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### PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON DIPLOMACY, SECURITY, AND REGIONAL DYNAMICS

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#### ABSTRACT

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a complex and intertwined history, shaped by geographical proximity, ethnic ties, and geopolitical interests. This article examines Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, focusing on the historical context, diplomatic engagements, security challenges, and regional dynamics that have defined their relationship. From the Soviet-Afghan War to the post-9/11 era, Pakistan's foreign policy has been deeply influenced by its strategic interests in Afghanistan, particularly its desire for a friendly regime to counterbalance Indian influence. The Durand Line, a contentious border drawn during colonial rule, remains a source of tension, exacerbated by cross-border militancy, refugee crises, and economic instability. The article also explores the impact of U.S. policies, the role of regional players like China and India, and the potential for economic cooperation through initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Despite efforts to foster bilateral dialogue and regional stability, persistent mistrust and unresolved grievances continue to hinder progress. The study concludes that a collaborative approach, addressing shared concerns such as terrorism, economic development, and cultural ties, is essential for lasting peace and stability in the region. By analyzing historical events and contemporary challenges, this article highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations to inform future policy decisions.

**Keywords:** Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, Durand Line, Soviet-Afghan War, regional security, CPEC, U.S. foreign policy, cross-border militancy, diplomatic engagement, historical context, economic cooperation.

#### Introduction

The two nations share a profound connection, woven together by a rich tapestry of historical events, intertwined belief systems, geographical realities, and contrasting preferences regarding their landscapes, all framed by a longstanding boundary that shapes their mutual rapport. President Ashraf Ghani has notably referred to this border as one rooted in acceptance, advocating for a partnership rather than antagonism. He has stressed the importance of cultivating a shared narrative, which could foster deeper comprehension and

collaboration between the nations. For the sake of regional stability, it is imperative that these countries unite to initiate a fresh chapter in their historical relationship. Both have distinct desires and aspirations, making it essential to ensure that Afghanistan is not used in ways harmful to Pakistan, nor should India capitalize on Afghanistan's position to undermine Pakistan's interests. A possible solution could involve a trade route model like the India-Iran-Afghanistan collaboration, coupled with partnerships involving nations such as Russia and Turkey, which could help balance the strategic needs that influence regional dynamics (Bhat and Rajeshwari2022). Genuine stability can only be achieved by addressing the shared concerns that afflict the locality. The ongoing battle against a deteriorating economic situation, the imminent threat of civil unrest, escalating sectarian conflict, and the increasing refugee crisis all highlight the urgent need for collective action. Such assurances indicate that a cohesive strategy may offer avenues to mitigate the challenges faced by this region.

Looking from Kabul, it is evident that the region of Baluchistan, distinct from Pakistan's Punjab province, plays a significant role as an influx point for radical Pashtun militants. These individuals not only provide a steady supply of fighters but also serve as leaders and create an essential support base for the Taliban's activities in key provinces such as Nangarhar, Kunar, and Nuristan within Afghanistan. It is critical to note that Pakistan is home to the world's largest population of Pashtuns, and there are substantial numbers of these communities present in Afghanistan as well. This demographic reality helps to explain the broad consensus that long-term sustainable peace can only be achieved through some form of reconciliation among all citizens, or more specifically, intra-Pashtun reconciliation in the context of Afghanistan. Historical attempts at diplomatic engagement with the Taliban have been made; however, these efforts ended in failure, culminating in the single most devastating assault on the nation's armed forces that has ever been recorded in their history. If there were to be peace negotiations aimed at concluding the nearly two-decade-long conflict in Afghanistan this time around, such discussions would inevitably coincide with a continuing decline in diplomatic relations with Kabul (Din et al., 2023). Thus, the stark reality remains: there is no possibility of a peaceful or stable future for Afghanistan or its neighboring countries if the pursuit of peace is abandoned in favor of a military victory. This situation demands a serious reevaluation of the strategies employed in seeking a resolution to ongoing conflicts.

### **Historical Context**

World attention is once again focusing intently on the troubled and complex region that encompasses Afghanistan and Pakistan. This renewed interest comes despite consistent diplomatic and political engagement with both states since the early years of their existence. Notably, the efforts to foster lasting stability within one country have often been undertaken without fully considering the repercussions for its neighbor. Consequently, this approach has proven largely counterproductive. This analysis of the historical context regarding the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan highlights the significant and critical events that have profoundly shaped their interactions since both nations achieved independence. The research delves into how overlapping ethnic and tribal affiliations between the two countries have substantially weakened the effectiveness of the international borders that were drawn by

colonial powers after the nations gained independence (Müller-Crepon, 2024). Other vital considerations in this complex scenario include the ongoing effects of persistent refugee crises that have emerged over the years, the destabilizing issues stemming from competing religious and political ideologies, and the far-reaching consequences of foreign interventions that have taken place in both countries. The interplay of these factors continues to present challenges that complicate the path toward regional stability and peace.

A more in-depth understanding of the evolution of the national identities and changing political landscapes is needed to better inform the policies of the states on their border frontier. During periods of crisis, the states closely involved have suffered the consequences of the inner instability existing at the border and acted with the goal of defending themselves against the threat of spillover. However, such an approach does not necessarily allow a positive impact in neighboring countries to be achieved. The wrong approach could stir resentment in a neighboring country whose national dignity has long been undermined and fueled by unresolved territorial claims. During periods when efforts are made to develop interstate relations, old wounds may resurface while government efforts are seen as interference and non-recognition of the autonomous reign of affairs (Vaara et al.2021).

The Soviet Afghani War created immediate a new common agenda between Pakistan and the United States for the first time since George W. Bush visited the region. The government of Pakistan was closely supported by the successive US government from Carter onwards with respect to Afghanistan and it is in this regard that the following can be attributed the Pakistani-American alliance and the Pakistani "jihad" in Afghanistan. Diplomatic and covert support for growing resistance to the Soviet presence in Afghanistan went hand in hand with Pakistani operations that sought to further stabilize and control the Pashtun minority on the Afghan side of the border. United States military supplies to the federated areas were linked to the U-2 collaboration and it did not go unnoticed that these were later used to suppress the nationalist movement of Kabali Baluchi (Muzaffar et al.2021). This cooperation also included US attempts to deter Indian intervention to support the secession movements by colluding with Pakistan to cut additional funding and indirectly supporting the Khmer Rouge who took refuge in the northwestern border territories of present-day Baluchistan. As such, it is understandable that the USSR and India have always been highly critical of Islamabad's role throughout the Soviet-Afghan war. Alongside this support, however, were a number of later allegations, namely refusals by the Americans to fully meet their commitments to Afghan resistance, and an insistence that a key central government side of Kabul be excluded from negotiations to end Soviet withdrawal and avoid spillover of the war (Stephen Jackson, 2011).

### **Geopolitical Significance of Afghanistan**

The strategic geopolitical location of Afghanistan, positioned somewhere in the very center of the Asia map, carries significant and crucial implications for both regional and global politics, making it a critical player on the international stage. Afghanistan is a land-locked country that finds itself surrounded on all sides by historically conflict-ridden neighboring countries. However, this unique strategic location has enabled Afghanistan to serve as an essential land bridge between the subcontinent and the Central Asian states, transforming it into a vital focal

point for the ongoing regional power dynamics that shape the area (Rasool et al.2024). Because of these factors, the classic great game unfolded between the British and Romanov Empires, which persisted and continued into the latter half of the twentieth century with the significant emergence of both the United States and the Soviet Union as superpowers vying for influence in this strategically important region.

Lastly, the geographic location of Afghanistan has vital geopolitical implications for many countries, especially Pakistan and India, huddled along it. From a wider perspective, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other regional states, could act as the geographical juncture of the regional powers. From a geopolitical stand, the Pakistani establishment sees India's growing influence in Afghanistan as an acute security threat. Over the years there was a condescending civilizational attitude towards Afghanistan. First, Pakistan could not understand the complex, vibrant and diverse society of Afghanistan; at the core, they believe Afghanistan is just another backward and tribal society. This kind of geographic perception paved the way for complicated policy of strategic and selective support of whatever elements in Afghanistan for its regional extension. At the very best geo-politically, the bifurcated policy became outdated, when the well-entrenched Taliban Government in Afghanistan was toppled down after occupation by NATO forces in the aftermath of 9/11 tragedy for both the West and Pakistan (Jayasree Nath, 2019).

Second, the strategic interest of a stable, peaceful and neutral Afghanistan must be at the top of the foreign policy priorities of Pakistan. Instability in Afghanistan could wreak havoc in the entire regions. In terms of security, it poses not only considerable defense but also national security problems, such as the soft-belly syndrome of Pakistan. The volatility of Afghanistan could have deleterious security implications for Pakistan. Unstable Afghanistan provides an unfriendly platform and sanctuaries for anti- Pakistan militants. The consequences could be blowback of terrorism and an influx of arms and drugs across the porous border. Therefore, in the geopolitical hyphenated political arena of Afghanistan, it should be in Pakistan's self-interest to support the Afghans for the quick formula to stabilize the newly established governments (Fatima & Zafar, 2020). Third, Afghanistan could have the potential to become a preeminent bridge most and transit country due to its geographic location, thereby giving an economic boost to landlocked Pakistan and other Central Asian states.

### **Pakistan's Foreign Policy Objectives**

Pakistan attaches paramount importance to its foreign policy objectives concerning its immediate neighbor, Afghanistan, as these objectives are intertwined with Pakistan's national security. National security is the paramount goal and the primary consideration of Pakistan's foreign policy objectives, especially concerning an immediate neighbor such as Afghanistan. Balancing between diplomacy and national security objectives is a complex act, especially in the case under study, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The foreign policy of Pakistan is the continuation of the post-colonial struggle for economic stability, trade and other resources, after the British colonial departure. National security and economic stability have always been paramount in all regimes, either military or civilian. The financial restraints and worsening law and order have forced Pakistan to engage in economic diplomacy. The US drawdown and the

ever threatening India have forced the Pakistani establishment to seek alternatives for its old objectives concerning Afghanistan (Ali, 2022).

Pakistan has longstanding and multifaceted concerns about Afghanistan that stem from a variety of compelling factors. Primarily, as a smaller riparian state, it is deeply worried about its northern neighbor's potential control over the shared Indus River Basin's vital water resources, which are crucial for its agriculture and livelihood. Additionally, being uniquely surrounded by India on three sides, Pakistan has a strong desire to see a friendly, pro-Pakistan regime in Afghanistan, as this would help to avoid the risk of a two-front conflict that could severely threaten its national security (Ali, 2025). Historically, the British Empire placed immense value on the Torkham and Khyber passes, recognizing their strategic importance for access to both Afghan and Central Asian territories. These geographical and historical factors continue to inform Pakistan's "strategic depth" concept, which is critical to shaping its foreign policy toward Afghanistan. Economically, Pakistan's approach mirrors its post-colonial stance, focusing significantly on the development of Gwadar port to enhance regional trade, stimulate economic growth in underprivileged areas, and improve vital infrastructure that could benefit the entire region. Since the events of 9/11, Pakistan has faced the necessity to align its foreign policy objectives concerning Afghanistan with the broader political dynamics of the neighborhood, particularly in consideration of India and other regional dynamics that could influence its strategic posture and economic interests (khan et al., 2024).

### **Diplomatic Engagements**

Bilateral dialogues between Pakistan and Afghanistan conducted over the past several years have persistently aimed to address mutual concerns and enhance cooperation effectively. More often than not, diplomats representing both neighboring countries emerge from their meetings to reiterate a mutual commitment to peace, or at the very least, they express good intentions to engage on various pressing security matters. Externally mediated dialogues, as well as high-level visits, have proven to be significant and impactful in fostering understanding between the two nations. Moreover, initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) talks, which aim to promote dialogue, direct peace negotiations, and the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) play crucial roles in this ongoing relationship. Additionally, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stands out as a noteworthy element in the context of Pakistan's comprehensive diplomatic engagements with Afghanistan, highlighting the importance of regional connectivity and economic collaboration as key factors in promoting peace and stability (Paliwal, 2019).

Regardless of the varying intensity with which diplomacy has been pursued, nearly every such initiative has been aspired to foster substantive political peace and economic relation. However, seldom among either country's diplomats is there genuine confidence that past grievances have been resolved through diplomatic parlance. Above all trust the ingredient paramount to reviving derailed intentions. Afghan doubt that Pakistan's security threats to Afghanistan will not change persist and Pakistani officials rejoiner critique of Afghan border management and questions about the potential for either Afghan-led peace, or sustained dialogue. This persistent list of grievances belies the sentiment of recent Afghan and Pakistani

statesmen who have described their relations as rich in familial and historical ties (Schroden, 2021). This piece, thus, seeks to comprehensively reflect on the contoured linkage between the evolving nature of Pakistan-Afghanistan diplomatic ties and broader regional dynamics. It will endeavour to underscore the unique circumstances and recent initiatives that have attempted to draw progress in fostering better political and security ties within the gossamer yet changing regional environment. Above all, this piece aims to intimate the importance of continued dialogue and to chart the road ahead from both professedly distant neighbors.

### **Security Challenges**

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, stemming from Afghanistan's establishment in 1747, have been characterized by a multitude of complexities due to the deep-seated cultural and political ties that are shared by nearly half of Pakistan's population and a portion of the land that constitutes Afghan territory. The intricate border between these two nations is marked by the Durand Line, which stretches over an extensive distance of 2,430 kilometers. This line was unilaterally drawn by the British in 1889 without taking into account the perspectives and concerns of local Pashtuns, leading to longstanding tensions. Despite facing international pressure from various countries and organizations, Pakistan has been notably reluctant to extend regular laws and regulations to the Tribal Areas situated in close proximity to this contentious line. Historically, the movement of people and the flow of goods between both countries were largely unrestricted and informal until the tumultuous late 20th century (Asfahan et al., 2023).

During this period, extremist groups began to exploit this previously seamless freedom of movement, which resulted in significant economic losses as well as an alarming increase in insecurity for the region. In areas such as FATA and Waziristan, there has been a growing reaction among local tribal populations towards US drone strikes that frequently harm innocent civilians. The profound cultural bonds that exist among the Pashtun communities add another layer of complexity to the overarching issue of governance. Although there was a decrease in illegal activities following military operations around the years 2009-2010 and the advent of the 2000 Free Visa Act brought certain benefits to locals, the overarching authority of the government in these regions remains alarmingly weak and ineffective. Furthermore, the persistence of traditional tribal systems, coupled with unresolved territorial disputes regarding the Durand Line, continues to hinder the establishment of effective governance and peaceful resolution in this historically volatile area (Birchall et al., 2023).

Since the year 2003, the challenges encountered by the Pakistani Army in its attempts to effectively manage security within its borders have significantly multiplied. These challenges have become even more pronounced particularly because the army has received minimal support from the broader international community, largely due to its extensive focus on the ongoing and multifaceted war on terror. This prioritization on combatting terrorism has led to a myriad of complications, some unexpected, that further complicate the security landscape. Additionally, the persistent presence of pro-Taliban Afghan refugees at the border continues to aggravate local populations, significantly fueling the insurgency that plagues the region and exacerbating an already tense situation. The instability stemming from these issues holds the

potential to destabilize both nations involved, creating a scenario where mutual interests are threatened. Given these circumstances, it becomes crucial that both countries engage in cooperative efforts to effectively tackle the escalating complex challenges they face together. As the conditions around them continue to deteriorate and tensions rise, it becomes increasingly important for both states not only to understand but also to enhance their strategic collaboration. This partnership must be aimed at mitigating conflict and ensuring the prospect of lasting regional security, especially in an environment that is becoming increasingly volatile and unpredictable (Stephen Jackson, 2011).

### **Impact of U.S. Policies**

The analysis of Pakistan's closest neighbor, Afghanistan, and long-standing partnerships with the U.S. are of paramount importance. The intertwining destinies of the U.S., Afghanistan and Pakistan are legacies from the '80s and have had profound impacts on each other. To fully grasp the dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and of Pakistan's concerns and role in post-9/11 Afghanistan, it is necessary to begin with the historical context of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and of post-9/11 policies. This intervention and the subsequent circumstances are significant for various reasons. First, the Soviet Union's invasion and its implications shaped the constantly war-torn political-military landscape of Afghanistan and also had long-term impacts on U.S. policies. The U.S. partnered with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to fund the anti-Soviet Jihad, primarily through extremist groups. Second, the backlash from the weakening of U.S. support created a "security dilemma" for Pakistan. The overwhelmingly dominant predominance of Taliban in the late '90s (enjoying Pakistan's exclusive support) blew up into an escalating rivalry with the Northern Alliance and India, further shaping the strategies, incentives, and constraints of Pakistan's engagement with Afghanistan (Jalal, 2023)

Lastly, after the 1999 military coup by General Musharraf in Pakistan, U.S. sanctions were imposed until 9/11. Post-9/11, military and economic support from the U.S. has in part generated positive dynamics and in part further challenged and shaped Pakistan's policies. Besides proper implications, the collapse of American military power, withdrawal of troops, and regional implications call for re-thinking and re-making of policies. The recent ascendance of ISIS in the region highlights a new challenge and opportunity. While attempting to assess and analyze contemporary dynamics and the roles of external factors, the section critically considers the controversial implications and strategies of America's attempts regarding Afghan peace negotiation and historico-political fluctuation of U.S.-Pakistan relations or interests. Since U.S. foreign policy often determines regional dynamics, especially in South Asia and its far-reaching implications, what might generally affect reconciliatory or confrontational stances for Pakistan, this text also lists the broader significance and consequences for similar states. This heightened competition and confrontation across the continent with India and Pakistan, and especially within South Asia, raises concern and necessity for Pakistan to find a complicated balance in its foreign policy and delicate relations, especially with Afghanistan (Khan et al.2023).

### **Role of Regional Players**

This article aims at critically examining the intricate diplomacy that has characterized a tumultuous period in the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship since October 1992. Pakistan's role as a pivotal crossroads between West Asia, Central Asia and the subcontinent and post-Soviet Central Asia has assumed great significance (Rahman Tahiri, 2017). Islamabad has given new primacy to solidifying its alliance with Washington in the anti-Soviet conflict to the neglect of disorder and women in neighbouring Afghanistan with dire long term consequences. At no time in the rocky history of the two nations as sovereign states has there been such a high level of mutual distrust and distaste (Jayasree Nath, 2019). The 1990s have brought many foreign policy challenges for Pakistan. Perhaps the most ominous have been the prospects of settling the problem of Afghanistan, Pakistan's western neighbour. In this respect, Pakistan has been following a bivalent diplomatic policy. It faces the risk of Moscow maintaining its influence in Kabul which it eventually could exploit against Pakistan. This in particular pertains to suspected Russian intrigues in Central Asia on the viability of which Pakistan's war on Afghanistan depends. Islamabad's apprehensions about Russian plans in Central Asia were not deemed far-fetched.

Pakistan views economic cooperation as a crucial element in bolstering its security. The ability for Pakistan to establish a significant economic presence within the Central Asian states could effectively diminish the reliance on its traditional bridgehead argument. By doing so, it would allow Pakistan to promote its policy objectives more vigorously across Central Asia, fostering mutual understanding especially regarding the complex situation in Afghanistan. Additionally, it is posited that the security implications of Pakistan's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative hold considerable importance not only for Pakistan but also for Afghanistan, as it plays a critical role in managing the rise of defiant nationalist movements in Central Asia. The ongoing transformations within the country can be seen reflected, in particular, within the realm of diplomacy. This is evident in the examination of pertinent treaties and agreements, alongside the perspectives of influential personalities in the region. Furthermore, it is essential to analyze the ramifications of domestic events in key states, including instances of violent clashes, revolutionary movements, significant governmental shifts, and pressing economic and military concerns. These dynamics must also be understood in the context of relationships with more powerful nations, as they significantly shape and inevitably alter governmental policies in a profound manner (Khan, 2024).

### **Economic Cooperation and Development**

Stability in Afghanistan is generally seen as a strategic goal for Pakistan and the entire region. Economic cooperation is often cited as something that could help build longer-term and more durable relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and could provide a foundation more robust bilateral relations. With trade, energy, and infrastructure development as principal areas, Pakistan can potentially offer Afghanistan its key support. Trade collaboration between Afghanistan and Pakistan has increased significantly, though it faces potential resistance from some interest groups in both countries. A perennial challenge in expanding transit trade has concerned the level of smuggling (Zarawar et al.2024). Opportunities for hydroelectric power



transmission and completed transport infrastructure are other potential areas for investment in Afghanistan's natural resources.

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have shown interest in the economic development of the region and they would like to make full use of their available resources particularly in energy sector and to this effect they have already initiated many joint ventures. There is a perception in Pakistan that the main pre-requisite for achieving success in Afghanistan includes a joint regional approach and this joint regional approach can be made successful by exploiting the geostrategic location of Afghanistan. In order to bring economic reforms in Afghanistan, there is urgent need to provide modern infrastructure facilities including road links to international markets. Development projects such as Termez-Mazar-e-Sharif railway scheme are providing the necessary infrastructure and desired connectivity effects. Such joint connectivity projects are of great importance as they are helpful in regional connectivity, development and integration as well as provide alternative trade routes. These alternative trade routes are also helpful in reducing dependency on a single trade route. In view of such complexities, there is a need to devise a joint regional approach to exploit the available resources in a more efficient manner. Even though ongoing conflict and the issue of insurgencies could hinder economic engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan, both countries are planning to invest in economic cooperation during 2010-14 (Vaqar & Ghulam, 2011). There is a need for timely and substantial international support from broader efforts for economic progress and development in the region. In the longer run, it is clear that economic collaboration between Afghanistan and Pakistan is crucial for the lasting peace and prosperity of the region.

There is no doubt that the CPEC will provide immense opportunities for economic growth in Pakistan and change the economic and security dynamics of Afghanistan. As a result, Kabul is considering an option to join the CPEC and share the benefits, particularly in the energy and infrastructure sectors. However, it may damage the Indo-Afghan economic relationship, which is pivotal in reconstruction efforts. Austere border management will have significant economic implications, with an estimated 40 million people living within a 50-kilometer radius of the CPEC route in Pakistan. In context to COVID-19, the Afghans porous border with Pakistan and the recent border tension between the two states have difficulty in blocking pandemic cross-border transfers, which would have helped to bring improvement (Fazal et al., 2023). Given this, this research cannot ignore the broader discussion of the economic consequences of both geo-political tensions, the economic corridor between Pakistan and Afghanistan and China's economic growth potential.

### **Cultural and Social Ties**

Cultural and social ties that bind Afghanistan to Pakistan are considerable. Whether it is the shared history, common languages between people who live on both sides of the border or the familial links that exist with each Afghan family having Pakistani relatives and vice versa, this shared culture does much to keep the two nations cohesive (Stephen Jackson, 2011). This natural relationship is in addition to the ongoing long-term driver of cross-border population movements. Every week, tens of thousands of Afghans travel to trade, educate, and treat healthcare in Pakistani cities, while others travel in the other direction for pilgrimage purposes

in a hereditary tradition that has significance in everyday life as much as it does in the more grand scale of policy and politics (Marsden, 2022). Gates on the Durand Line, even if they did exist, cannot prevent these personal interactions, while they can also significantly restrict the movement that would be welcome. Meanwhile, there have been recent examples of a reverse in the usual direction, with thousands of Pakistani Pashtuns moving across the border in order to flee the military operations and TTP violence that has come to the North-West Frontier Province and FATA in the last three years – an additional consideration on how the policy of a 'closed and managed border' can be upheld without causing significant humanitarian concern. There is a further and more command role that is played in fostering mutual understanding between the two countries, and that is the role of cultural exchange. Long-standing such projects have been aimed at fostering 'people-to-people contact,' including in such areas as arts, education, and sport. Of these, the most high-profile to date has been Ghaznawey, but there have been other programs and visits in a variety of fields including TV and radio which it is claimed showcase and help establish a shared heritage on both sides of the Nilab River. These points are built upon by the broad and deeply historical relationship that exists between the peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan. On an everyday level, understanding and behavior is shared by the broader cultural impact of linguistic commonality, while more academically there is also a shared narrative of history, myth, and ethnicity that goes back many centuries and crosses the current artificial boundaries of the two countries. However, these cultural ties might also be seen as emphasizing difference or even highlighting historic competition in the wider region, facilitating rising nationalism in both countries even where political decision-making is able to view issues in a more pragmatic and moderate light (Mumtaz et al., 2025). That said, key principles within the field of tourism for conflict resolution also suggest that heritage and cultural issues are but one area of potential collaboration. A less threatening and goading of them would be in tourism development, conservation projects including the upkeep of battlements, and support given to historical and respected sites on the other side of the border.

### **Challenges in Bilateral Relations**

The more things change, the more, it seems, the more they stay the same. This can be said about the ongoing resolution of the issues of proximate importance in Pakistan's diplomatic ambitions in Afghanistan. For half a decade now, the maintenance of peace and stability in this war-torn neighbouring country has constituted a principal, if not foremost, object of Pakistan's foreign policy. Occasionally, the sentiment has grown high here that the progress made was only in the reverse direction. Not only has there been no wonder resolution of the Afghan problem; but the military dictatorships in Kabul have periodically strained Pakistan's reserves of patience and endurance. Besides, the scant progress in better economic ties and regional cooperation, not to mention the unresolved issue of boundaries with Afghanistan, have become other sources of irritation and strain in relations with this contiguous, Pushto-speaking country with which Pakistan has more than neighbours in common (Hassan Syed, 1970). Perhaps, the first set of challenges concerns those pressing daily against long and porous joint borders. The first inter-state border dispute between newly independent Pakistan and

Afghanistan erupted in 1949; and since when this 2245-km-long demarcation has remained a source of unabated concern in bilateral relations. The division of the Indian sub-continent had unfortunately left this arena more undivided than divided between the newfound countries. On any count, pre-partition factors or post, the sound management of these volatile boundaries has always been rare. This remained so before there was the Soviet invasion, during its long occupation as well as after it pulled out; and has remained so ever since the internecine cum ethnic cum socially Balkanised rivalries among corrupt and feuding authorities came to the forefront in Kabul and Afghanistan (Stephen Jackson, 2011). On the Pakistani side, the frontier areas with their tribal adjuncts, too, harbour militant and war-like traditions in which the landscape bristling with weapons has always an instant answer to any naive, bureaucratic solution to strife. Quite frequently, successive regimes in Kabul have harassed Islamabad on carelessly raising the Durand Line issue: a 19th Century relic agreement which Afghans still do not accept as international borderline.

For three decades, quasi-guerilla warfare has plagued the region, now filled with mines and marked by skirmishes and precarious peace agreements. The flow of Afghan refugees and cross-border mujahids raises security concerns and may transform the area into a bizarre Afghan version of Orwell's Cowboy-West. The concept of "strategic depth" in Pakistan has deepened the trust deficit on the Durand Line. In Islamabad, there is concern that warlords have exacerbated violence against co-ethnics amid the "holy warriors" legacy from past conflicts. Afghanistan's role has become a blend of interest and compulsion in Pakistan's foreign policy, driven by geographical proximity, shared religion, and societal ties. The Afghan border security, migration, drug issues, political resolutions, and transit cooperation are urgent matters that underpin decades of tension. Each nation has capitalized on these enmities, yet has reaped little satisfaction. Major Powers like the U.S. and Soviet Union influenced this dynamic during the Cold War, enabling Pakistan's elites to mismanage the windfall, while China balanced its support. The situation raises questions about whether it constitutes benign apartheid amid lost hopes and illusions (Azam, 2024).

### **Conclusion**

Since the inequalities of political, social, and economic power in relation to the United States and the Soviet Union, conflictual theory has been applied in different arenas such as for international power politics analysis. In such context, militaristic actions could take the form of war or ongoing military tensions, thus differing from militarism in a more indirect form. At the beginning of the Cold War, the USA and USSR were two powerful states, which used their own resources and mutual tensions to dominate smaller ones. However, the simultaneous rise of many other states like China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, etc., starting in the 1950s, the process known as decolonization, has also turned the bilateral equilibrium into multilateral deadlocks. This is the languid portrayal of Western-based interpretations about Soviet foreign policy, Balkan "insanity," as well as meetings held in the 1950s, all of which served the purpose of shutting off the Soviet Union and its researchers from hegemonic dominance of knowledge space. Here tentacle is an allusion to the snaky dynamics of American policies. It turns out that Greece with its Monarchist autocracy did everything to sabotage any Communist attempts at

equilibrium, such as keeping up railroad agreements. The Soviet Union's Albania base and Mediterranean base of Thessaloniki would have opened new avenues in this hemisphere's struggle. However, the brutal involvement of Turkey, whose motives are unclear to this day, strangled the very few possibilities of interaction. Nevertheless, some abilities such as the Paphos guns ending in Libya showed determination. Furthermore, the USSR tried constructive methods in relation to its military apparatus: sending more aid than its share, the famous huge Palace of Gomorrah, as well as flocking trainers.

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