

## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN - AFGHAN RELATIONS (2017-2021)

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### Abstract

Pakistan and Afghanistan share 2,260 kilometers. Though both the states are immediate neighbors, but since 1947, their relations remained fragile and have seen many ups and downs. However, this research is focused on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during the Pakistan government (2017-2021) from a critical point of view. The era has witnessed some basic changes in the attitudes between the two countries towards each other. Pakistan abandoned its policy of strategic depth while Afghanistan and America realized that the road to peace, stability and prosperity goes through Pakistan. Though the dialogue and talks did not succeed but it provided a base for future discussions. This study critically analyzes the relations between the two countries in the given period of time from different dimensions: political, economic, social, and strategic etc. Though the relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan did not remain ideal from the day first but there are some common areas where they can co-operate the convergence of interest while there are also other areas where their interests contradict, the divergence of interest. However, the study finds that the convergence points are more than the divergence but the countries failed in building durable trust. The problems started from disagreement on Durand Line and then the chain of events and issues stretched to the current war against militancy and peace process in Afghanistan. During the under-discussion era, trade and cooperation increased between Pakistan and Afghanistan. In this respect, this article shows that the development of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations is somewhat like one step forward and two steps backwards.

**Keywords:** *state, peace, terrorism, relations, Afghanistan, Pakistan, stability, war, security.*

### Introduction

For most of the time, the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have remained victims of conflicts and mistrust since the creation of Pakistan. Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan to become member of the United Nations in 1947 primarily due to the issue of Durand Line border. In 1950s, the Pashtunistan issue further worsened the relations between the two countries as it took various forms of propaganda warfare, closure of consulates, border fighting etc. However, in 1960, these relations were turned to become normal, but after a decade, their ties became strained once again when President Dawood came into power as the nationalist had tilted towards the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). Likewise, in 1980s, due to Saur Revolution and the USSR interventions in Afghanistan, these relations were again affected negatively. Pakistan started to support Afghan Mujahedeen which were fighting against the Socialist Regime. Therefore, in 1992, the Socialist Regime was overthrown after the Soviet withdrawal and Mujahedeen government was formed in Afghanistan. However, the short period of Mujahedeen government did not prove well for the bilateral relations of the two countries. Thus, the new government has created chaos for civil war which had

brought further destruction to Afghanistan. Therefore, utilizing the opportunity, the Taliban emerged on Afghan scene in 1994 when they captured their stronghold in Kandahar and thus they finally entered Kabul in September 1997.

The episode of 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) in the United States of America (USA) which took the lives of more than 3000 people. The attacks urged the US to launch a war against terrorism. Therefore, the Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan was influenced by the new world order by becoming the US ally in the war on terrorism. As a result, Islamic extremism has become one of the pressing factors in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations for the last two decades. Islamic extremism, a product of cold war, has always set a parameter of relationship between the two countries. This factor played an important role during military dictatorship in Pakistan (1999-2007).

Moreover, the restoration of democracy in Pakistan brought some positive changes. This is due to the fact that democratic countries usually avoid wars and try to resolve their problems through diplomacy and peaceful means. When elections took place in Pakistan in 2017, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani expressed his hope that both countries would fight against terrorism which was considered as the common enemy being faced by both the countries. The Imran Khan government

witnessed some challenges but the then incumbent government had made efforts to resolve the confronting issues through peaceful means (Safdar, 2011).

Among the peaceful developments, one of them was the Lisbon Summit held in 2010 which set the agenda for withdrawal of the US forces by 2014 to 2020. This summit also discussed the security situation and power sharing with Taliban for which Pakistan's assistance was quite essential. The PPP government also prepared the ground for economic ties and development projects with Afghanistan.

Therefore, the government also took steps for countering the monopolized economic competition in the region where India and Iran were the major players. In short, the government tried its level best to improve and normalize Pakistan-Afghanistan relations for durable peace and stability in the region. The Afghanistan's recurring accusation on Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism and suicide bombing increased the mistrust. Nonetheless, peace, political stability and economic development and social progress of both the countries were deeply linked with the cooperation and support of each country (Safdar, 2011).

### Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the nature of relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan during (2017-2021).
2. To examine the political relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and their potential impact on bilateral relations.
3. To assess the security challenges that confronts Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

### Theoretical framework

National interests govern a state's foreign policy system and the realistic paradigm. There are areas where the national interests of Pakistan and Afghanistan are converged and diverged from each other. Pakistan and Afghanistan relations are based on their common historical legacy, cultural and religious commonality, historically the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained unpredictable. An incident on the border or any foreign propaganda or intervention and policy could affect the relations between them. They are immediate neighbors that's why the foreign policy or even the internal policy of one can affect the other directly or indirectly through many ways. It is said in international politics that everything could be changed in international politics except neighbor. Many shifts could be seen in the Pakistani foreign policy due to the foreign intervention in Afghanistan.

Mujahedeen, Taliban and the impacts of terrorism were felt equally by both states. This study is a critical appraisal of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during from 2017 to 2021. The realist theory of international relations best suits the study. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are doing efforts to survive in an anarchic environment. According to this theory "international politics is governed by national interest". Each actor tries to maximize his power for the advancement of national self-interest. The theory of Realism is a "state centric" approach measuring the state response in terms of power. Moreover, critical policy analysis will be used to analyze the data from technical and other aspects

### Research Questions

1. How and where the national interests of Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations converge and diverge during (2017-2021)?
2. What were the peaceful efforts initiated by Pakistan and Afghanistan during the PPP Government (2017-2021)?
3. What prospects and problems were faced in area of political cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan during this particular time period?

### Data collection & Data Analysis

The research paper mainly relies on the documents available in either electronic or printed form. The secondary sources will consist of books, research reports and articles, and scientific commentaries available on line or in printed form. The researcher also has utilized websites of television channels and newspaper, particularly those from Pakistan and Afghanistan including The News, DAWN, Express, Journal and magazine such as IPRI, PIPS, The Afghanistan times Daily, The Kabul times, ICG etc.

The collected secondary data has been analyzed qualitatively through Critical policy analysis; A critical Analysis of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations (2017-2021). The gap between theory and practice has been investigated from the critical policy analysis. This research also critically analyzed the areas of diverge and converge of interests, political challenges and their solution for achieving the trust factor and have cordial ties.

### Methodology for the research study

This research paper explores the issue in-depth while conducting qualitative research methodology

and analytical research to understand the prevailing situation between Pakistan and Afghanistan relations (2017- 2021). Secondary sources like research articles, books, newspaper articles, available literature and internet sources will be consulted to dig out historical account, converge and diverge of interests, Issues and Political and challenges of Pakistan-Afghanistan ties (2017-2021).

### **The Status of Durand Line and Mistrust between both Countries**

Afghanistan and the British supported each other before the partition of the Subcontinent despite the fact that the British government in South Asia used Afghanistan as a buffer zone against the U.S.S.R. Therefore, the partition further accelerated the problems for Afghanistan in case of Durand Line. Afghan government has recognized the validity of Durand Line agreement and legitimacy of its border with the British India on multiple occasions and their agreement concluded in 1905, 1919, 1921 and 1930. Afghanistan with its weak legal stance took the agreement of historical and ethnic similarities to expand its territory in shape of Pashtunistan (Daveed Gartenstein, 2012).

The Durand Line is about 2,260 km long boundary between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since the birth of Pakistan, Durand Line became a hardcore issue between the two countries. The Durand Line issue gives an opportunity to Pakistan to counter Afghanistan in different ways. The Durand agreement was signed in Kabul on 12th November 1893 between the British government and Amir Abdul Rahman. Pakistan considered the Durand Line as international border but Afghanistan always opposed it. Afghanistan approached Pakistan after 1947 to resolve the issue of Durand Line and division of Pashtuns. Pakistan rejected this proposal and said that border could not be reformed because of Vienna Convention on Succession of States on Respect of Treaties (VCSSRT) which says that bilateral treaties between the colonial powers on descendent states. So, this is a reason that Durand Line could not be changed. However, afterwards, hostile and mistrust developed between both nations. It was not the will of Afghans but British India established Durand Line by force. Afghanistan argued that Durand Line agreement was valid for 100 years and it has expired in 1993. They believe now these agreements have no value because all agreements were signed with the British India not with Pakistan. In response, Pakistan said Afghanistan cannot ignore the legal aspects of international laws (Bazai, 2008, pp. 11-19).

### **The role of Islamists in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations**

Dawood Khan government reacted very strongly to its opponents as he assassinated more than 600. Islamists and the remaining fled to Peshawar. The prominent among them were Professor Burhan Uddin Rabbani, Professor Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf and Gulbadin Hikmatyar. The agenda of these religious leaders were to develop modern Islamic political ideology in Afghanistan according to which people could live in terms of principles and teaching of Islam. The government considered these religious scholars a major threat because these were against the USSR, Pashtun nationalism and communism. More than 50 religious leaders came to Pakistan during the Dawood Khan government. Pakistan got an opportunity to use them against Dawood Khan government to weaken and damage it. Bhutto government helped these leaders for strategic rather than ideological reasons. In response to bomb attack in Pakistan, the Afghan Islamists in July, 1975 attacked on two police stations in Panjshir Valley. Nasir Ullah Baber associated with Afghan affairs during the Bhutto era stated in the book by Imtiaz Gul "The Unholy Nexus: Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations under the Taliban" We had a small operation in Panjshir in August 1975, a time when there were so many bomb attacks in Pakistan, probably by the Afghan insurgents. So, we thought we must give a message to Afghan Ruler Dawood Khan and I personally advised Mr. Bhutto to do something. We also wanted to assess the level of training of these people who had been training since 1973 (Usman, 2013, pp. 12-13).

### **Emergence of Taliban**

Taliban is a plural of Talib, which means a student, the one who studies in religious Madrassa or School. Taliban were always the parts of religious Afghan society but some political analysts argue that they were a new phenomenon. Taliban gained power after 1994 when they occupied the Helmand, Kandahar and Kabul. Earlier, the Afghan warlords blocked the trucks of Pakistan convey which were going to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Taliban came forward to help Pakistan convey and opened the roads to Central Asia. Mullah Mohammad Umar controlled the area where threewomen were raped besides two boys which were dressed as girls belonging to infamous warlords like Daro Khan, Saleh Jan and Nadir Jan. These types of activities were not acceptable to Taliban and they started to eliminate these activities. Taliban extended

their influence with the passage of time and decided to work for introducing Islamic values, justice, peace and harmony. In order to achieve these goals, he founded Tahriki-Islami-Taliban. The main objectives of Taliban were to disarm all the rival militias, fight against all those who did not give up arms, enforce sharia-law in liberated areas and controlled all the areas they captured. After implementing objectives, Tahriki-Islami-Taliban controlled most areas and Mullah Mohammad Umar become powerful leader of his country. Pakistan and Afghanistan relations were good in Taliban regime, so in 1994 Pakistan getting the opportunity and wanted to establish road and road links to central Asia to utilize the resources of the region.

For this purpose, Pakistan approached Powerful warlords Abdul Rashid Dostam and Ismail Khan; these were the heads of Council of Mazar-i-Sharif (Balkh) and Herat. So finally, the agreement was done and they assured Pakistan for help and co-operation. Thirty trucks of convoy which were carrying food, clothes and medical left Pakistan to central Asia, the purpose of trade was to increase the economic development in the region. The Central Asian States also want to reach to sea for their development and trade; otherwise, they have no other options for development and regional connection. Mujahedeen commanders blocked Pakistani convoy of trucks and asked for ransom, the power of Taliban once again helped Pakistan to resolve the issues as the Taliban had good relations with Pakistan which was not absorbed by many regional and international powers. Like Russia, India and Iran, they believed the rise of Taliban is due to Pakistan's support. Taliban became powerful day by day and Afghan leaders like Burhan Uddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masood started bashing Pakistan for supporting Taliban and their supporters attacked on Pakistan Embassy in Kabul. The result of these activities and non-stop aggressive towards Pakistan, give an opportunity to support Taliban (Bazai, 2008, pp. 147-150).

### **The Indian Factor and the Pakistan's foreign policy**

The Indian always in search of opportunities to oppose Pakistan interest's in Afghanistan. From the birth of Pakistan till to date India always support Afghan government which creates trouble for Pakistan. Durand line and Pashtunistan issue give chance India to destroy Pakistan in two fronts. In 1992, the situation was totally changed when mujahedeen took control of Kabul and later civil war started between different mujahedeen groups. In 1996, when Taliban captured

Kabul, for the first-time, India supported opposition parties in Afghanistan, otherwise, some Politicians in Pakistan army think that Afghanistan would be a strategic depth in case of war with India. Afghanistan and U.S should know India's presence in Afghanistan is threat to Pakistan's security. Instability in different parts of Pakistan like Baluchistan, FATA and Karachi is due to Indian involvement. Indian presence in Afghanistan is only for development and other projects but they also sponsor terrorism in Pakistan. Pro-India government in Afghanistan is a risk to Pakistan security as the Afghanistan did not want Taliban government, so the situation is difficult for both sides. Now there is mistrust on both sides, and solution is sitting together to resolve these issues by peaceful means (Sial, 2011, pp. 7-8).

The corner stone of Pakistan's foreign policy is directly linked with its security and economic development. In this respect; the history of Pakistan shows that its foreign policy is India centric. Regarding its security issues, no matter what happens but Pakistan is never ready to ease this approach in Afghanistan. From the first day, Pakistan had some important issues which need attention here to identify that why Pakistan and Afghanistan lack trust on each other. India remained a dominant factor in Pakistan's foreign policy. Pakistan considers Afghanistan its strategic depth against India. In a nutshell, the influence of India in Afghanistan is not acceptable for Pakistan whatever its reason may be and Pakistan always tried to install a friendly government in Kabul particularly focusing on Pashtun ethnicity. That's because, Pakistan does not want to be confronted on the both western and eastern borders at the same time. This is clear that India through different techniques exploited Afghanistan for its covert operations against Pakistan. India always tried to have friendly relations with Afghanistan, through which she can keep an eye on Pakistan and even tries to influence. Pakistan on different occasions accused India for supporting Baloch militants and the TTP (Tahrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), which are constantly attacking Pakistani security forces and Politicians. India denied these accusations and termed them propaganda by Pakistan. India is innocent on this matter, because both the states do not miss a chance to interfere in each other is a matter this time Afghanistan is battle field where they try to get power by supporting different groups (Fair, 2014).

### **Pakistan role Post 9/11 and War on Terrorism**

After the 9/11 incident, Pakistan was also affected especially its relations with the Taliban government

in Afghanistan. Pakistan had limited options either to support or oppose the Taliban government and there was no third option. So, Pakistan joined war on terrorism led by the United States. Pakistan deployed 100,000 troops around the border areas to stop Taliban and al-Qaida infiltration into Pakistan. Despite its sincere efforts, some al-Qaida and Taliban members were successful to enter Pakistan and take a shelter in different areas like Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta etc. During various operations, Pakistan and the U.S arrested different Taliban and al-Qaida activists, in response, these extremist's groups developed a network to launch attacks in Pakistan and pro-western parties Pakistan had to pay the price of its changed policies towards Taliban in different ways, like increase in terrorism, collapse of economy, disorder in society, radicalization, security issues etc. (Akhtar, 2008, pp. 61-63).

The 9/11 incident forced Pakistan to change its policy towards Taliban and pursue anti-Taliban policies. Although it was a big decision because Pakistan has always supported the Taliban government and enjoyed close relations with them. Pakistan deployed 80,000 troops to its western border to stop cross-border terrorism despite that Afghan officials alleged Pakistan for supporting terrorists which they claimed easily come to Afghanistan and carry out their activities. They further alleged Taliban and Al-Qaeda leadership had safe heavens near Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Pakistan consistently accused India for sponsoring terrorism and collected all proofs of supplying money and arms ammunition to the militants. In July 2006, Senator Mushhid Hussain, Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs stated that the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) was giving training to 600 Baloch's and Afghan Intelligence. These accusations are difficult to prove or refute because historically India has always good relations with Afghanistan while Pakistan and Afghanistan have hostile relations. So, India and Pakistan are fighting proxy war in Afghanistan. The killing of Indian engineer and it was assumed that Pakistan is trying to stop Indian presence in Afghanistan. There is no doubt the strong presence of Indian intelligence in Afghanistan but this does not mean to conduct operations against Pakistan (Grare, 2006).

### **Pakistan's Interest in Afghanistan**

The security of Afghanistan is of paramount importance for Pakistan in many respects. After the soviet intervention in Afghanistan, the neighboring state Pakistan suffered the most due to the spillover

effects of the war as Pakistan has hosted around three million of Afghan refugees. As a result, the law and order situation of Pakistan was also deteriorated. The border management has also become a difficult task especially handling the refugees coming to Pakistan. The huge inflow of refugees has increased burden on the economy of Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan had a very bad experience while fighting the American wars. The US left Pakistan alone to tackle the aftermath of the American sponsored war against the USSR. This may happen again after the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaida. This is a fact that if the NATO forces leave Afghanistan, it would not only complicate the situation for Pakistan but for the whole region (Rehma, 2013). Furthermore, due to the spillover effects, Pakistan had conducted military operations in which more than 60,000 people lost their lives and along with billions of dollars of loss occurred to the economy of the country (Rana, 2013). Pakistan is considered as assets and so long as the Indian factor posed an existential threat to its security, Pakistan would not desert themselves or change its policy. In 2011, when attacks were mounted on the NATO forces, the US administration was left with no choice but to blame Pakistan and the Haqqani network. Some analysts consider that the Salala Check post incident was a shut-up call for Pakistan but they also considered that it would be very difficult to change Pakistan's policy if there is an Indian threat (Hilali, Nov 2013).

### **Convergence of Interests and Political Aspect**

Interests which both Pakistan and Afghanistan are sharing would be discussed in this section. Though the relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan are hostile since the beginning but there is a considerable level of geo-economic and geo-strategic interests which both the neighboring countries are sharing. As both Pakistan and Afghanistan are bound in socio-cultural and religious bonds, there is a considerable level of rapprochement on different times in different sectors. Some of political, economic, social-cultural and geo-strategic development is responsible for the convergence of interests are as the followings. It is very important that the civil leadership of both countries should be on the same page against these problems. It is very important that the leadership of both states should not blame each other for their political point scorings. Furthermore, they should not let their soil to be used against the other. The US persistently press Pakistan to "do more", and they had started strategic talks with Pakistan to find out a safe way to get rid of the fatal Afghan War. On the other hand, the Afghan

government is giving priority to India over Pakistan which is of grave concern for the Pakistan. Since inception, the foreign policy of Pakistan is being dominated by the Indian factor. They fought deadliest wars, and Pakistan cannot afford a two border wars which could be possible due to priorities and policies of Afghanistan. It is in the best interest of both the countries to work closely instead of fighting proxies against each other because in that case there could be no winner (Sial, 2013, pp. 8-9).

### **Interference in internal affairs**

Afghanistan persistently accused Pakistan of interference in internal affairs. Pakistan does it as it needs security and a friendly government in Afghanistan. According to Pakistan, Afghanistan has given safe havens to the Baloch separatist militants supported by India to sponsor terrorism in Pakistan. Furthermore, they had given more space to India than Pakistan desire for them, which it considers bad for Pakistan. On the other hand, the terrorists who were pushed by military operations are using Afghanistan as a launching pad against Pakistan. Afghanistan thinks that when the NATO forces defeated Taliban than the Taliban crossed the border and went to former FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, they regrouped themselves over there and are carrying out their activities against the Afghan authorities and they also blame Pakistan of creating Taliban. One of the major sign of developing country is weak government which had zero performance in policy making of both internal affairs and external affair. These countries also face security issues which leads anarchy in a country. Due to these issues, a foreign country can easily interfere in the matters of the country. Here is the same situation with Pakistan and Afghanistan, in 2011-12 Afghanistan believed their internal situation is violent and unsatisfactory due to Pakistan interference (Rizvi, 2011).

### **Strategic Depth**

A theory constructed by Pakistani military dominated establishment. It means that in case of a war with India, it will provide the second-strike capability from Afghanistan to counter India. Currently, some scholars believe that Pakistan has changed this policy of strategic depth, in which, only the Pashtun ethnicity was considered as suitable for its interests. It is believed now that Pakistan is contacting the political forces of northern parts (Sial, 2011). In the words of Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad: "Thus, in the current cost-benefit

calculus, the cost of not changing the policy course is far higher than the benefit accruing from continuing it and hence the recent shift in Pakistan's Afghan policy" (Ahmad D., 2013). Every state wants to maximize its gains and minimize its losses, the same is time for Pakistan. On the part of Afghan policy, the change was inevitable because the change in the foreign policy should be according with the changing dynamics. This is a positive development to build trust with Afghan government and to normalize its relations with Afghanistan.

### **Terrorism and cross border Infiltration**

A concern which both countries have against each other. As mentioned above that Afghanistan blame Pakistan for providing safe havens in FATA and KP to the Taliban and other groups who are persistently targeting in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it is believed that Pakistan is distinguishing between the Taliban, like good Taliban and bad Taliban. This is not acceptable for Afghan government. On the other hand, Pakistan has the same concern. When the TTP started the Tahrik-e-Nifaz-a-Shariat Mohammadi and demanded the implementation of Sharia law in Swat, the Pakistan government accepted their demand on the conditions that they would lay arms after the implementation of the agreement but they breached these arrangements and entered in Buner. Thus, Operation Rahe-e-Rast was launched in Swat against the TTP and about 2.5 million people become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Ali, 2012, pp. 12-14). The TTP leadership pushed by Pakistan-Army crossed the border and are currently stationed in Afghanistan, from where they operated without any interruption. The US pressed on Pakistan for a military operation in Waziristan but Pakistan insisted and successfully defied that we will do the operation but at the time of our own choice Pakistan started the South Waziristan operation called the Rahe-e-Nijat in 2009. Pakistan has the concerns that these TTP leaders and warrior should be brought to justice and that they should be eliminated to root out militancy. Furthermore, the Baloch separatists are also using the Afghan soil against Pakistan to disrupt the peace and stability. Likewise, it was also blamed long time ago that Afghanistan was supporting the Pakhtunistan cause (Sial, 2011).

### **Political support and Afghan Peace Process**

Pakistan ever tried to provide political support to bring peace and stability to war torn Afghanistan. After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan,

it was Pakistan that actively engaged to bring the war lords for conflict resolution to the talk table. And indeed, Pakistan was successful in this respect because in early 1990s, it has managed to install the government in Kabul. Due to the lack of trust among the warlords, civil war was once again breaking out. This time a new class, the clergy class from a very lower level came to power with the support of common people and Madrasah students. The Madrasah Teacher Mullah Mohammad Umar rose to power. He was given the title of Amir. When the 9/11 happened and America demanded from Afghanistan to hand over Osama bin Laden. It was Pakistan who pressed for the handing over of OBL, to save the Taliban regime but due to their strictness to the Pashtun social codes and their conservativeness led to the most devastating and fatal war against terrorism. In 2009, when the ISAF forces held elections in Afghanistan, Pakistan appreciated and supported the political arrangements as a solution for instability in Afghanistan. Due to the elections, Hamid Karzai came into power. He started the reconciliation process for the purpose to arrange talks with the Taliban, he visited Pakistan in 2010. He recognized the important position of Pakistan and requested for help to reconcile with the militant groups. Pakistan welcomed him and assured of all possible assistance in this regard but the Afghan issue is very complicated and it is not possible to resolve it with the support of only one stakeholder. This peace process was failed because the US was only interested to hold talks with the Taliban and not with other militant groups particularly, the Haqqani group. Though talks were failed but it was a positive sign to bring peace and stability through a civil and political process owned by the Afghan government and people themselves. In 2018, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Kabul and the final statement issued on this occasion said that both Pakistan and Afghanistan will counter terrorism collectively because it was a common enemy. On one occasion, Hamid Karzai said that the permanent bases of American in Afghanistan or their withdrawal must be according to the interests of all major neighboring countries. On 27 December, in Mini-Summit Ghani said that the security of Pakistan and Afghanistan is interconnected and the security of one country is guarantee to the other as the political and economic interests of both are the same. Afghan High Peace Council led by Abdul Salam Rahimi in 2019 came to Islamabad to discuss the ways and means for the Afghan peace process and the role of Pakistan in this respect. It was a positive thing because not long-ago Afghanistan was blaming Pakistan for the sponsoring of terrorism on Afghan soil (Sial,

2019, pp. 9-11). The peculiar situation of Pakistan after the 9/11 attacks and the influence of military establishment in foreign policy are some major elements on which not only the Afghan governments but the Americans as well consistently blamed that Pakistan was playing a double game in this whole pack of war against terrorism. They believe that Pakistan had the concept of good and bad Taliban. It is also a fact that the Taliban were more interested in dialogue with the Americans instead of Ghani government. At the same time, However, Pakistan believed that the NATO and Afghan forces were not doing operations to prevent the Pakistani Taliban to intrude into Pakistani territory and attack on civilian and military. Analysts believe that the Trilateral Border Commission which includes Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US could stop the clashes between the forces of both the states and the infiltration of Taliban to Pakistani soil. The British Prime Minister David Cameron in July 2012 has brought Pakistan and Afghanistan to a trilateral summit in Kabul together. The result of the meeting was not very fruitful. Later on, both the countries agreed to send joint military team to investigate the matter of the military skirmishes. In order to encourage the Afghan peace process, Pakistan released 13 senior Afghan Taliban leaders including Mullah Noor Uddin Turabi (John Lunn, 2013).

### **The role of Regional and International Actors in the Peace**

Process During the NATO conference in Lisbon, it was called on America to develop an administrative, political and a judicial system to take the issues of the Afghan people secondly, to give big role and engage the regional countries in the peace process particularly Pakistan, Iran and China thirdly that a power sharing arrangement with stockholders to ensure a representative government including Taliban (Sial, 2011). Up till now, it is crystal clear that without a pro-active role for the regional countries, the peace in Afghanistan is a distinct dream. Their institutions are very weak and take time to come to the level to deliver quality services to their people. On the other hand, the-trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan has not been mitigated till now. Resultantly, the common men suffer e.g. the skirmishes on the border result in casualties for common people, if the border closed than common men face the fatality due to using alternate routes which are not safe because people living in these states particularly KP province are connected and have relations which is not easy to separate.

## Pakistan's Regional Pivot

A Pakistani policy shift in the changing regional dynamics, unveiled in 2009 for the first time. Based on good neighborliness and economic relations diplomacy with CARs and South Asian countries, the basic pillars of this policy are, to normalize the relations and trade with India, to make Pakistan as bridge for transportation of energy resources and other trade and finally to reach to the CARs resources. In fact, these are not possible without peace in Afghanistan. (Ahmad D., 2013). As it is desire of both the states to counter militancy and has peaceful relations, Pakistan has launched operations against the TTP in FATA and other parts of country, though it was tough decision because it would further create a lot of problems. Pakistan's relations with the NATO were also endgame phase so it made Pakistan more focused to fight against these terrorist groups. However, weak Afghan Government was fighting against Afghan Taliban and other groups but unable to bring peace and stability as desirable (Yusuf, 2013). Though Pakistan is also strong stakeholder in Afghanistan, in 2009 December when President Obama announced to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan, then in response, Pakistan asked about the strategy of troop's withdrawal and conditions on the ground. Islamabad was worried about these conditions because after all Pakistan would face whole of the issues, which are happening in Afghanistan. The US has always focused to fight against Taliban and to build pressure on them in order to bring into negotiation table. Pakistan believed in negotiation talks by peaceful means not by pressure tactics, and further argued Taliban would like to sit on table after end of night raids and ceasefire by US and NATO forces (Nicoll, 2013).

## Issues and Challenges to Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Pakistan is as equally important for Afghanistan vis-à-vis as Afghanistan for Pakistan. They share "history, ethnicity, religion and geography". It could be reasonably deduced from this fact that Pakistan is more concerned with the Afghan problem than any other neighboring country and would adopt itself accordingly. (Ahmad D., 2013) As a matter of fact, the issues and contestations between the two neighboring countries are historical in nature. Pakistan is considered as the only country which has suffered the most due to instability of Afghanistan among the neighboring countries. The history of relations

between these two countries is characterized by the blame game and periodical rapprochement. The era from 2008- 13 is very important in the relations, because in 2008, a civilian government came to power in Pakistan followed by Afghanistan. However, this could be characterized as rapprochement oriented and with the emergence of a shift from the historical hard-core policy of Pakistan. The debate in this chapter has been dedicated to the critical analysis of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations between 2017 and 2021 (Ahmad D., 2018)

## Afghan government collapse in August 2021

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 has produced a surge of misinformation about the country. It has been fueled by information shortages that emerged following the Taliban's ascent to power and the withdrawal of NATO forces. Initially, much of the misinformation focused on U.S. actions. On the whole, the rapid collapse of Afghan government forces and the Taliban's seizure of power have shocked all the world. While the United States was the prime mover and decided the strategy of Western intervention in Afghanistan, several European countries made a big investment of troops and resources in the effort. Now that effort lies in ruins, and Europeans are left with several unavoidable questions. In the first instance these revolve around the best ways to get their citizens, and those who worked with them, out to safety. But, further ahead, they must consider the lessons of the Afghan experience for their policies on security, the reason of Afghan government collapse needs more studies and research to find the main causes and findings (South Asian Voices, online policy platform for strategic analysis on South Asia)

## Conclusion

Pakistan and Afghanistan, the neighboring states, share around 2,260 km long borders dividing the Pashtun ethnicity from North to the East. In the same fashion, throughout history, the relations of these two states underwent many fluctuations. Furthermore, the relations of both the countries have remained subjects to inter-stated and intra-state rivalries not only on the local level but internationally as well. The Durand Line is considered as the line of separation between Pakistan and Afghanistan creating the first controversy between the two states. That's why Afghanistan (the only state) opposed the membership of Pakistan in the United Nations. Though both the states lack trust but still



there exists a considerable level of goodness toward each other. It also played the role of a facilitator in the Afghan rapprochement and peace process to bring stability. Pakistan has also tackled the post-Soviet withdrawal waste to end the civil war and bring the warlords to the table talks. Indeed, it was successful to some extent but with the rise of Taliban, civil war was once again started. However, on one hand, Afghanistan blames Pakistan for militarization, radicalization of Madrassahs, and instability. In addition, Pakistan is also blamed that it has been backing the government of its own choice in Afghanistan. On the other hand, it is also claimed that the whole history of Pakistan is Indian centric but the country cannot afford to have hostile neighbors on both western and eastern borders. India being a factor to the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations is quite well discussed by scholars and international relations analysts. Pakistan, on the other hand, complains that Afghanistan is sheltering the Baloch nationalists supported by India. During the era 2017-2021, America and Afghanistan have given free hand to India in Afghanistan as the country has established consulates near the areas of Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which Islamabad believes are used for subversive activities in Pakistan. Furthermore, Pakistan also blamed Afghanistan for supporting the Pashtunistan cause. After 9/11 episode, both Pakistan and Afghanistan suffered on the same footings from the brunt of militancy and terrorism. In the changing geo-strategic situation, Pakistan has joined the Western Powers in war against terrorism by becoming the front-line ally of the US. However, despite huge human and economic losses in the war against terrorism, Pakistan is still blamed by Afghanistan and Western Powers of doing the “double game” Likewise, when the NATO forces intervened in Afghanistan, the Taliban crossed the border areas and moved to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, particularly the erstwhile FATA and KP - the areas of Pakistan. But the country is kept on accused for supporting certain militant groups who are carrying activities against the Afghan government and Western powers in Afghanistan. But Pakistan itself became victim of terrorism, as a result, it had launched military operations for rooting the menace of terrorism. Moreover, Pakistan believes that some of the major terrorist acts carried out in Pakistan have been planned in Afghanistan. In a nutshell, the Afghan soil is being used for anti-Pakistani activities. Thus it is assumed from the discussion that the PPP era (2017-2021) has been characterized by blame game and periodical rapprochement between Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. While focusing on the economic

relations during the particular era, the study reveals that the bilateral trade has been increased. But due to the complexities in bilateral relations, the desired targets were not achieved. Likewise, Pakistan and Afghanistan are the members of some regional organizations like SAARC, ECO etc. which provides some relations and incentives for political and economic engagement. Regarding economic relations, both the states have bilateral agreements. The research also shows that the major issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan is the trust deficit, which is a hindrance in smooth relations. Its roots are historical and very complicated. Due to the geo-strategic and geo-economic position of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it attracted not only the regional, but most importantly, the major powers. Many times, the ground became the battle ground between and among the regional and great powers. In these wars, the most sufferers are Pakistan, Afghanistan or both of them. Throughout from Pakistan-Afghanistan troubled relations, the enemy states took the advantage; particularly, India has left no stone unturned in this regard. In the understudy period, a paradigm shift was seen in Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan and other regional countries. The Pakistan's approach turned from the historic strategic depth to a strong Afghanistan for ruling itself without external influence. Furthermore, during the PPP era, Afghanistan has also sought Pakistan's help in the peace process. Pakistan has assured that it would provide every possible help for restoring long-term peace in the war-torn Afghanistan. Thus Pakistan is in favor of Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process as the former Foreign Minister of Pakistan during the PPP government of the mentioned period once said in a statement, ‘Pakistan will support Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-driven initiative regarding the peace process and that nothing is dearer to Pakistan than peace, stability and security;’ (Ahmad D., 2013). The stability in Afghanistan is very important subject for Pakistan, because it directly affects the security of Pakistan. Moreover, the menace of terrorism has affected the political and economic activities of both the nations besides badly affecting the image of these countries (Hussain Z., 2011). But first and foremost, efforts are needed to address the issue of trust deficit and the powers rivalry in shape of proxies between the two countries for restoring peace. Moreover, peace in the region is not possible without restoring peace to war-torn Afghanistan. Currently Pakistan Government have fully Influence on Taliban new Government after 15 August 2021 previous Ghani Government collapse.

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