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Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations Since 9/11 Security, Foreign Policy, and Regional Dynamics

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a complex and historically layered relationship shaped by strategic, political, cultural, and economic principles. Under general Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan experienced noteworthy transformations. Scrutiny of global events such as 9/11 and the U.S.-led War on Terror were significant and shaped Afghan foreign policy. Civilian administrations continued to maneuver the contentious policymaking environment. Civilian administrations continued to address the Taliban insurgency, trans-border terrorism, and a web of trade and strategic issues. This article reviews the foreign policy of Musharraf, the Afghani Taliban, the PPP government, and Pakistan's primary interests, encompassing geopolitical, economic, and national interests, while engaging in a multitude of stake holder issues and assessing the impact on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and on Afghanistan's trade.

Keywords: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Musharraf, PPP Government, Taliban, FATA, Haqqani Network, CPEC, Regional Security, Trade, Geopolitics

Historical Background

Pak-Afghan relations have changed over time. In the beginning, there were some situations due to which the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan became very bad; the main reason was the Durand Line. During the Cold War, the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan became deteriorated. There were two blocs, one led by America and the other by Russia. This greatly affected relations at the international level ^[1]. During the Cold War, Pakistan supported the capitalist block of the American, which greatly affected Pakistan relations with Afghanistan. In the beginning, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were not very tense and somehow stable to some extent. It was the first priority of the Pakistan that there must be a stable government in Afghanistan which favors the Pakistan policy. When Russia attacked Afghanistan, Pakistan changed its policy and adopted a policy that was in favor of America. America and Russia were



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

antagonistic to each other and the main effort of both was to harm each other as much as possible ^[2]. The US tried to make Afghanistan a minefield to defeat Russia. The US tried its best to defeat Russia in Afghanistan. In order to defeat Russia in Afghanistan, America chose Pakistan and gave full support to Pakistan so that Pakistan should get together with America. When America chose Pakistan, America first gave aid to Pakistan to create a jihadist group ^[3]. The training camps were organized in Pakistan and they were given the advanced weapons with the help of money and support of the gulf countries, UK and others. Taliban came into power in 1996 and were replaced by the America in 2001. The situation becomes worse when the America replaced them. It greatly affected the Pak-Afghans relation when the Pakistan provided the basis to the America. Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the Afghanistan as it was very difficult for the America to control the Afghanistan. The new American President Joe Biden continues with the Donald Trump's policy and decided to withdraw the America troops from Afghanistan, especially before the 20th Anniversary of 9/11 ^[4].

Pak-Afghan Foreign Policy During Musharraf Reign

The events occurring worldwide post-911 influenced Pakistan foreign policy relations with its neighbors in particular Afghanistan during General Pervez Musharraf. Pakistan had friendly relations with the Taliban regime initially considering it an ally in acquiring new geography and influence on the continent. But with the entrance of the World Super Power Pakistan ally Taliban regime it had to change to a new policy of supporting the US led War on Terror although with the desire to keep some influence in Afghanistan ^[5]. Moreover, the strategic vision of the military during the entire period Musharraf was in power was subcontinent geopolitics. After much of the diplomatic channels had been exhausted to maintain some degree of influence in the Afghan region, Pakistan military integrated with the Taliban and continued to influence some of the domes Taliban factions. A result of this Pakistan was some degree of control the Talibans. This in turn resulted in relations with the Afghanistan government to reach an impasse with Pakistan ^[6].

PPP Government (2008–2013)

The complex Pak-Afghan situation was inherited from the preceding government and the PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and President Asif Ali Zardari and the PPP Government continued with the same phenomena of assisting the US Terrorism. The PPP continued with Pak-Afghan positive engagement, but as with the Zardari Government, as opposed to the Musharraf era, the Taliban factions were central to PPP's purported imitative in policy. The PPP continued with stating that all factions that threaten Pakistan's security and collusively support peace and stability at the regional level would be engaged ^[7].

The PPP advocated for the use of diplomacy while concurrently attempting to minimize military engagement by encouraging negotiations with Afghanistan. The development of economic collaboration and trade was emphasized as a primary mechanism for stabilizing the region. Nonetheless, the occurrence of security incidents on both sides of the border created tensions and restricted the impact of these solely diplomatic efforts ^[8].

Good Taliban

Under Musharraf's administration, "good Taliban" were those groups who did not pose a threat to Pakistan and who, in line with Pakistan's interests, were geopolitical allies during the Soviet-Afghan war. Support for these groups was often provided clandestinely



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

to retain control in Afghanistan and counter the interests of the Soviet Union and India.

The good Taliban were seen as an effective mechanism for controlling border areas and managing competing militant factions. While Pakistan's support for such groups had and continues to have an international backlash for allowing some of them to operate unregulated out of Afghanistan, Pakistan considers them as a means to have some control over Afghanistan politics in order to have strategic depth [9].

Bad Taliban

In contrast to good Taliban, "bad Taliban" were considered to be those insurgent groups that were either anti-Pakistan or were in collaboration against the US's objectives. The military operations conducted during Musharraf's era were targeted against these groups, and then the PPP government expanded the operations to encompass all of the Taliban groups in order to have all inclusive counter-terrorism efforts.

Bad Taliban were responsible for numerous attacks on Pakistani soil, including in major cities and military installations. Their operations undermined the region's security and provoked cross-border tensions. Pakistan's counterinsurgency campaigns targeted them with both military force and intelligence-driven operations to restore stability [10].

Absence of Political Parties in FATA

The absence of politically and socially representative bodies for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) has certainly contributed to a lack of political consciousness and a relative absence of governing structures; however, the political and social void of the region is also a degree of control and encompassed by the national state of Pakistan through a perceived political and social dependence on the governmental structures of Pakistan [11]. The political and social void also allowed militant organizations to enter the region and it also provided these organizations a degree of control over the political and social structures in the region. The political and social control that these organizations gained over the region provided a degree of difficulty for the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan in managing cross-border militancy and managing security in the region [12].

Without the presence of political institutions, there was no social or economic development, resulting in discontent among the residents. These discontented individuals were targeted by militants to establish credibility in the eyes of potential recruits. Pakistan then, for the first time, started the reforms needed to politically integrate and govern FATA through the merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa [13].

Jalaluddin Haqqani Group

The Jalaluddin Haqqani network was a militant group operating from Waziristan who was a key player in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border conflicts. Although the network first gained support in the Soviet-Afghan War because of their contributions and support of the Afghan insurgents, they later became a key logistical center and supporter of insurgents. In later years, the threats and attacks posed by the network became problematic and drew the ire of NATO and other governmental institutions in Afghanistan. This also drew the ire of and complicated foreign relations in Pakistan [14].

The Haqqani networks ties to other militant groups in the area further complicated security in the area. The formation of the Pakistan military and the operations in the area of Waziristan were to keep influence of this network to a minimum while also keeping their strategic interest.



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Geo-Strategic Location of Waziristan

The Waziristan region lies along the Kurram and Gomel rivers and borders the Paktia and Paktika provinces of Afghanistan. Here, Afghani and Pakistani troops faced one another and placed Waziristan in a position of great military significance. This mountainous and tribal region offered safe haven for insurgent groups and allowed them to conduct military activities across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Waziristan had to be controlled by both Afghanistan and Pakistan simultaneously to defend from the operational and tactical insurgent threats of the region, which made the Waziristan crisis a paradox. This region offered insurgent groups a safe haven in which to evade all military action against them for extended periods ^[15].

Pakistan and Afghanistan: Joint Fight Against Militancy

The administration of former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi also encouraged joint efforts with Afghanistan in the war on terrorism and sought joint action against the Taliban who were on the rise. Integration of military action and intelligence cooperation was hoped to preclude the imposition of the soft corner discourse on Pakistan in regard to terrorism and create peace in the region ^[16].

While joint operations could occasionally be hampered by mutual distrust and competition in strategic priorities, both governments understood that cooperation was necessary for effective management of cross-border attacks. Cooperation with international entities, especially the United States, further enhanced the collaboration in counterterrorism ^[17].

Regional Understanding

Pakistan has been trying to elicit regional collaboration to mitigate all forms of security threats including cross-border terrorism and insurgency. Pakistan has also taken a more diplomatic approach trying to ease tension with the neighbors and strengthening Afghanistan's governance and institutional capacities to ensure a cohesive and stable diplomatic environment. Pakistan's understanding of the region also encompassed the Central Asian states to promote trade and energy projects. In trying to foster regional peace and integration, Pakistan has rightly understood the importance of promoting trade and utilizing multi-lateral platforms to ease tensions and resolve disputes economically and diplomatically which Pakistan rightly perceives as a way to foster trade and utilize multi-lateral platforms to ease tensions and resolve disputes economically and diplomatically ^[18].

Collision Supply Routes

Pakistan facilitated trade routes to provide the US and NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan with the military equipment they needed. Although the US and NATO had military protection at their bases in Afghanistan, the routes and bases were not secure and were often ambushed by Taliban and militant factions within Pakistan. This highlighted the fact that Pakistan is a transit country, the security issues resulting from militant attacks, and the need for operational control by Pakistan. Supplementing Pakistan trade routes with NATO Afghanistan military protection is a classic case of trade and security interdependence ^[19]. It is in Pakistan's interest to secure trade routes from attacks. Long-standing military and economic pressures from the US and NATO provide the incentive for Pakistan to secure military protection of trade routes. Most of the military protection is required to protect supply routes within Afghanistan from being ambushed by Taliban factions. Protection of trade routes is the military obligation of Pakistan with fewer US



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

and NATO economic constraints applied to trade routes ^[20].

10. Trade Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan have a long history of commercial exchange. The Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) granted Afghan merchants 19 duty-free privileges, promoting Afghanistan's construction and the mutual economic co-relation.

The economic relation strengthened the political ties even more. Trade relations have been put under the lense of Afghanistan trade imbalances and economic security. Therefore, Pakistan has put in a significant amount of effort in promoting commerce streamline Afghan access to numerous markets ^[21].

Pipelines (TAPI Project)

Regional geopolitics and policy related to the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline continue to highlight Afghanistan's potential as a transit trade and energy hub, though recent geopolitical shifts and security risks have hindered progress.

For the sake of the development and stability of a region, cooperating on the energy front is essential. Projects involving the construction of pipelines offer all interested parties the opportunity to earn money and incentivize them to avoid conflicts. The delays experienced by TAPI exemplified the region's ongoing security and political issues.

Agreement to Resume Talks with Pakistan

Diplomatic discussions highlighted the need to renew talks, improve commerce, and strategize together against terrorism. These discussions were vital to securing peace and fostering development ^[22].

Routine dialogue assisted in mitigating ambiguities and tensions. Both parties understood that an increase in the commerce of nations would enhance security complemented by policy economics. Ongoing talks enabled the formulation of policies regarding border control and trade to be advantageous to both parties involved ^[23].

Attack on Indian Embassy in Afghanistan

The extent of the volatility posed by the militant attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul showcased the region's volatility and the need for security cooperation in the region. Militant attacks in the region posed a threat to security in Pakistan, which led to a condemnation of the attacks and security cooperation in the region to prevent militant attacks. The attack strengthened the need on the Afghanistan side to share security intelligence in a timely manner. Also, the attack showcased the Indian interference in Afghan politics which further complicated the peripheral politics ^[23].

Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations after 2011

Everyone knows the level of Pakistan's international credibility and the implications of the operation against Osama bin Laden in 2011 on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Not only did the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations become even more tenuous because of the accusations against Pakistan of harboring militant leaders, but this event also caused the need for Pakistan to alter its Afghanistan relations policies to find some level of equilibrium among its strategic counter-terrorism interests.

After 2011, there was a marked increase in the military operations Pakistan had in the tribal regions. The aim was the boying and the addressing of the militant safe and secure areas. Diplomatic operations tried to rebuild trust toward Kabul. The regional players including the US and China have requested Pakistan to have continued operations in order to preserve and to have overall stability ^[24].



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Pakistan's National Interest in Afghanistan

Geo-Economic Interest

Afghanistan opens the door to markets in Central Asia. For CPEC and other trade and connectivity initiatives that integrate Pakistan into the economy of the region, the Afghanistan trade route is of particular importance because of the CPEC integration. An economic corridor running through Afghanistan would benefit Pakistan and also enhance economic development throughout the region. With Afghanistan and stability, there is the opportunity for economic growth ^[25].

Cultural Interest

Having mutual bond with each other cross border, most Pashtuns share ethnic, linguistic, and cultural relations, and this can promote interaction and cooperation. Reducing suspicion and strengthening interpersonal relations as a result of cultural connections are helpful in relation bilateral strengthening via educational and cultural changes, and this mutual interaction as well as the degree of perception of cultural sensitivities are primary factors in attaining long-standing peace.

Political Interest

A prosperous Afghanistan mitigates risks emanating from the hostile regimes and militancy on Afghanistan's western border which provides security and enhances Afghanistan's regional stability and influence.

In the case of Afghanistan's political stability, Pakistan would be able to concentrate on internal development and, perhaps more importantly, would be able to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a base for anti-Pakistan undertakings. The control of Kabul is, therefore, a major aspect of Pakistan's regional strategy ^[26].

Multi-Stakeholder Environment and Clashing Interests

India, the US, China, and Russia affect Afghanistan to varying degrees. Competing priorities pertaining to Afghanistan require Pakistan to manage its relationships in an even more calculated manner to protect its national interests, especially concerning peacebuilding.

Involvement from these actors can lead to escalated violence and/or longstanding conflicts, and it is in Pakistan's interest to act as a facilitator so that its strategic objectives are preserved. In this environment, Pakistan must balance the interests of diplomacy with the reality of potential violence ^[27].

CPEC as a Strategic Consideration

CPEC has also espoused a growing interest in regional stability for Pakistan. Without Afghanistan's security, Pakistan cannot gain access to Central Asia and trade freely. Pakistan also needs to remove any threats to CPEC from insurgencies or regional rivalries.

CPEC also has a potential to provide economic incentives for neighboring countries to sustain conciliatory relations. The CPEC's infrastructure needs to be protected and, therefore, security partnerships and intel sharing is necessary. The corridor provides economic potential and political power for Pakistan ^[28].

Pakistan's Key Interests in Afghanistan

Pakistan wants to keep a friendly government and secure trade and energy routes, while also countering cross-border terrorism and protecting its geostrategic depth in the region. These aims have always shaped Pakistan's approach and relations with Afghanistan



Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

concerning an intricate balance of peace, trade, and diplomacy.

Maintaining Afghanistan's status as either neutral or an amicable neighbor is fundamental to Pakistan's defense strategy. Regional security is directly connected to trade, energy, and infrastructure activities. With the prospect of achieving a stable environment that allows for shared development and prosperity, Pakistan seeks long-term engagement ^[29].

Conclusion:

Of all the relationships Pakistan has, the one with Afghanistan is the most sensitive one owing to the combination of the the three factors of history, politics, and strategy. Throughout the term of Musharraf and the PPP rule, Pakistan foreign policy has had to confront problems related to the Afghanistan and counter-terrorism policy due to the influence of the global powers and the instability of the Afghanistan region. The addition of the many other players such as the US, India, China,""" and other terrorist groups spawn to the problems with their rival aspirations to affect the region. Pakistan Afghanistan relations and trade relations in energy. These interests are evident in the Afghanistan. The CPEC, China Pakistan economic Corridor has even more placed on the Pakistan's Afghanistan relations. Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations have been stabilized by diplomacy Afghanistan's economy with trade, however, foreign policy, counter-terrorism, trade relations, and supported relations, seclusion and militant groups have ruined Afghanistan relations. In the Afghanistan. In order to have the region and the stakeholders in the region of the negative. Pakistan has to maintain this approach combining security with diplomacy, economic and cultural collaboration, to allow both countries to embark on a more stable, integrated and prosperous future. The experience from previous policies is evident and highlights the value of integrating cooperative policies, mutual confidence, and strategic vision to build a more stable South Asia.

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Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

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