

Part II

Q2: Pak-Afghan relations continue to remain tensed even after mediation by China. What do you think and how could it be improved.

1) Introduction: Pakistan and Afghanistan two neighboring countries shared deep historical, religious and cultural bonds yet their relationship is marred by several factors which deepen the seed of mistrust and volatility. Despite China's mediation on August 20, 2025 include the sixth trilateral foreign minister's dialogue in Kabul, China welcomed a recent ceasefire agreement with the help of Turkey and Qatar, but tensions persists along security, border, political fronts. The root cause lie in divergent security perceptions, unsolved territorial disputes and regional rivalries. Sustainable peace between the two hostile neighbors is pivotal not only for bilaterable stability but also the overall security of South and Central Asia.

2) Major Factors Behind tensed Pak-Afghan Relations:

a) Cross-border Terrorism and Security Concerns:

Afghanistan and Pakistan shared a common hostile and porous border of 2660km. The roots of Pakistan and Afghanistan security tensions date backed to Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when Pakistan became a frontline ally of Afghan mujahideens with the U.S. After the withdrawal of USSR troops in 1989, Pakistan sought a friendly government in Kabul to ensure strategic path against India. The rise of Taliban's regime (1996-2001) initially aligned with Pakistan's interest. But following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Pakistan aligned with the US in the WOT. Moreover, due to this invasion, elements of Taliban sought refuge in Pakistan's nearby Tribal areas by crossing the porous border. Afghanistan accused Pakistan of harbouring Taliban leaders, while Pakistan faced increasing attacks by militants linked to TTP (Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), focused mainly on fighting the Pakistani state and to establish strict enforcement of Islamic

Sharia in Pakistan. After NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, border violence and militant infiltration increased. Pakistan repeatedly blamed Afghanistan for harboring TTP factions and Afghanistan as a sanctuary for hostile elements against Pakistan. The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 initially raised hopes in Pakistan for improved relations. However, these hopes soon collapsed as the TTP regrouped under the Afghan umbrella protection, conducting hundreds of attacks inside Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and Balochistan provinces.

Despite China's Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue (2025, 2024)

including meetings in Kabul, Beijing and Islamabad, border clashes and skirmishes escalated when Afghan forces opened fire on Pakistani border posts. Pakistan retaliated with airstrikes and artillery resulted border posts destruction. This happened from 11-12 October and on 15th October both sides formally agreed on ceasefire. Also, previously frequent

exchanges of fire occurred along the Torkham and Chaman-spain border crossings. So, frequent border skirmishes, sporadic conflicts and attacks and mobility restrictions have deepened the mistrust.

(b) The Durand line Dispute:

The Durand line, 2640 Km long border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was demarcated in 1893 under an agreement between Sir Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman, the ruler of Afghanistan. The line was meant to define the spheres of influence of both territories not the original border. After Pakistan's creation, Pakistan considered the Durand line as **Legitimate** international border. However, successive Afghan gov. refused to recognize it, arguing the agreement was imposed under duress and had a 100-year limit, it unfairly divides ethnic Pashtun tribes and Baloch communities living along both sides, creating a division between the monocultural local populace belong to the same ethnicity. Later on, Afghanistan was the sole

country to oppose Pakistan's admission to the United Nations (UN) in 1947. Since then Durand line remained a permanent dispute in bilateral relations. Also, since 2017, Pakistan has constructed a **Security fence** along the Durand line to curb cross border terrorism and smuggling. Afghanistan ruling under the Taliban Government, opposes this fencing, viewing it a permanent division of the Pashtun Population.

Meanwhile, Pakistan upholds that the border is internationally recognized and confirmed by the multiple treaties and international laws. Also, Durand line cuts tribal regions such as **Waziristan, Kurram, Chaman** where Pashtun tribes have cultural and family ties.

c) **Refugee and Economic Strains:**

Pakistan has hosted Afghan Refugees since the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, when millions fled to Pakistan due to conflicts and repression. Over the year conflict has fluctuated and persisted through every major Afghan crisis, the Civil War of

1990s, War on Terror 2001, Taliban's Return to power in 2021.

According to **UNHCR** (United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees)

Pakistan currently hosts **over 3 million** refugees, including **1.5 million** registered and significant number of undocumented migrants. This makes Pakistan one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the World.

In the late **2023**, Pakistan launched a major operation to repatriate the undocumented Afghan refugees.

Pakistan cited major reasons include militant attacks by groups and economic strains on Pakistan's economy leading to repression. Hosting millions of Afghan refugees for decades

has strained Pakistan's education, health and labor markets.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan perceives repatriation of Refugees as extremely coercive and against the Human rights, which has deepened the mistrust further.

(d) Political distrust and the India Factor:

Political distrust between Afghanistan and Pakistan is deeply rooted in divergent perceptions of Sovereignty

and influence. Afghanistan has often accused Pakistan of interfering in Afghan politics, first through tribal influence in Pashtun areas and later through support to the Mujahideen and Taliban Movements.

Pakistan, meanwhile, views Afghan government's alignment with India as a strategic encirclement threat. India invested over **\$3 Billion** in Afghan Infrastructure including the **Parliament building** and **Salma dam** and road projects linking to **Chahbahar port**. Pakistan accuses India's Intelligence agency (**CRAW**) of using Afghan soil to support **Baloch separatist** and **TTP** elements targeting Pakistan.

Afghanistan accuses Pakistan of manipulating Afghan factions, hosting Taliban leaders and interference in Afghan's governance. Even under the Taliban government, Taliban accuses Pakistan's military operations near the Durand line as an attempt to impose control over Afghanistan's policy. Meanwhile, India's quite engagement with the Taliban and trade initiatives through Iran's Chahbahar Port have alarmed Pakistan.

, reinforcing its fear of regional isolation.

(e) Weak institutional Mechanisms, regional geopolitics and External influence:

The absence of sustained diplomatic, military and intelligence coordination hinders the conflict resolution.

Policy inconsistencies in Afghanistan after frequent regime changes further complicates the situation.

Also, both nations are influenced by border rivalries; China, India, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Moreover, the US influence further exacerbates the conflict between the Afghanistan and Pakistan, each rival state shaping both state's strategic calculation in opposing direction.

3) Steps towards to improve Relations:

a) Strengthen Security Cooperation:

Both nations should establish a joint coordination mechanism and intelligence share mechanism to counter terrorism and cross-border movement. There should be a regional neutral body such as SCO for

Keeping an eye on both^s as a neutral body

(b) Economic and Trade integration:

Expand bilateral trade through economic corridors and Special Economic zones at Torkham & Chamman Projects like TAPI, CASA-1000, CPEC extensions could enhance mutual interdependence.

(c) Regular political Dialogue:

Expand regular political and military talks to resolve disputes diplomatically. Avoid involving rival states as facilitators and avoid biased behaviour. Personal interest should override and should adopt the national interest's foreign policy for the welfare of the tribal areas' populace.

e) Manage Refugees Humanly:

Implement a voluntary repatriation plan with the help of International bodies such as UNHCR and the Afghan authorities. Allocate funds to refugees for the initiation of life and fulfilling the necessities in their new homeland.

(f) Regional cooperation and Mediation:

There must be cooperation and coordination among the regional countries. Engagement must be done on the interest of the Welfare of the people instead of personal grudges. There must be focus on connectivity via trade, anti-narcotics and anti-terrorism efforts.

Q.8:

Pakistan and Saudi Arab have signed a historic defense pact. Critically Evaluate the Causes and implications of the deal.

1) Introduction:

On September 17, 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the Strategic mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA), Stated "Aggression against one will be treated as aggression against both".

This marks a historical upgrade in their mutual defense security cooperation. Earlier, the security ties between Riyadh and Islamabad were informal, shifting the informal ties to the formal Strategic cooperation. The pact

Comes at a time of shifting global and regional security dynamics: Gulf states reassessing their reliance on traditional powers, Pakistan facing economic and strategic challenges and the middle east and south Asia witnessing their volatility.

2) Historical Background:

Pakistan and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have deep rooted historical ties, embedded in religious affinity, military and trade cooperation. Since inception of Pakistan in 1947, Saudi Arabia consistently supported Pakistan during crisis, from the 1971 War and nuclear sanctions and also in the 1990s during economic distress.

In return, Pakistan has been a key military partner for Riyadh. Pakistan military advisers trained Saudi forces in the 1960s and 1970s, and Pakistani troops stationed in the Kingdom during the critical periods for KSA, such as the Gulf War (1990). The relationship, however, deepened strategically after 2020, as global and regional dynamics

Shifted Such as the U.S retrenchment from the middle east reduced Gulf reliance on Western defense agreements. Moreover, Pakistan's economic crisis pushed it to seek closer ties with the oil-rich countries. Rising Iran-Saudi rapprochement and the Israel-Palestine conflict created new regional security uncertainties.

2) Causes of the Pact:

Several causes underpinned this pact:

a) Security anxiety in Gulf and Declining US Reliance:

Saudi Arabia has grown increasingly wary of depending solely on the U.S security umbrella, especially after the U.S inconsistent regional posture in recent years. The Houthi missiles and drone attacks on Saudi oil facilities and the recent airstrike incidents on Qatar highlighted vulnerabilities in the Gulf security. During all these incidents the U.S showed reluctance for direct intervention, forcing and convincing

the Saudi government to shift its security cooperation towards the regional alliance. According to Al-Jazeera (2025), and Frontier India (2025), Riyadh now seeks to diversify its partnership, turning towards a nuclear-armed muslim nation with the proven military capacity in order to bolster its deterrence posture and strategic autonomy.

(b) Pakistan's Economy and Strategic needs:

Pakistan's economy remained under intense stress, marked by heavy debt burdens, stringent IMF loan conditions, persistent energy shortages and not being able to allocate subsidies to various agricultural and industrial sectors. In this context, Pakistan views the defense Pact as a both a strategic and economic opportunity.

As The Week (2025), notes, the agreement allows Pakistan to leverage its military and nuclear capacity to attract investment and secure oil payments. Strategically, it helped Pakistan to regain its waning

position in the geopolitical framework within the gulf states.

(c) Historical Military cooperations and Mutual interests:

Pak-Saudi Partnership is historically deep rooted. Since, the 1960s, Pakistani Military advisers have trained Saudi armed forces and the thousands of Pakistani troops have been stationed in the kingdom for the internal and external defense.

As the **Gulf news** (2025), highlights, the new defense pact formalizes this standing cooperation, transforming informal collaboration into a structured alliance. It also reinforces continuity of shared interest, ensuring Saudi internal security and providing Pakistan with the strategic depth, economic aid and religious legitimacy.

(d) Regional Strategic calculations:

This pact is also shaped by wider geopolitical rivalries including **India-Pak** tension, **Iran-Saudi** competition and the **Israel-Gaza** conflict.

For Saudi-Arabia, Partnership with Pakistan serves as a deterrence sign to Iran and enhances its regional influence within the broader muslim world.

3) Implications:

The signing of the SMDA (2025), carries wider range of implications, not only for Pakistan and the Saudi Arabia but for also broader regional balance in the Middle east and South Asia.

a) Positive implications:

The pact elevates Pakistan's profile in these regards:

(i) Enhanced Strategic Partnership relevance for Pakistan:

This pact elevates Pakistan's profile in the South Asia as a Islamic security partner and reinstating its significance in the muslim world.

Moreover, this formal alliance enhances Pakistan's position at the Gulf's Security tables,

Specifically consolidating its Status in the OIC.

(ii) Economic and Energy gains:

Saudi Arabia has already Pakistan's largest source of remittances and an oil supply. This pact is expected to enhance and expand the trade and new investment in energy, infrastructure and defense manufacturing.

(iii) Diversification and Strategic Autonomy for Saudi Arabia:

For Saudi Arabia, this pact represents a diverse defense partnership away from the United States and the Western powers.

By engaging with the nuclear armed military power, Saudi Arabia is shielded with an extra layer of deterrence, it bolstered its domestic and regional defense capacities.

(iv) Strengthening Islamic Cooperation:

This agreement symbolically can be viewed as a step towards greater muslim military cooperation. Some reliable international sources declared this pact as an "Islamic NATO". It also enhances Intra-OIC

Solidarity and presents it a collective defense within the muslim World.

b) Negative implications:

(i) Ambiguity and operational uncertainties:

The pact's clauses being vague could potentially reinforce misinterpretation which could drag Pakistan into conflicts.

(ii) Regional polarization and rivalries

This pact may reshape India-Saudi trade partnership, Iran-Saudi tensions may re-ignite and could accelerate Iran's nuclear mission.

(iv) Non-Proliferation and nuclear concerns:

This pact although does not include any clause of proliferation of nuclear arms in the middle east but it can potentially be a cause of nuclear sanctions against Pakistan

(v) Global and Strategic implications:

This pact underscores a shift in the global power dynamics, signalling recalibration of Saudi alliance drifting away from the Western power can complicate

Western's Middle east and South Asia Strategies

Conclusion:

The Pakistan-Saudia defense Pact is both a strategic opportunity and a calculated risk. It promises collective defense, economic prestige and investment. It also enhance Pakistan's image in the muslim world and can strengthen Pakistan's seat in the OIC. Meanwhile, it could potentially engage Islamabad into the regional conflicts by misinterpreting the vague clauses and can deepen the mistrust with the tehran which could potentially lead to ignite its nuclear program.

Pakistan needs to maintain strong ties with the other muslim states as well by formal pacts and relations. Moreover, this Pact could also reflect an emerging strategic triangle of Riyadh-Islamabad-Beijing, reducing Western dominance over Middle Eastern security affairs.