



Pak-Afghan Ties: A Case of Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract:

This study through extensive literature, historical and contemporary examines the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both countries relations been complex and multifaceted, influenced by historical, political, security, and cultural factors. Pakistan and Afghanistan share a border that stretches over 2,600 kilometers, making them immediate neighbors. This geographic proximity gives their relationship significant strategic importance. The border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been a hotbed of militant activity and cross-border attacks. Both countries have faced security challenges related to terrorism and insurgent groups. While Pakistan has been involved in international efforts to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict. It has played a role in hosting peace talks and negotiations between various Afghan stakeholders. However, the future of Pak-Afghan ties will depend on the evolving political and security landscape in both countries. The potential for peace and stability in Afghanistan is critical for the prospects of improved relations between the two nations.

Keywords: Pak-Afghan, Ties, Conflict, Geography etc.

Background

The history of Pakistan-Afghanistan ties has been marked by a complex and often turbulent relationship, shaped by a range of political, historical, and regional factors. Here is an overview of the history of their ties: Before the partition of British India in 1947, the region that is now Pakistan and Afghanistan was part of the larger British Indian Empire. Both regions shared historical, cultural, and trade ties. The Durand Line, established in 1893, divided the Pashtun tribal areas and became a source of dispute (Omrani, 2009).

After the partition of India and Pakistan independence in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan's membership in the United Nations due to the unresolved issue of the



Durand Line. Relations became more strained in the 1950s and 1960s, as Afghanistan pursued a "Pashtunistan" policy, which aimed at supporting Pashtun separatist movements in Pakistan's tribal areas and the NWFP (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). The dispute over the Durand Line, Afghan support for Pashtun separatism, and other issues led to diplomatic tensions.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had significant consequences for the region. Pakistan, under General Zia-ul-Haq, became a frontline state in supporting Afghan mujahideen, while Afghanistan's communist government was backed by the Soviet Union. Pakistan played a key role in facilitating the supply of arms and fighters to the Afghan resistance, and millions of Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan during the conflict (Naeem & Rafi, 2019).

Post-Soviet Afghanistan (1990)

In the post-Soviet period, Afghanistan descended into civil war, with various factions vying for power. Pakistan supported the Taliban, a Pashtun-dominated militant group, as it took control of Kabul in 1996. The Taliban government received diplomatic recognition from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Trenin & Malashenko, 2010).

Post 9/11 and the War on Terror

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States led to a realignment of regional dynamics. Pakistan, under President Pervez Musharraf, initially supported the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan to oust the Taliban, but the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan became strained over issues such as counterterrorism cooperation and Pakistan's role in the Afghan conflict (Rubin & Rashid, 2008).

Post U.S. Withdrawal (2021 to Present)

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the subsequent Taliban takeover of Kabul have raised new challenges for Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Pakistan has expressed a willingness to work with the new Afghan government and has emphasized the importance of stability in Afghanistan. Throughout their history, Pakistan and Afghanistan have experienced periods of cooperation and tensions. The Durand Line dispute, Pashtunistan issue, and the



regional complexities have been central to their relationship. The future of their ties depends on how the new Afghan government consolidates power, the role of regional actors, and the ability of both countries to work together on shared challenges, including security, refugees, and economic cooperation.

Major Disputes between Pak-Afghan

Durand Line

The Durand Line, the border that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan, has been a source of contention for many years. Afghanistan does not officially recognize the Durand Line as its legitimate border with Pakistan, which has led to border skirmishes and disputes.

Security Concerns: Cross-border terrorism and militancy have been a significant issue. Pakistan has accused Afghanistan of harboring militants who launch attacks on Pakistani territory, while Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of supporting and providing safe havens for certain militant groups.

Refugee Crisis

Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees for several decades. While this is often seen as a humanitarian gesture, it has placed a significant strain on Pakistan's resources and infrastructure. Repatriation and resettlement of Afghan refugees remain a complex issue.

Political Tensions

Both countries have had political disagreements and tensions over issues such as the Afghan government's relations with Pakistan and other regional powers. Afghanistan's closeness to India, Pakistan's regional rival, has also added to the tension.

Water Disputes

The Indus Water Treaty between Pakistan and India, which allocates water resources from the Indus River and its tributaries, can indirectly affect Afghanistan since it shares some river systems with Pakistan. Water-sharing issues can lead to conflicts.



Trade and Economic Challenges

Bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan is affected by a range of issues, including border closures, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers. Improving economic cooperation remains a challenge.

Cultural and Ethnic Tensions

Afghanistan and Pakistan have diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Sometimes, tensions between these groups can spill over into political and diplomatic relations.

Proxy Conflicts

Both countries have been involved in proxy conflicts, often aligned with different regional and global powers. These proxy conflicts can further complicate relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Geopolitical Influence

Both countries are influenced by external actors, including the United States, China, India, and Russia. Their differing alignments with these global powers can create tension.

Regional Stability

The stability and security of Afghanistan have a direct impact on Pakistan. The situation in Afghanistan has been a source of concern for Pakistan due to the potential for spillover violence and instability.

Addressing these challenges and improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is essential for regional stability and security. Diplomatic efforts, dialogue, and cooperation are crucial in managing and resolving these issues.

Literature Review

(Yousafzai & Yaqubi, 2019) discusses in research that historically, the Durand Line, established in 1893, has been a contentious issue, as Afghanistan does not officially recognize it as the



legitimate border with Pakistan. (Kosar, 2021) points out the geopolitical considerations and the impact of great powers in the region, particularly the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, have influenced the dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan. While, (Bano, 2019) highlighted the issue of cross-border militancy and terrorism has been central to the relationship. Scholars have examined Pakistan's role in supporting Afghan militant groups and the subsequent impact on security in both countries.

(Safdar & Budiman, 201) described that the U.S. "War on Terror" and its effect on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have been explored. However, trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan has historically been significant. Both countries have been each other's major trading partners. The trade balance, however, has generally favored Pakistan. While (Sachdeva, 2010) discusses the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority (APTTCA) are key trade agreements that facilitate trade between the two countries. These agreements outline the terms and conditions for transit trade.

(Cochran, 2013) mentioned that the most commonly used trade route between Pakistan and Afghanistan is the Karachi-Quetta-Chaman route. The Peshawar-Torkham route is also significant, and both are essential for landlocked Afghanistan's access to international markets. Author further discussed that, informal trade, or cross-border trade, plays a substantial role in Pakistan-Afghanistan economic relations. It often goes unrecorded in official trade statistics. Economic integration between the two countries has been discussed in the context of improving infrastructure, reducing trade costs, and fostering closer economic ties.

(Mishali-Ram, 20) discussed that the cultural and ethnic dimensions in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been a central focus of academic discourse. The shared Pashtun heritage between the two countries, as well as other cultural and linguistic affinities, has been examined as a basis for potential cooperation and understanding. Conversely, the ethno-cultural complexities, including the Durand Line issue, have also contributed to historical tensions and challenges in diplomatic relations. Scholars have explored how cultural and ethnic ties can both facilitate cooperation and contribute to friction in the context of regional geopolitics and security



concerns. Understanding these dimensions is essential for comprehending the nuances of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and their impact on regional stability and diplomatic engagement.

(Gillani, 2023) discussed the Afghan refugee issue in Pakistan has been a long-standing and multifaceted concern. Author investigated the historical context and scale of the refugee crisis, with millions of Afghans seeking refuge in Pakistan over several decades, analyzing the humanitarian challenges it poses and the strain it places on Pakistan's resources and infrastructure. Research has also focused on repatriation efforts and the complex process of resettling Afghan refugees, addressing issues of sustainable return and reintegration.

(Khan & Bashir, 2022) mentioned that the impact of the refugee situation on security dynamics, social structures, and economic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the roles of international organizations and the broader international community in managing this protracted crisis. Understanding the refugee issue is integral to comprehending the broader complexities of Pak-Afghan relations, regional stability, and human rights considerations.

(Hilali, 2017) highlighted the role of regional and global powers in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations dissected the influence and involvement of key actors such as India, Iran, China, the United States, and Russia in shaping the dynamics of the region. This literature has addressed the varying interests and objectives of these external powers, which can both facilitate and complicate diplomatic efforts between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Moreover, the interplay of these actors within the broader context of the Afghan conflict, peace initiatives, and regional rivalries has been scrutinized, as their actions impact security, economic cooperation, and the overall stability of South Asia. Understanding the intricate web of regional and global powers in the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is essential for comprehending the complexities and geopolitical significance of this crucial region.

(Malik, 2022) discussed and pursuits of peace and conflict resolution in the context of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have examined various peace initiatives, including the Afghan peace process, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation between the two countries. The literature has scrutinized the roles of external actors and regional powers



in facilitating or obstructing peace efforts, the impact of security dynamics, and the potential for building trust and cooperation to mitigate cross-border tensions and conflicts. Scholars have underscored the significance of resolving long-standing disputes, including those related to the Durand Line, as a crucial component of achieving lasting peace and stability in the region. Understanding the complexities of peace and conflict resolution is vital for assessing the prospects for improved Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and their broader implications for regional security.

(Lanteigne, 2013) discusses the diplomatic engagement between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been a central role of diplomacy in shaping their bilateral relations. Scholars have examined the complexities of diplomatic interactions, including high-level talks, negotiations, and conflict resolution efforts, highlighting the challenges stemming from historical disputes and security concerns. This literature underscores the importance of sustained diplomatic efforts as a means to build trust and address contentious issues, with an emphasis on seeking peaceful solutions to long-standing conflicts and promoting regional stability. Recognizing that diplomatic engagement is an essential avenue for achieving a more cooperative and stable relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, scholars have offered insights into strategies for effective diplomacy and the role of international actors in facilitating these efforts.

(Small, 2010) suggested that security cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan depends on their interlinked security challenges and the potential for collaboration. Scholars have scrutinized the dynamics of cross-border terrorism, the role of militant groups, and the impact of such security concerns on bilateral relations. This literature emphasizes the necessity of collaborative efforts, including intelligence sharing, coordinated military operations, and border security enhancements, to address common threats and enhance regional stability. While acknowledging historical tensions and mistrust, scholars have underscored the mutual interest in countering terrorism, making a strong case for increased security cooperation as a vital step toward mitigating cross-border security issues and achieving a more stable and secure environment in the region.



(Khan et al, 21018) analyzed the potential for collaboration between these neighboring nations in addressing common regional issues, including economic development, counterterrorism, and trade connectivity. This literature highlights the significance of regional frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in promoting interconnectivity and regional stability, this stability also in favor for Afghanistan. Despite the complexities of regional politics and the involvement of external actors, scholars have emphasized the importance of leveraging regional cooperation as a means to unlock economic potential, enhance security, and contribute to broader peace and stability in South Asia and beyond.

Significance of the research

Pakistan-Afghanistan ties hold significant importance for both countries. For Afghanistan, Pakistan serves as a crucial trade partner, a key transit route for goods, and a source of support for its reconstruction and development efforts. Moreover, Pakistan historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan, particularly among the Pashtun communities, offer an opportunity for enhanced people-to-people connections and cultural exchange. For Pakistan, a stable and cooperative relationship with Afghanistan is essential for security, economic integration, and access to Central Asian markets. Improved ties can help address cross-border security concerns, promote economic cooperation, and contribute to regional stability. Additionally, a peaceful and stable Afghanistan is conducive to curbing militancy, ensuring the sustainable repatriation of Afghan refugees, and fostering a conducive environment for regional development and connectivity, making the relationship significant for both nations' well-being and progress.

Research Objective

The research objective of the study on "Pak-Afghan Ties: A Case of Challenges and the Way Forward" is to comprehensively analyze the historical, political, economic, and security challenges that have defined the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Through a rigorous examination of these issues, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities, the impact of regional and global dynamics, and their implications for both nations.



Furthermore, it seeks to identify and propose viable strategies and recommendations for a constructive way forward, emphasizing diplomatic engagement, conflict resolution, security cooperation, economic integration, and regional collaboration, with the ultimate goal of fostering stability, peace, and cooperation in the region.

Research Methodology

In this research qualitative and historical analysis methodology that involves the in-depth examination of Pak-Afghan ties, meanwhile understand and interpret past events between both countries (trade agreements, conflicts, economic integrations etc.). Researchers employing this approach aim to uncover the potential way forward to strengthen the ties between Pak-Afghan in kind of geographical and geopolitical cooperation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Pakistan-Afghanistan ties remain complex and multifaceted, characterized by historical disputes, security challenges, and cultural affinities. The relationship significance is underscored by the potential for economic integration, enhanced security cooperation, and regional stability. The two nations share not only a border but also a history that spans decades, fostering both opportunities for cooperation and long-standing grievances. As both countries strive for a more peaceful and prosperous future, the need for constructive diplomatic engagement, resolution of historical disputes, robust security collaboration, and regional cooperation is paramount. A stable and cooperative Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is not only vital for their own well-being but also for fostering broader regional peace, development, and connectivity. During research observed that both countries have deep rooted ethnic and cultural relations and sustainable are favorable for both countries. However both states can mutual dialog and make strategy to overcome security, border trade and refugees issues.

USA remain in war in Afghanistan for more than two decades, but US couldn't contribute significantly in the economic development of Afghanistan, However, the United States plays a crucial role in strengthening Afghanistan through various means, primarily through diplomatic, economic, and security support. As a long-standing partner, the U.S. can facilitate the peace



process by engaging with regional stakeholders and supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation effort. Economically, the U.S. can continue providing development aid, financial assistance, and investment to help rebuild the country's infrastructure, education, and healthcare systems. Furthermore, ongoing security cooperation, including training and equipping Afghan security forces, is vital for ensuring the country's stability. By fostering these multifaceted partnerships, the United States can contribute significantly to Afghanistan's transition to a more peaceful, stable, and self-reliant nation.

During study observed that most of the less developed countries become developed or developing with the regional or neighboring cooperation. Similarly, regional cooperation is essential to strengthen Afghanistan's stability and development. Neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Iran, China, and Central Asian states, need to collaborate on multiple fronts. Economic integration and trade connectivity, particularly through regional initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Chabahar port in Iran, can provide Afghanistan with access to international markets and boost its economy. Furthermore, security cooperation is vital to counter cross-border terrorism and militancy. Together, regional powers can provide diplomatic and political support to an Afghan-led peace process, promoting reconciliation and stability. By fostering a coordinated approach, these nations can contribute significantly to Afghanistan's progress, helping it overcome security challenges and promoting economic growth, ultimately leading to a more secure and prosperous region.

Suggestion and way forward

Strengthening Pak-Afghan ties requires a multifaceted approach that addresses historical grievances, security concerns, and economic cooperation.

Both countries should commit to sustained and structured diplomatic engagement. Regular high-level talks and negotiation channels can help build trust and address outstanding issues.

Prioritize conflict resolution, including disputes related to the Durand Line. Engage in comprehensive dialogue and potentially involve neutral third parties as mediators to find mutually acceptable solutions.



Enhance security cooperation to combat cross-border militancy and terrorism. Collaborative efforts, intelligence sharing, and coordinated military operations can improve border security.

Promote economic integration by reducing trade barriers, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers. Both nations should seek to enhance trade relations and infrastructure connectivity.

Develop a well-managed and transparent process for the repatriation and resettlement of Afghan refugees. This issue needs a joint approach, with the support of international organizations.

Encourage cultural and educational exchanges, academic cooperation, and tourism to strengthen people-to-people ties.

Engage with regional powers and international actors to support peaceful resolutions and regional stability.

Explore opportunities for economic cooperation in various sectors, including agriculture, energy, and manufacturing, to create mutual benefits and strengthen economic ties.

Promote Track-II diplomacy and non-governmental organizations' involvement in building bridges between civil societies, academia, and business communities.

Seek support and involvement from international organizations such as the United Nations and neighboring countries in finding peaceful and stable solutions to regional challenges.

By implementing these suggestions and demonstrating a sincere commitment to peaceful relations, both Pakistan and Afghanistan can work towards fostering a more stable and cooperative relationship, ultimately contributing to regional peace and development.

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