

Paper: Current Affairs

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PART-II

Question No.2

Introduction:

Pakistan and Afghanistan are intertwined into the geopolitical and geographic landscape with ties grounded in the history through common language, culture and people-to-people ties. Both countries share a long border on their western and eastern sides, respectively, which has always been a source of confrontation between the two and has ^{rendered} ~~impeded~~ efforts have by regional players to achieve peace and longterm stability ineffective.

Following the return of Taliban regime in Kabul in 2021,

After the withdrawal of the ~~NAT~~ US-led NATO forces, militancy in the region has rebounded and poses a serious threat to the security of neighbouring countries. China, being a global

economic and military giant has made concerted efforts to achieve peace and stability between Pakistan and Afghanistan, but deep rooted faultlines and failure of the Afghan regime to rein in militancy, which emanates from its territory, have nearly failed these mediation attempts. The road to peace between Pakistan and Afghanistan would remain bumpy unless structural causes of the unrest are addressed in the first place.

→ Post-2021 Afghanistan and International Concerns: →

In December 2020, ~~Bot~~ both Taliban and the US sides had agreed to a phased withdrawal of the foreign forces after 20 years of war on terror, and ~~Aftan~~ Taliban had assured the western allies to not allow the country's territory for attacks against the United States and its allies. The Afghan regime since taking over the power has reneged on its promises to the international fora and has extended safe heavens to the militant outfits which pose a serious threat to

The security and integrity of the regional countries. Furthermore, the Taliban regime has also failed to form an inclusive government in Afghanistan while works on the fundamental rights of women to get education have been strictly imposed.

These reasons have held the international community back from extending diplomatic recognition to the regime even after the passing of almost five years since the ~~withdr~~ Taliban forces captured Kabul.

→ Post-2021 Afghanistan and Pakistan relations.

After Taliban takeover the government in Kabul, Pakistan maintained a cautious engagement with the interim regime. ~~It is~~ Despite maintaining a cautious posture, Pakistan extended humanitarian support to the Afghan people and facilitated their repatriation to the western countries, who fled the punitive actions of the regime. Pakistan offered diplomatic and moral support for the war-wrecked nation's reconstruction. However, the security situation in Pakistan

began to deteriorate soon after the Taliban takeover, as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters started to enjoy a conducive environment to carry out attacks against Pakistan's security forces and civilians under the patronage of the ideological allies. Moreover, Pakistan has been hosting over 4 million Afghan refugees, largest number of refugees in the world, by according full respects.

Under the sentiment of brotherhood since Afghan Jihad in 1979, and started their repatriation after peace had returned in their homeland.

Taliban rulers have exhibited their resistance to welcome Afghan refugees back to their country, which has added another layer of strained relations between the two countries.

→ Mediation by China and continuing tense relations.

In May 2025, China decided to mediate peace between the two countries by promoting talks and bilateral engagement. Being an inevitable stakeholder in the

region, China acted pragmatically and held a trilateral summit of China-Pakistan-Afghanistan in Beijing to offer its good offices to ~~see~~ overcome impasse and promote a diplomatic thaw.

→ Success of Chinese mediation:

- During the summit in the Chinese capital, both Pakistan and Afghanistan mutually agreed to upgrade their diplomatic ties to ambassadorial level.
- Previously, both countries held diplomatic engagements through charge d'affaires.
- Under the summit, both Pakistan and its western neighbour agreed to improve talks and bi. hold bilateral visits to keep the channel open for discussion in order to avoid confrontation.
- During the summit, China also expressed its desire to extend the outreach of its Belt and Road Initiative through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to strengthen and consolidate regional trade and connectivity.

→ **Failure of Chinese mediation:**
Although the Chinese efforts to reset ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan bore initial fruits in the shape of upgraded diplomatic relations and subsequent bilateral visits by foreign ministers, it failed to address the deep rooted faultlines between the two countries.

→ During the summit in Beijing, Chinese foreign minister has highlighted the urgency to address the threat of militancy in the region and need to address counter it through mutual efforts. The Chinese top diplomat had implicitly backed the Pakistan's concerns over cross-border terrorism taking place from Afghan soil.

→ **October confrontation:**

→ Despite the upgradation of ties and improved engagement, ~~P~~ ~~Pak~~ deadliest confrontation ~~was~~ took place in October at Pak-Afghan border areas as both sides traded fire, as the underlying issues remained unresolved.

→ During the intense skirmishes, which ~~even~~ escalated after unabated military attacks on Pakistani territory, both sides used heavy artillery and

Loss of lives was reported on both sides. Pakistan retaliated by attacking the sanctuaries of TTP militants in several provinces of Afghanistan at its eastern border with air strikes and over 200 militants and Afghan fighters were killed. However, a ceasefire was achieved following the intervention of Qatar and Türkiye.

→ Qatar and Türkiye brokered talks:

As the October conflict began to escalate seriously between the two sides, Qatar and Türkiye performed a fire fighting act to prevent further confrontation and extended their support to ease the tensions and address underlying causes.

Qatar Talks:

→ In Doha, first round of talks was held between security and civilian leadership of the both countries, where an extension of ceasefire was agreed.

→ Pakistan sought the interim regime in Kabul to take action against TTP & militants who

enjoy safe heavens and attack security forces through cross-border militancy. Afghanistan, in response, sought time to give an answer to the Islamabadi demand.

However, the negotiation venue was shifted to Istanbul as Turkey offered to mediate a workable solution.

→ Istanbul Talks:

Both sides held multiple rounds but talks ended inconclusive as Pakistan sought verifiable action against terrorists from Afghanistan on its soil while the latter continued to reject any presence of militants on its territory, and termed cross-border terrorism as an "internal matter" of Pakistan.

Major Factors Behind Tense Pak-Afghan relations:

1. Cross-Border Militancy:

Since the Taliban takeover in Kabul since 2021, cross-border militancy has emerged as the greatest stumbling block between the bilateral relations between the two neighbours. Pakistan, despite

its serious concerns, attempted to deal the issue pragmatically with the interim ruler in Kabul but its demands to take decisive action against militants have been unheeded. According to the report published by Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's Reconstruction (SIGAR), advance weapons worth \$7.2 bn left behind by US-led NATO forces were ~~recovered~~ by Afghan fighters which include M16s, M4s, M249 machine guns, night vision goggles, encrypted radio communication devices and other equipments. Another report published by BBC in 2025, revealed that almost half of the weapons abandoned by the US were unaccounted for with the Taliban rulers and these had been sold away to militants in black market. The pilferage of advance weapons to the militants has further aggravated terrorism in the region as militants attack Pakistani security forces including police and military with advance weapon equipped with night vision goggles and thermal vision devices.

→ Permissive environment to militants:

Besides getting hands over advance weaponry, militants also enjoy "permissive environment" in Afghan territories under the patronage of the Taliban rulers. According to a report presented before the United Nations Security Council by Chair of Committee on Sanctions on Al-Qaeda, in November 2025, revealed that around 6000 TTP fighters enjoyed safe heavens in Afghanistan's eastern bordering provinces and were carrying out attacks against Pakistan. The report warned that other militant groups were also receiving training in the territory and militancy could spill over to Central and South Asian regions.

Despite credible evidences against the inaction of Afghan rulers against militants in their proximity, they have donned an inf indifferent attitude towards international and Pakistan's calls for curbing militancy.

2. Durand Line Dispute:

The 2600 km border stretching between Pakistan and Afghanistan has historically been a cause of bilateral conflict and deadlocks, despite that the border issue was settled for good between Afghan monarch and British rulers back in 1893.

→ Afghanistans Claim:

Although the Durand Line Agreement ~~was~~ permanently settled between Afghan king and British India, and the of successive Afghan governments had accepted the border as international boundary, the issue has been made a bone of contention by Afghanistan ^{since} after Pakistan got independence from British India, in 1947.

→ Subsequent Afghan regimes have used the issue to instigate nationalism in Afghan nationals, and to achieve political agenda.

→ The present incumbent Afghan regime has also used the issue to ~~see~~ domestically to seek legitimacy for its arbitrary rule.

→ Pakistan's Stance:

→ Pakistan has vehemently stated that Durand Line is an international border and the symbol of its integral sovereignty maintains

→ Pakistan ~~claims~~ that the 1893 agreement was signed as a permanent document to define the border and it inherited the Durand Line as international border from British India.

→ Additionally, the claims of Afghanistan are not backed by any of the international organizations or regional and global community while Durand line is ~~internat~~ accepted as international border globally.

→ This historically settled issue has strained the Pak-Afghan relations due to Afghan belligerence.