

Q2- Pak-Afghan relations continue to remain tensed even after mediation by China. What do you think are major factors and how could it be improved.

Introduction:

Pakistan and Afghanistan have always had a tense and rocky relationship. It goes back to 1947 when Afghanistan was the sole country to vote against Pakistan joining United Nations as a newly formed country.

These tensions were further magnified due to factors such as boundary conflicts, terrorism and third party interventions from Afghan soil. While Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to enjoy a good relationship on the trade and transit front - there have been efforts by other countries, such as China in the region to start peace dialogues especially to keep the economic fronts stable - other fronts still continue to take a hit because of these sour relations.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PAK-AFGHAN RELATIONS:

As iterated earlier, these tensions go all the way back to Pakistan's formation. One of the major contentions in this aspect ~~was~~ is the Durand Line - while Pakistan continue to recognise it as its international border, Afghanistan has time and time again refused to do as such.

This is particularly seen in the 2017 fencing incident, when Pakistan tied fencing the Durand line, but Afghanistan was highly against it ~~strongly~~ calling it illegal and criminal. While Pakistan's only contention was ~~to~~ to curb the porous nature of the border as ~~as~~ a lot of reported terrorist activity happens because this border is easily cross-able. ~~What~~ What adds to this already rocky relationship is ~~the~~ Pakistan's role in 'war on terror' which acted as a launch pad for American military to curb terrorism in Afghanistan post 9/11. Afghanistan blames Pakistan for the lives lost in ~~the~~ the past two decades but fails to see that Pakistan became home to 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees - providing them with employment and housing.

TERRORISM IN PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN'S ROLE IN IT.

Since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in 2021, Pakistan has been facing a rise in militant violence, mainly carried out by Tareekh-e-Taliban (TTP) in Pakistan which has ideological alliance with ~~Pakistan~~ Afghanistan. ~~According to~~ According to Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security; TTP has carried out nearly 600 attacks in Pakistan in 2024 alone causing over a thousand casualties ~~and~~ and another 700 casualties of armed personnel

alone, this underscores how grave the terrorism situation is in Pakistan especially considering the fact that most of these casualties and attacks happened in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan area near the Durand Line - again highlighting its porous nature and how dangerously it has gripped Pakistan in terrorism's claws. Even before, Taliban takeover, there have been numerous bombings and terrorists attack in Pakistan over the decades which was curbed successfully through military operation, ~~Zube Azad~~ as was seen in the APS attack where children were killed by terrorists. The UNSC Report 2024 has revealed that Afghanistan's de facto government ~~to~~ directly funds TTP which is huge ~~indirect~~ indicator of how serious the situation is in Pakistan. To further curb this issue strategically, Pakistan has introduced the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Programme (IFRP) which is designed to expel undocumented Afghan Refugees - keeping in mind that Pakistan already hosts over 1.4 million ~~refugees~~ registered refugees.

FUTURE THREAT FROM AFGHANISTAN TO PAKISTAN: DESPITE CHINA MEDIATION

A recent conflict in October has made relations between the two countries even more grim. Pakistani warplanes conducted airstrikes targeting the leadership and infrastructure of

Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), this operation was carried out within the framework of self-defense. This was concluded with a ceasefire agreement signed in Doha, the capital of Qatar under Turkey and Qatar's mediation. China also actively mediated the Pak-Afghan conflict by promoting dialogue through China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Meetings (CPA), urging restraint ~~among~~ amidst border clashes and offering its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which is a CPEC extension to Afghanistan for economic stability even as Taliban-Pakistan tensions persist over terrorism. China further supported enhanced security cooperation to combat terrorism, a common threat to all three nations. ~~and~~ Despite these efforts, Pak-Afghan Relationship continues to be strain ~~and~~ ~~was~~ because while ~~of~~ China is working towards Regional Economic stability - the issues of terrorism that originate from Afghan soil and seep into Pakistan portray a much bigger and far grim picture that cannot be shaken off simply because economic stability is needed. Both factors continue to be equally important.

Afghanistan continues to be a threat to Pakistan's national cohesion. This is evident in the fact that Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) operates from Afghan soil and aims to control local resources and separate Balochistan from Pakistan. In November 2024, BLA conducted a suicide attack at a crowded railway station in Baluchistan, raising the death toll to 26 and wounding more than 600 people — this is important to note because this attack caused civilian casualties. These armed terrorist groups continue to violate Geneva Conventions and all forms of humanity for the sake of ~~the~~ breaking the nation apart from within. This is further evident in the fact that in 2024, they blew up the main gas pipeline of Baluchistan, resulting in suspension of gas supply to several cities in Pakistan and leaving citizens struggling for basic needs.

Way Forward:

Prioritize ~~Prioritize~~

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan must clearly define their positions in the relationship. Crucially, this involves a shift from "shying away from core realities" to embrace the realities and work out and discuss and debate on relationship and discuss and debate our issues and challenges that frequently disrupt our ties.

Partnership:

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan need to develop a "bilateral framework" that is "very diverse". This framework could encompass a wide range of engagements, including "border management to continued commercial and trade agreements." ~~At the end~~ They should focus on a comprehensive and multifaceted engagement beyond singular issues.

Participation:

Both countries must also adopt a "people centric approach". Acknowledging the deep cultural, linguistic, and historical connections between the people of both nations, it is vital to consider "the sentiment of the people". Pertaining to refugees, it is important to develop a people centric approach.

Persistence:

Achieving a sustainable and long term relationship requires "diversity of engagement". The relationship should not be "solely focused on security centric lens." Instead, there should be "our own bilateral platforms with Afghanistan and they should be diverse in nature". This independence and diversification are key to building "a very long-term sustainable persistent relationship with our neighbor". While Pakistan and Afghanistan have

sought diplomatic cooperation in areas like counterterrorism and trade, several challenges continue to undermine progress.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, Pak-Afghan relations remain strained despite China's mediation due to unresolved border disputes, militant insurgent issues, distrust and competing regional interests. Without addressing security concerns and trust deficits, external mediation, such as provided by China, cannot deliver sustainable peace alone. A stable Pak-Afghan relationship is essential not only for bilateral harmony but also for regional peace, economic integration and counter-terrorism efforts.

Q3. The formation of new provinces is a recurring discourse in Pakistan. Critically evaluate the hurdles and give recommendations.

Pakistan has ~~four~~ provinces a total of eight administrative units which includes ^{the} four provinces; Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and the capitals/territories, such as; Islamabad Capital Territory, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Federally Administered Tribal Areas which merged into KP. And the demand for more provinces continues to grow primarily due to governance gaps, resource disparity and ethnic identity. It faces certain challenges ~~the~~ which stem from the constitution like, requiring 2/3 majority in the Parliament, and also stem from lack of capital such as; for building new assemblies/courts as well as political destabilization from ethnic demands, as seen with FATA merger into KP. This answer would delve into a discussion that addresses ~~HURDLES TO FORM~~ all these hurdles as well as give recommendations while maintaining that formation of new provinces would be in betterment of Pakistan for a more effective governance and administration.

HURDLES TO FORMING NEW PROVINCES:

To start with, the Constitution of Pakistan, ~~also~~ sets out certain requirements for formation of

of new provinces. This is iterated under Article 239 which states that, there has to be a two-thirds majority in Parliament and even consent from the affected provincial assembly, a very difficult political feat to accomplish. Aside from this, there is the financial burden where each new province brings huge costs for new infrastructure to build each new province's assemblies, secretariats and courts etc. This could be seen as extravagant, especially for a third-world country like Pakistan and particularly it could be really impractical ~~in~~ given Pakistan's current economic climate.

One very important thing, aside from these hurdles could be the political and ethnic sensitivities attached to this separate province discourse alone.

This issue is highly politicised and puts anyone talking about it at the risk of opening a Pandora's Box of unending demands from various ethnic groups (e.g., in Karachi, South Punjab, Hazara). Critics do argue that creating more provinces doesn't guarantee better governance and that power might still remain with provincial elites, not devolve to local levels. While this might be true, the feelings of repression and unrest people ~~are~~ under certain administrations feel would no longer be an issue.

Although, it could be noted that, this separate province debate diverts attention and resources from

more pressing national problems like economy and terrorism. But it is pertinent to consider that ~~economy~~ ~~might get better and~~ these issues might get curbed if internal governance and administration issues are resolved as well.

ADVANTAGES OF FORMATION OF NEW PROVINCES.

There are many ~~improved~~ advantages of forming new provinces in Pakistan. These include; improved administrative efficiency due to smaller and more manageable governance units. ~~In the past~~ ~~year~~ In 2025 alone, 538 people died in Karachi because of dumper incidents — this could have been curbed with better governance.

BETTER SERVICE DELIVERY:

With smaller provinces, there could be better service delivery in health, education, and ~~information~~ infrastructure at the local level.

For instance, everybody in rural areas come to big hospitals in Karachi for their medical check ups, even minor ones, because there are no adequate medical facilities in their cities or even proper primary education institutions. This puts them at a disadvantage because these are supposed to be basic necessities and no human being should have to travel thousands of miles for basic check-up to another city.

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT:

The creation of new provinces would reduce feelings of deprivation ~~is~~ among the marginalized groups who feel that ~~they~~ their voices are not heard in the current political landscape. As this would address regional inequalities and uneven resource distribution, which is what causes most of these feelings of deprivation amongst the marginalized of the regions.

ECONOMIC GROWTH:

The creation of new provinces would also help economic growth through targeted regional planning and localised industrial development. As each province would have its ~~economic~~ own industrial hub, and this disparity and sentiment that only one city carries the whole country's financial burden would be curbed. This would also give greater representation and employment ~~increased public~~ opportunities to a lot of people across the country.

INCREASED PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

~~The~~ More provinces, as discussed earlier, would lead to smaller governing / administrative units. This also means that, proximity would be close as well. This would then increase public

participation and they would have more of a say in decision making powers — which is a norm for any democratic country.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A WAY FORWARD:

STRENGTHEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE.

To overcome the hurdles, the focus needs to shift to a more constitutional ~~amendments~~ centric approach. The amendments need to empower and ensure the continuity and fund of local governments, decentralizing power effectively. Because every ~~pro~~ province would have their own Chief Minister, their own secretariat, their own ministers — which ~~is~~ would make governance efficient in the best way possible.

ESTABLISH INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONS:-

There also needs to be set up bodies to assess demands based on administrative viability, economic potential, geographical factors, and security dynamics, not just political expediency.

PRIORITIZE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUITY:-

To further overcome hurdles pertaining to separate province issue, it's to address

root causes of discontent which includes; mismanagement and resource disparity; to build trust - this would also be better magnified by showing new units which can deliver better services in terms of health and education which are fundamental rights for every citizen.

POLITICAL CONSENSUS:

It is important to move beyond populist slogans to build broad agreement among federal and provincial stakeholders, ensuring that any changes that happen should ensure stability.

PHASED APPROACH:

One important thing is that, it should be considered open mindedly is that, if provisions are made, a phased process can allow for experimentation, learning from experiences like the FATA merger, and ensuring smoother integration. This would save the country from the sudden shock of managing and balancing new ~~old~~ multiple new administrations.

CONCLUSION:

Conclusively, this answer would state that formation of new provinces has become greatly ~~an~~ important for Pakistan in order to better manage its constituenties. As explained in the answer above with examples, smaller administrative units would be directly proportional to better governance - which is a necessity for Pakistan at this point in time. The reason this a recurring debate is because of many factors explained earlier, which is also important but what's more important is a proper dialogue on this and proper outcome.