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Current Affairs

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Q.2

I- Introduction

Pak-Afghan relations continue to remain tense despite mediation by China due to multiple political, security, and humanitarian challenges. The major factors include cross-border terrorism, Taliban's limited action against anti-Pakistan militants, border disputes over the **Durand Line**, economic and trade disruptions, and the refugee crisis following the large-scale return of Afghans from Pakistan. These tensions not only undermine bilateral cooperation but also affect regional stability and economic connectivity. Improving relations requires a combination of verifiable counter-terrorism measures, structured diplomatic dialogue, effective border management, humanitarian-sensitive refugee policies, and strengthened economic and people-to-people ties. This answer analyzes the underlying causes in detail and outlines practical ways to improve bilateral engagement.

II. Background

Pak-Afghan relations have historically been shaped by contested borders, security concerns, and regional rivalries. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, Afghanistan's non-recognition of the Durand Line, support for Pashtunistan, and successive Afghan governments' claims over Pakistan territory created a foundation of mistrust. The Soviet Invasion (1979), ensuing Afghan civil war, and the Taliban era (1996-2001) further complicated ties, with Pakistan hosting millions of Afghan refugees. After the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Pakistan expected closer cooperation, particularly in controlling anti-Pakistan militant groups, but the persistence of cross-border attacks and border clashes revived long-standing tensions. China's mediation has ~~facilitated~~ facilitated diplomatic engagement and economic discussions, but deep-rooted mistrust and structural challenges continue to prevent sustainable improvement.

III. Major Factors Behind Persistent Tensions

a- Cross-Border Terrorism and Security Concerns

Pakistan continues to face attacks by TTP, BLA, and other anti-state groups operating from Afghan territory. Despite assurances from the Taliban, measures against these groups have been insufficient, leading to increased mistrust. The border clashes in October 2025 highlights the risks of escalating violence due to poor bilateral coordination, while the surge in terrorist incidents within Pakistan intensifies Islamabad's security concerns.

b- Taliban's Internal Security Calculus

The Afghan Taliban's connections with the TTP encompass ideological, tribal, and operational dimensions. Taking significant action against the TTP could threaten internal unity and provoke factional dissent. This lack of decisive action contributes to Pakistan's belief that Kabul is unwilling to intervene rather than incapable of doing so.

c- Border Management Disputes

Frequent clashes at Torkham and Chaman disrupt trade and heighten public hostility, exacerbated by Afghanistan's ongoing non-recognition

of the Durand Line. The October 2025 skirmishes further eroded trust, with Pakistan's border regulations, including fencing and visa restrictions, viewed by Kabul as unilateral and coercive.

d- Economic Dependency without Structured Integration

Despite increased trade and transit activity, bilateral economic ties lack formal institutional frameworks. Afghanistan relies heavily on Pakistan ports and markets but complains about arbitrary closures, transit restrictions, and visa constraints.

The proposed extension of CPEC into Afghanistan remains slow due to security concerns and lack of political clarity.

e- Refugee Repatriation Crisis

In 2025, One million Afghans returned from Pakistan due to the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP), a situation the UNHCR views as a violation of humanitarian norms. Many returnees are POB cardholders and face significant challenges, returning to Afghanistan during a deep crisis marked by extreme poverty and poor public

DATE: ___/___/___

DAY: ___/___/___

services. The repatriation has strained bilateral relations, with Kabul perceiving IFRP as coercive, while Pakistan cites security risks as justification for stricter controls. UNHCR emphasizes that poorly managed returns exacerbate instability in Afghanistan and intensify tensions between the two nations.

f Regional Geo-Political Dynamics

Statements and accusations from both Afghanistan and Pakistan exacerbate misunderstandings despite upgraded diplomatic ties to ambassador level. Political dialogue remains disconnected from ground realities, with Kabul viewing certain Pakistani actions as coercive and Islamabad considering Afghan responses inadequate. Additionally, Pakistan fears Indian influence in Afghanistan contributes to instability, while China's mediation offers a neutral platform, it cannot resolve deep structural mistrust or ensure effective cooperation unless there is a political shift in Kabul.

IV- How Relations Can Be Improved Between Pakistan and Afghanistan

a- Establish a Verifiable Counter- Terrorism Mechanism

Both sides ~~es~~ should establish a Trilateral Counter-Terrorism Coordination Cell with China, focusing on real-time intelligence sharing, verification protocols, joint investigations for cross-border attacks, and mechanisms for dismantling safe havens to enhance accountability and mitigate blame ~~game~~ games.

b- Humane and Structured Refugee Policies

Efforts should focus on ensuring the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of Afghan refugees, particularly PoR holders and vulnerable groups. Cooperation between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and UNHCR is vital to facilitate reintegration and mitigate humanitarian stress and political friction.

c- Border Management Reforms

Coordinated border policing can enhance security through joint patrolling and standardized movement protocols, alongside biometric systems to reduce infiltration.

These measures promote mutual confidence, prevent unilateral actions, and improve crisis-communication mechanisms to avoid escalation during border incidents.

d. Economic and Trade Cooperation

Pakistan and Afghanistan should separate political tensions from economic cooperation by ensuring uninterrupted transit trade and fast-tracking the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) extension to Afghanistan. This approach fosters independence, reduces hostility, and maintains open trade corridors despite political disagreements, thereby creating mutual incentives for stability.

e. Structured Bilateral and Trilateral Dialogue

Bilateral and trilateral dialogues should be held regularly, focusing on China's role as a mediator to enhance technical cooperation, maintain dialogue, monitor commitments, and promote regional projects.

f. People-to-People and Cultural Engagement

Promoting educational, cultural and business exchanges can foster goodwill and

trust, while relaxing visa regimes for students, businessmen, and patients may enhance human relations previously focused on security.

V- Conclusion

To conclude, Pak-Afghan tensions continue due to security issues, refugee pressures, border disputes, and political mistrust. While China's mediation offers dialogue opportunities, sustainable improvements require both countries to implement ~~verifiable~~ verifiable counter-terrorism measures, humane refugee policies, and efficient border management. Emphasizing peaceful coexistence and regional stability is crucial to evolving their historically fraught relationship into a cooperative partnership. ~~achieving this depends on ongoing dialogue, joint security~~ Ultimately, consistent engagement with mutual ~~engagement~~ respect for security concerns are vital for enhancing Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.



I- Introduction

On 17 September 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the **Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMPA)**,

establishing a strategic alliance based on mutual cooperation in various sectors.

The agreement asserts that aggression against one nation is deemed aggression against both, mirroring **NATO's Article 5**.

Factors prompting this pact include regional security issues, Pakistan's military capabilities, and Saudi Arabia's intent to broaden defense relationships. The **SMPA** is designed to enhance regional security, deter adversaries like India and Israel, promote economic integration, and elevate both nations' strategic influence, significantly impacting regional dynamics and political circumstances in Pakistan.

II- Causes of the Pact

a- Historical and Strategic Military Ties

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a long-standing military relationship characterized by troop deployments (**1500-2000 troops**

currently in KSA), joint exercises like

Al-Samsam and North Thunder, and

counter-terrorism cooperation through IMTC

since 2018. The **SMPA 2025** aims to

formalize this relationship, reflecting decades

of trust and operational coordination.

b - Regional Security Threats and the India Factor

In May 2025, Pakistan and India, both possessing nuclear capabilities, engaged in a short military conflict against a history of low bilateral relations. A new pact enhances Pakistan's strategic defense deterrence and sends a strong message to India regarding its powerful allies and the regional security dynamics.

c - Saudi Arabia's Security Diversification

Rising concerns about the reliability of US security guarantees have pushed Saudi Arabia to seek regional partners. Pakistan, with the largest military in the Muslim world and nuclear capabilities, offers a strong deterrent. This partnership strengthens Saudi Arabia's overall security assurances.

d. Broader Middle Eastern Geopolitical Context

The timing coincides with escalating Gulf tensions, including regional conflicts near Doha, Qatar, in 2025, signalling

the urgency for Saudi Arabia to diversify its defense partnerships. It also serves as a strategic hedge against potential threats from Iran's nuclear program.

III. Implications of the Pak-Saudi Defense Pact.

a. Regional Security and Geopolitics

The SMDA strengthens Pakistan's position as a key security player in the Middle East. It consolidates Saudi-Pakistan alignment and may deter regional adversaries. India has expressed caution with officials stating they will "study the implications of this development for our national security as well as for regional and global stability." The deal could also signal to Israel, especially after recent military activity in Doha, showing Saudi Arabia's intent to reduce dependence on Western alliances.

b. Nuclear Dimension

For the first time, Pakistan has officially acknowledged that its nuclear umbrella could extend to Saudi Arabia. This provides strategic reassurance and strengthens deterrence.

The nuclear dimension also adds symbolic and strategic weight to the pact in regional calculations.

d. Economic and Strategic Cooperation

It encourages joint ventures in sectors like AI, construction, tourism, energy, and mining under Saudi Vision 2030.

The pact facilitates the export of skilled labor to Saudi Arabia, boosting high-value remittances which reached \$9.35 billion from 2.5 million Pakistani workers in 2024. Additionally, it promotes trade diversification, energy cooperation, and strategic engagement in Central Asia, potentially unlocking \$270 billion in trade by leveraging Saudi influence.

IV- Conclusion

The Pakistan-Saudi SMDA 2025 represents a historic alignment with both strategic and symbolic significance.

Driven by historical ties, regional security threats (notably India), Saudi diversification needs, ~~and~~ broader Middle Eastern tensions (including Doha 2025 and Iran), the pact reshapes regional geopolitics. Its implications are multifaceted: reinforcing

deterrence, enhancing Pakistan's regional and domestic influence, expanding economic cooperation, and sending clear signals to key players including India, Israel and the US. In sum, the deal cements Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's strategic partnership, strengthening mutual security while shaping the future of South Asian and Middle Eastern geopolitics.



Q.5

Introduction

The Paris Climate Agreement (2015) represents a landmark global effort to combat climate change, aiming to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century and provide climate finance to developing nations.

The United States, as the world's largest historical emitter and a key architect of the agreement, has played a central role in setting targets, mobilizing resources, and ensuring accountability. President Trump's withdrawal in 2020, following a similar exit during his first term, raises serious questions about the

future trajectory of international climate action, global cooperation, and financial support for vulnerable nations.

Impact of US Withdrawal

a. Leadership Vacuum

The US has traditionally driven climate ambition alongside the EU, pushing for cleaner energy transitions, emission reduction targets, and enforcement mechanisms. Its absence undermines the coherence of the international response, reducing pressure on other major emitters, and risking slower implementation of climate commitments.

b. Financial Implications

Developing nations rely heavily on climate finance to adapt and mitigate climate impacts. While the Paris Agreement initially pledged \$100 billion annually (achieved in 2022), the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) aims to mobilize \$300 billion by 2035, supported by public and private actors. The US absence may reduce funding flows, leaving vulnerable countries under-resourced.

COP30 and the Global Response

a- Outcomes of COP30

At COP30 in Belem, Brazil (2025), despite the US absence, nearly 200 nations agreed to triple adaptation funds for developing countries. However, the summit avoided binding commitments on phasing out fossil fuels, reflecting geopolitical tensions and the influence of major oil-producing states like Saudi Arabia.

b- Shift in Leadership

In the absence of US, China, the EU, Brazil, and India are expected to take on more prominent roles in climate diplomacy. Subnational actors, private capital, and civil society initiatives, such as the "We Are Still In" movement in the US, can partially compensate for federal inaction, maintaining momentum in renewable energy and emissions reduction projects.

Challenges to Future Efforts

a- Failure to Meet Temperature Targets

Current NDCs indicate that the 1.5°C target may be exceeded by 2030, exposing ecosystems and populations to extreme weather, rising seas, and biodiversity loss.

b- Unequal Burden on Developing Nations

Reliance on private finance risks increasing debt burdens and undermining equity principles central to the Paris Agreement.

c- Geopolitical Fragmentation

Without US engagement, global coordination becomes harder, and national interests may take precedence over collective climate goals.

Opportunities and Prospects

a- Multi-lateral Coalitions

Regional alliances and blocs can step up leadership roles, coordinating emission reduction strategies.

b- Private Sector and Technological Innovation

Market-driven renewable energy, AI, and clean tech can accelerate decarbonization.

c- Civil Society Action

Local governments, NGOs, and corporate initiatives provide resilience against federal inaction.

Conclusion

Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement presents a significant challenge to global climate governance, threatening leadership, finance, and ambition. However, COP30 demonstrates that the international community retains the capacity to advance climate action through multilateral coordination, private-sector engagement, and subnational initiatives. While the absence of the US makes achieving the **1.5°C target** and mobilizing equitable climate finance more difficult, global efforts are unlikely to stall entirely. The future of climate change mitigation will depend on the collective resolve of other major powers, innovative financing, and persistent international cooperation.



Q.3

Introduction

The debate over creating new provinces in Pakistan resurfaces repeatedly, rooted in aspirations for improved governance, administrative efficiency, and greater political representation. Proponents argue

that smaller provincial units could ease governance challenges in an overly centralized system and address longstanding ethnic and regional grievances. However, Pakistan faces significant structural, constitutional, political, and economic constraints that complicate this idea. The absence of strong grassroots movements, the heavy fiscal burden of establishing new provinces, and the unresolved centre-province tensions highlight deep systematic issues. In this context, the debate must be critically evaluated to determine whether new provinces are the best route to better governance or whether strengthening local governments offers a more feasible alternative.

Hurdles in the Formation of New Provinces

a- Constitutional and Legal Constraints

Altering provincial boundaries requires a two-third majority in the concerned provincial assembly and again in both Houses of Parliament.

Achieving this level of consensus is extremely difficult given Pakistan's political fragmentation. Unlike India, where

boundary changes are simpler due to its quasi-unitary structure, Pakistan's federal character makes such alterations legally and politically rigid.

b- Financial and Administrative Costs

Creating new provinces requires establishing new assemblies, governors, chief ministers, bureaucracies, high courts, police setups, public service commissions, civil secretariats, and infrastructure. With Pakistan's already fragile economic situation, adding new provincial governments would impose massive, recurring annual costs. In a period of austerity and IMF discipline, such extravagance may be fiscally irresponsible.

c- Weak or Non-Existent Grassroots Movement

Pakistan does not have active mass movements demanding new provinces like those in India, where linguistic states emerged from strong, sustained, and sometimes violent mass movements. Although there are historical demands for regions such as Hazara, South Punjab, and Mohajir provinces, these are intermittent and currently dominated by issues like terrorism, inflation, and

governance problems. In the absence of consistent grassroots pressure, political elites tend to exploit the issue for their own benefit.

d- Centre-Province Mistrust

The centre faces difficulties in fulfilling its financial obligations to provinces as per the **NFC Award**.

Provinces claim that the centre is leveraging the new province debate to recentralize powers while the centre contends that provinces are mismanaging funds. This mutual distrust hampers efforts for administrative restructuring.

e- Misdiagnosis of Governance Problems

The main governance failures in Pakistan stem from weak local governments, not large provinces. Countries like the **UK**, despite being unitary, deliver good governance through strong local councils, not by breaking regions into more provinces.

Recommendations

a) Strengthen Local Governments

Pakistan should constitutionally guarantee empowered local governments

instead of creating new provinces, similar to India's 73rd and 74th Amendments. This includes ensuring regular elections, fiscal transfers, and administrative autonomy.

b- Establish an Independent Provincial Reforms Commission

If new provinces are considered, a neutral commission like India's States Reorganisation Commission (1953-55) should be established to conduct research, consultations, and impact assessments. This prevents adhoc, politically motivated decisions.

c- Address Fiscal Sustainability First

To enhance economic stability and effective governance, it is essential to improve tax collection, reform state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and stabilize the economy prior to implementing expensive administrative changes. Failing to secure fiscal space risks turning new provinces into financial burdens instead of being fiscal solutions.

d- Strengthen Administrative Decentralization within Existing Provinces

Provinces should devolve power to divisions and districts to improve service delivery without creating new constitutional units.

Implementing digital governance and restructuring administration can help minimize bureaucratic obstacles.

e- Respect Regional Identity and Resolve Grievances

Engage with communities in South Punjab, Hazara, Karachi, and tribal areas to comprehend their socio-political grievances and provide focused development, representation, and linguistic/cultural inclusion.

Conclusion

To cap it all, while the creation of new provinces is not inherently flawed and could, in theory, enhance administrative decentralisation, the current debate in Pakistan lacks the rigorous research, fiscal capacity and political consensus required for such a major restructuring. Unlike India, where new states emerged from strong linguistic movements, a 21-month Commission review, and overwhelming public demand, Pakistan has none of

these ~~pre~~ prerequisites. Without empowered local governments, new provinces risk merely multiplying bureaucracy, escalating costs, and leaving governance problems fundamentally unchanged. Therefore, strengthening local governance, building consensus, and ensuring economic stability remain more practical and sustainable pathways to improving service delivery and resolving regional grievances.

←————→
'The End'