

Q. What will be the critical issues in Afghan-Pakistan relations since the Taliban took over Kabul in 2021? (CSS-2023)

Introduction

The Taliban's return to power in Kabul in August 2021 was initially viewed as a strategic relief, ending two decades of hostility under pro-Indian Afghan regimes. However, expectations of a friendly government in Kabul soon gave way to renewed tensions. Despite Pakistan's early diplomatic support, the relationship since 2021 has been marked by deep mistrust, cross-border militancy, refugee crisis, and disrupted economic ties.

These unresolved issues highlight that the Taliban's rise has not granted Pakistan the long strategic depth, but instead created new security and diplomatic challenges.

Date: _____

Day:

M	T	W	T	F	S
---	---	---	---	---	---

Historical Context

Since 1947, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have been strained by Durand Line Disputes and the Pashtunistan issue. During the Afghan-Jihad (1979-89), Pakistan became a frontline state but inherited the refugee and militancy burden. In the post-9/11 era, Kabul accused Pakistan of harboring Taliban sanctuaries, while Pakistan blamed Afghanistan for ITP activities. The 2020 US-Taliban Peace Deal held in Doha, brokered by Pakistan, raised hopes of stability. Yet, the Taliban's complete takeover in 2021 has once again complicated Pakistan's security landscape.

Date: _____

Day: **M T W T F S**



Critical Issues since 2021

TTP Sanctuaries and Cross Border Terrorism

Groups like TTP, ISK exploit Afghan soil to launch attacks inside Pakistan. Since 2022, Pakistan has witnessed a surge in terrorism, especially in KP and Balochistan. The Taliban regime's inability to control

Date: _____

Day: **M T W T F S**

TTP operations has become the most serious irritant

Durand Line Dispute and Border Clashes

Despite Pakistan forcing 98% of the 2640km border by 2024, the Taliban continue to reject it as the official boundary. Frequent skirmishes at Torkham and Chaman crossings (2022-2023) have strained ties. This dispute prevents normalization of relations and fuels nationalist sentiments on both sides.

Refugee Crisis and Repatriation Issues

Pakistan has hosted 3 million Afghan refugees since 1979.

After 2021, new refugee inflows strained Pakistan's economy, education and security. In 2023, Pakistan announced large scale repatriation plan, creating

Date: _____

Day: **M T W T F S**

humanitarian and diplomatic friction.

Trade and Transit Disruption

The Afghanistan - Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA 2010) was already controversial, after 2021, smuggling and border closures worsened the crisis. Afghanistan also refuses to allow Pakistan direct access to Central Asia, limiting economic integration. Instability in Kabul undermines projects like TAPI pipeline and CASA-1000 Power Project.

India Factor and Regional Rivalries

While Taliban's rise reduced India's influence in Kabul, New Delhi maintains engagement through humanitarian aid and economic aid. Pakistan fears a revival of India-Afghanistan partnership, especially in the context of TTP support. China and OIC

Date: _____

Day:

M	T	W	T	F	S
---	---	---	---	---	---

have begun mediating between Islamabad and Kabul (2025) but mistrust remains high.

Implications for Pakistan

Security

Renewed terrorism has reversed gains of Zarb-e-Azb and Radd ul Fasad operations.

Economic

Trade disruptions and refugee burden worsen Pakistan's fragile economy.

Diplomatic

Islamabad faces global scrutiny for its Afghanistan policy and struggles to build consensus in OIC & SAARC.

Geopolitical

Afghanistan's instability & restraints Pakistan's ambition to become a hub for regional connectivity via CPEC extensions.

Way Forward

R Structured Dialogue Mechanism

Revive and strengthen frameworks like APAPPS (2018) for intelligence sharing, border management and security cooperation

Balanced Policy on TTP

Islamabad must press Kabul diplomatically while also developing inherent counterterrorism resilience.

Humanitarian Approach to Refugees

Gradual and dignified repatriation, combined with international burden-sharing can reduce friction.

Economic Integration

Expand bilateral trade, encourage legal crossings, and push forward

Write atleast 5 lines under each heading

Date: _____

Day: M T W T F S

regional projects TAPI, CASA as confidence building measures.

Leveraging Multilateral Forums

Utilize China's influence and platforms like OIC and SCO to mediate with Kabul.

Conclusion

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 has reshaped Pak-Afghan relations. Instead of strategic depth, Pakistan faced renewed militancy, economic stress and diplomatic uncertainty. The critical issues demand a multi-layered policy. Only through sustained dialogue, regional cooperation and realistic expectations can Pakistan convert its geographic proximity to Afghanistan.