-Soviet Alliance with US:

After 1979 invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet Union, Pakistan was used as a proxy by USA to counter Soviet influence in region. Pakistan has signed South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and (CENTO) (Central Treaty Organization with America to contain USSR.

Saudi and US funds were utilized and CIA (Central Investigation Agency) and Inter Services Intelligence ISI gave trained Mujahideen on Pakistani land. These Mujahideen were sent to fight in Afghanistan.

Pakistan was used as a proxy and ~~was~~ suffered heavy losses in return. Pakistan faced heavy casualties, economic losses, refugee influx and terrorism.

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a) **Refugees influx:** According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: "Pakistan bore an enormous humanitarian burden, hosting one refugee for every ten of its own citizens at height of conflict."
"Pakistan has hosted 3.3 million refugees."

b) **Casualties:** According to United Nations office on Drugs and Crime:
"Pakistan suffered approximately 15000-20000 deaths."

c) **Economic loss:** By World Bank report: "Pakistan had faced economic losses of approximately \$5-6 Billion."

Former Prime Minister
Benazir Bhutto said:

"The war that was fought across our border has left us bleeding within - guns, drugs and ghosts of militancy."

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2) Pakistan's role in war on Terror:

Pakistan was used in post 9/11 war on terror. US operation in Afghanistan against terrorist was aided by Pakistan. It ^{opened} ~~attempted~~ its ground and air spaces; allowed routes for NATO forces and gave logistic bases. The war was carried in Afghanistan and in Pakistan Tribal areas. Operations caused colossal infrastructure damage, economic losses, casualties and influx of terrorism to Pakistan. Pakistan faced terrorists backlash domestically and become a proxy for foreign state.

a) Economic losses: According to World Bank: "Pakistan suffered economic losses of more than \$123 Billion from 2001 to 2023 because of war on terror."

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b) Casualties: By Brown University report on "Costs of war":
Pakistan faced more than 73000 deaths between 2001 to 2023.

Tariq Ali in his book

"The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power":
Pakistan's strategic location has made it a pawn in the larger geopolitical game, often serving as a proxy for US interest in the region."

Pakistan faced retaliation and became a terrorism prone country. Groups like Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Jaish-e-Muhammad etc had risen from there and started an unending devastation in state. TSTS-Khorasan and other Takfiri groups have safe havens and assistance from Afghanistan.

United Nations Security Council report 2024-25:

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"The TTP is using Afghan soil for training and launching attacks into Pakistan, often with assistance of Afghan Taliban"

3) India Igniting separatist movements in Pakistan

Pakistan and India are hostile countries since their creation. Both countries have been through three wars and certain issues like Indus Water Treaty. Both countries accuse each other of funding terrorist groups in their countries. Pakistan alleges India to finance its separatist group Balochistan Liberation Army BLA to carry out attacks and protests to destabilise the country. These groups militias are used as proxies to weaken Pakistani state.

Case in Point: Kulbhushan Jadhav

an Indian RAW Agent was apprehended operating in Iran against Pakistan in espionage and terrorism.

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4) Saudi-Iran Rivalry and its Impact on Pakistan's Sectarian groups

Saudi-Iran rivalry has waged conflicts in Pakistan also. Both are Sunni Muslim and Shia Muslim countries respectively. They finance specific sect groups in Pakistan to extend their ideologies. Border infiltration on Iran side has caused smuggling, Narcotics and other illicit activities in KPK and Balochistan. Groups like Shia Group Asaib Ahl-al Haq carry out these tasks and operate through Iran. These sectarian conflicts have caused destabilization in Pakistan.

Case in Point: In November 2024, an ambush on Shia sect in Kussam district have caused 54 deaths and 86 injuries.

5) Resurgence of Terrorism and ~~Ferous~~ Separatist movements in Pakistan:

Pakistan is prone to terrorism and separatist movement funded by foreign powers to destabilize the country. Pakistan's Balochistan and KPK province are a major target to foreign conspiracies. They wage proxy wars inside Pakistan. They entail BLA, TTP, Lashkar-e-Tehrik, Sipah-e-Sahaba etc.

US State Department designated BLA as "Foreign Terrorist Organization" highlighting international dimensions of conflict."

6) US-China counter balancing each others effect in region:

China is a major rising super power of world shifting global order. It has made projects with Pakistan like CPEC (China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor) under Belt and Road Initiative to connect Asia to Europe for trade routes. Pakistan is benefitted from these projects as it is the shortest safe route ~~from~~ of China and central Asia to Arabian Sea. To counter it, US also increased influence in Indo-Pacific region and made a project with Pakistan of \$1.2 billion that will link through railway to ~~in~~ mineral rich interior regions ~~into~~ Pasni near China's Gwadar Project.

Pawel Bernat in his book "Proxy Wars from a Global Perspective" said:

"Pakistan's strategic location has made it an ideal candidate for proxy wars, serving as a battleground for regional and global powers."

Conclusion:

Pakistan's strategic location is its greatest advantage. But this is also a battleground for proxy wars and interest of major world powers. Due to these challenges, Pakistan could not flourish and use its geography and natural resources for economic stability.