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Current Affairs

Test-3

Question No. 3

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

I. Introduction

Despite sharing a common religion, ethnic heritage, and a 2670 km long border, Pak-Afghan relations have remained strained for decades. The two Muslim states have been embroiled in a state of bitter relations since the inception of Pakistan. The unresolved border dispute, cross-border militancy, and refugee crisis remain some of the core issues which remain unresolved despite mediatory

efforts by China. However, with enhanced counter-terrorism collaboration, increased trade and economic partnerships, and sagacious addressal of the mutual concerns, the relations can be improved.

II. Historical Background

The strained Pak-Afghan relations can be traced back to Pakistan's independence in 1947 when Afghanistan was the only state to oppose Pakistan's admission into UN.

This was due to the disputed Durand Line border surrounded by Pashtun population which Pakistan inherited from the British India. Pakistan remained a frontline state in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979) training the Mujahideen. Besides, Pakistan was accused of harboring Afghan Taliban after the 9/11 US War on Terror. The return of Taliban in Afghanistan could not bring any improvement in the bilateral relations.

III. China's Mediatory Role

China has been making mediatory efforts to improve Pak-Afghan relations as witnessed in the Trilateral meeting of the three states' foreign ministers in August, 2025. China also expressed its desire to extend CPEC to Kabul, seeking normal relations among the three states. It has also advised the two states to refrain from cross-border skirmishes. However, little progress has been made thus far.

IV. Core Issues between Kabul and Islamabad

A. Cross-Boarder Militancy

Afghanistan has been allegedly providing safe havens to militant groups, particularly Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) whose resurgence has been linked to their support from the Afghan soil.

As per UNSC (2022 Report):
Extremist groups like TTP and Al-Qaeda enjoy greater support in Afghanistan now than

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ever, from where they carry out militant attacks in the neighboring countries.

B. Durand Line Dispute

The Durand Line border dispute remains unresolved to date as Taliban not ^{only} refuse to acknowledge the border but are also against the fencing of the border.

C. Refugee Crisis

Pakistan has been a home to over 3.7 million Afghan refugees since the Soviet invasion (1979). This has created intense security concerns in Pakistan as majority remain undocumented. There have been attempts of repatriation of refugees by Pakistan but the refugees still remain in millions.

D. Diplomatic Strain

Although Taliban return to government was expected to improve diplomatic relations between

Islamabad and Kabul, however, the relations have not normalized as Taliban resisted Pakistan's pressure of taking action against terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan.

E. Water Dispute

The two states have also raised concerns over their water resources which they share. Afghanistan's plans to build a dam (namely Shektoot dam) on Kabul River and recently on Kunar River, have raised serious concerns in Islamabad as it is perceived to reduce water flows downstream into Pakistan.

V. Prospects for Cooperation

A. Counter-Terrorism Collaboration

Pakistan and Afghanistan can collaborate on joint counter-terrorism efforts as both share a common enemy in the shape of Islamic State Khurasan (ISIS-K).

B. Bilateral Treaty on Water Sharing

The two states can draw an official agreement to regulate their mutual water resources as per the UN Watercourse Conventions.

C. Leveraging Cross-Cultural and Religious Ties

Pak-Afghan relations can be improved by leveraging their common Islamic and Pashtun heritage. Cultural exchanges in the shape of educational exchanges and religious forums can help ease their strain.

D. Role of Regional Organizations in Improving Pak-Afghan Relations

Regional organizations such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Organization of Islamic Countries can prove vital in improving relations between the two neighbors. These platforms can provide an opportunity to reconsider their relations and address their mutual concerns.

E. Focus on Enhancing Trade and Economic Ties

Both the states need to enhance bilateral trade to create economic interdependency which can translate into peace. The ~~Pak~~ Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (2010) needs to be revised and revitalized.

F. Resolving the Durand Line Dispute Through a Chinese Mediation

The long-lasting border dispute can be resolved by mediation from China. While Pakistan can help Afghanistan gain international recognition, Kabul can settle the Durand Line dispute to ease the bilateral tensions.

V. Conclusion

Pak-Afghan relations have been strained since Pakistan's inception in 1947. Their ties have been characterized by tensions over Durand Line border dispute, refugee.

crisis, cross-border militancy, and water dispute. However, Pak-Afghan ties can be improved by enhancing trade, leveraging cross-cultural ties, and collaborating on cross-border terrorism.