

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations:

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1. Introduction:-

Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep-rooted historical, cultural, and geographical ties, yet their relationship has remained persistently fragile. The return of Taliban in August 2021 was initially seen as an opportunity for strategic alignment and stability. However, contrary to expectations, relations deteriorated due to security concerns, border tensions, and mutual mistrust. Over time, the relationship has evolved from cautious optimism to confrontation.

2. Historical Context of Pak-Afghan

Relations:-

Afghanistan has always held strategic importance due to its location at the intersection of South and Central Asia. In earlier times, it served as a buffer state during great power rivalries. After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, relations became tense as Afghanistan opposed Pakistan's entry into United Nations due to disputes over territorial and political matters. Although both countries share cultural and ethnic similarities, their relationship

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has been marked by suspicion rather than cooperation.

3- Key Issues In Early Relations:

(a) Durand Line Dispute:-

The Durand Line, drawn in 1893 remains the most critical issue. In 1893 Amir Abdul Rahman of Afghanistan requested British India to draw a border limit. The British government appointed Mr. Mortimer Durand to draw the line with mutual consent of Amir. In 1905, 1919, 1921 and 1930 Afghanistan reaffirmed this line as border with British India. In 1921 Afghanistan delegation came to Rawalpindi and reaffirmed the Durand Line as border. In 1930 Afghan delegation visited the London government; and the Anglo-Afghan treaty was signed, and Durand line was considered as a border.

After Pakistan Independence in 1947, Afghanistan denied the Durand Line as border with Pakistan, and declared claim on FATA, North Baluchistan, and KPK. But Pakistan rejected Afghanistan's claim. However, the dispute has led to border insecurity, illegal crossings, and ~~smuggling~~ smuggling. Bagram incident in 1950, where

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Afghanistan attacked a Pakistani checkpoint on the Durand Line. In 1955 a mob attacked Pakistani Embassy in Kabul. In 1956: attacks on Pakistani diplomatic missions continued.

4-Cold War Phase And Soviet Invasion:

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 transformed regional dynamics. Pakistan became a frontline state and supported Afghan Mujahideen along with the US and other allies. The invasion posed a serious threat to Pakistan's security and raised fears of Communist expansion. Millions of Afghan refugees entered Pakistan, creating social and economic pressure. During Soviet invasion from 1979-1989; first major refugee influx occurred into Pakistan. During Afghan Civil war from 1989-1996; second refugee wave occurred and 5 million refugees reached Pakistan. During Taliban regime from 1996-2001 third refugee wave occurred; illegal immigrants: fleeing Taliban rules, liberal professionals and head-money individuals arrived Pakistan. In 1997-2001 illegal immigration continued from Afghanistan.

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5- Post-Soviet Era And Rise Of Taliban:-

(1989-2001)

After the Soviet withdrawal; Afghanistan descended into internal conflict; Mujahideen failed to establish stability, and Taliban emerged as a powerful force and took control of Kabul. Pakistan recognized the Taliban government, expecting stability, improved trade access, and resolution of border issues. However, internal instability and extremism persisted.

6- War on Terror and Its Impact:-

After 9/11 attacks the US demanded action against Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Pakistan supported the US. In 2001 US forces replaced Taliban in Kabul; And Hamid Karzai appointed interim president. After Bonn conference in Germany. In 2002 Taliban announced comeback. In 2006 Taliban played themselves the "lethiest force" against foreign forces. Taliban regrouped and insurgency continued. Pakistan faced terrorism, security threats, and international pressure.

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7. Taliban's Return (2021) and Changing Dynamics:-

In August 2021; Taliban rapidly took control of Afghanistan. Pakistan had expected a stable and cooperative government but instead, situation became uncertain and complex. New security and political challenges emerged.

9. Key Factors Affecting Relations:

a) Indian Role:-

India's involvement in Afghanistan has been a major concern. It supported anti-Pakistan elements and increased influence through developmental and political ties with Afghanistan. This created strategic pressure on Pakistan.

b) US Role:-

The US has significantly influenced relations. It supported Pakistan during Soviet war and later pressured Pakistan during Soviet war on terror. Its withdrawal changed regional balance.

10-Contemporary Issues In Pak-Afghan

Relations =

a) TTP Threat :-

After Taliban's return Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan became active again. Attacks significantly increased and Afghan Taliban failed to take decisive action. As a result in February-March 2016 Pakistan launched multiple airstrikes inside Afghanistan, targeted hideouts of TTP. The strikes came after a surge in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, including suicide bombings and cross-border militancy.

b) Border Fencing Dispute :-

From 2013 onwards, Pakistan invested \$0.6 billion in fencing the Durand Line. 95% fencing was completed, but Post 2021 after Taliban takeover Taliban resisted fencing and allegedly destroyed fencing. Pakistan conveyed: "Line of life and peace - we will not tolerate these actions further."

c) Refugee Problems :-

Pakistan has hosted over 3 million

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Afghan refugees for decades, including around 1.6 million registered under UNHCR. This has strained Pakistan's already burdened infrastructure and economy. Pakistan initiated large-scale deportations of undocumented Afghans. Around 3.8-4.4 million Afghan were present, over 1.7 million deported by 2025.

d) Border clashes and Trade Disruptions:-

Tensions along Durand Line escalated sharply in late 2024 and early 2025, with Pakistan launching airstrikes against TTP hideouts in Khost and PK Paktika Provinces. In retaliation, Afghan Taliban forces fired across the border. These clashes disrupted Pak-Afghan transit trade leading to closures of trade routes like Torkham and Chaman. This disruption deepened economic instability in Afghanistan.

11 Present mediation and Diplomatic stance:-

Pakistan and Afghanistan have confirmed they are holding talks in China aimed at the ending worst conflict between the South Asian neighbours.

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Mediation Context:-

→ Talks hosted by China.

→ Aim: Reduce cross-border terrorism, TTP Sanctuaries, and border clash.

Pakistan and Afghanistan held peace talks in China to end the worst fighting since 2021. Pakistan-Afghanistan relations deteriorated sharply in early 2026 due to border clashes.

Talks resumed after months of clashes. On 2 April 2026, Pakistan and Afghanistan held talks in China aimed to end "months of conflict" between the two sides. On 7 April 2026,

Afghanistan termed the dialogue "useful", signaling cautious optimism.

12-Future Of Pak-Afghan Relations:-

The future of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations appear cautiously optimistic but fragile, as reflected in recent China mediated talk in April 2026.

Both sides engaged in dialogue to end months of conflict, while on 7 April 2026 the talks were described as "useful" indicating willingness to ease tensions. Both countries agreed to work on "comprehensive plan" and emphasized dialogue as "viable and effective way"

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forward. However, despite these encouraging signals, deep-rooted issues such as the TTP presence, border tensions, mutual distrust continue to hinder long term stability, suggesting that future relations will likely remain managed and cooperative at times, but unstable and conditional overall.

