

Current affairs (Mock-4)

Qno: 2

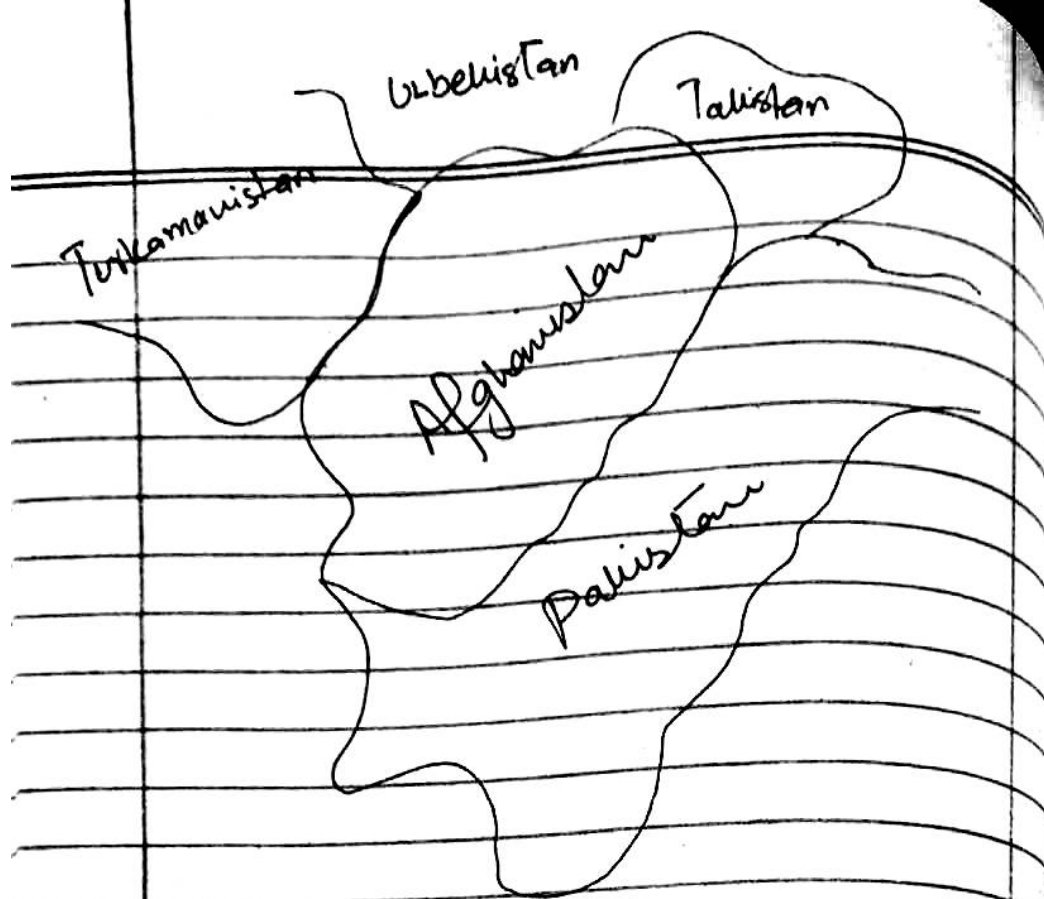
Pak-Afghanistan relations

• Afghanistan stability is not just a foreign policy concern for Pakistan; it is an existential imperative. Without peace on our western border, we cannot fully focus on our economic revival or strategic positioning in the region.

Dr. Moeed Yusuf
(former national security
advisor and policy
analyst).

Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have remained focal point of South Asian geopolitics marked by periods of cooperation and conflict. The relationship is deeply rooted in shared geography, culture and history yet marked by mistrust and geopolitical divergence.

The bilateral relations between Pak-Afghan, as the two nations grapple with overlapping security concerns, economic dependencies and cultural affinities



The post-2021 US withdrawal from Afghanistan has dramatically reshaped the region the rise of Taliban government ushered a new opportunities and challenges. Reports by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) highlight the fragility of Afghanistan's government structures, while think tanks like the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) report: a worrying 50% increase in cross-border militant activity in 2023-24. This upsurge in violence underscores the urgency of addressing bilateral irritants for regional stability.

Present key irritants or factors:-

"The turmoil in Afghanistan is not an isolated issue; it directly impacts Pakistan's internal security. Ignoring this connection will only allow militancy and extremism to grow on both sides of border."

Zahid Hussain
(Senior journalist and author)

Post-2021, relations have been further strained by multiple factors, including security concerns, economic hardships, and unresolved border disputes. The following issues represent major challenges in 2024-25.

1. Cross-border terrorism:

The resurgence of TTP, which operates from Afghan territory, represents a significant threat to Pakistan's security. According to PIPS 2024 report over 1200 fatalities linked to TTP violence in 2023-24 and the recent cross-border clash in October 2025 is a sharp increase from previous years. Pakistan reportedly called on

Taliban regime to honor its commitments under the Doha agreement to prevent Afghan soil from being used for terrorism. However, the Taliban's reluctance to act against the TIP has deepened tensions.

2. Refugee Crisis:-

Pakistan hosts approximately 3.7 million Afghan refugees of whom more than 1.5 million are undocumented. Economic pressures and national security concerns have led to strict border policies and deportation campaigns in 2024 straining bilateral relations.

The refugee situation is exacerbated by Afghanistan's economic collapse, with the World Bank reporting that over 90% of Afghan households face food insecurity.

3. Border disputes and Skirmishes:

The Durand line remains a flashpoint for conflict. Pakistan's efforts to fence the border, intended to curb illegal crossings and smuggling, have

been opposed by Taliban, which does not recognize the line as an international boundary.

Incidents such as Cham an Border clash (2023) and temporary closure of Torkham Border (2024) disrupted trade and heightened tensions.

4- Economic and Trade Challenges:

Bilateral Trade, which once reached \$2 billion annually, has plummeted due to border closure and political instability. Smuggling through informal channels further undermines formal trade mechanisms.

Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan for access to ports and essential goods adds a layer of economic interdependence that could either exacerbate tensions or pave the way for cooperation.

5- Water Resource management and disputes:-

The Management of transboundary water resources, particularly the Kabul River, has emerged as a contentious issue. The Kabul River, which originates in Afghanistan and flows into

Pakistan, is a crucial water source for both countries.

→ Afghanistan's plan to build dams such as proposed Shatart dam with Indian collaboration have raised concerns in Pakistan about reduced downstream water flows. Pakistan fears that such projects could adversely impact its agriculture and energy sectors, which heavily depend on Kabul River system.

→ Lack of formal water sharing treaty between two countries exacerbate mistrust. Pakistan has called for dialogue on this issue, but progress remain slow due to political instability and mutual suspicion.

In 2024, reports indicated that Afghanistan complete the initial feasibility study for another dam on Kabul river with foreign assistance. Pakistan expressed concern about potential unilateral action, warning of adverse impacts on its water security.

6. Influence on External powers:-

The involvement of external actors like China, India and the US has further complicated Afghan-Pakistan relations.

India's engagement in Afghanistan, including the investment in infrastructure projects, is viewed by Pakistan as an attempt to encircle it strategically. Pakistan alleges India uses its presence in Afghanistan to support anti-Pakistan elements including TTP and Baloch insurgents.

Conversely, Afghanistan perceives Pakistan's growing ties with China as a geopolitical move to limit Afghan sovereignty. Afghanistan remains cautious about becoming overly dependent on Chinese investment that Pakistan facilitates through initiatives like CPEC.

→ Suggestive measures to improve Afghan-Pakistan relations

A Stable Afghanistan is buffer for Pakistan against external pressures. Conversely, an unstable Afghanistan is an invitation to foreign meddling in Pakistan 'backyard' (Kamran Bukhari)

1. Joint economic Zones (JEZs):

Establish border-based economic hubs with shared management to promote trade and investment. It will boost formal trade, reducing smuggling. It will create employment opportunities for both countries.

2. Joint Counter Terrorism Task force

Create dedicated bilateral task force for intelligence sharing and joint operations against militants operating across borders. It will enhance trust through cooperation. It also reduces terrorism and cross-border infiltration.

3. Cultural exchange programs:

Initiate programs focusing on art, sports, education and youth interaction to bridge cultural gaps and foster goodwill. It builds mutual understanding and reduces mistrust. It also engages the younger generation for long-term relations.

4. water-sharing agreements:-
Formulate a formal water sharing treaty on Kabul river water usage including provisions for joint dam construction and irrigation projects. It will help resolve key irritants and ensures equitable resource usage. It will also encourages long term cooperation on shared assets.

5. Regional connectivity projects:
prioritize collaborative efforts in projects like TAPA, CASA-1000, and road networks linking Pakistan, Afghanistan and central Asia.

By focusing on these recommendations both Pakistan and Afghanistan will have mutual peace behind borders and in future there will be less tension between both brotherly countries.

Qno: 8

Pakistan - Saudi defense Pact.

The Strategic Mutual defense agreement (SMDA) between

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed on September 17, 2025 has surprised many observers in South Asia and Arab Gulf. Coming soon after an Arab League and OIC Summit in Qatar which condemned Israel's strike on Hamas leadership in Doha but failed to take concrete action the pact has generated both excitement and question. It raises uncertainties about responsibilities during attack, deterrence, goals, nuclear implications and the reaction of the United States.

Signing of defense Pact:

Although discussions have been ongoing for years, Israel's September 7 strikes on Doha accelerated the pact's conclusion. On September 20, Islamabad and Riyadh signed the agreement, which treats an attack on either country as an attack on both. This raises questions about its implications in case of an India-Pakistan war.

→ India's reaction: Former Indian

foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal criticized the deal as 'grave misstep'

→ Saudi balancing act: Riyadh is unlikely to deploy troops against India since India is its second-largest trading partner. Historically, Saudi Arabia has acted as a mediator as during the India-Pakistan crisis in 2019 and 2025.

→ Pakistan's Limitations:

Pakistan is unlikely to send troops in Saudi conflicts with Iran or the Houthis due to three reasons:

1. Avoiding Shia-Sunni tensions spilling in Pakistan
2. Preserving the Beijing mediated thaw between Riyadh and Tehran
3. Depending on Iran's cooperation to curb militancy in Balochistan.

→ Saudi Motivations and Pakistan's Opinions:

For Saudi Arabia, the agreement is aimed at deterring Tehran and ensuring security for its Vision 2030 economic diversification. For Pakistan

the pact promises financial and military support, though it risks entangling Islamabad in Gulf rivalries.

The agreement strengthens:

- 1- More joint military exercises
- 2- Training of Saudi personnel
- 3- Enhanced intelligence sharing
- 4- Deployment of more Pakistani defense staff in Saudi Arabia
- 5- Better integration of Saudi command and control system.

Motivations under this Pact.

1) Long standing ^{Pak} Saudi ties.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have closed strategic link since 1980s. Pakistan trained Saudi ~~officers~~ officers, deployed troops in Saudi Arabia. For Saudi Arabia Pakistan offers a muslim-majority nuclear armed partner with military experience; for Pakistan, Saudi Arabia offers political, financial backing, energy security and diaspora linkage.

2. Changing regional security environment

The middle east is more volatile, Israeli operations (e.g. strikes on Doha, Qatar) and rising tensions around Yemen, Iran and elsewhere have shaken Gulf states sense of security. Pakistan's increased assertiveness in its May 2025 engagements in India and its status as nuclear power give it greater muscle. On the other hand Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia appear to be hedging against over-reliance on the US and its shifting commitments.

3. Mutual interests: economic and political

For Pakistan, beyond defence, the Pact carries promise of economic cooperation, Saudi investment, energy deals and export opportunities.

After the pact, Pakistan formed a high level committee for economic talks with Saudi Arabia. For Saudi Arabia it gives enhanced security assurance and strengthening of its role in the Islamic world.

4- Symbolic / ideological dimension

The pact is presented in Islamic-solidarity terms which helps both states domestically and regionally. Some Pakistani commentators see it as signalling that Pakistan has stepped into the role of guarantor of muslim world security away from reliance on the west.

Future Implications

For Pakistan:

For Pakistan, the defense pact presents both opportunities and dilemmas. On the positive side, it enhances Islamabad's strategic profile by positioning it as a regional security guarantor beyond South Asia. The agreement promises Saudi financial inflows, energy cooperation and potential defence industrial investments, providing much needed relief to Pakistan's struggling economy. It may also strengthen Pakistan's diplomatic leverage signalling to global powers that

Islamabad remains central to security calculus of Islamic world. The pact in essence could reassert Pakistan's relevance amid shifting alliances and declining western aid.

For Saudi Arabia:

For Saudi Arabia, it strengthens its quest for regional security diversification and autonomy.

By formalising military cooperation with nuclear armed Muslim partner, Riyadh gains a credible deterrent against regional threats while signalling independence from western defence umbrellas. Pakistan's

combat experience and technological capabilities, coupled with shared Islamic identity, offer Saudi

Arabia a unique combination of strategic reliability and ideological legitimacy. This alliance may also elevate Saudi leadership in Muslim world, counterbalancing the influence of Iran and Turkey while reinforcing the security of the holy sites of Makkah and Madinah.

Regional and Global Implications

Regional pact could reshape the security architecture of both Saudi Arabia and middle east. For India, it poses a strategic dilemma: Saudi Arabia is one of its major energy suppliers and investors, yet New Delhi must now contend with Riyadh's defence alignment with traditional rival. The development could also revive concerns over nuclear proliferation and security spillovers into Gulf region. For Iran, the pact represents direct challenge into its influence, potentially escalating regional competition.

Other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members may follow suit, seeking similar defence frameworks with Muslim allies to reduce dependency on Western powers.

Globally, the agreement underscores the ongoing multipolar transformation in international security alignment. It signals a move towards a regionalised defence arrangements independent of cold war era alliances.

The United States may deal as erosion of its ^{perceived} influence, while China could welcome it, as stabilising development it aligns with Belt and Road security interest. However, the lack of transparency surrounding nuclear international cooperation could lighten anxiety over potential proliferation risks.

The Pak-Saudi defence pact represents both continuity and innovation. It formalises a relationship long grounded in military and ideological ties, yet it extends it into formal treaty bound framework that echoes Nato style guarantees. It strengthens lies in reinforcing mutual security, economic cooperation and Islamic unity at a time of regional volatility. However, its weakness stem from ambiguity, overcommitment risks and potential entanglement in regional rivalries. The absence of operational clarity and the shadow of nuclear speculation further complicates its perception internationally.

Qno: 3

Formation of new provinces

The debate on creating new provinces in Pakistan is deeply rooted in the country's historical legacy of centralized governance, ethnic complexities, and socio-economic disparities. Since independence in 1947, Pakistan's provincial boundaries have remained largely static, with only minor administrative reshuffling. In contrast, Pakistan's population has multiplied six-fold, its ethnic diversity has become more assertive, and governance challenges have grown more complex. The existing four-province model no longer adequately reflects the country's demographic, ethnic or geographic realities.

The 18th amendment to the ~~constit~~ constitution in 2010 which significantly enhanced provincial autonomy, brought new attention to intra-provincial inequalities. It revealed that more devolution to provinces is not enough unless further decentralization occurs.

within provinces themselves. As such voices for new administrative units, such as South Punjab, Hazara, and Karachi have gained renewed strength. However, such calls also trigger ethnic resistance, constitutional hurdles and fears of balkanization. Despite these tensions the debate continues, emphasizing the urgent need to redefine the federal structure of Pakistan for inclusive development and national stability.

Hurdles in the way of new provinces.

1. Constitutional & legal obstacles:

Under current laws, creating new province is extremely difficult. The process to alter a province's boundaries requires a constitutional amendment and supermajority in Parliament and in the affected provincial assembly. The ambiguity over whether new provinces falls under boundary changes or new entities further complicates matter.

2. Political resistance and vested interest:

Political parties and provincial elites have strong incentives to oppose or indefinitely delay the formation of new provinces. For instance, the largest province Punjab, where many demands for new provinces originate (e.g. South Punjab, Bahawalpur) resist division because it would dilute its political clout.

3- Ethnic / linguistic dynamic:

Many demands for new provinces stem from ethnic / linguistic identity claims (Sairiki belt, Hazara region) while recognition of such identities maybe valid carving provinces on such lines deepening divisions, provoking counter-claims and complicating national integration.

4. Economic and administrative

Cost & resource implications:

Establishing new provinces means setting up new provincial administration, provincial government, judiciary, bureaucracy, police, budgetary allocation etc. These impose substantial fiscal burden.

Recommendation:

1- Establish an independent national commission on provincial Restructuring:-

A dedicated non-partisan commission should be set up to study and make recommendation on criteria for creating new provinces (Population, geography, administrative viability, boundary demarcation, resource sharing formulas and transitional agreements).

2. Ensure broad-based stakeholder consultation and consensus building:-
Any proposal must engage provincial assemblies, local governments, ethnic / linguistic minorities, civil society and political parties. Building consensus will reduce perception of top-down imposition and improve legitimacy.

3. Plan transitional arrangements and resource sharing mechanism in advance:

Before a province is carved out, detail planning should cover:
budget for initial years, administrative structures, divisions of assets / liabilities, revision of representation

in National/provincial ~~assembly~~
assembly and senate and
adjustments of NFC award. This
will reduce disruption and
ensure stability.

4. Strengthen local government system:

The formation of new provinces should not be seen as a substitute for strengthening local governments. Improved decentralization and local government reduce over-centralisation and may address many grievances without immediate creation of new provinces.

The call for new provinces in Pakistan reflects genuine governance development and representation concerns especially in under-developed and remote areas. However, considerable constitutional, political and social hurdles exist. If handled haphazardly, efforts could lead to increased fragmentation, resource conflict and governance burdens. But with careful planning, consensus building and clear criteria

the formation of new provinces
could become a tool for better governance,
enhanced services delivery and
strengthened federation rather
than source of instability.