

Question #3

Pak-Afghan tensed relations: Major factors and wayouts for improvement

1) Introduction

"Stability in Pak-Afghan ties is not a luxury; it is a prerequisite for peace in the entire region."

~ Maleeha Lodhi

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has always remained oscillating between cooperation and confrontation. Recently, the China mediated between both the countries to make relations better. But there are a multitude of factors, including Afghanistan rejection of Durand Line, surge in terrorism from Afghan soil, and bonhomie relations between India and Afghanistan, which cause tensions between the two states. Therefore, for a pragmatic and improved relations, it is necessary for both the countries to take some sagacious steps, like involving regional actors, promote joint-cooperation against terrorism, and bolster trade through legal means. In this way, the relations between both states can be improved.

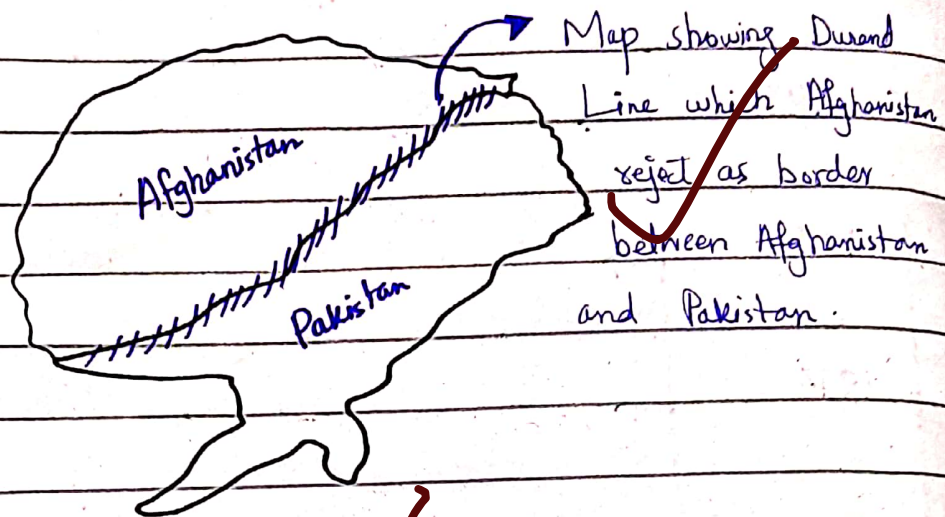
2) Overview of Pak-Afghan relation

1947	→ Afghanistan opposition of Pakistan UN membership
1979	→ Pakistan supported Afghan Mujahideen against Soviet Invasion.
1996	→ Pakistan recognized 1 st Taliban government
2001	→ Pakistan as frontline ally of US in War against Terror in Afghanistan
2020	→ Pakistan played active role in Doha Agreement
2025	→ China mediation, appointment of ambassadors, border clashes and airstrikes leading to deteriorating relations.

3) Understanding major factors behind tensed relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan

3-1) Afghanistan rejection of Durand Line as a border

To begin with, The foremost major factor behind strained relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan is that Afghanistan does not accept Durand Line as international border due to its long dream of making Pakhtunistan.



Hence, the rejection of Durand Line is the leading factor behind tensed relations between both the states.

3.2) Bonhomie relations between Afghanistan and India

Moreover, India, as archrival of Pakistan, has started maintaining good relations with Afghanistan in order to use Afghanistan against Pakistan and cause destabilization.

“Kabul is fighting proxy war for New Delhi.”

Khawaja Asif: Defense Minister Pakistan

Thus, India's huge investment in Afghanistan has stabilized its relation with Afghanistan, ultimately causing tensions between Pak-Afghan ties.

3.3, Surge in terrorism and security concerns from Afghan soil

Furthermore, the surge in menace of terrorism from Afghan soil has deteriorated the relations. As Pakistan accuses, Taliban for providing safe havens to terrorist groups, like TTP and BLA, who are conducting attacks in Pakistan.

As per report of Pakistan Institute of Studies of Peace and Conflict, "TTP led militant attacks has increased by 73 percent since the government of Taliban 2.0."

3.4, Issue of ~~Smuggling~~ and drug trafficking

Another major factor behind nosedive relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan is - the issue of smuggling and drug trafficking as Afghanistan government failed to control drugs supply in Pakistan.

"Around 70 percent of Afghan's opium is grown in five province along Pak-Afghan border. And the porous border facilitate the trafficking of Afghan drugs to the world through Pakistan." **UNODC survey**

As a result, indirectly Pakistan is accused for drug trafficking and smuggling in international world.

3.5) Resistance of Afghanistan towards border fencing and management

Additionally, Taliban government also resist border management and fencing on Pak-Afghan border which ultimately push relations towards tensions between both the states.

For instance, when the fencing process began on Pak-Afghan border, border clashes and damage of fencing were seen along the Torkham border.

3.6) The crisis of refugees and their deportation

The refugee influx and deportation is also one of the major factor behind strained ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since 2023, Pakistan has started deporting Afghan refugees which cause tensions.

As per UNHCR, "Pakistan is home to around 2 million Afghan refugees."

So, such huge refugee population has become strain on Pakistan resource and also caused security risks,

3.7) Issue of Afghan government recognition

Lastly, Pakistan is also hesitant towards recognizing Afghan Taliban government due to their violation of international laws and human rights that pushed relations towards downward trajectory between both the states.

"Pakistan government reluctance in recognizing Taliban government in Afghanistan is a roadblock in way of establishing cordial relations between both the states."

~ Javed Husin

In short, recognition of Afghan government has caused tensions between both the nations.

4) Way forward for improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan

4.1) Activation of regional triangulation to pressurize Kabul

First, Pakistan showed switch towards involvement of regional actors, like China, Iran, and Russia, for pressurizing Afghanistan to tackle the issue of Pakistan's security concerns and illegal trade, ultimately leading to cordial relations between both the nations.

4.2) Enhance joint-cooperation for countering terrorism

Next, Pakistan and Afghanistan can enhance their joint cooperation against countering the menace of terrorism. As a result, both the states will come on friendly terms, and the relations can be improved.

For this purpose, they can utilize RATS platform under SCO and counter-terrorism.

4.3) Enhance border fortification with techno-surveillance

Besides, for improving relations, the governments of both the states can fortify border management through techno-surveillance, advanced CCTV cameras, and strong regulation of trade. In this way, the issues related border management can be resolved and friendly ties can be established between both the nations.

4.4) Promotion of trade through proper regulation

For establishing good relations, both the states can promote trade and harness their true potential.

For example, Pakistan can integrate Afghanistan into CPEC trade route.

So, this will ultimately improve relations.

4.5, Resolve security issues through proper dialogue

To add more, both the states should resolve security and terrorism related issues through proper diplomatic dialogue.

As renowned scholar and historian Ahmed Rashid notes, "Neither sides wants a breakdown in relations, so diplomatic engagement is the panacea towards solving security concerns."

4.6) Cultivate Track-II diplomacy for effectively delivering messages to people

Last but not least, for improving ties it is important to effectively deliver point of views of both the nations to their people and government. In this regard, both the states can cultivate track-II diplomacy.

For instance, involving tribal elders and clerical intermediaries for backchannel leverage can prove beneficial.

5. Conclusion

To sum up the discussion, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have remained strained and stable time and again. With recent Chinese mediation, the relations are still tensed. There are various factors, such as good relations between India and Afghanistan and border resistance from Afghan government, that caused tensions. However, by taking some steps, like cultivating track-II diplomacy and resolving security issues through dialogue, the relations between both the states can be improved.

Question #2

1) Introduction

18th amendment and NFC award were defining steps towards devolving powers towards provinces in Pakistan's history. However, they have failed to materialize the dream of devolving powers towards district level that is local government. As aptly said by Umar Farooq, "Passage of 18th amendment to secure provincial autonomy was big accomplishment, yet the provincial governments remain hesitant to further devolve their powers to lower tiers." There are various factors that limit devolution of powers to district level, including resistance

of political elite and weak local government structure. Nevertheless, by introducing federal level institutes to oversee devolution process and providing finances to the district level government, the issue can be resolved diligently.

2) A brief appraisal of 18th Amendment and NFC in regard of devolution of powers.

2.1) 18th Amendment and devolution of powers

Abolishment of concurrent list

devolving administrative sectors to provinces

Establishment of local governments with provincial autonomy

2.2) NFC Award and devolution of powers

According to Article #160(3), the share of finance of province will remain fixed and can not be changed.

3) Discussing factors that limit devolution of powers to the district level that is local government

3.1) Resistance of political elites for transferring powers.

First, The major reason behind unfinished agenda of devolving powers to the district level is due to resistance of political elites for transferring powers to lower tiers, fearing erosion of their authority.

For instance, the strong hold of CM office on city services in Sindh.

3.2) Weak structure and constitutional support of local government

Likewise, the weak structure of local government and absence of constitutional support have limited the devolution of powers towards district levels.

Such as, KPK local government was dissolved in 2019 and delay in elections is one of the defining examples, showcasing weak structure of local governments.

3.3, Fiscal centralization at provincial level

Besides, the provincial governments have strong hold on finance, ultimately centralizing all the resources and restricting access of district level governments to the resources.

For instance, the Punjab government has only allocated 7 per cent to the local government from overall budget.

3.4, Strong bureaucratic control over administrative sectors.

Moreover, the strong control of bureaucracy on administrative sectors of district level limits the role of local government and restrict the proper devolution of powers.

Such as, in KPK and Balochistan, Deputy Commissioners directly report to the government, skipping district level government in performing their roles.

3.5, Lack of accountability of provincial governments.

The lack of accountability of the provincial governments provides them role to limit the devolution of powers towards district level.

Raza Rabbani says, "The inadequate accountability has provided leverage to provinces to limit powers of district level local governments."

3-6) Inadequate interest and engagement of citizens in district level government

Lastly, the insufficient interest of the citizens in local governments has limited their engagement, which ultimately gives patronage to the political elites to fill the vacuum and restrict devolution of power to the local government as shown in PILDA Governance index that 70 percent citizens have no interest in local governments.

4) Pragmatic wayforward for devolving powers to the district level (local government)

4.1) Create a federal-level institution to oversee the devolution process

To start, for proper devolution of powers, the federal government can create federal-level institution with duty of overlooking the devolution process.

Such as, in establishment of institutes, like National Reconstruction Bureau by Musharraf under LGO 2001, can resolve the issue diligently.

4.2) Ensure that local government receive due financial resource for better performance

Furthermore, devolution can be materialized in actual sense to the district level by ensuring proper resource allocation in budget to the local governments. In this way, district level governments will improve the service delivery.

4.3) Put in place proper mechanism for accountability of provincial governments

Moreover, a proper mechanism for accountability of provincial governments should be introduced to track their devolution process.

In this regard, using third party and citizen audits can be proved beneficial.

4.4) Facilitate environment for citizens engagement with local bodies

To add more, the devolution of powers to the district level can also be ensured through facilitating citizen engagement with local bodies.

Such as, platforms like Citizen Community Boards under LGO 2001 can be helpful.

4.5, Ensure that reserved seats are occupied by local candidates not political elites

Finally, to undermine the hold of provincial political elites, it is pertinent to ensure that candidates elect on behalf of their constituencies rather than political patronage. In this way reserved seats will be occupied with local citizens and as a result, local problems will be solved through local solutions.

5) Critical analysis

In a robust analysis, the devolution of powers to the district level in Pakistan is still an elusive dream albeit 18th amendment and NFC Awards. To resolve this problem, the government should follow some successful models of the world and ensure proper devolution. For example, the Local Government Model of the UK is a glowing example in this regard. So, if Pakistan can follow the suite, it would definitely become successful in devolving powers to the district level government.

6, Conclusion

In conclusion, devolution of powers to the district level in Pakistan is still in limbo. It is due to various factors, like resistance of political elites, strong bureaucratic hold, and weak local government structure. However, it can be resolved by creating federal-level institution for overlooking devolution process and giving due share in budget to the district level governments.