

## PAKISTAN – AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

*'Study the past and you would define the future.'* — Confucius.

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### Abstract

*Due to geographical contiguity, Pakistan and Afghanistan are interdependent and their bilateral relations affect regional stability, growth, security, integrity and regional peace. Historically, their relations have been strained due to divergent stance on various bilateral issues. The standard security and economic challenges, shared faith, and ethnic and cultural similarities could not help restore trust between the two states, which helped India interfere and disrupt the bilateral engagement. The bilateral mistrust developed during the partition of India, when the Afghan government demanded the accession or separation of the Pashtun tribal areas and revoking of the Durand Line. Failing in its demands, Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's membership in the UN in 1947 and consistently opposed Pakistan at regional and global levels. Bilateral issues were exploited as political tools against Pakistan to incite public support, which mired cooperation. On the contrary, Pakistan supported Afghanistan during troubled times, extended economic facilitation and pursued reconciliation. Scholars believed the rise of the Afghan Taliban in August 2021 would ensure improved bilateral relations between the two states. However, the disconnect further exacerbated the issues of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), repatriation of unregistered refugees, illegal trade, massive outflow of foreign currencies, particularly US dollars and border management. The research paper will evaluate Pakistan-Afghanistan relations historically, identify bottlenecks, and explore avenues for cooperation that lead to specific policy recommendations for durable regional peace and stability.*

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bilateral Relations, Disputes, Stability

### Introduction

**P**akistan and Afghanistan are two Muslim neighbouring countries with strategic geo-contiguity, shared security, and an economic future. Their interdependence is further cemented by their common religious faith, ethnicity, regional, and global interests. Despite converged interests and common challenges, their bilateral engagement is marred by mutual mistrust and disputes.<sup>1</sup>

The mutual mistrust has its roots in the pre-partition British era when the 1893 'Durand Line Agreement' was signed between the British India and Afghanistan, demarcating the international border between the two states.

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At the time of partition, the Afghan government demanded the revoking of the border, the accession of the tribal region, and the establishment of a separate state for Pashtuns. Failing to fulfill its demands, Afghanistan opposed Pakistan's entry into the UN in September 1947.<sup>2</sup> Though the negative vote was withdrawn and diplomatic relations were established in 1948, the move severely damaged bilateral relations. Since independence, Afghanistan has consistently interfered in Pakistan's internal affairs and incited its people on the issues of 'Pashtunistan' and the international border.

Diplomatically, Afghanistan supported India's anti-Pakistan stance and projected Pakistan as a security threat for its sovereignty. It joined Soviet Russia and India in protesting against US military support for Pakistan in 1955 and its entry into SEATO and CENTO. Afghan government presumed that reinforcement of Pakistan would unbalance the regional security paradigm and encourage interference in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan's strategic location at the crossroads of Central and South Asia has been imperative for regional peace and security. It has been confronted with multifarious challenges including political instability, civil unrest, power struggle and foreign intervention which has damaged the social and economic fiber of the Afghan society. The announcement of jihad against Soviet invasion in 1979 and the concentration of Muslim fighters from around the world further undermined Afghanistan and regional stability. Pakistan extensively supported Afghan Jihad to preserve Afghanistan's sovereignty, regional stability and Pakistan's security. Pakistan's relentless efforts in resettlement and rehabilitation of millions of Afghan refugees have been globally appreciated. After Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan accelerated peace and reconciliation efforts to strike a deal between warring Afghan factions and install an inclusive Afghan government in Kabul for durable peace.

Wary of growing Indian influence in Afghanistan and inflexible stance of various Afghan groups, Pakistan supported Afghan Taliban to secure its regional interests. However, the aftermath of 9/11 changed regional dynamics dramatically. Failing in its efforts to influence the Afghan Taliban to expel Osama Bin Laden, Pakistan joined the global war on terrorism and aligned itself with the US policy. Though Pakistan consistently supported the US-backed Afghan government and extended financial, economic and diplomatic cooperation for stability and prosperity, the Afghan government did not reciprocate in the same tone. Afghan government objected to Pakistan's efforts of fencing the international border for a joint monitoring mechanism and ridiculed Pakistan's peace efforts. Unwearied with Afghanistan's negation, Pakistan continuously vowed for Afghanistan's peace through reconciliation between Afghan Taliban and the US administration.

'Doha Agreement' signed in February 2020 resulted in the withdrawal of International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and the irresistible victory of Afghan Taliban in August 2021.

With the rise of the Afghan Taliban to power, the global stakeholders and Pakistan expected regional stability, denial of Afghan soil to terrorists' activities and installation of an inclusive Afghan government which would pledge freedom for women, respect for human rights and an end to terrorist organisations. To this end, Pakistan urged the global community, international forums, to release financial aid to the war-torn country and lift international sanctions to address the humanitarian crisis. Pakistan extended all out diplomatic, financial and economic support to the newly installed Afghan government to deny space to terrorist outfits and restore reconstruction and resettlement process. Pakistan has also extended cooperation to Afghanistan in economic development, border management, refugee crises, drug control, and intelligence sharing, which, if judiciously undertaken, can enhance bilateral engagement and stability.

The Afghan Taliban government averted international pressure and did not adhere to the 'Doha agreement'. It rejected Pakistan's demand for elimination of terror hubs and released TTP ranks. It offered reconciliation between Pakistan and TTP, for peaceful settlement of the issue through dialogue. It is also evident that TTP activities inside Pakistan have increased since Afghan Taliban took over Kabul. TTP is used as a pressure instrument against Pakistan by the Afghan Taliban. Afghan Taliban's stance on fencing, TTP and other core issues have also affected bilateral relations.

Pakistan is aware of the spillover effects of the Afghan crisis. Instability in Afghanistan creates a vacuum for foreign interference, particularly India, causing serious security ramifications for Pakistan and regional peace. Increased Indian influence would allow India to help terrorist organisations to reorganise inside Afghanistan and undertake sabotage activities inside Pakistan. India would also provoke extremist, militant and ethnic tendencies inside Pakistan. Afghanistan's instability would also hinder Pakistan's efforts for regional integration and reach out to Central Asian Republics (CARs) for energy needs.

Relations between the two Muslim neighbouring states have always affected regional stability and peace with serious repercussions for Pakistan. Geographically, they have no other option but maintaining cordial relations, progressive engagement and harmony for public welfare, denying foreign intervention and stern policy against terror groups.

This research aims to analyse different phases of Pak-Afghan relations, identify challenges and suggest measures for improving economic, security and regional stability.

### **Geo-Strategic Significance**

The geographical contiguity of Pakistan and Afghanistan allows interdependence on each other and reinforces regional integration. The mountainous terrain astride 2430 km of shared border restricts cross-border movements through existing routes and passes. The Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of territory (350 km long and 13-65 km wide) in Northeastern Afghanistan, provides access to China and separates Pakistan from Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup> The British mapped this corridor to contain the Soviet Union's interference in the subcontinent.

Afghanistan is pivotal to regional integration and connectivity.<sup>4</sup> It provides the shortest land route between the energy-rich Central Asia and other regions including South Asia. It acts as a bridge for oil transportation from energy rich Central Asia to other regions through Pakistan. Its instability would barricade oil passage preventing the countries of the Caspian Sea, i.e. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia, from accessing the energy market. The landlocked nature of the country increases its trade dependency on neighbouring states, especially Pakistan. Karachi and Gwadar ports provide an ideal sea link and accessibility to Afghanistan to accelerate its trade with India and the Middle East.

The instability, economic deterioration, ill-governance and the spirit of Jihad allowed concentration of terrorists' organisations in Afghanistan, causing regional instability and a security dilemma. Being in the backyard, Afghanistan has security significance for Pakistan and any development has a direct impact in Pakistan. The non-cooperation policy of Afghan Taliban with Pakistan on eliminating the threat of TTP has further strained the fragile relations between the two neighbours, allowing space to India's exploitation strategy. Increased India-Afghan cooperation will undermine Pakistan's regional influence and force it to enhance security measures on two fronts.

### **Pakistan's Afghan Policy**

Aware of Afghanistan's geo-strategic location, internal dynamics, security implications for Pakistan and foreign dependence, Pakistan has always supported peace and stability in the neighbourhood. Pakistan's Afghan policy has always been friendly and responsive regarding Afghanistan as its sphere of influence.<sup>5</sup>

Though the policy has been changing due to global dynamics, Pakistan emphasised restoration of stability and economic activities to deny foreign interference, terror breeding and Indian exploitation.<sup>6</sup> Pakistan also emphasises the peaceful settlement of bilateral issues without compromising the status of international borders and national sovereignty.

A Pakistan-Afghanistan transit trade agreement was signed in 2010 to further cement bilateral engagement and drive collective growth. Joint trade and accelerated economic cooperation would facilitate regional integration, attracting prosperity for the neglected regions of the two countries. CPEC has enormous potential for regional connectivity, which will extend to CARs through Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

### **An Appraisal of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations**

The bilateral engagement between the two neighbours has been chiefly uneven. The age-old trust deficit did not allow both countries to capitalise on their socio-economic potential, thus affecting regional growth. Their divergence impelled India, non-state actors, and terrorists' organisations to intrude and subvert their security environment. A comprehensive analysis of historical Pak-Afghan relations would present a conclusive outlook on future bilateral relations and their regional implications.

- a. **Post India's Partition Relations.** Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have their roots in the British colonial era. Under the security perspective, modern Afghanistan was formed by demarcating its borders with neighbouring countries, by the British and the USSR governments.<sup>8</sup> The British India and Afghanistan agreed to recognise 'Durand Line' as the international border between the two countries in 1893.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the relations between Afghanistan and its neighbours stabilised, allowing states to focus on economic revival. At the time of partition, Afghanistan tried to force the British to revoke the status of international border and the tribal regions along the border. Failing in its undue claims, Afghanistan provoked controversy over the two issues, inciting the Afghan public against Pakistan.<sup>10</sup>

Disregarding Pashtun Loya Jirga's decision to accede to Pakistan at the time of partition, Afghanistan consistently pressured Pakistan to divert public attention from its failure in governance and economic fields.<sup>11</sup> In a step ahead, the Afghan government opposed Pakistan's UN membership, alleging it for human rights violations in the tribal areas.

The relations severed between the two states due to Afghanistan's unexpected position against Pakistan, which was already under security threat from India. Despite failed attempts to stir public sentiments, Afghanistan continuously pursued the policy of interference inside Pakistan. Imposition of restrictions on Pakistan-Afghanistan transit trade resulted in serious tribal incursion into Pakistan in 1950-51. Though Afghanistan branded these insurgents as 'freedom fighters' and denied Kabul's support to them, however, the evidence proved contrary.

- b. **Bilateral Engagement during Soviet Invasion.** Pakistan extended security, diplomatic and economic cooperation, for its internal stability, despite Afghanistan's tug of war. Afghan markets were linked with imports and exports through access to the Karachi port.<sup>12</sup> The unrestricted movement across the border reinforced people-to-people contacts and the development of public association. The relations between the two states reached their peak during the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Soviets' desire to access warm waters and influence broad regions against the western front confronted Pakistan's interests, hence Pakistan and Afghanistan displayed a joint front with the western support. Pakistan also accommodated millions of Afghan refugees who migrated into Pakistan for shelter. The resilience of Pakistan to support Afghan Jihad improved Pakistan's relations with various Afghan factions, mainly Afghan Taliban. Pakistan's active involvement and support for its neighbour increased its influence in Afghanistan, which helped in driving reconciliation between the warring factions. The failure of reconciliation led to a resurgence of the Afghan Taliban, which helped both countries improve bilateral engagement, however, other factions opposed Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban.
- c. **Post 9/11 Relations.** In post 9/11 environment, Pakistan aligned itself with the world community in combating terrorism and facilitated the US invasion of Afghanistan to secure its national interests and avoid global isolation.<sup>13</sup> Afghan Taliban announced their reservations on Pakistan's position, however, they remained diplomatically dependent on Pakistan. The security situation in Pakistan deteriorated due to the spillover effect of the Afghan conflict, especially after the emergence of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in 2007.<sup>14</sup> Although TTP formally pledged their allegiance to the Afghan Taliban and their supreme leader, Pakistan retained its engagement with the Afghan Taliban to drive regional stability, restore Afghanistan's peace and influence TTP through the Afghan Taliban.

Such engagement was necessary to maintain influence in the neighbour, refute India's designs, and contain TTP's ingress and sabotage activities inside Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

Pakistan's sacrifices and efforts for peace restoration and regional stability remained futile as the US and Afghan coalition government alleged Pakistan for covert support to Taliban, cross border terrorism and interference in Afghan affairs.<sup>16</sup> Afghan government's reliance on the US-led International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) for financial aid, military reorganisation, economic revival, and promotion of democratic values in Afghan society further antagonised bilateral engagement between the two neighbors.<sup>17</sup> The conflicting stance helped India exploit the regional environment, hence it provoked accelerated anti-Pakistan activities. Through extensive financial contribution and technical assistance, India initiated joint development projects inside Afghanistan and financed TTP for destabilising Pakistan. The situation eventually resulted in cross-border fire incidents and casualties on both sides.<sup>18</sup>

- d. **Post US Engagement.** With the resurgence of the Afghan Taliban, after the US withdrawal in August 2021, Pakistan believed that, by the 'Doha agreement', the Afghan Taliban would eliminate the menace of terrorism on its soil while turning hard on the TTP. However, TTP activities and cross border terrorism gained further momentum, creating uncertainty in bilateral relations. Pakistan's efforts for the establishment of a joint mechanism to monitor cross-border movement have been severely undermined by Taliban grievances on border fencing and frequent firing incidents.<sup>19</sup> Aligned with the global stance, Pakistan declined to recognise the Afghan Taliban government due to violation of their commitment to respect women and human rights and install an inclusive Afghan government. Pakistan's efforts for lifting of international sanctions to address humanitarian crisis in the war-torn country, have not been acknowledged. Afghan Taliban have also protested against Pakistan's policy of reverting unregistered Afghan refugees.

## Genesis of Mistrust between Pakistan-Afghanistan

The mistrust between the two states surfaced due to conflicting stances on the legitimacy of the international border and the Pashtun tribal areas.<sup>20</sup> However, many other factors also contributed to the widening gap which hindered conflict resolution due to political interests of various Afghan elements: -

- a. **International Border.** Afghanistan governments consistently demand revoking of 'Durand line agreement' contesting it to be invalid due to departure of the British and creation of Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> It has continuously protested against fencing by Pakistan and the construction of border posts. Pakistan vigorously stand on its legal status as acknowledged by international law, the Durand Line agreement and the article 5 of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919.<sup>22</sup> Although Afghanistan governments are convinced regarding the legal status of the border, they believe that departure from their erstwhile stance would be fatal for their vested political interests.
- b. **Pashtunistan Issue.** Although Afghanistan has not changed its stance, it has been silent on the issue due to unwavering loyalty of the tribal people with Pakistan. At the time of partition, Afghanistan declined to accept tribal areas as part of Pakistan and demanded its independence.<sup>23</sup> The demand for Pashtunistan accelerated in December 1947 when India intervened in the Kashmir valley. Skirmishes along the western borders also started, forcing Pakistan to remain alert on the Eastern and Western borders. Similarly, Afghanistan protested to the announcement of 'one-unit system' in West Pakistan in 1955, which involved integration of the tribal areas. Strong rallies and protests were organised against Pakistan inside Afghanistan, the Pakistani embassy in Kabul and consulates were attacked, and Pakistani flags were burnt. The reaction from Pakistan was also very severe, inciting public sentiments. This time again, the US administered reconciliation between the two neighbours. However, the issue remained vulnerable to Indian exploitation and provocation.<sup>24</sup>
- c. **Water Sharing – River Kabul.** The Kabul River is significant for the irrigation system in Pakistan. Hindering the flow of Kabul river into Pakistan would create problems for the water-stressed country. Afghanistan has shown reservations over Pakistan's use of its water. For optimum utilisation of its water, Afghanistan is in the process of constructing dams on the river with Indian support. With the construction of these projects, Pakistan will suffer about a 16-17 % drop in water share.<sup>25</sup> Without a water-sharing treaty between the two states, the issue would become a significant source of conflict that India will always exploit.<sup>26</sup>
- d. **India Factor.** India has always exploited the bilateral differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan to destabilise Pakistan. Through increased India-Afghan collaboration, India always aspired to mitigate Pakistan's influence in the neighbouring country.<sup>27</sup> The establishment of Indian

consulates along Pakistan's western borders has been covertly operating against Pakistan through financing terrorist groups and the TTP.<sup>28</sup> Today, India is refining its relations with the Afghan Taliban government to resume its development projects as well as its vicious designs.

- e. **TTP Factor.** Despite their commitment to deny Afghan soil to be used by terrorists, the presence of Al-Qaida, IS-K and TTP is threatening the regional peace. TTP has increased their terrorist activities inside Pakistan, whereas Afghan Taliban have ignored Pakistan's concerns and did not take any action against TTP despite evidence. On the contrary, many TTP ranks were released after their takeover in August 2021. It is also evident that the Afghan Taliban are using the TTP factor to keep Pakistan under pressure.
- f. **Border Management.** To regulate the uninhibited porous borders and monitor any movement of terrorists and illegal traders, Pakistan installed a fence and constructed numerous border posts.<sup>29</sup> The strategy helped in reducing cross-border movement and confined it to the established trade routes between the two countries. However, the Afghan Taliban objected to the fencing, referring to it as a violation of the undeclared borders. Unprovoked firing by Afghan forces resulted in many casualties on the Pakistan side.<sup>30</sup>
- g. **Refugees Repatriation.** The Afghan Taliban government has criticised Pakistan's recent decision to repatriate unregistered Afghan refugees. The return of refugees would help stabilise Pakistan's economy and security while allowing the Afghan Taliban to settle them and involve them in the reconstruction of the country.
- h. **Pakistan's Reconciliation and Afghan Apprehensions.** Pakistan has always pursued reconciliation among the Afghan factions and the Taliban-US to restore peace and stability. However, Afghan governments have alleged that Pakistan is inclined towards the Afghan Taliban and violates Afghan sovereignty. Afghanistan's baseless allegations have led to mistrust between the two nations.

## Prospects of Peace and Cooperation

The geographical contiguity, shared culture and faith present ample opportunities to accelerate economic growth and security cooperation between the two states.<sup>31</sup> The avenues of cooperation are: -

- a. **Common Linkages.** The common religious faith, culture, and linguistic association present avenues for securing geostrategic economic and security interests. Such common grounds would enhance interdependence and regional integration and help countries address their commerce and energy needs.
- b. **People-to-People Contact.** People-to-people relations are based on common faith, language, and culture and shared necessities of life.<sup>32</sup> Disregarding Afghan government official relations, Afghans enjoy cordial relations with Pakistanis, especially after their prolonged association developed during their refuge in Pakistan.
- c. **Economic Interdependence.** As a landlocked country, Afghan Transit Trade needs Pakistan's ports for trade connections with the outside world. Pakistan is one of Afghanistan's largest trading partners, exporting goods and services worth approximately \$3 billion annually. At the same time, Afghanistan is significant for Pakistan in accessing energy-rich CARs and pursuing regional integration.
- d. **Security Interests.** Pakistan and Afghanistan face the common challenge of terrorism which has risked regional stability and peace. The presence of al-Qaida, IS-K and TTP in Afghanistan has dangers for regional unity and spillover effects for Pakistan. Moreover, peace would be difficult till the installation of an Afghan inclusive government and the implementation of stern policies against TTP and other banned organisations. The terror challenges can be overcome with cooperation and a joint mechanism along the border.
- e. **CPEC.** The flagship project of CPEC under OBOR has the capacity for regional integration and economic growth for all the regional states, including Afghanistan. The war-torn country is suffering through humanitarian catastrophe after the departure of the US and is in dire need of economic revival. Hence, CPEC as a project can bring the two neighbouring states together.
- f. **Diplomatic Cooperation.** Due to international sanctions on the Afghan Taliban, the humanitarian crisis has increased manifold. Pakistan has been urging the international community to provide financial aid and relax sanctions to address various issues in Afghan society. Such efforts will align Afghanistan and Pakistan towards future cooperation.

## Recommendations

Considering their past association and war history, Pakistan and the Taliban government in Afghanistan can resolve bilateral issues through cooperation amicably, promoting bilateral interests and economic growth.

### a. Recommendations for Afghanistan

- (1) **Adherence to International Demands.** Afghan Taliban must fulfil their commitments of 'Doha Agreement' and install an inclusive government. Afghanistan should also deny its soil for use of terrorist activities and expel all banned organisations from the country. The stern policy against terrorists, involvement of all factions in governance, respect for women and human rights would lead to recognition of the Afghan government, more stability and lifting of international sanctions. Such measures would lead to economic prosperity and regional cooperation.
- (2) **Anti-Terrorists' Policy.** Announcement of a clearly defined 'anti-terrorists' policy would help improve Afghanistan's relations with neighbouring countries and remove the stigma of being a 'terror sponsor' state. Actions against TTP would also balance bilateral engagement with Pakistan. Improving relations would help Afghanistan become the pivot to regional integration and connectivity, ultimately leading to economic prosperity.
- (3) **Improved Governance.** Weak governance leads to terrorists and extremists exploiting youth. Improving governance would accelerate economic activities, denying space to extremist elements. In order to achieve the aim, besides strong commitment and resolve, all elements of National Power must be mobilised.
- (4) **National Reconciliation.** An Afghan Taliban-led 'Loya Jirga' involving all factions would help develop consensus for peace in society and avert the chances of another civil war. Consensus should also be developed to implement a national constitution.

- (5) **Ideological Underpinning.** Afghanistan needs to understand that Pakistan came into being on the religious and cultural grounds, and the people of the tribal areas always maintain the century-old legacy of their loyalty to Pakistan. Moreover, Afghanistan's stance that since Pakistan is not a 'successor state' but a 'clean state' hence border redefining is required with Afghanistan, is wrong. They need to understand that as per the definition of international law, Pakistan qualifies as a successor state as it replaced another state. This position has been legalised by the Indian Independence Act 1947.<sup>33</sup> The ideological understanding will help the Afghan government convince their people about the status of the international border.

b. **Recommendations for Pakistan**

- (1) **Policy Orientation.** Pakistan should remain aligned with the international community and urge Afghan Taliban to respect women and human rights, install an inclusive Afghan government and deny use of soil to terrorists. On the other hand, Pakistan should remain committed to helping the Afghan Taliban government in addressing various economic, social and financial challenges. Pakistan should accelerate its diplomatic efforts to convince the international community that the humanitarian crisis in the country has exacerbated due to international sanctions, which need to be lifted or softened to prevent terrorists' ingress into the society. Sincere efforts would allow Pakistan to maintain its influence in Afghanistan and deny access to India's nefarious designs.
- (2) **Engagement with all Afghan Factions.** Pakistan's past policy of engaging with only the Afghan Taliban has agitated other Afghan factions, which do not favour Pakistan. To ensure stability in the neighbourhood, Pakistan must adopt a broad-based approach involving all Afghan factions and regional stakeholders, including Russia, Iran, and China, for holistic political stability.
- (3) **Economic Interdependence.** For improved bilateral relations, accelerated economic cooperation is necessary. Pakistan, being accessible to Afghanistan, should facilitate its exports and imports to help generate revenue and stabilise its economy.

Besides bilateral and multilateral economic engagements, Pakistan can extend private sector partnerships and joint investments, reduce tariff rates, and facilitate infrastructural development in Afghanistan. Due to the current economic position, Pakistan would not be able to support Afghanistan's reconstruction, which would force Afghans to rely on India and Iran. Therefore, Pakistan should immediately restore its economic sustainability to influence Afghanistan.

- (4) **Developing Afghan Stakes in CPEC.** Afghanistan must realise that Pakistan's approach has changed from Geo-Politics to Geo-Economics. The CPEC project has enormous economic potential that can be extended to Afghanistan. Afghanistan has also shown its desire to benefit from the project. Pakistan needs to involve Afghanistan as a stakeholder in the connectivity project and extend special incentives to Afghanistan. Access to CPEC and Gwadar would allow Afghanistan to maintain its cordial relations with Pakistan and deny space to India and TTP to sabotage economic activities in the region.
- (5) **Technical Training Opportunities.** Afghanistan needs skilled manpower for reconstruction. Extending technical education and opportunities through various exchange programs would enhance Afghans' confidence in Pakistan. To promote goodwill, special seats should be maintained at reduced charges in all universities for Afghan students.
- (6) **Investments in Selected Sectors.** Pakistan must invest in communication infrastructure, especially in Eastern and Southern Afghanistan, to reduce trade diversion through other routes. Moreover, Pakistan must also help Afghanistan in its capacity-building efforts through investment in human capital.
- (7) **Military Cooperation.** Since the Afghan Taliban government is focused on reviving the Afghan Army, Pakistan should support Afghanistan in training its officers and soldiers and help them rebuild it. Pakistan should reserve maximum seats for Afghan soldiers in training institutes and provide the Afghan Army with cost-effective military equipment.

c. **Recommendations for Mutual Cooperation**

- (1) **People-to-People Contact.** People-to-people contact can pay rich dividends in bridging the gap between neighbours. In this regard, initiating mutual cooperation programs, joint ventures of governmental working groups, and intellectual collaboration would be helpful.
- (2) **Security Cooperation.** Pakistan and Afghanistan realise the necessity of security cooperation for economic growth and prosperity. Pakistan should seek Afghanistan's support for regional peace and stability, which is possible through cooperation and promoting a joint mechanism. Denial of soil's use against each other, non-interference, and joint border mechanisms would ensure the security of mutual interests. Afghanistan has to respond positively to Pakistan's demand of stern measures against TTP, which would build Pakistan's confidence in Afghan Taliban and will promote further harmony.
- (3) **Border Management.** The installation of fences, radars, sensors, and check posts will ensure continuous surveillance and monitoring of the borders and restrict the movement of illegal trade and terrorists.<sup>34</sup> Afghan authorities must realise its significance and join Pakistan in further reinforcing border management. Bilateral facilitation in intelligence sharing would encourage confidence building and enhance capacity building in border management.
- (4) **Refugees Management.** Since the situation in Afghanistan has improved with the resurgence of the Taliban, both countries should amicably resolve the refugees' issue and the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan should be immediately undertaken.
- (5) **Role of Media.** Media can play a pivotal role in confidence-building measures at both sides and further improve people-to-people contact. At present, state-controlled media has created an environment of mistrust through conflict reporting and non-coverage of issues of common interests, between the two neighbours. To improve bilateral engagement and enhance cooperation, collaboration between media and journalists of both

countries must be enhanced. TV channels should be allowed to operate on both sides of the border. Pashto and Persian TV and radio channels should be established to promote friendly behavior towards Pakistan. As a policy, negativity towards each other must be avoided.

## Conclusion

Afghanistan and Pakistan have a long history of tense relations defined by five recurring drivers: sovereignty concerns, security interests, geopolitical dynamics, cross-border ties, connectivity and trade.<sup>35</sup> Relations between the two have seen the ups and downs in the recent history. At various times, players with vested interests have been playing with both countries' common masses to create differences amongst them. However, it is an undeniable geographical reality that Pakistan and Afghanistan will have to co-exist. Owing to the geo-political significance of the region, the area is likely to remain the focus of regional and world players. There are enormous opportunities for both countries to work together to improve the overall condition of their respective people. The security environment, terrorism, deteriorating economic situation, and climate change are significant challenges confronting both countries, and they require a joint mechanism and harmonised operations. The installation of the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan has provided an excellent opportunity to both countries to resolve their bilateral issues amicably and create an environment for mutual growth and prosperity.

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