

Date: 21/10/25

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MOCK EXAM

PART - II

QUESTION NO:- 2

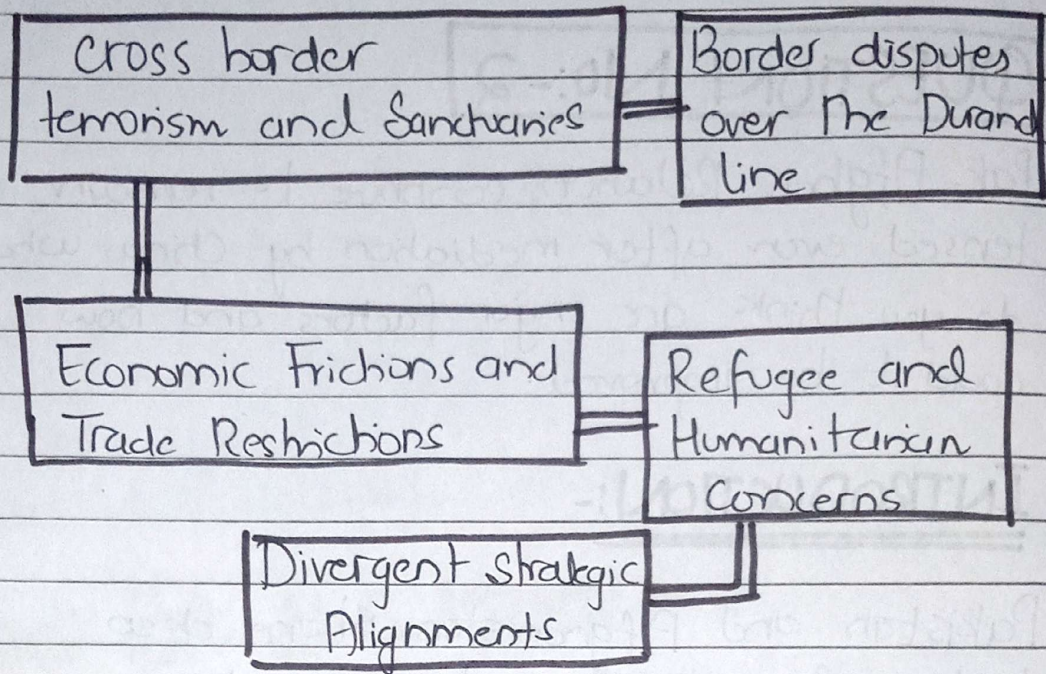
Q:- Pak-Afghan Relations continue to remain tensed even after mediation by China. What do you think are major factors and how could it be improved.

INTRODUCTION:-

Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep historical, cultural, and religious ties; however their bilateral relations remain strained. Despite China's mediation efforts under regional security and economic cooperation frameworks such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), persistent mistrust and security concerns have hindered stability. The issue has become a major concern for regional peace and for Pakistan's Foreign Policy, especially after the Taliban's return to power in August 2021.

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Major Factors behind Tense Relations:-



① Cross-border Terrorism and TTP Sanctuaries:-

The core irritant is the presence of **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)** and affiliated militant groups allegedly operating from **Afghan soil**. Pakistan claims that Afghan government isn't taking necessary actions against these elements, while at the same time Afghanistan denies harboring them.

According to reports in Dawn (September 2023), Pakistan has faced over 700 cross-border attacks since 2021, most

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traced to TTP hideouts in eastern Afghanistan. Even recently Afghan government was given two options:- either to choose between militants or Pakistan. The Taliban regime's reluctance to act decisively against TTP reflects its ideological proximity and Pushtun kinship dynamics.

② Border disputes over the Durand Line

The Durand line remains an unresolved issue. Though most of ~~the~~ it is functionally fenced but still not completely fenced serving as a hideouts for militants thereby posing a severe security threat to Pakistan. Similarly, while Pakistan considers it an international boundary, successive Afghan governments - including the Taliban view it as an artificial colonial divide. Frequent border skirmishes and closure of key trade routes (like Torkham and Chaman) deepens mistrust bilaterally. The fencing of the border of Pakistan is further antagonized by Afghan side.

③ Economic Frictions and Trade Restrictions

Trade relations have deteriorated time and again due to border closure, transit trade complications, and restriction on

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Afghan imports through Pakistani ports.

According to Al-Jazeera, Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan have declined over 40% since 2021. The lack of formal banking mechanism due to Afghan sanctions worsens economic interdependence.

④ Refugee and Humanitarian crisis:

Pakistan despite having scarce resources and fragile economy has hosted over **3 million Afghan refugees**, both registered and unregistered. It was getting difficult to bear the burden of refugees anymore so refugees are being departed back to Afghanistan while Kabul perceives it as coercion, Islamabad cites security and resource pressures. Even though sending refugees back may pose a threat to internal security as such individuals left empty handed leaving behind jobs, homes so they may fall prey to militant groups ultimately adding up to the risk of posing security threat, despite that it was need of the time.

⑤ Divergent Strategic alignments:-

While Pakistan seeks a stable, cooperative Afghanistan, most importantly serving as a **strategic depth** to counter the Indian enmity, Taliban regime is

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asserting independence in Foreign policy. Afghanistan's growing outreach to India, as evident from recent visit of Foreign Minister of Taliban led Afghan government to India for about six days to strengthen political, economic, and trade ties. Pakistan accused Kabul of acting as a proxy for Delhi - a charge rejected by Afghanistan, all of this contrasts with Pakistan's expectations of friendly ties.

China's Role as a Mediator :-

China's interest lies in ensuring regional stability to protect its BRI and CPEC projects. Beijing hosted multiple trilateral dialogues among Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China to promote counterterrorism and economic integration. However these initiatives haven't yielded tangible results because

- Taliban regime remains diplomatically isolated; they are the forebearers of old politics and they're rigid in their terms and not willing to change and this has isolated Afghanistan from rest of the world.
- China has always played safe and it avoids direct confrontation with Afghan authorities to safeguard its investments.
- Pakistan's domestic security instability limits its diplomatic flexibility.

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Strategies for Improvement:-

① Security cooperation and Joint Mechanisms:-

Establish a Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Counterterrorism commission under China's facilitation to share intelligence and coordinate border patrols. Engage tribal elders and local jirgas in border management for community level trust building.

② Economic Integration through CPEC Extension:

Inclusion of Afghanistan in CPEC phase-II could create mutual dependency and economic incentives for peace. China's investment can foster cross-border infrastructure, energy, and transport corridors benefitting both States.

③ Balanced Refugee policy:

Instead of abrupt expulsions, Pakistan should adopt a phased repatriation policy aligned with UNHCR guidelines. Joint Pakistan-Afghanistan Committees can manage refugee welfare and reintegration.

④ Regional cooperation:

Utilize SCO and ECO platforms for multilateral engagement involving China, Iran, and Central Asian states to

create a regional consensus on Afghan stability.

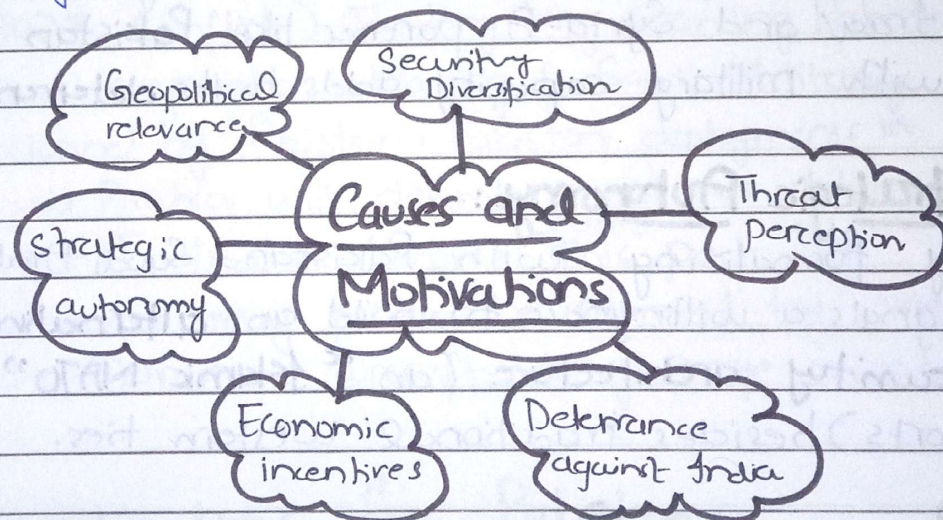
The biggest challenge for Pakistan's foreign policy is to balance ~~ex~~ strategic patience with pragmatic engagement, using regional diplomacy rather than coercive measures. A stable Afghanistan, integrated economically and politically with its neighbours remains essential for Pakistan's internal security and regional influence.

CONCLUSION:-

Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions stems from deep-rooted mistrust, cross-border military, and conflicting strategic visions. China's mediation provides a framework but not a solution. Only through mutual security guarantees, economic interdependence, and inclusive diplomacy can both nations move from hostility ~~into~~ cooperation—a shift vital for South Asian stability and success of regional projects like BRI and CPEC.

QUESTION No:- 8"Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA)"INTRODUCTION:-

on 17 September 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement in Riyadh, wherein both countries agreed that, "Attack on one country will be considered an ~~defence~~ ^{attack} on the other". This marks a shift from decades of informal cooperation to a formalized defence alliance. This pact was very important as it changed the global dynamics.

A) Saudi Arabia's perspective :-

① Security Diversification:

Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia, are increasingly uneasy about reliance on the United States as sole security guarantor. Recent Israeli strikes on Doha, Qatar to kill Hamas leadership encouraged Riyadh to seek additional defence partners as sole reliance on US for security was a wild goose chase. The silence of United States while one of its strongest ally was attacked using US-aircrafts, rose a lot of questions and it became need of the time to rely on others for security purposes.

② Threat Perception:

Saudi Arabia faces multiple threats - from Iranian expansion, Houthis missile attacks in Yemen and Red Sea, to instability in Iraq and Syria. A partner like Pakistan with military capacity adds to its deterrence.

③ Strategic Autonomy :-

By formalizing with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia signals a willingness to build an alternative security architecture (an "Islamic NATO" of sorts) besides traditional western ties.

B) PAKISTAN'S PERSPECTIVE :-

① Economic Incentives:

Pakistan is facing severe macroeconomic stress, fiscal deficits, IMF programmes, and need for external investment and oil credit lines. The defence pact is a lever to deepen Saudi economic support (investments, oil under deferred payments, defence contracts).

② Geopolitical Relevance:

Pakistan gains from being elevated from a peripheral ally to a central defence partner of a major Gulf power. This boosts Islamabad's strategic leverage internationally and within the Muslim world.

③ Deterrence against India:

This agreement comes amid heightened Middle-East tension and South Asian volatility (latest India Pakistan confrontations i.e.g: May-2023 conflict). Existing long standing Pakistan Saudi cooperation: training of Saudi Military personnel by Pakistan, Pakistani deployments in Saudi Arabia will definitely act as deterrence against India. Moreover, ^{under} this pact the deterrence may further be improved by adding more advanced aircrafts along range missiles etc.

Implications for Pakistan:-

① Enhanced Strategic profile:-

The pact elevates Pakistan's military and diplomatic status. It helps Islamabad portray

itself as a security provider beyond South Asia.

② Economic gains:

Pakistan's economic crisis can be alleviated through this pact e.g.: Pakistan's defence industry could supply Saudi Arabia or Pakistani troops be deployed to Saudi bases for pay, moreover deferred oil payments, all of this will contribute to improve Pakistan's economy.

③ Domestic and Institutional Impact:

Pakistan military will gain further foreign policy influence and institutional weight as international commitments increase.

④ Risk of Entanglement:

Alongside everything there is risk of entanglement too as Pakistan may get drawn into Saudi regional rivalries (with Israel, or Israel proxy wars) or defense commitments beyond its capacity.

b) For Saudi Arabia and Gulf regions:

① New Security Architecture:

The pact signals a shift from US-centric Gulf defence to more diversified regional partnerships - potentially reducing American leverage.

② Arms and Defence Industry:

The pact could open collaborative defence

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production/training between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

③ Deterrence posture:

Saudi Arabia now projects a strong deterrence posture by aligning with Pakistan. This may limit adversaries' aggression (for e.g.: India will have to think twice before launching operation Sindoor 2.0)

c) For Regional Geopolitics:

① India's Strategic calculus:

India is a key Saudi Strategic partner especially in energy and investments. The pact complicates India-Saudi ties and may push New Delhi towards deeper ties with ^{her} ~~its~~ own counter-parts.

② Iran and Israel:

Iran may view pact as a threat - Saudi Arabia aligning with a nuclear-armed Pakistan may heighten tensions. Israel too may reassess its security arrangements in the Gulf.

③ Shift in Global Alliances:

The deal may reduce dependence of Gulf States on western military architecture and could lead to new alignments with China/Russia.

④ Establishment of Muslim NATO:

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Pakistan's nuclear status and ambiguous commentary fuel concern over Saudi access to nuclear umbrella. This could spark regional arms race or push Gulf states to seek similar alliances, providing a foundation for building Muslim/Islamic NATO.

CONCLUSION:-

The Saudi-Pakistan defence pact is a game changer in both South-Asia and Middle Eastern strategic landscapes. For Pakistan, it offers economic relief and global relevance, for Saudi Arabia it offers security diversification and deterrence enhancement. However, the success of the pact will depend on how concretely it is implemented, whether it remains a political symbol or becomes a credible operational alliance, and whether the risks of entanglement, escalation and strategic over-commitment be managed or not.

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