

Q. 2:- Pak-Afghan relation continue to remain tensed even after mediation by china. What do you think are major factors and how could it be improved.

Introduction:-

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is defined by shared history, culture, and ethnicity, yet it remains one of South Asia's most complex and volatile geopolitical realities. Despite the Afghan Taliban's return to power in 2021, an event initially seen by many in Islamabad as a strategic opportunity, bilateral ties have plummeted to an unprecedented low, characterized by deadly cross border clashes and a breakdown of communication. The fact that even the strategic mediation efforts by China, Pakistan's 'all weather ally' and a key regional player, have failed to create lasting de-escalation suggests the deeply entrenched nature of the conflicts. The core challenge today, in late 2025, is a profound security-trust deficit rooted in the resurgence of cross border militancy and the issue of border sovereignty.

Major factor fueling the current tensions:-

The current state of extreme tension is not driven by a single issue but by a convergence of historical disputes and immediate security threats.

1 The Existential Threat Posed by TTP:-

This is the most critical factor driving the current crisis. Pakistan views the TTP, or the Pakistani Taliban, as an existential threat operating from sanctuaries inside Afghanistan.

- **Sanctuary and Resurgence:** since the Afghan Taliban took control in Kabul, the TTP has found greater freedom of movement and access to resources, including NATO weapons left behind. The TTP unilaterally ended its ceasefire with Islamabad in June 2022, leading to a massive spike in violence. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) reported that the TTP engaged in more than 600 attacks against or clashes with Pakistani security forces in the past year alone (2024-2025), with total violence across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan seeing a 46% surge in the first three quarters of 2025, according to the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS).

- **Cross-Border Strikes:** Pakistan's recent, unprecedented air strikes targeting TTP leadership inside Afghan territory demonstrate Islamabad's resolve, but they are viewed by the Afghan administration as a violation of sovereignty, directly escalating border conflicts.

-2 The Unresolved Dispute over the Durand Line:-

The 2,600-kilometer border, drawn during the colonial era, is contested by successive Afghan governments.

- **Sovereignty vs. Security :-**

The Afghan Taliban, like their predecessors, refuse to formally recognize the Durand Line as the international border. This non-recognition creates an environment where cross-border movement by militants (e.g. TTP) is ideologically supported, or at least tolerated, by the ruling authorities in Kabul.

- **Border Clashes:-**

This sovereignty issue is the immediate trigger for many

military skirmishes. Efforts by Pakistan to fence the border or construct posts are often met with resistance, leading to frequent exchanges of fire and casualties on both sides, as witnessed in the deadly clashes of October 2025.

3 Strategic Mistrust And Ideological Incongruity:-

The historical relationship is burdened by mutual suspicion.

- The "Strategic Depth" Mongoose:-

Kabul remains wary of Pakistan's previous policy of seeking "strategic depth" in Afghanistan, fearing continued interference.

- Inclusivity vs. Practicality:-

Pakistan, along with the rest of the world, has consistently demanded a more "inclusive" government in Kabul. Conversely, the Afghan Taliban accuses Pakistan of hypocrisy and trying to dictate its domestic political structure, creating further friction. As one geopolitical expert noted:-

"The relationship has moved from a strategic alignment of interests to a tactical confrontation of security demands, where the Afghan Taliban's ideological kinship with the TTP overrides any political obligation to Pakistan."

4 The complex Regional power play (India):-

Pakistan views any deepening of India-Afghanistan ties with deep suspicion, viewing Afghanistan as a zero-sum strategic space. India has been ~~steadily~~ subtly re-engaging with the Afghan administration through humanitarian aid and expanding economic projects. For Islamabad, the prospect

of a renewed Indian influence corridor in Kabul heightens anxiety and increases the pressure to assert control on its western border.

• The Limits of China's Mediation:

China has attempted to mediate, primarily through the "China - Afghanistan - Pakistan Foreign Ministers" Dialogue, driven by its own security and economic interests, particularly the extension of the China - Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan. However, this mediation has faced significant limitations:

-1 "Developmental peace" Focus:

China's approach is centered on economic incentives, what analysts call a "developmental peace" model, prioritising regional connectivity and trade over coercive political leverage. While Beijing has offered to facilitate dialogue, it is widely regarded as a facilitator rather than an assertive mediator.

-2 Principle of Non-Interference:

Crucially, China strongly adheres to the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. This prevents Beijing from exerting the necessary pressure of the Afghan Taliban to take "concrete and verifiable actions" against the TTP, which is Pakistan's core demand.

-3 Limited Leverage:

While China has massive investments in Pakistan, its economic footprint in Afghanistan is still limited. This means it lacks the direct leverage to compel the Afghan administration to fundamentally alter its security policy regarding the TTP, rendering its mediation efforts largely palliative rather than curative.

• The Way Forward: Recommendations for improvement:

A lasting improvement requires a multi-pronged strategy that addresses both the immediate security vacuum and the long-term economic and political fault lines:-

-1 Institutionalising verifiable counter-Terrorism

Mechanism: The current ad-hoc responses are insufficient. Both sides must agree on a formal, institutionalised mechanism focused on counter-terrorism:-

- **Joint Border Control and intelligence sharing:-** Establishing a technical, working-level group to share real-time intelligence on TTP movements and coordinate actions against specific hideouts. This must replace the current reliance on punitive air strikes and shelling.

- **Verifiable Metrics:-** Pakistan should demand transparent, verifiable actions from Kabul, such as the relocation of TTP families away from the border regions, a demand that has been historically raised.

-2 Prioritising "Trade and Security":-

A paradigm shift is needed from a security-first approach to an economic one. As a strategy document from the ISSRA noted, the "trade and security" approach can address the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty and lack of opportunities.

- **Boosting Transit Trade:-** Simplifying complex transit trade routes (Afghan Transit Trade) and resolving issues like the absence of a formal banking system by exploring a barter system or using local currencies.

- **Regional Connectivity:-** Activating and accelerating regional projects like the CASA-1000

(central Asia-south Asia power project) and the TAPI Pipeline (Turkmenistan - Afghanistan - Pakistan - India) which create shared stakes in regional stability.

→ Sustained And Consistent High-Level Dialogue:

Dialogue should be persistent and insulated from short-term security flare-ups.

- Diplomatic Channels:

Establishing permanent, low-key, military-to-military and political to political channels of communication at the highest level to manage border crises immediately.

- Focus on the people:-

Pakistan must separate humanitarian concerns from political grievances, continuing to facilitate aid and people-to-people contact, thereby demonstrating a long-term commitment to the Afghan people rather than just the ruling structure.

• Conclusion:

The strained Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is trapped in a destructive cycle where Pakistan's security imperatives clash with Afghanistan's claim to sovereignty and its ideological tolerance for the TTP. China's role, while helpful in facilitating communication and highlighting economic potential, has been insufficient to bridge this fundamental trust deficit. To break the deadlock, both nations must move past the baggage of history. Pakistan needs to pivot from a "strategic depth" mindset to a "shared prosperity" vision, while the Afghan administration must honour its international commitment to prevent its territory from being used as a

against any neighbour only through institutionalised security cooperation and tangible economic integration can the fragile frontier be transformed into a functional, peaceful gateway to central Asia.

Q8:- Pakistan Saudi Arabia have signed a historic defence pact. critically evaluate the causes and implications of the deal.

Introduction:-

The SMD, signed during the visit of Pakistan's Prime Minister to Riyadh, codifies and elevates the security partnership between the two nations, which dates back to the 1960s. The defining feature of the agreement is the declaration that "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both," a commitment that mirrors the language of NATO's Article 5. This pact is a watershed moment because it moves the relationship beyond the conventional dynamics of financial security structure. It reflects the growing insecurity felt by the Gulf states and the strategic need for diversification felt by Pakistan in the current multipolar world.

Causes and Impulses Behind the pact

The timing of SMD is crucial, arriving amid rapid geopolitical flux, particularly in west Asia in July 2025. The causes are multifaceted, driven by Saudi Arabia's security anxieties and Pakistan's urgent economic and strategic compulsions.

1 Saudi Arabia's Quest for Diversified Security

The primary driver for Riyadh is a deep, existential concern

over the credibility of the US security umbrella.

- Waning US Reliability:-

Recent regional events, notably the Israeli airstrike on Hamas leadership in Qatar earlier in September 2025, have exacerbated doubts about Washington's commitment to protecting its Gulf allies. This has forced Saudi Arabia to pursue a policy of strategic hedging and multi-alignment. By signing a pact with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia signals its intent to secure its own defenses without being solely dependent on the west.

- Extended Deterrence and the Nuclear Question:-

This pact is widely interpreted as Riyadh's attempt to secure access to extended deterrence. Pakistan is the only nuclear-armed Muslim state. While Pakistani officials quickly walked back any explicit promise of a "nuclear umbrella", the intentional ambiguity serves a powerful deterrent purpose against hostile actors like Israel or Iran. As a senior Saudi official reportedly stated, the agreement is a "**comprehensive defensive agreement that encompasses all military means**", leaving the nuclear dimension deliberately opaque for maximum strategic effect.

- Countering Regional Threats (Iran and Israel):-

The agreement is a direct message to adversaries. It increased the potential costs of escalation for Iran and its proxies (like the Houthis) and acts as a political deterrent against Israel, demonstrating that any attack on the kingdom is not just an isolated incident but risks invoking a response from Pakistan's formidable military apparatus.

-2 Pakistan Economic and Strategic Imperatives:-

For Islamabad, the agreement offers a much-needed strategic anchor in a period of acute domestic instability and regional isolation.

• Institutionalized Financial Lifeline:-

Pakistan is in perpetual need of financial bailouts. Saudi Arabia has traditionally provided essential support (loans, oil-on-deferred payments), but this pact is expected to "institutionalize and diversify" that financial support, providing Pakistan with a more stable economic cushion. It shifts the relationship from a precarious dependency to one based on mutual security obligations.

• Strategic Diversification:-

The Pakistani military is acutely aware of its growing, almost exclusive, reliance on China for defence procurement and strategic partnership. The SOMA offers an opportunity to "rebalance its foreign policy" and reduce its over-reliance on Beijing by attracting significant Saudi investment into its defence industry, a key component of vision 2030.

• Enhancing Regional Leverage:-

With India successfully forging deeper economic and military ties with several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries over the past decade, Pakistan risked being marginalized. This pact significantly "re-established Pakistan's strategic importance" in the Gulf region, leveraging its position as the Muslim world's only nuclear power and its history of training over 8,000 Saudi military personnel since 1967.

• Critical Implications And Future Challenges:-

The implications of the SDMA are far-reaching, introducing new variables into South Asian and Middle Eastern geopolitics.

1. Shift in South Asian Power Dynamics:-

This pact injects significant complexity into the perennial India-Pakistan rivalry.

- **Heightened Deterrence:-** For Pakistan, the collective defense clause significantly raises the threshold for any potential Indian military operation. The immediate risk of drawing in Saudi Arabia means that any renewed conflict could quickly escalate into a wider regional complication.

- **Strain on India-Saudi Ties:-** The agreement places Riyadh in an awkward diplomatic position regarding its burgeoning strategic and economic partnership with New Delhi. India has aggressively courted Gulf investment and cooperation, and Saudi Arabia is a critical partner in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) initiative. The pact could potentially complicate or slow down the implementation of IMEC, a crucial project for regional connectivity and U.S. interests, as it forces Riyadh to balance its security obligations to Pakistan against its economic interests with India.

- **The Expatriate Factor:-** The presence of over 2.5 million India Expatriates in Saudi Arabia, who remit billions annually, adds a sensitive layer. Any India-Pak crisis that involves Saudi Arabia would immediately jeopardize these economic and human links.

-2 Deepening institutional security cooperation:-

Beyond symbolic posturing, the pact creates a durable framework for conventional military cooperation.

- **Defense Industrial Base:-** The pact is set to accelerate defense industry collaboration, technology transfer, and joint military co-production. This aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 goal of localizing 50% of its defense spending and provides Pakistan's struggling defense industry with a vital injection of foreign capital.

- **Strategic Deployment and Training:-** It will lead to the expansion of Pakistani military contingents in Saudi Arabia, which have historically played advisory and defensive roles, thus increasing the Pakistani military's operational presence in the Middle East.

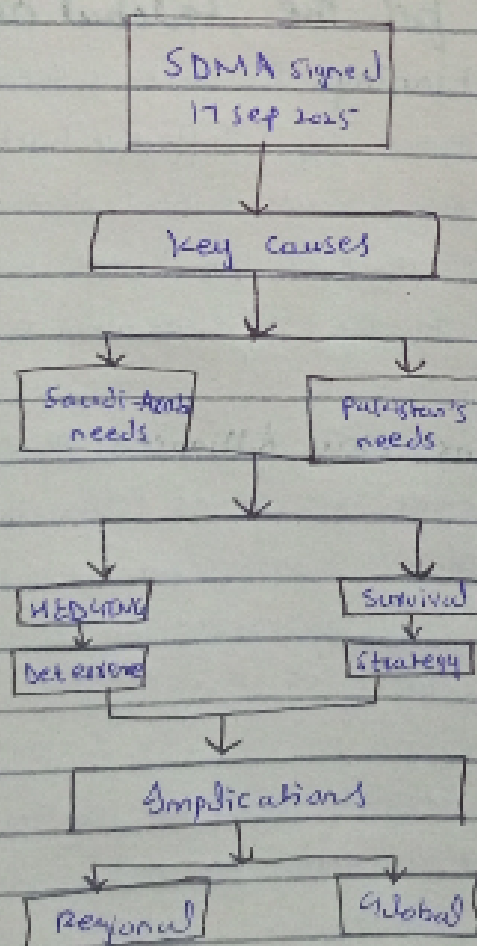
-3 Implications for the Global order:-

- **U.S. Positioning:** The pact is seen by some US strategists as an instance of "effective buck-passing", allowing Riyadh to hedge against rivals without demanding new American security commitments. However, the latent nuclear question and the potential threat to the IMEC remain sources of Washington's long-term concern.

- **Template for New Alliances:** The ISMA could serve as a model for other GCC states (like the UAE or Qatar) to forge similar strategic defense agreements with Asian powers, leading to a new, complex architecture of security alliances linking West Asia and South Asia.

Conclusion:- The Pak-Saudi strategic mutual defence agreement is a clear demonstration of how middle powers are adapting to a multipolar world by proactively diversifying

their security partners. It underscores the declining influence of the U.S. security guarantee and highlights the rising strategic value of Pakistan's military and nuclear status to the Gulf region. The most critical test of the pact's substance over its symbolism will be future crisis: will Saudi Arabia actively militarily intervene in a potential India-Pakistan conflict, risking its vital economic relationship with New Delhi? The pact is primarily an exercise in "signaling solidarity and strengthening joint deterrence", aimed at dissuading aggression rather than providing an unconditional war guarantee. Nonetheless, it has irreversibly altered the geopolitical risk calculation for all stakeholders. For Pakistan, the immediate benefits are a strategic uplift; for Saudi Arabia, it is a crucial step towards greater strategic autonomy and a stronger deterrent posture in a volatile region.



Q No 7:- How Pakistan could balance its relations after the recent engagement with US and strategic partnership with China?

Introduction:-

Pakistan's foreign policy today is defined by its unique position as the only major state maintaining deep, long-standing, and strategic ties with both the United States and China amidst escalating great power rivalry. The recent surge in engagement with the US while simultaneously reinforcing the "All weather strategic cooperative partnership" with China presents Pakistan with both a delicate challenge and an immense opportunity. The core objective of Pakistan's foreign policy is to pivot from a purely geo-strategic role to a geo-economic one, using its pivotal location as a bridge for cooperation rather than a battleground for competition. The successful navigation of this tightrope walk demands a multi-pronged strategy rooted in economic diplomacy, non-partisanship, and robust domestic reform.

-1 The Enduring Anchor: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Strategic partnership:

The relationship with China serves as the bedrock of Pakistan's foreign policy, often referred to as an "ironclad friendship". This partnership is non-negotiable and provides Pakistan with essential strategic depth and economic stability.

1.1: Economic and Developmental Security:-

• **CPEC 2.0 Relaunch:** Following the 14th joint cooperation committee (JCC) meeting in Beijing, both countries have formally relaunched the second phase of CPEC. This phase is shifting focus from energy and infrastructure (Phase 1) to industrial

cooperation, agriculture, and mining.

- **Action plan 2025-2029:** The two nations agreed on a multi-year action plan aimed at fostering an "even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future". This deep integration is strategically vital for Pakistan's long-term industrialization.

- **Investment and Energy:** China remains Pakistan's largest investor. CPEC projects continue to be crucial, such as the operationalization of major power plants, which strengthen Pakistan's energy security and industrial base.

B: Defence and Diplomatic Alignment:-

- **Defence Ties:** Pakistan remains China's largest arms client, accounting for approximately 63% of China's arms exports between 2020 and 2024. This enduring military cooperation (J-10 fighter jets, naval assets) guarantees Pakistan's defense capacity and regional balance, particularly vis-a-vis India.

- **Diplomatic support:** China consistently provides political and diplomatic cover to Pakistan at international forums, including the UN Security Council, on matters of sovereignty and regional stability.

• Leverage the opportunity: Renewed Engagement with the United States:-

The recent upswing in US-Pakistan relations, driven partly by Washington's re-evaluation of South Asia policy and global energy security needs, provides Pakistan with a crucial opportunity to diversify its partnerships and reduce reliance on a single partner.

A: Trade and Geo-economic Diversification:

- The Transformation Trade Deal (July 2025):-

The signing of a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement marks a significant shift. The deal focuses on a "transformative energy partnership", allowing US oil giants to lead the exploration and development of Pakistan's newly confirmed offshore and onshore oil and gas reserves.

- Critical Minerals Investment: In a landmark move, the US International Development Finance Corporation (USIDFC) is investing in Pakistan's critical minerals and rare earth elements, with a proposal to develop a port terminal in Pasni (Gawadar district). This \$500 million investment offers a significant counterweight to existing Chinese involvement in Balochistan's resource sector.

- Market Access:- The agreement also includes the reduction of US tariffs on Pakistani textile (19%) and leather exports, boosting Pakistan's export capacity.

B Security and Diplomatic Recalibration:-

- Counterterrorism Dialogue: The revival of the Pakistan-U.S. counterterrorism dialogue (August 2025) signals renewed security cooperation, allowing Pakistan to access advanced technology and intelligence sharing.

- Global Diplomacy:- Pakistan's diplomatic outreach, culminating in its successful election to "UN Human Rights Council (HRC)" in October 2025 and the PM's participation in multilateral summits, demonstrates its regained visibility and leverage on the global stage.

3 The Path Forward: A Strategy for Humanization and Balancing:-

the transform its geopolitical location into geo-economic strength. Pakistan must adopt a clear strategy of "multi-alignment" rather than choosing sides.

A: Geo-economic centrality: The "Bridge" philosophy.

Pakistan must continue to adhere to the National Security Policy's principle that "the economy is in many ways our strategic compass". The goal must be to maximize economic benefits from both relationships:-

1: CPEC plus: Actively encourage the participation of third countries, including the US and Gulf States, in CPEC's Special Economic Zones (SEZs). This make CPEC inclusive and less exclusive.

2: Facilitating Trade: Leverage the renewed US trade deal to access western markets while ensuring CPEC remains the primary corridor defining its regional connectivity (Afghan, central Asia trade).

B: Maintaining strategic communication and transparency:

Pakistan's leaders must be transparent with both Beijing and Washington about their engagements to prevent suspicion. At the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson's briefing noted, "Pakistan stressed that its interaction with the US will never harm China's interests or its cooperation with China".

• Non-Alignment: Islamabad must reinforce the message that it is not seeking to replace its strategic partners (China) but merely diversifying partnerships for the sake of its struggling economy. Its foreign

Minister Auneshi stated: "a country like Pakistan ... cannot make a binary choice. We will remain equidistant, accessible to all, reaching out to all".

C. Domestic Stability and Institutional Reform:

The biggest threat to Pakistan's budding strategy is internal instability, which frustrated foreign investors (both US and China).

- Security of CPEC: Guaranteeing the security of Chinese persons remains paramount. Any lapses directly affect Beijing's confidence in CPEC 2.0.

- Policy continuity: Implement robust fiscal management, bureaucratic efficiency, and political stability to ensure that investment projects (both US and Chinese) are executed smoothly. Good governance is the ultimate guarantor of external relationships.

• Conclusion:-

Pakistan's attempt to harmonize its rejuvenated US ties with its enduring strategic partnership with China represents the most complex diplomatic maneuver in its recent history. The strategic pivot towards geo-economics, evidenced by the US energy deals and the industrial focus of CPEC 2.0, provides a clear roadmap. The key to success lies in avoiding the zero-sum game mentality of the great powers. By acting as a "melting pot" for US and Chinese economic interests and focusing on domestic reforms, Pakistan can successfully achieve strategic autonomy, using its geo-strategic location to maximize economic interdependence rather than falling prey to geopolitical polarization.