

NOA Mock-5

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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.

A. Pak-Afghan relations have always been demarcated as one of stress, unpredictability, and bad blood irrespective of continual efforts to remedy it. From the moment Pakistan was formed in 1947, relations have been continually rocky, partly due to deep rooted enmity, and partly due to the involvement of other countries. Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep ties of kinhood, they have shared heritage and culture despite which relations are often tensed. The most recent blow to their relationship occurred in late 2025 wherein cross border attacks were launched, lives were lost, and enmity grew. China has significant interest in both countries hence it stepped in to mediate in order to maintain peace and stability in the region.

HISTORY OF PAK-AFGHAN RELATIONS

Since the very day Pakistan was born on 14th August 1947, Afghanistan disliked the country. They were the only country to oppose Pakistan's membership to the UN, based off of historical issues. The very first quarrel that Afghanistan had against Pakistan was that it did not accept the demarcation of boundary Pakistan's boundary with Afghanistan.

2- JUM AOM
It is known on the Durand Line, it is a 2640 km long^{from Peshawar to Paghman} boundary which was established in 1893 by Sir Henry Mortimer Durand of British India, and Emir Abdur Rahman Khan of Afghanistan. This demarcation was established about 50 years ago, when Pakistan was a part of the subcontinent, however even now, Afghanistan disputes its relevancy^{and} legitimacy calling it an unfair division. This boundary runs through mountains, valleys and deserts, and Afghanistan believes that the Pashtun tribal lines in Pakistan are rightfully theirs hence they dispute its legitimacy as a permanent border.

+ COLD WAR.

THE STRAIN OF WW-II ON PAK-AFGHAN RELATIONS

WW-II officially began on September 1, 1939, and ended on September 2, 1945, even before the origin of Pakistan, however the effects it had were lasting. At the time of war, the world was divided between 2 groups, however Afghanistan tried its very best to balance relations between the Allies and Axis. The cold war officially began on March 12, 1947 and ended in 1991. Its longevity played a crucial role in worsening Pak-Afghan relations. The war albeit mainly being the US vs. Soviet Union, the whole world took sides, it became a point of divide for all wherein the world had to choose the west bloc (capitalist) or the communist bloc. Pakistan was a key non-NATO ally at time, it wholly supported the west bloc in hopes of support and aid to build its economy and whilst the Afghan mujahideen

too picked this side, whereas the communist government of Afghanistan aligned itself with the Soviet Union. As a result, in 1979, the Soviet Union in December, invaded Afghanistan whilst the Afghan Mujahideen sought refuge in Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan became a launchpad for the mujahideen against the Soviet Union, all of which was funded by an international coalition of US, Saudi Arabia, China, and the UK. This Soviet-Afghan war became a major proxy conflict of the Cold War and thus resulting in Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

THE US LED WAR ON TERROR

Post 9/11 on 9th September 2001, the US wished to launch a full scale war against terror in Afghanistan in hopes of countering terrorism and finding Osama bin Laden who they believed was the perpetrator of 9/11. Before this, Pakistan had cordial relations with Afghanistan, so much so that they supported the Taliban led government in an attempt to counterbalance Indian influence in the region. However, post 9/11 Pakistan became a crucial launchpad for the war on terror and thus began a new era of strained relations. However, during this time millions (approx 3 million) Afghans sought refuge in Pakistan, which Pakistan happily provided.

US WITHDRAWAL + RESURGENCE OF TALIBAN

When the US finally exited Afghanistan in 2021, there was hope for better relations with Afghanistan, hope for better opportunities, trade, balance and security. However, it just led to

major security concerns as once the US left Afghanistan there was a resurgence in terror attacks in Pakistan, so much so that in 2024, terrorist attacks in Pakistan surged by 40%. The focal point of concern Pakistan had was that the Tehreek-e-Taliban ~~Afghanistan~~ Pakistan often sought refuge in Afghanistan hence Pakistan requested that Afghanistan stop harboring them, but it was to no avail as terror induced attacks continued.

AREAS OF COOPERATION OVER THE YEARS

Despite the strained relationship between the two neighbors, there have been significant areas of cooperation too. In 1948, Pakistan opened its embassy in Kabul and then Jalalabad, Kandhar, Herat etc. ^{Their} ~~There~~ trade has always been strong and despite it all Pakistan has remained one of Pakistan's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade of US \$1861 million in 2023, they also streamline processes through the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). Pakistan has also hosted millions of Afghan refugees over the years, given support in healthcare, education and infrastructure sectors. It also provides scholarships to Afghan students and has educated over 50,000 Afghan students, and the TAPI pipeline, and railway project are also to support regional connectivity and trade.

SURGE OF TERRORISM IN PAK. + AFGHAN'S ROLE IN IT.

The rise of terrorism is the crux of Pakistan's problems with Afghanistan, as aforementioned Pakistan, is a result of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has resulted in Pakistan being terror

riddled on the TTP is proud and vocal of its plan to enforce Shariah laws as extreme as those in Afghanistan. They routinely target military personnel and government installations. The consistent cross border skirmishes and airstrikes leave both countries in a compromising position. It has reached new lows as in the Global Terrorism Index 2025, Pakistan ranks second, whereas Burkina Faso is first and Syria third.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS B/W PAK-AFGHAN 2025

EXPANSION OF CPEC TO AFGHANISTAN

During bilateral dialogues²¹ on May 2025^(Beijing), it was proposed that CPEC be extended to Afghanistan ~~after~~ following which another bilateral meeting was held in Kabul on²⁰ August 2025 where it was agreed that cooperation would be deepened. This would boost regional trade and economy and smoothen Pak-Afghan relations.

TERROR ATTACKS IN PAKISTAN 2025

There have been 'innumerable'^{ten} attacks in Pakistan in 2025 alone with each month showcasing devastating statistics. On 9th October 2025, Pakistan launched airstrikes in Afghanistan targeting the leader (Nawaz Mehsud) of the TTP who had fled to Afghanistan for safe haven. It was a self defence tactic following innumerable attacks that the TTP launched in Pakistan with the aid of the Afghan Taliban, as proven by UNSC report 2024. This was followed by yet more attacks by the TTP on 11th October, and soon.

This conflict finally ended on 19 October 2025 through Turkey and Qatar brokering a ceasefire agreement in Doha, Qatar. China too has always supported peace and prosperity between the two countries, and has urged both countries to stay 'cool headed', it again called for restraint and urged deescalation in December 2025 after renewed clashes. It has time and time again facilitated meetings, supported ceasefires, and offered constructive roles.

FACTORS OF STRAINED RELATIONS

Pak-Afghan strained relations stem from various factors inclusive of historical, political and security related factors, but the ~~the~~ root cause of it all has always been a lack of bilateral trust. As aforementioned, the Durand Line dispute, cross border militancy, terrorism, foreign interference, lack of cooperation and the fact that Pakistan ~~was~~ did a mass repatriation drive to drive undocumented Afghans back to Afghanistan (as they were 'breeding grounds for terrorists' and posing a toll on Pakistan's already fragile recovered economy) further agitated Kabul.

WAY FORWARD

In order for both countries to have civil and pragmatic ties, it is necessary for a myriad of measures to be undertaken. The 4 P's must be implemented.

~~Peace~~

→

PRIORITIZE

Both Leabul and Islamabad must sit together, and discuss the historic areas of divergence as well as the current ones and decide a joint way forward in order to disintegrate the deep rooted mistrust.

PARTNERSHIP

It is imperative to develop a "bilateral framework" that is "very diversified" through a wide range of engagements inclusive of border management, ~~border~~ enhanced trade and economic engagement. As per ISPR 2025, the Durand Line border has been 90+% complete, it is crucial to complete the border whilst having specific checkpoints for trade only inclusive of faster checking, and a more efficient process, multifaceted engagement is crucial for both countries.

PARTICIPATION

This is a "people centric approach" which indicates that policy formation must be done with people in mind. In order for that to be achieved, both countries must embrace their shared deep cultural, linguistic and historical ties by considering "the sentiment of the people" specifically with the context of refugees too.

PERSISTANCE

In order for sustainable and flourishing relations there must

be "diversity of engagement", it should not be "solely focused on a security centric lens" or but rather separate "bilateral platforms" as the lack of foreign involvement would lead to "a very long ~~and~~^{term} sustainable persistent relationship" between the neighbours. New trajectories on the discourse of Pak-Afghan relations are a vital necessity as the old or current approaches have "usually backfired in Pakistan".

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IMPORTANCE OF PAK-AFGHAN TO ONE ANOTHER

Pakistan has always engaged with Afghanistan and pushed for a good relationship because it not only needs regional support but also because it needs "strategic depth" from Afghanistan. As of 2025, relations with both India and Afghanistan are highly strained leading to Pakistan being vulnerable to attack from both the east and the west i.e. both largest borders. As Bruce Riedel said, "Afghanistan is a graveyard for empires, but a strategic prize for Pakistan." Similarly, Afghanistan needs Pakistan to boost its economy, trade (its livelihood), curb terrorism, military training, fiscal support and regional peace and stability. The increase in terror attacks of TTP and BIA supported by Afghan govt. led to bilateral trade decreasing substantially hence cordial relations are essential.

Conclusively, despite the reconciliation measures undertaken by China, Pak-Afghan relations remain tense due to unresolved border disputes, militant sanctuaries, mutual distrust and competing regional interests. In order for lasting improvement, there must be border management, intelligence sharing, political will and diplomacy. Cooperation is vital for regional harmony, vested interests and bilateral success through boosted economies (more trade, more GDP).

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

A3. Pakistan has long since been battling with whether the creation of new/more provinces is a good idea or not and whilst some are for the notion, others are wholeheartedly against. As of date, Pakistan has 8 administrative units comprising of four provinces (Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan and KP) as well as Islamabad Capital Territory, Gilgit Baltistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (FATA merged into KP). Since its inception Pakistan has dealt with economic, political, cultural and social hurdles from the repeated martial laws to the language problem to the separation of East Pakistan. Many believe that the formation of new provinces would remedy problems such as the governance gap, resource disparity and ethnic frustration whilst others opine that it would merely be costly, cause destabilization from ethnic demands (like what happened with FATA), ~~would~~ and induce political resistance. Nevertheless, this task will not be an easy one, and demands for new provinces initiated upon the passing of the 18th Amendment in 2010. It seems as if the benefits of forming new provinces far outweigh the detriments especially as there are countries with successful governance due to a multitude of models.

OBSTACLES HINDERING THE FORMATION

Constitutional Obstacles

The creation of new provinces requires a vast majority of Parliament to agree, and the way to go about that is by amending the Constitution, to be precise Article 239. In order

to do so a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority is necessitated in the House of Parliament along with consent of the affected provincial assemblies. This is a truly difficult political feat as it stands politicians and assemblies very rarely see eye to eye, and this is one conundrum upon which the people of Pakistan do not necessarily see eye to eye either. Sindh is against the formation of new provinces whereas Karachi ~~is~~ has called to be divided into at least 2 provinces whereas the Seralikis are calling for a separate province of their own.

THE CRIPPLING FINANCIAL BURDEN

Pakistan despite its best efforts still remains a third world country with a struggling economy and crushing debt. The creation of even a single new province would bear immense costs for new infrastructure such as assemblies, secretariats, courts etc which to most seems like an ~~un~~avoidable fiscal burden on an already sensitive economy.

POLITICAL + ETHNIC SENSITIVITIES

The political climate of Pakistan is highly competitive, hence often such matters are politicized or weaponized, often used as election slogans in order to gain votes. This could prove to be ammunition if it insured to create false information and propaganda. Moreover, Pakistan has a very diverse array of culture,

heritage and ethnicities which results in separatism, extremism and terrorism when certain groups feel as if they are being neglected. Furthermore, most cities/^{districts} are demanding to be separate provinces based off of ethnicity, and by giving in to such demands, floodgates may open, and other groups will feel neglected e.g. Karachi would like to be separated into two, one province solely for its Muhajir population, South Punjab such as Multan etc wishes to be a Saraiki province, and similarly with Hazara too. The creation of new provinces would not only result in impossible expectations but disappointment for a large group too.

ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS + FRAGMENTATION

Some argue that a surplus of provinces does not in any way shape or form guarantee more efficient governance, but rather it could further disrupt it via the ideas of ethnic, or sectarian divides. If all in all, there is no guarantee that power may devolve to local levels, it may still remain centralized.

DEVIATION FROM CORE ISSUES

The creation of new provinces, as a whole can be a major area of divergence throughout the country, not only with it divergent focus, but also resources from more pressing obstacles such as those of stabilizing the economy or terrorism. Moreover, it would promote the wrong idea of ethnicity, that just because

an ethnic group is a majority it ~~also~~ can be separated, that even though everyone in Pakistan is one nation, it will indubitably create divide and eventually completely annihilate ~~to~~ the notion of national integration. As Qasim-e-Azam said upon the creation of Pakistan "we are now all Pakistanis - not Baluchis, Pathans, Sindhis, Bengalis, Punjabis, and so on - and as Pakistanis we must feel, believe and act, and we should be proud to be known as Pakistanis and nothing else." He also said, ~~that~~ ⁱⁿ his address to the Constituent Assembly on 11 August 1947, "We are all citizens and equals of one state. We are not going to stand in those days where there is... no distinction between one community and another." Hence, the creation of new provinces would result in going against the ideology Pakistan was built upon.

WHY NEW PROVINCES ARE A NECESSITY

There are innumerable advantages to the formation of new provinces ranging from administration, to accountability to development, all of which shall be denoted below.

ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY

It has been proposed that there be at least a handful new provinces in Pakistan, with some suggesting even up to 38 as the formation of new provinces would be more efficient. The provinces would be smaller hence more

manageable thus facilitating efficiency.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

If there is a greater number of provinces, a great deal of problems can be prevented such as in 2025, 538 people died due to dumper accidents. An astonishingly high number when the year is yet to end. If there was better governance then the people committing such atrocious horrifying accidents would be apprehended rather than getting away.

EMPOWERMENT

The creation of new provinces would facilitate and validate the feelings of those ethnic, cultural and social groups whom often feel unheard, isolated or marginalised which in turn would result in ^{them feeling} happy, empowered and heard, and Pakistan's rating on the world happiness ~~index~~ report (2025) would be much higher than 109th. A prime example is Norway who has 15 counties and is 7th in the report, and Finland who ~~is~~ has ranked first since the last 8 years, has 19 regions (maakunta) with governance structures as per the needs of the regions.

IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

If there are additional provinces then health, education and infrastructure at a local/provincial level will indubitably be improved because there will be no more of people travelling from rural villages to urban cities for education or

healthcare as they will have it close by.

BALANCED DEVELOPMENT + STRENGTHENED FEDERALISM

If more provinces are created, then then regional grievances, ~~and~~ would be addressed. There would be fair and equitable distribution of resources, and the country on a whole would be stronger due to strengthened federalism through decentralization of power as was quoted in the constitution.

ENHANCED ACCOUNTABILITY + TRANSPARENCY

There would be increased public participation in governance owed to closer proximity to of citizens to decision makers, enhanced law and order due to focused, region specific security management, economic growth through regional planning, and localized industrial development as well as enhanced accountability and transparency due to closer monitoring of provincial governments. This would prevent any opportunities for corruption, and create a governance structure the country would love and trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS / WAY FORWARD

STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

In order to bring about real change and the maximum satisfaction of citizens, such extreme change is not the way to go about it. There are less extreme and burdensome options that can be ~~explored~~ explored.

first. If there is focus on constitutional amendments to empower and ensure the continuity and funding of local govt. then power will be effectively decentralised as was done in India.

ESTABLISH INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONS

Independent commissions are a dire need in order to assess demands based on administrative ~~stability~~ viability, economic potential, geographical factors, and security dynamics rather than merely political expediency.

PRIORITIZE DEVELOPMENT + EQUITY

It is do or die to address root causes of discontent, there must be understanding of the underlying issues in order to truly, sustainably solve problems, rather than just shelling a law on a pure horse and pretending everything is fine. Mismanagement, corruption, and resource disparity in order to build up lasting trust. It is important to be equitable and hence ensure access to better services such as health and education to all cities.

SEEK GENUINE POLITICAL CONSENSUS

It is imperative to dig deeper than populist slogans in order to ensure changes serves national stability. There must be broad agreement among both federal and provincial stakeholders.

PHASAL PROCESS RATHER THAN ~~GRAT~~ IMMEDIATE

~~The~~ It would be recommended that if new provinces were to be made, it cannot be an abrupt process or one merely a symbolic figurehead proven by the demarcation of lines. It must be a slow, gradual phased process that can allow experimentation, and room for error. All the problematic aspects of the FATA merger must be learned from to ensure smoother integration if new provinces are to be formed. It is crucial to undertake the aforementioned steps before jumping to conclusions, and making rash decisions albeit it seeming like a great solution, but in order for genuine devolution to come about, the current federal strength must be balanced first.

The formation of new provinces seems to be a great prospect for a new flourishing era. It is a recurring discourse that will not be forgotten about anytime soon. It is an evolutionary idea, but some smaller steps can be taken first to remedy the pre-existing problems that are persisting. The constitution of new provinces has proven to be greatly successful for other countries such as Austria, which is smaller than KP, it has nine regions. whilst Monaco has an area of 2.08 km^2 and is divided into 8 regions. In order for good governance, ^{stable economy} ~~and~~ development, and transparency, more provinces are a necessity however it is not an immediate need, and other steps must be taken before taking such a plunge.