

Subjective Part - Part II

QUESTION NO.1

I. Introduction

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have historically remained complex and tensed due to a combination of historical, security and geopolitical factors. Despite mediation by regional players like China, mutual distrust, border issues and security concerns continue to hinder a stable coordinated partnership. To improve bilateral ties, a comprehensive approach is required which includes dialogue and confidence-building measures, economic cooperation, effective border management, settling refugee issues and limiting external influence.

II. Major Factors behind Strained Relations:

A. Early tensions and Border disputes (Durand line issue)

Afghanistan was the only country to oppose the admission of Pakistan in UN in 1947, which underscores their early diplomatic friction. Moreover after the independence of Pakistan in 1947, Afghanistan refused to recognize the Durand line as an international border and continues to refuse it, while Pakistan insists on its legitimacy. This unresolved issue remains a major source of friction between both the countries and had fueled border skirmishes and border closures which impacts bilateral trade. According to sources, recent border skirmishes between Pakistan and Afghanistan have reduced the bilateral trade below \$ 1 billion from \$ 1.6 Billion earlier.

B. Pashtunistan Factor

The historical "Pashtunistan issue", involving Afghanistan's claim

over Pashtun territories in Pakistan, continues to affect bilateral trust and cooperation. Pakistan views it as a direct challenge and threat to its territorial integrity.

C. Security Concerns and Cross-border Militancy

Pakistan often accuses Afghan soil of being used by militant groups targeting Pakistan. After the fall of Kabul in 2021, there has been a surge in militant groups like TTP which uses Afghan soil to carry out attacks on Pakistan's security forces, civilians and Chinese nationals. Recently on Nov 20, 2025, Denmark highlighted TTP as a major threat in Central and South Asia and the group receives support from de-facto Afghan leadership.

According to a CIGIAR report in 2024-2025, the militants have acquired weapons worth around \$7.2 Billion left by US and NATO forces after their withdrawal from Kabul in 2021.

According to ISPR, TTP is responsible for 70% terrorist attacks in Pakistan. This shows the significant rise in militancy and terrorist activities affecting mainly KP and Balochistan region. But Afghan government continues to denies Pakistan's claims despite recognition by international players and says that this is internal problem of Pakistan.

D. Refugee issues

Pakistan hosts around 4 million Afghan refugees, which has economic and political implications. Disputes over repatriation creates tensions and complicate bilateral relations. Relations strained when Pakistan started repatriation of Afghan refugees which was criticized by the Afghan government.

E. Influence of great powers

Both countries are affected by the strategic interests of regional players like India, US etc. Pakistan perceives Indian influence in Afghanistan as a threat to its influence in Afghanistan and cannot afford encirclement. The growing India-Afghanistan partnership makes cooperation with Afghanistan more difficult.

III. Measures to improve Pak-Afghan relations :

A. Effective Border management

This includes effective border fencing to prevent infiltration and smuggling by militants, using effective surveillance systems e.g CCTV, drones etc, biometric verification of travellers and regulated crossings to normalize movement and trade. Furthermore, borders should remain open for trade and transit trades even in war-like situations to prevent halting of trade.

B. Dialogue and Confidence building measures

Both countries should initiate continuous diplomatic dialogue at political, security and economic levels. There is a lack of bilateral trust which needs to be overcome by developing bilateral relations.

Moreover, continued dialogue and negotiation, frameworks on border-related issues, trade and commercial engagement is necessary and policies should be persistent.

C. Strengthen economic connectivity

Economic cooperation can be strengthened by promoting cross-border trade, infrastructure projects, energy projects like TAPI and CASA-1000, transit trade etc. It can create mutual economic benefits.

D. Refugee management

Both countries can collaborate on fair and humane refugee policies. A major part of management is planning safe return of refugees to Afghanistan.

E. Limiting external influence

External influence especially India's growing political and economic presence in Afghanistan has long been a strategic concern for Pakistan. Pakistan can reduce Indian influence by strengthening its own constructive role and building deeper partnership with Pakistan. Also multilateral engagement can reduce India's unilateral influence.