

Q No: 1

Discuss the contours of Pakistan's Strategic relations with India and Afghanistan in detail. Do you foresee any serious security challenges from these neighbors in near future? Explain your opinion with scholarly evidence.

Ans:-

Introduction

Pakistan Strategic geography situated at the crossroads of South, Central, and West Asia, defines the essence of its relation with its two immediate neighbours: India and Afghanistan. The complexity of these ties is deeply rooted in history, ideological, territorial disputes, and evolving regional dynamics. While Pakistan seeks peace and connectivity in the region, mistrust and competing national interests have continuously shaped its security calculus. As Maleeha Lodhi (2022)

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Notes in "Movement of Truth":

"Pakistan's Strategic Location is both a blessing and a curse. It offers immense opportunities for connectivity but also exposes it to regional turbulence."

This observation aptly reflects the nature of Pakistan's uneasy relations with its neighbors.

Pakistan and India Relations

1- Genesis of Rivalry

The partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947 sowed the seeds of hostility.

The unresolved Kashmir dispute, water issues, and mutual distrust became the cornerstones of antagonism.

Pakistan's First Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, once remarked

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"Peace with India can only come when justice is done to Kashmir."

Since, both States have fought four major wars (1947-48, 1965, 1971, and Kargil 1999) and have remained locked in a zero-sum security mindset.

2- Kashmir Conundrum

Kashmir remains the core dispute between both nuclear-armed neighbors. The revocation of Article 370 and 35A by India in August 2019, which stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its semi-autonomous status, marked a serious downturn in bilateral relations. Pakistan viewed this as a violation of UN Security Council Resolution (1948, 1951) and bilateral Shimla Agreement (1972). As Dr. Rifaat Hussain (2020) highlights in his analysis published in the Journal of South Asian Studies,

India's unilateralism in Kashmir has closed the door to dialogue and

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"Cemented Pakistan's perception of existential threat from its eastern neighbor."

3- Strategic and Security Dimensions

relate your headings and arguments to the qs statement.

Pakistan's security doctrine historically revolves around the "Eastern threat".

The Cold War alliances (SEATO and CENTO),

nuclear deterrence policy, and China-

Pakistan Strategic partnership have all been influenced by its perception of India as a hegemonic power.

The Indo-US Strategic partnership, particularly under the U.S.-India

Civil Nuclear Deal (2008) and

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD),

has widened Pakistan's strategic concerns.

Islamabad perceives these developments as attempts to encircle or isolate it strategically.

4- Cross-Border Terrorism and Hybrid warfare

India has accused Pakistan of

supporting insurgent groups in Kashmir while Pakistan alleges Indian involvement in destabilizing activities, particularly through RAW (Research and Analysis wing) operations in Balochistan and FATA.

The arrest of Kulbhusan Jadhav (2016), an alleged Indian spy, is cited by Pakistan as evidence of India's interference.

"India's hybrid warfare strategy spanning, disinformation, cyber operations, and support for anti-state elements poses a significant challenge to Pakistan's internal cohesion."

2023 Report by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

Pakistan - Afghanistan Relations

1. Historical Backdrop

Pakistan and Afghanistan share 2640 km border (Durand line) and deep ethnic,

religious, and cultural ties. Yet, their relations have remained fraught with suspicion. Since 1947, Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan's admission to the UN, citing border disputes. The Durand Line remains a contentious issue, with successive Afghan governments refusing to recognize it as the official border. Pakistan, on the other hand, considers it a settled matter based on international law.

2- Post-9/11 Dynamics and the Taliban Factor

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan (2001) dramatically altered regional geopolitical. Pakistan, as a frontline state in the war on Terror, faced the dual challenge of combating militancy and managing cross-border instability. The rise of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in the tribal areas was a direct consequence of spillover effects

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From the Afghan conflict. After the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, Islamabad hoped for improved ties, but relations have soured over border attacks, refusal to act against (TTP) sanctuaries, and trade restrictions. As Moeed Yusuf (2023), Pakistan's former National Security Adviser, stated in a recent interview:

"Our biggest immediate threat emanates from the western border, not because of Afghanistan's hostility, but because of its instability."

3- Economic and Strategic Interests

Pakistan aspires to transform its western border into a corridor of connectivity, linking Central Asia through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Initiatives like TAPI Gas Pipeline, CASA-1000 and Trans Afghan Railway project are crucial for Pakistan's economic integration. However, persistent

insecurity and Taliban's reluctance to address cross-border terrorism hinder progress.

4- Security Concerns from Afghanistan

Pakistan faces serious security challenges from Afghan soil, particularly due to TTP sanctuaries. Since 2022, there has been a significant uptick in terrorist attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. According to Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) Annual Report 2024, there was a 73% increase in terrorist incidents originating from across the Afghan border. The Afghan Taliban's denial of harboring militants has deepened mistrust. Islamabad has repeatedly urged Kabul to fulfill its commitment under the Doha Agreement (2020) and prevent the use of its territory against Pakistan.

Future Security Challenges

1- Hybrid and Non-Traditional Threats

In the coming years, Pakistan may face hybrid warfare, cyber threats, economic coercion and information manipulation from regional rivals. Both India and Afghanistan have been accused of supporting anti-Pakistan propaganda networks.

2- Border Instability

The Durand line skirmishes, refugee inflows, and smuggling remain persistent challenges. Instability in Afghanistan directly translates into security and economic strain for Pakistan.

3- Strategic Isolation Risk

The India - U.S. Strategic convergence and India's growing role in the Indo-Pacific may isolate Pakistan unless it diversifies its alliances and strengthens internal stability.

4- Nuclear Deterrence Stability

India's pursuit of ballistic missile defense systems and nuclear modernization could undermine the deterrence equilibrium in South Asia, heightening the risk of miscalculation.

Way Forward

- 1- Revival of Dialogue: Reengagement with India through Track II diplomacy and regional forums like SAARC can help reduce hostility.
- 2- Counterterrorism cooperation with Kabul: Establishing joint border mechanisms and intelligence sharing to counter TTP and IS-K threats.
- 3- Economic Integration: Leveraging CPEC and Central Asian connectivity to promote regional interdependence.
- 4- Regional Multilateralism: Strengthening ties with China, Russia, and Iran to balance Indian and U.S. influence.

Conclusion

Pakistan's relations with India and Afghanistan remain pivotal to its national security and foreign policy. Both fronts present enduring challenges. One driven by ideological hostility, the other by strategic instability.

"Pakistan's best defence lies in regional peace, not perpetual rivalry."

Ayesha Siddiqua (2023) observer

If Pakistan can balance deterrence with diplomacy and prioritize regional economic integration, it can convert its strategic geography from a liability into an asset.