

Question no: 03Pak. Afghan RelationIntroduction :-

Pakistan and Afghanistan, although shared a history, border linkages, ethnicity and religious affinity. However, bilateral relations remained tense. Despite China's intervention as a mediator to resolve conflicts for peace in a region could not resolve deep-rooted mistrust. Terrorism and cross-border insurgencies, using Afghan soil to launch terrorist attacks in Pakistan, Afghan refugee issue and trade barriers are factors for tense relations, that require structural solutions rather than temporary diplomacy.

1. China's mediation role :

On 21 May 2025, the foreign ministers of Pakistan, Afghanistan and China met in Beijing to express willingness to elevate diplomatic relations. Also, ^{both} agreed to exchange ambassadors as soon as possible.

In these talks China also linked in economic dimensions i.e. to extend the CPEC project into Afghanistan under the belt and road initiatives.

2. Major factors behind the tensed relations

i) Historical legacy of trust deficit

Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan's admission to UN in 1947, hence signifying early mistrust.

This psychological mistrust continues to shape relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan even in modern day relation dynamics.

Pak-Afghan relations have been shaped by perception rather realities.

(Barnett Rubin)

ii) Durand line dispute:

The Durand line demarcated in 1893 remains a matter of conflict by Kabul, which considers it as a division of their pashtun homelands.

Contrary to this, Pakistan perceives it as a recognized international border. Frequent clashes at Torkham and Chaman border reflect border dispute a flashpoint.

Borders are not just lines on map; they are lines in mind.
(Anatol Lieven)

(iii) Terrorism and cross-border militancy

Pakistan accused Afghanistan of providing safe havens to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), for launching terrorist attacks in Pakistan since 2018. Afghanistan alleges Pakistan interference in its domestic affairs.

This security dilemma is the single biggest factor of mistrust.

iv) Afghan refugee issue:

Pakistan has hosted 1.7 million afghan refugees for over four decades. Economic, demographic and security burden of Pakistan intensified. However, Kabul perceives afghan repatriation as a coercion.

v) Trade barriers and economic frictions:

Pakistan is Afghanistan's largest trading partner yet border closures and informal trade weaken economic dependency.

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Pak-afghan trade dropped from
2.5bn\$ to less than 1bn\$
in 2023.

(World trade organization)

vi) India's diplomatic presence in Afghanistan

India's diplomatic presence in Afghanistan with the intention of using Afghan soil as a launching pad against Pakistan is seen as a security threat for Pakistan. China's mediation is primarily security concern to promote CPEC and BRI projects.

vii) Economic instability in Afghanistan

The Taliban regime lacks full international recognition, institutional stability and revenue generation system. This is also making cooperation between two states inconsistent.

3. Recommendations to improve relations

a) joint border security mechanism

In order to improve relations, both the states are encouraged to establish a joint border security intelligence cell to counter TTP and ISKAF to prevent further escalations.

b) Recognition of Durand line

Pakistan needs to adopt confidence building measures along border for ~~and~~ recognizing regulated border management. Practical recognition through bilateral agreements can help to resolve border conflict.

c) Structured framework for refugee repatriation

Pakistan needs to repatriate afghan refugees through a structured framework. It should be a gradual, voluntary and internationally-supported repatriation under UNHCR supervision.

d) Economic integration and connectivity

There is a need to digitalize border customs to curb smuggling. Moreover, expanding CASA-1000 energy projects coupled with TAPI pipelines can lessen the chances for future terrorist insurgencies in Pakistan.

e) Promoting people-to-people contact and cultural diplomacy

By promoting people to people contact through media exchange programs, medical visas and cultural festivals can reduced the tensions for future hostilities.

Conclusion:

The stability of Pakistan and Afghanistan is interlinked. If tensions between the two persist, it will benefit militant groups. For a peaceful resolution of conflict, it requires security cooperation, gradual trust-building, mutual trade initiatives and border managements to improve relations further.

Question no: 02

Devolution of power towards provinces

Introduction:

The 18th constitutional amendment (2010) and the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) award (2009) were landmark reforms intended to devolve power from federal government to provinces. It ensures political autonomy and fiscal decentralization. However, local governments at district, local union council and tehsil level did not receive similar decentralization of power. This created a two-tier devolution, though strengthening provinces but leaving grassroot

administrative units weak.

1. Historical background of 18th amendment and NFC award

i) political and legal empowerment of provinces

18th amendment devolved 47 subjects to provinces, abolishing concurrent list and strengthened council of common interests.

Through 18th amendment, provinces gain authority over social services and planning.

ii) Fiscal decentralization through the NFC award

Through NFC award, provinces share in federal divisible pool increased from 47.5% to 57.5%. Distribution of resources follow multiple indicators like poverty, density and revenue not just population.

2. Reasons of no power devolution at district level

i) Provincial political elites reluctant to share power

Provincial leadership replaced the federal

center but replicated the same centralizing behavior at the provincial level. They consider local governments as threat to their electoral control and patronage networks. This prevented districts from becoming effective decision making units.

(ii) Weak local government laws

The 18th amendment strengthened provinces but did not constitutionally safeguard local bodies. Provincial governments dissolved local institutions frequently, leaving districts without elected representation for years.

(iii) Centralized bureaucratic structure

Administration at district level remained controlled by provincial secretaries and chief secretary. Bureaucracy resisted power-sharing with elected local councils. So, no fiscal or political devolution takes place.

(iv) Local governments repeatedly dissolved or amended

Each provincial government introduced its own local government law, replacing the previous one. This constant change disrupted institutional

continuity and planning cycles.

Punjab dissolved elected local governments in 2019 despite Supreme Court ruling.

V) Patronage-based political culture

local governments increase citizen-based accountability, reducing the power of elites.

Provincial elites intentionally resist meaningful devolution.

vi) Provincial financial commission not implemented

While the 7th NFC award increased provincial shares from 45% to 57%, provinces did not form or operationalize provincial finance commission.

Without fiscal transfers, district governments remained financially dependent - a key reason behind weak service delivery.

3. Recommendations for effective district-level devolution

a) Constitutional protection for local governments

To ensure constitutional protection for local governments, amend article 161A to guarantee:

- 5 year fixed term
- Elected councils cannot be dissolved without judicial review

Constitutional backing will prevent political manipulation of local government systems.

b) Regular and binding provincial finance commission

Making provincial finance commissions compulsory every 3-years similar to NFE. Allocating atleast 30-40% of provincial budgets to district based on development needs for equitable distribution.

c) Direct elections of mayors and district chairpersons

Directly elected city mayors and district heads create strong, visible and accountable leadership.

By reducing elite interference it will strengthen democratic legitimacy at district level.

d) Strengthen district-level revenue collection

Empowering districts to collect property tax, business licenses, building permits and local service fees will enhance financial autonomy and reduce dependency on provincial grants.

e) Transfer of administrative powers to districts

Education, health, agricultural extension, municipal services and local policing should be administered placed under district control. Deputy commissioners should be accountable to district councils not only provincial secretaries.

f) Stable and uniform local government system nationwide

g) Civil society and community participation

Conclusion:

The 18th amendment and the 7th NFC award successfully decentralized authority to provinces, but the spirit of

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democratic decentralization remains incomplete without empowered district governments. Real progress requires constitutional protection, fiscal autonomy, administrative authority and stable local governance. Only then Pakistan can achieve effective service delivery and grassroots democracy.

