

## Pak-Afghan Relations Post NATO Withdrawal

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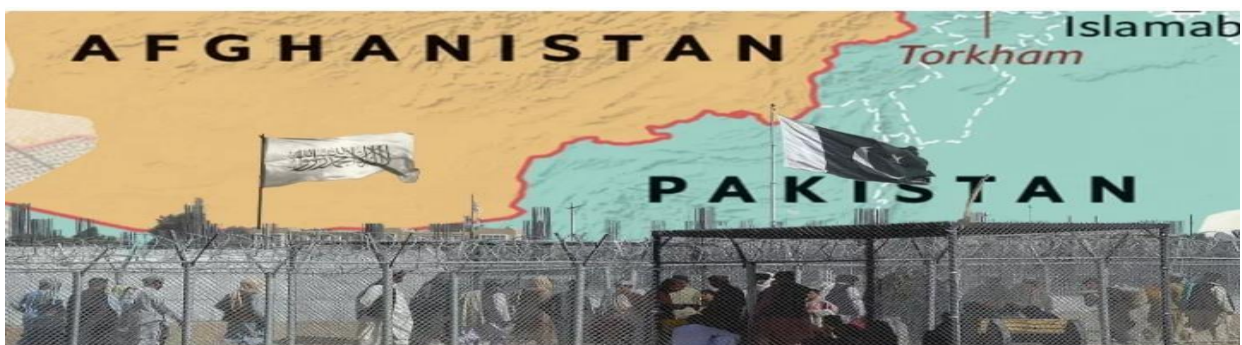
### Abstract

*The aim of this study is to analyze Pak-Afghan relations in the aftermath of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan, focusing on the political, economic, and security dimensions of bilateral ties. The withdrawal led to significant shifts in regional dynamics, impacting border security, trade, and diplomatic engagement between the two nations. Pakistan's role in fostering stability, addressing cross-border militancy, and managing refugee crises remains critical in shaping its foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Additionally, the influence of regional and global actors has further complicated the geopolitical landscape. This study explores both the challenges and opportunities for cooperation, emphasizing the need for strategic dialogue and policy coordination to ensure long-term regional stability.*

**Keywords:** *Pak-Afghan Relations, Post-NATO Withdrawal, Border Security, Trade Relations, Regional Stability, Cross-Border Terrorism, Diplomatic Engagement, Geopolitical Dynamics*

### Historical Overview of Pakistan and Afghanistan Relations

The historical ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been complex, influenced by geopolitical, cultural, and ethnic factors. The border region, known as the Durand Line, drawn during British rule, has been a source of contention. Both states share cultural and ethnic connections, but political differences and security concerns, especially regarding the Afghan conflict, have strained relations. Balancing these factors remains crucial for regional stability ("Relations with Pakistan", 2022). Pakistan and Afghanistan have faced challenges and opportunities in their bilateral relations over the years.



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## Geopolitical Dynamics

The establishment in the late 19 century, the Durand Line has been a recurring problem. Because Afghanistan does not officially recognize it as the official boundary, there are sometimes disagreements about it. The existence of terrorist organizations and insurgent activities is one of the most critical problems facing Afghanistan and Pakistan. The border between the two states has been used by the Taliban, ISIS, and other extremist groups to launch assaults, destabilizing the area and thwarting attempts at peace and progress. The Taliban insurgency has fueled the continuing conflict in Afghanistan, which has impacted Pakistan and added to the country's internal security issues.

The geopolitical rivalry between Afghanistan and Pakistan exacerbates the situation in both states. There has been a protracted struggle between India and Pakistan, and both have utilized proxies to further their interests in Afghanistan. Tensions have been made worse by Iran's attempts to influence events in the area. The both Pakistan and Afghanistan claim portions of the Durand Line, the boundary between the two states is still a source of contention. Ethnic tensions have been heightened by the ambiguity surrounding the boundary, which has periodically resulted in border confrontations. Millions of Afghan refugees are also housed in Afghanistan, which presents serious socioeconomic difficulties for both states.

Due to their location in a strategically significant area, China, Russia, and the United States are among the main states that are interested in Pakistan and Afghanistan. These outside players frequently vie for influence in the area, which can either exacerbate already-existing conflicts or present chances for harmony and stability. China's increasing influence in Afghanistan and its effects on regional dynamics China's Expanding Role in Afghanistan for the Carnegie Endowment for Interstateal Peace. The geopolitical situation is further complicated by great power competition, which also shapes Pakistan's and Afghanistan's paths.

The geopolitical dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan are complex and interwoven, posing a variety of difficulties from border conflicts and proxy warfare to terrorism and insurgency. To address these issues and advance regional peace, stability, and prosperity, the interstateal community as well as regional players must work together.

## Crisis of Refugees

There has been a notable inflow of Afghan refugees into Pakistan because of the Afghan conflict. One constant in their relationship has been navigating this humanitarian crisis. Afghanistan has one of the world's greatest and longest-lasting refugee crises due to decades of war, instability, and insecurity that have forced millions of Afghans to flee their homeland. Pakistan is the world's largest host state for refugees, with over 2.6 million Afghan refugees registered there, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). The severity of the refugee crisis has exacerbated the already poor situation in both Pakistan and Afghanistan by placing a great deal of demand on humanitarian organizations and resources.

Pakistan's social services, infrastructure, and resources are under a great deal of strain as a result of the flood of Afghan refugees, especially in places near the Afghan border. This has put a burden on public services including healthcare, education, and sanitation, resulting in shortages of resources and overpopulation. In addition, Afghan refugees frequently experience marginalization, discrimination, and restricted access to possibilities for a living, which increases their vulnerability and fuels social unrest.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are both experiencing security issues as a result of the huge number of Afghan refugees living there. There have been cases where extremist organizations or criminal networks have taken advantage of refugees, endangering the security of the host communities. To

further complicate security dynamics in the area, the porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan have made it easier for terrorists, weapons, and illegal operations to move around. Pakistan and Afghanistan's diplomatic ties, as well as those with the rest of the world community, have been strained due to the prolonged duration of the refugee crisis. Periodically, there have been conflicts and tensions around citizenship rights, border management, and the return of refugees. The absence of an all-encompassing and enduring resolution to the refugee predicament has impeded endeavors towards regional collaboration, peace establishment, and stability. The refugee crisis in Pakistan and Afghanistan is a multifaceted and ongoing issue that calls for concerted efforts from governments, non-governmental organizations, and the interstateal community to address the socioeconomic risks, political tensions, humanitarian needs, and security issues related to forced displacement and extended refugee situations (Baqai & Wasi, 2021).

### **Taliban Influence**

The relationship between both states and the Taliban has been complicated. Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban is complex although it has been accused of helping the latter group, it has also been involved in fostering peace negotiations. Pakistan and Afghanistan are both seriously threatened by the Taliban's return of authority. The Taliban continue to assault people, government soldiers, and infrastructure in Afghanistan, and they hold a sizable chunk of the country. Similar to this, Pakistan has been subjected to many terrorist assaults by the Taliban and other militant organizations, which has undermined attempts to establish peace and stability in the state. The influence of the Taliban worsens security, erodes the legitimacy of the government, and fosters an environment of dread and uncertainty.

The Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have governance issues as a result of the Taliban's influence and presence. The Taliban frequently enforces its stringent interpretation of Islamic law in regions under their control, restricting women's rights, civil freedoms, and freedom of speech. Human rights, the rule of law, and democratic government are all weakened by this. Furthermore, the central government's authority is challenged or undermined by the Taliban's alternative governance systems, which lead to governance voids and encourage corruption and impunity.

The stability of the region is more broadly affected by the Taliban's presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan. India, Iran, China, and Russia are examples of neighboring states that keep a close eye on regional events and may try to take advantage of the circumstances to forward their own agendas. Areas under Taliban influence or control give terrorists and extremist organizations safe havens, endangering regional security and making collaboration and conflict settlement efforts more difficult.

The influence of the Taliban makes efforts at peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and Pakistan more difficult. Though attempts have been made to hold peace negotiations with the Taliban, the group's conflicting interests, ideological stance, and military prowess have made it difficult to come to a long-lasting peace accord. The Taliban's sway over some political groupings in Afghanistan further impedes attempts at stateal reconciliation and unity. In order to address security threats, governance issues, regional instability, and barriers to peace and reconciliation, governments, interstateal organizations, and civil society must work together to develop comprehensive and coordinated strategies. These challenges are a result of the influence of the Taliban in both Pakistan and Afghanistan (Kugelman, 2024).

### **Ethnic and Cultural Links**

There are strong historical and cultural ties between the two countries despite their political differences, especially because they share ethnic groupings. The Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are multiethnic states where different ethnic groups live side by side. important ethnic groups in Pakistan are Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Baloch, and others; important ethnic groups in Afghanistan are



Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and others. These states' ethnic variety may contribute to cultural richness and diversity and be a source of strength, but it can also cause conflict, especially when ethnic identities are marginalized or politicized.

The Deep historical and cultural linkages, including linguistic, religious, and family ties, exist between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These relationships have, yet, also seen times of collaboration and disagreement. Relations between the two states have occasionally been strained by historical grudges, territorial conflicts, and conflicting stateal narratives, which has affected ties across ethnic and cultural groups (Dawi, 2022).



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The Cross-border encounters and cultural exchanges are facilitated by the porous border that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan and allows people, products, and ideas to flow freely. But it also brings with it difficulties with security, sovereignty, and border control. The cross border flow of terrorists, traders, and refugees from Afghanistan affects the security dynamics, economic stability, and social cohesiveness of both states. The Political dynamics in Afghanistan and Pakistan are significantly shaped by ethnic and cultural identities. Armed organizations, political parties, and movements frequently organize along ethnic lines in an effort to further the goals of their local communities. Rivals and ethnic conflicts have the potential to worsen political unrest, sabotage stateal harmony, and obstruct initiatives for inclusive government and social cohesion (Bashir, 2023).

The intricate and diverse issues surrounding the ethnic and cultural ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan are a result of ingrained political, social, and historical elements. In order to overcome these obstacles, initiatives must be made to advance inclusive government, social cohesion, and cross-border collaboration. Disagreements must also be resolved, communication must be encouraged, and the various identities and goals of the people in both states must be respected (Gul, 2023).

## Security Concerns

Fighting terrorism and preserving regional stability are two security issues that both states must deal with. There have occasionally been attempts at collaboration, but tensions have also resulted from mistrust and conflicting interests. The security issues that Pakistan and Afghanistan confront are complex and intricate, originating from both internal and foreign factors such as border conflicts, terrorism, insurgency, and geopolitical rivals.

The Taliban, ISIS, and other extremist organizations have been the driving force behind terrorism and conflict in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. By attacking citizens, governmental buildings, and law enforcement, these organizations destabilize the area and thwart initiatives for growth and peace. The two countries' weak border makes it easier for terrorists and weapons to cross between them, increasing security risks for both sides. The Challenges of Stability and Governance," which sheds light on the intricate dynamics of insurgency and terrorism in the area ("NATO and Afghanistan" ,2022).

The both Pakistan and Afghanistan claim portions of the Durand Line, the boundary between the two states is still a source of contention. Conflicts over borders and tensions between countries have occasionally resulted in clashes, strained relations, and security issues. Furthermore, the weak border makes it easier for terrorists, illegal commodities, and contraband to be smuggled in, which complicates security dynamics even more. The Political instability, ethnic strife, and sectarian violence are some of the internal security issues that Pakistan and Afghanistan must deal with. These problems are made worse by ineffective law enforcement, corruption, and governance, which gives terrorist organizations and criminal networks a favorable environment in which to operate. Comprehensive approaches centered on bolstering institutions, encouraging inclusive governance, and addressing the underlying causes of instability and conflict are necessary to solve internal security challenges.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are confronted with intricate and diverse security issues that stem from a blend of both internal and foreign elements. Governments, regional players, and the interstate community must work together to improve security cooperation, foster communication, and address the root causes of conflict and instability in the area in order to meet these challenges (Akhtar, 2015).

## Collaborative Economy

Initiatives to improve economic cooperation have been made, such as trade and infrastructure initiatives. However, political problems and security worries have impeded progress. There are many facets to the connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and a variety of historical, cultural, and geopolitical elements influence how they interact. Maintaining stability in the area depends on striking a balance between these complexities. The post NATO withdrawal dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have been marked by a combistate of challenges and opportunities.

Regional cooperation among adjacent states like China, Iran, and others is indeed crucial in addressing shared challenges and promoting stability in the region. The no one country can handle the security, economic, and environmental problems of a region on its own due to their interdependence. For instance, economic downturns in one state may swiftly spread to its neighbors, and security concerns can also fast cross-stateal boundaries (Ahmad, 2010).

There are several difficulties that bordering states face that transcend stateal boundaries. These might include drug trafficking, environmental damage, terrorism, and interstate crime. Working together enables a more thorough and efficient approach to solving these problems. Coordinated border security measures, for example, can aid in stopping illicit activity that jeopardies the stability of several countries. The Economic potential may be realized through trade, investment, and infrastructure development when regions work together. Through mutual use of capabilities and

resources, neighboring states can improve their competitiveness within the global marketplace. Economic integration and growth are facilitated by programs like cooperative infrastructure projects and regional trade agreements.

The History demonstrates that hostilities between adjacent states may swiftly spiral out of control and have disastrous effects. Through promoting communication and collaboration, countries may establish credibility, settle disagreements amicably, and stop hostilities from getting worse. Joint training exercises and military-to-military contacts are two examples of confidence building activities that can help ease tensions and misconceptions.

The respect for one another's sovereignty, conformity to interstate law, and mutual understanding, cooperative efforts can support political stability. Neighboring states establish diplomatic ties and networks via cooperating on regional concerns, which aid in resolving political disputes and averting unstable events. The Common resource management issues that many areas deal with include energy security, sustainable development, and water shortages. In order to secure the equitable distribution of limited resources and reduce conflict over them, collaborative approaches to resource sharing, conservation, and management can be beneficial to all parties involved (Taye & Ahmed, 2021). The leadership, kindness, and collaboration on the interstate scene, regional cooperation gives states the chance to bolster their soft power. Neighboring countries may enhance their standing and power in the interstate arena by supporting regional projects and working together to solve common issues.

It is not only desirable but also necessary for neighboring countries like China and Iran to work together in the area to handle common issues, advance stability, and promote development. Neighboring states may create a future for their populations that is more safe, wealthy, and linked via communication, cooperation, and respect for one another (Asl, 2024).

### **Security Issues**

The changing security dynamics in Afghanistan are a result of the withdrawal of NATO forces. The problem of dealing with the possible spread of extremism and violence affects both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Effective border management and collaboration are crucial in the fight against terrorism. Due to the interrelated nature of regional geopolitics, regional cooperation with neighboring states like China and Iran becomes even more crucial in light of the Taliban's revival in Afghanistan. This is a thorough justification of cooperation is essential in resolving the Taliban issue and fostering stability.

The Afghanistan security is threatened by the Taliban's hold over a portion of the country, as well as that of its neighbors. The instability of Afghanistan has the potential to worsen drug trafficking, refugee flows, and regional terrorism, all of which can affect neighboring states. To keep the entire area from becoming unstable as a result of these security issues, cooperation is crucial.

The Coordinated and efficient border management is essential to limiting cross-border trade, migration, and illegal activity. Afghanistan's neighbors, who share its borders with China, Iran, Pakistan, and the republics of Central Asia, are immediately impacted by its internal events. Joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and cooperative border security measures can all aid in preventing the entrance of criminal and extremist groups.

The number of Afghan refugees leaving the state has significantly increased as a result of the Taliban's come back. The infrastructure and resources of the surrounding states are strained as a result. Coordinated measures are required to handle the refugee surge and attend to the humanitarian needs of the migrants. This might entail helping refugees relocate or return home in a dignified and safe manner, as well as sharing the cost of sheltering them and offering humanitarian aid (Javaid & Javaid, 2016).

To combat the terrorist danger presented by organizations like the Taliban and its linked networks, regional collaboration is crucial. To stop terrorist acts and destabilization, states in the area

must cooperate in their counterterrorism operations, exchange intelligence, and destroy networks that support terrorism. Building mutual confidence and collaboration between regional players, such as China, Pakistan, Iran, and the Central Asian republics, is necessary to achieve.

The stability and economic growth of the whole area are intimately related to those of Afghanistan. Stability and prosperity in the area can be enhanced by cooperative efforts to help Afghanistan's peace process, rebuilding, and growth. This might entail funding trade agreements, infrastructure development, and economic integration programs that are advantageous to all of the region's states.

The Taliban, the Afghan government, and other interested parties can benefit from the facilitation of talks and engagement by regional powers like China and Iran. Their diplomatic efforts can foster peaceful dispute resolution, trust-building, and difference-bridging. Afghanistan related issues may be discussed and cooperatively worked on regional platforms such as the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The Afghanistan to advance human rights, decent governance, and the rule of law, cooperation with its neighbors is crucial. Regional players have the ability to encourage the Taliban and other Afghan factions to uphold interstate norms and standards and protect human rights, particularly the rights of minorities and women. Effective diplomatic pressure, engagement, and support for Afghan civil society and democratic institutions are necessary to achieve.

The Taliban problem and advancing peace in Afghanistan and the surrounding area depend heavily on regional cooperation with neighbors like China and Iran. Regional stakeholders may help ensure that Afghanistan and the whole region have a more safe, stable, and prosperous future by cooperating to manage borders, support refugees, combat terrorism, promote economic growth, and protect human rights (Hanif, Butt, & Ashraf, 2021).

### **Role of the Taliban**

The region is affected by the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan. Pakistan is in a unique position because of its historical ties to the Taliban. A careful balance must be struck when interacting with the Taliban to promote stability, taking into account the expectations and concerns of other countries. In the context of the Afghan government, collaboration with adjacent states like China and Iran is crucial due to the interdependent structure of regional geopolitics.

The security of neighboring states is directly impacted by the stability of Afghanistan. Counterterrorism, avoiding the return of extremist organizations like the Taliban, and resolving cross-border security challenges all need cooperation with China, Iran, and other regional countries. Coordinated border control strategies, cooperative intelligence sharing, and military collaboration may all aid in reducing security threats and advancing regional stability. The Afghanistan economic growth is correlated with the wealth of its surrounding states. Working together with China, Iran, and other regional allies can advance infrastructure development, commerce, and investment—all of which are critical for promoting stability and economic prosperity in the area. Projects for regional economic integration and initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) provide chances for cooperative and connected efforts that benefit both parties.

The humanitarian issues brought on by the flood of Afghan refugees must be addressed by the Afghan government and the governments of its neighboring states. To manage the refugee crisis in a way that is both ethical and sustainable, cooperative approaches to refugee aid, re-settlement, and repatriation are needed. To deliver humanitarian help and support, cooperation between donor governments, neighboring countries, and interstate organizations is required (Haidari, 2024).

The Promoting peace, stability, and conflict resolution in Afghanistan requires diplomatic cooperation with surrounding states like China and Iran. The Afghan government may help insurgent groups and other stakeholders engage in communication, negotiation, and reconciliation initiatives by using its connections with regional parties. Regional platforms for diplomatic communication



and collaboration on Afghanistan-related problems include the SCO and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The Work together on infrastructure development projects is essential to boosting regional integration, facilitating commerce, and enhancing connectivity. The Afghan government may collaborate with its neighbors, China and Iran included, to build energy pipelines, transportation networks, and other vital infrastructure projects that would benefit the whole region. Collaborative investment and development programs have the potential to boost regional stability, generate jobs, and accelerate economic progress. The natural resources of Afghanistan, such as energy, water, and minerals, have the potential to support regional cooperation and development. Water-sharing agreements and energy cooperation initiatives are two examples of collaborative methods to resource management that can assist handle regional resource constraints and achieve mutual benefits. The Afghan government should establish contact with its neighbors to investigate joint venture and sustainable resource utilization prospects.

The Fostering people-to-people and cultural contacts with surrounding states promotes goodwill, mutual understanding, and trust. To improve relations and encourage regional cooperation, the Afghan government might support exchanges in education, culture, and tourism. These interactions support the development of social cohesiveness, bridges across groups, and a feeling of shared destiny.

To solve common issues and advance regional stability, the Afghan government must work in tandem with neighbors such as China and Iran. Regional stakeholders can help ensure that Afghanistan and the entire region have a more secure, prosperous, and connected future by cooperating on issues related to infrastructure development, resource management, economic development, refugee crisis management, diplomatic engagement, infrastructure development, and cultural exchanges (Roghani & Naseer, 2021).

### **Economic Opportunities**

There is room for more economic collaboration despite security concerns. Both states should look towards forming trade relationships, particularly considering Afghanistan's strategic location as a commerce corridor. Projects to connect the two countries' infrastructure could promote economic growth. Despite the difficulties, there could be a lot of economic potential in Pakistan-Afghan relations after the NATO withdrawal. These are the main fields of economic cooperation and prospects that both states can investigate.

Increased bilateral trade presents a significant chance. Pakistani exporters benefit from Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan for imports of consumer goods, medicine, and food. On the other hand, Pakistan can purchase minerals, carpets, and dry fruits from Afghanistan. By serving as an intermediary for Afghan commodities traveling to foreign markets, Pakistan stands to gain economically. In this context, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) is essential because it offers a legal framework for trade with the rest of the world via Pakistan. Joint infrastructure initiatives can improve trade effectiveness. Enhancing border infrastructure, transportation systems, and customs procedures can greatly lower trade obstacles and expenses, which is advantageous for both economies (Hanif, 2018).

Collaborative energy initiatives can benefit both parties. One well-known example is the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, which aims to transfer natural gas from Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. When such projects are completed successfully, both countries stand to gain economically and in terms of energy security.

Pakistani investors in fields including mining, agriculture, and construction may be drawn to Afghanistan if the country is stable. On the other hand, Pakistan's varied economy, which includes real estate, retail, and manufacturing, may present prospects for Afghan investors. SEZ establishments along the border can draw in business and generate employment. These areas can



serve as centers for processing, manufacturing, and logistics since they are ideally situated between South and Central Asia. Collaborative farming initiatives can increase job opportunities and food security. Agricultural productivity can be increased in both countries by exchanging technology and knowledge about livestock, irrigation, and crop management.

The abundance of rare earth elements, copper, lithium, and other mineral resources in Afghanistan offers several promising prospects. Projects involving cooperative extraction and processing can be successful if Pakistan contributes funding and technical know-how. Including Afghanistan in the CPEC can improve connectivity within the area. Pakistan can increase its geopolitical and economic clout, while Afghanistan can gain from enhanced infrastructure and access to Chinese markets. Pakistan may be able to reach Central Asian markets through Afghanistan. Infrastructure and relationship improvements can open trade channels between Pakistan and resource-rich Central Asia, increasing Pakistan's economic potential (Alam, 2014). Working together in the fields of education and vocational training can produce a skilled labor force that is advantageous to both economies. In addition to addressing labor shortages, lawful labor migration facilitation can create job possibilities. In addition to bringing in money, tourism promotion helps strengthen interpersonal ties. Strong historical and cultural linkages have a lot of potential for tourism, and efforts to maintain security and building restructure will make the area more appealing (Monsutti, 2008).

### **Regional Cooperation**

In light of the interdependent structure of regional geopolitics, collaboration with other adjacent states, like China and Iran, becomes imperative. Working together can solve shared problems and promote stability. In the post-NATO withdrawal era, regional cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan has the potential to significantly improve stability and prosperity in South and Central Asia. A few crucial aspects help to understand this cooperation Improved cooperation is essential when it comes to security issues.

Terrorist organizations that operate over the border pose a threat to both countries. Cross-border insurgencies can be lessened, and regional security can be enhanced by cooperative border patrols, intelligence sharing, and coordinated counterterrorism operations. Multilateral security cooperation can be facilitated by participating in regional forums like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). These forums facilitate the exchange of ideas regarding shared security issues and the creation of group tactics.

To increase bilateral trade, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) should be strengthened, and new trade agreements should be investigated. Regional trade flows can also be improved by incorporating Afghanistan into bigger trade networks like the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). Infrastructure initiatives that involve collaboration, such as border facilities, railroads, and highways, can promote more efficient commerce and economic exchanges. Regional economic integration requires the establishment of effective logistical networks. Cooperation in managing shared water resources can prevent conflicts and ensure sustainable usage; developing transboundary water agreements and joint water management projects can benefit both states; and jointly developing energy initiatives, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline and the CASA-1000 electricity project, is essential. These projects can ensure energy security and create economic interdependence, fostering regional stability (Ali, 2021).

Building infrastructure to link Afghanistan and Pakistan with states in Central Asia may provide new economic routes. Regional trade can be greatly increased by initiatives like the Afghan Railway, which connects Pakistani ports with Central Asian regions. Resolving issues together and fostering trust need constant diplomatic involvement. Dialogue can be kept positive and open through working groups on different problems, high-level visits, and bilateral commissions.

Addressing more comprehensive regional challenges might be facilitated by actively engaging in regional organizations like SAARC and ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization). These forums offer chances for discussion and cooperation on social, security, and economic issues.

Tensions can be decreased, and humanitarian conditions can be improved by working together on refugee management. By working together to give refugees access to jobs, healthcare, and educational opportunities, the area may be stabilized. People-to-people relationships can be strengthened by supporting collaborative research projects, educational grants, and cultural exchange programs. These programs can lessen prejudice and promote tolerance among people (Ahmad, 2010).

### **Peace Process**

The stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in the best interests of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Long-term stability requires sustained diplomatic efforts and backing for an inclusive peace process. In order to foster peace and prosperity in the region, Pakistan and Afghanistan must cooperate on a variety of issues, have an honest conversation, and resolve past grievances while navigating these post-withdrawal dynamics. Fostering a constructive and productive partnership requires them to balance their interests in the face of changing geopolitical trends. Following NATO's withdrawal, the peace process in relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is intricate and multidimensional, impacted by regional factors, historical tensions, and security issues.

Due to disagreements over borders, the Durand Line problem, and claims of mutual support for militants, ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan have historically been tense. Current peace efforts are complicated by these ongoing difficulties. Both states are concerned about their security in light of the growth of the Taliban and other extremist organizations. The presence of ISISK horasan (ISIS-K), insurgency, and cross-border terrorism are serious dangers that must be addressed in the peace process (Ullah, Sulaiman, & Bukhari, 2023).

It is imperative that Pakistan and Afghanistan maintain diplomatic relations. Frequent high level gatherings, such as those between heads of state and foreign ministers, foster mutual confidence and address shared concerns. Facilitating peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government has been aided by Pakistan. Pakistan seeks to stabilize Afghanistan and lessen the repercussions that trickle down into its own region by arranging conferences and promoting communication. It is imperative to engage with regional powers such as China, Russia, Iran, and the Central Asian republics. There are opportunities for regional cooperation on security and economic challenges through platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

It is imperative that states like the United States and interstateal institutions like the United States get involved. Their assistance can be useful in settling conflicts, delivering aid to the needy, and making sure peace accords are carried out. To reduce cross-border militancy and maintain regional peace, increased security cooperation is necessary. This includes coordinated counterterrorism operations, intelligence sharing, and joint patrols. A few examples of efficient border management techniques are building barriers, checkpoints, and monitoring systems, which can help limit unauthorized cross-border travel and lessen insurgent activities (Nisar, Amin, & Asghar, 2023).

There is a peace dividend that comes from economic collaboration. Trade agreements, investment plans, and cooperative infrastructure projects can all lead to economic interdependence, which promotes stability and lessens the likelihood of conflict. It is essential to provide humanitarian relief, particularly to internally displaced people and refugees. To guarantee that impacted communities receive sufficient help, both states might work with interstateal organizations.

Long-term stability can be ensured in Afghanistan by promoting inclusive governance, where all political and ethnic groupings are represented. Pakistan may help with this by promoting cooperation and inclusivity in politics. The foundation for enduring peace can be laid by the mutual

understanding and trust that can be developed between the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan through cultural exchanges, educational initiatives, and social programs.

Interstateal organizations and reputable world leaders are examples of neutral third parties who can mediate conflicts and encourage communication while making sure that all sides feel heard and appreciated. Formal conflict resolution institutions, like regional peace councils or bilateral commissions, can be established to offer systematic means of addressing and resolving problems. It is essential to ensure that peace agreements are carried out by means of monitoring measures. Interstateal organizations and impartial observers may be useful in correcting infractions and ensuring compliance (Stobdan, 1999).

The Taliban is a major political and military power in Afghanistan that is indispensable. Stability in the region is impacted by their relationships with Pakistan and their influence over the Afghan government. After NATO withdrew, the Taliban became a more significant and intricate part of Pakistan-Afghan ties. The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been greatly impacted by the group's dominance over the country since August 2021. The salient features of this relationship.

Pakistan and the Taliban have been involved in each other's lives since the latter part of the 1990s. Pakistan was among the few states to formally recognize the Taliban government during the Afghan Civil War and the first wave of Taliban rule (1996–2001). Historically, Pakistan has seen the Taliban as a tactical tool to protect its western border and resist Indian dominance in Afghanistan. This has given rise to allegations that Pakistan is sheltering and supporting elements of the Taliban. The geopolitical environment was altered by the swift withdrawal of NATO soldiers and the Taliban's conquest of Kabul. Pakistan has approached the new Taliban leadership with caution, seeking to strike a balance between its historical obligations and the need for peace in the region.

The security issues faced by Pakistan have been made worse by the presence of Taliban fighters on both sides of the border. Islamabad is concerned that the revival of the Taliban may give the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) and other extremist organizations operating in Pakistan more confidence. Pakistan continues to deal with the Taliban regime pragmatically, even if it has not recognized them officially. Islamabad wants a cooperative and stable Kabul government that can reduce cross-border violence and guarantee regional security. In the peace negotiations between the Taliban and other Afghan factions, Pakistan has acted as a mediator. Pakistan seeks to advance political stability and inclusivity in Afghanistan through fostering discussion. Pakistan keeps up trading with Afghanistan despite the political unrest. Considering Afghanistan's economic collapse and ongoing humanitarian difficulties brought on by Taliban rule, both economic and humanitarian help are vital (Kousar, Magsi, & Charan, 2023).

Since the Taliban took power, Pakistan has seen an upsurge in the number of Afghan migrants applying for asylum. Pakistan faces tremendous difficulty managing the refugee inflow while maintaining security and offering humanitarian assistance. It is believed that regional stability depends on an Afghanistan that is stable under the Taliban. To maintain secure borders and stop the spread of terrorism, Pakistan supports a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.

Pakistan is under pressure from abroad to make sure the Taliban regime respects human rights, particularly those of women, and keeps Afghanistan from turning into a safe haven for foreign terrorist organizations. It is essential to work together to resist terrorism. Both states must work together to share intelligence and coordinate military operations against terrorist organizations that operate along their borders. To restrict militant movement and stop cross-border attacks, effective border management is essential. Building walls, setting up checkpoints, and improving monitoring are among of the initiatives. The difficulty comes from the several groups within the Taliban, including moderates and hardliners. The stability of the region and bilateral relations may be impacted by Pakistan's capacity to influence or interact with various factions. Opportunities for both



countries are presented by economic cooperation. Collaborative efforts in the fields of energy, trade, and infrastructure can promote economic growth and interdependence while also promoting stability (Rais, 2019).

### **Afghan Government**

An important factor in determining how Afghanistan and Pakistan interact is the official Afghan government. Stability in the region depends on diplomatic engagement and collaboration on security-related matters. The nature of the Afghan government, which the Taliban have controlled since NATO withdrew, has a big influence on relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Historical ties, security concerns, economic factors, and regional dynamics all influence this relationship.

Afghanistan had several governments before the Taliban took back control in 2021, and their ties with Pakistan fluctuated. Because of mutual accusations of supporting militants and meddling in one another's personal matters, these relationships were frequently strained. Pakistan was one of the few states to recognize the Taliban's administration during their first term in power (1996–2001). Even if the situation has drastically changed, these historical connections nevertheless have an impact on current dynamics.

Although it interacts with the Taliban-led Afghan government in a practical manner, Pakistan as not formally recognized it. This involvement entails discussions and agreements on diplomatic and commercial issues. Pakistan has pushed for an inclusive Afghan administration that includes members of every racial and political group. Pakistan needs stability in Afghanistan to stop extremism and war from spreading.

Pakistan-Afghanistan's Durand Line border is still a major source of security concerns. To stop the flow of refugees and terrorists, both states must control this porous border. Pakistan looks to the Taliban for assistance in fighting organizations like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is a serious threat to its security. For the stability of the region, effective collaboration in counterterrorism activities is crucial. (Karamat, Muzaffar, & Shah, 2019).



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The economy of Afghanistan is largely dependent on trade routes that pass via Pakistan. Improving other trade agreements, such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), can increase interdependence and economic activity. Pakistan supplies Afghanistan with humanitarian aid, attending to its immediate needs for food, housing, and health care. Another



important factor for Afghanistan's economic stability is long-term investment and development initiatives. Millions of Afghans have fled to Pakistan, and a fresh wave has arrived since the Taliban's return. Managing these refugees entails tackling security and economic issues in addition to offering humanitarian aid.

To promote stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan pushes for regional collaboration with states like China, Russia, and Iran. In this regional interaction, platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are important. Afghanistan's connectivity and economic development can be improved by incorporating it into regional infrastructural and economic initiatives like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan participates in interstate initiatives to help the Taliban government become more widely recognized, if they uphold their pledges to combat terrorism and respect human rights. Reconstruction in Afghanistan requires the assistance and support of other countries.

The Taliban's record on human rights, particularly regarding the protection of women's rights and minorities' rights, worries the interstate community, including Pakistan. Pakistan strikes a balance between promoting changes in human rights and engaging diplomatically. The Taliban government is made up of multiple factions with varying ideologies; it is not a single entity. These domestic issues may impact Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban, which may have an impact on cooperation and stability. Collaborative economic endeavors, such as trade facilitation, energy cooperation, and infrastructure initiatives, offer prospects for enhancing connections and promoting reciprocal economic development (Idrees, Rehman, & Naazer, 2019).

Pakistan is a significant participant because of its close vicinity to Afghanistan and its historical connections with it. Its actions have a major impact on the regional landscape, including border management, diplomatic endeavor, and counterterrorism efforts. Pakistan has a significant and complex role in determining the dynamics of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan after NATO withdrawal. This role, which reflects Pakistan's strategic interests and regional objectives, includes political, security, economic, and humanitarian components.

One major security concern is the porous Durand Line that separates Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan has stepped up its attempts to manage refugee flows and stop militant movement by building checkpoints, fencing the border, and improving monitoring. Pakistan aims to work with the Afghan government, which is governed by the Taliban, to counter extremist organizations such as ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). To lessen these risks, concerted military operations and cooperative intelligence sharing are crucial. Pakistan's internal security is directly impacted by Afghanistan's stability.

To maintain regional peace, an effective and cooperative Afghan government is required, as an unstable Afghanistan might provide a haven for insurgent actions against Pakistan. Pakistan keeps its relations with the Taliban administration realistic by striking a balance between the necessity for regional stability and historical ties. This covers discussions on security issues, diplomatic encounters, and support for an inclusive Afghan government. Pakistan has served as a mediator in peace negotiations between the Taliban and other Afghan forces in an effort to advance political stability and inclusivity. To promoting communication and settling disputes, Islamabad's mediation function is essential. Improving bilateral trade agreements, such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), can increase economic interdependence. The foundation of economic cooperation is lowering trade barriers and facilitating more efficient trading channels.

Collaborative infrastructure initiatives, including networks of roads and railroads, can boost commerce and connections. Regional trade can be improved by Pakistan's participation in projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) expansion into Afghanistan. Afghanistan receives a large amount of humanitarian aid from Pakistan, which takes care of its immediate needs

for food, shelter, and health. Given the ongoing humanitarian and economic challenges in Afghanistan, funding for humanitarian aid must continue. Millions of Afghan refugees are housed in Pakistan, and a fresh wave has arrived since the Taliban took charge.

Managing this group entails tackling the security and economic issues that come with sizable refugee communities, in addition to providing humanitarian relief. Pakistan's position in the interstateal community is to promote interstateal recognition and assistance for the Taliban government, subject to the latter's pledges to uphold human rights and combat terrorism. The rehabilitation of Afghanistan depends heavily on financial and humanitarian assistance from abroad. Pakistan is under pressure from abroad to make sure the Taliban regime respects human rights, particularly the rights of women and the protection of minorities. It is a hard undertaking to strike a balance between advocacy for improvements in human rights and diplomatic involvement.

Maintaining long-term peace in Afghanistan requires advancing an inclusive government framework that includes representatives from all political and ethnic groupings. Pakistan is in favor of programs that promote political collaboration and inclusivity. The Taliban government is made up of different ideologically aligned factions. The stability of the region and bilateral ties may be impacted by Pakistan's capacity to interact with these groups and shape internal dynamics. Collaborative economic endeavors such as trade facilitation, energy cooperation, and infrastructure development offer substantial prospects for fortifying bilateral relations and promoting reciprocal economic expansion (Qayum, Zaman, & Shah, 2018).

## Conclusion

Pak-Afghan relations have changed as a result of NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Although political unrest, border disputes, and security worries have strained ties, there is still hope for increased regional peace and economic collaboration. Afghanistan's recovery depends heavily on Pakistan, especially in the areas of trade, security, and diplomacy. But progress is still hampered by internal strife and historical mistrust. Pakistan is best served by a lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, and in order to forge a closer and more secure partnership, both countries must place a high value on communication, mutual trust, and cooperation.

## Recommendations

- Establishing frequent high-level gatherings to discuss important topics between military and political leadership.
- Strengthening border security measures through reciprocal agreements to stop smuggling and cross-border terrorism.
- Making commerce easier by lowering tariffs, enhancing infrastructure, and putting in place effective customs processes.
- Increasing security cooperation and intelligence sharing to counter militant threats to both countries.
- Creating a unified strategy for Afghan refugees in Pakistan that includes plans for integration and voluntary repatriation.
- Promoting cultural endeavours, academic cooperation, and student scholarships in order to strengthen interpersonal relationships.
- Growing infrastructure initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to incorporate Afghanistan into regional economic networks.
- To avoid future disputes, cooperative agreements on shared water resources should be established.
- Working with foreign partners to provide Afghanistan with developmental and humanitarian aid.
- Without intervening directly, supporting peace talks between various Afghan factions to guarantee

long-term political stability.

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