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Role of Pakistan in Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan Post – 2001: An Exploration

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Abstract

Given the political efforts that brought peace to Afghanistan, this research aims to examine Pakistan's role in Afghan peace and reconciliation post-2001 and provide an understanding of the roots of the conflict in Afghanistan. By employing a qualitative research design, the present study is conducted on descriptive discourse analysis. The results of the study identify both internal and external roots of the conflict that exists in Afghanistan, the role of external stakeholders being stronger, compared to economic and social factors along with personal, psychological and identity dimensions. Although the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been more or less uneasy, the road to peace in Afghanistan always runs through Pakistan; and a safe Pakistan guarantees a safe future for Afghanistan. Decreasing conflict and bringing reconciliation in Afghanistan was never an easy path for Pakistan, as Pakistan missed proportionately the required will, capacity, and public support to counter the peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Afghan peace process, Afghanistan Reconciliation

Introduction

A year after the departure of US-NATO forces from Afghanistan, the country continues to face growing challenges in various sectors of life. These challenges can be traced back to the 1970s, in which armed conflicts dominated and affected Afghanistan. The invasion of 1979, called the Soviet-Afghan War, was to replace the existing communist government in which Afghan resistance forces, known as the *Mujahideen* (Holy Warriors), fought against the Soviet intervention. Most of the *Mujahideen* factions received financial and military support from the United States of America and its allies, through the Pakistani ISI.¹

Since then, Pakistan has played an important role in the long-running Afghan conflict because the two neighbouring countries share deep historical, religious, and cultural ties, as well as a common border of more than 2,000 kilometres. Years after the USSR withdrew from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the US changed their strategy and withdrew their support of *Mujahideen*, and thus the Taliban emerged under the title of "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (IEA) as a new force against *Mujahideen* in the southern city of Kandahar, controlling many southern and central provinces.² The Taliban had the support of Pakistan, one of the three states that recognized the Taliban, both before and during their control of 91% of Afghan

¹ Weinbaum, Marvin G. *Afghanistan and its neighbors: An ever dangerous neighborhood*. Vol. 162. US Institute of Peace, 2006.

² Abbas, Hassan. *The Taliban revival: violence and extremism on the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier*. Yale University Press, 2014.

territory.³ However, following the 9/11 attacks in the United States of America in 2001, US-NATO forces invaded Afghanistan. The ostensible purpose of this operation was to defeat Al-Qaeda, the ouster of the Taliban from power, and create a sustainable democratic state and deny “terrorists” a safe haven to recruit, operate in Afghanistan. In this operation, Pakistan also provided logistic support to the US and its allies, thereby attaining the status of a non-NATO front-line ally. However, contrary to its role as an ally in the then declared War on Terror (WoT), Pakistan gave refuge to the fleeing leaders of the Taliban regime.⁴

The Bonn Agreement, signed on December 5, 2001, was idealized and provided a rough platform that would give Afghanistan a chance for peace. This briefly explains the responsibilities of the parties and sets out a timetable and processes for national political reconciliation that can, and should have, also framed local procedures. The required purpose was specifically acknowledged within the terms of reference of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, established according to the Bonn Agreement.⁵

While a new democratic government was being established through the direct support and protection of the US and its allies, at the same time, the Taliban was regrouping and trying to re-emerge. Pakistan also played a tangible role in the re-grouping and re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the prospect of their success against the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The sanctuary of Pakistan allowed the Taliban to re-organize their military operations and groups in Afghanistan.⁶

Given the political efforts that brought peace to Afghanistan, this research will examine Pakistan's role in Afghan peace and reconciliation after 2001. This study is qualitative in nature and conducted on a descriptive-analytic strategy. The rest of the study is organized with section 2 providing the literature review, section 3 outlining the roots of conflict and war in Afghanistan, section 4 presenting the role of Pakistan in peace and reconciliation, and section 5 concludes the study with recommendations.

Literature Review

The role of Pakistan in peace-building and reconciliation in Afghanistan is reviewed in this section. Although there is a scarcity of literature on the subject, a basic review of the existing literature on the topic is performed to understand the fundamentals of the concept in detail.

Peace and Reconciliation in Afghanistan

The idea of pursuing reconciliation, as it has been termed in the Afghan context, is now supported by all major powers, even if the implementation of the policy has been fraught with difficulties. Steps towards peace negotiations were stymied, however, by the Taliban's refusal to negotiate with former President Hamid Karzai's government. Karzai had offered the Taliban a peace deal by conducting, first, a grand peace *Jirga* in 2010 and then a *Loya Jirga* in 2011. The National Consultative Peace *Jirga*, held in June 2010, was Karzai's attempt to offer a public forum for Afghans to voice their views regarding reintegration and reconciliation and to build a wider domestic and international consensus.⁷

The reintegration plan focused on those who could be incentivized to abandon their allegiance to the insurgency; reconciliation offered amnesty and political positions to enemy leadership to bring them into the political mainstream.⁸ While they expanded their territory

³ Barve, Madelina. "Careless Peacebuilding: A Poststructural Policy Analysis of the Afghanistan Study Group Final Report: A Pathway for Peace in Afghanistan (2021)." (2021).

⁴ Hussain, Touqir. *US-Pakistan Engagement: The War on Terrorism and Beyond*. DIANE Publishing, 2009.

⁵ Hussaini, Sayed Mahdi. "The Social Challenges of Modern State-Building in Afghanistan." *Technium Soc. Sci. J.* 16 (2021): 529.

⁶ Barve, Madelina. "Careless Peacebuilding: A Poststructural Policy Analysis of the Afghanistan Study Group Final Report: A Pathway for Peace in Afghanistan (2021)." (2021).

⁷ Kaura, Vinay. "Understanding the complexities of the Afghan peace process." *ORF Occasional Paper* 151 (2018).

⁸ Kuehn, Felix. "Taliban history of war and peace in Afghanistan." *Accord: International Review of Peace Initiatives* 27 (2018).

and ranks mostly through incorporation and negotiation, the Taliban's understanding was that as long as the option to fight existed, then there would be fighting, or Afghanistan as a whole would fracture.

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, a statement by the American Episcopalian Bishops implored the US government to 'wage reconciliation' in response, but it was unclear on whom such reconciliation should be waged. President Bush delivered an ultimatum to the Taliban on September 20th to hand over all *Al-Qaeda* leaders in Afghanistan or face military action. The Taliban refused and instead suggested talks, which the US promptly rejected. Further attempts by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were made during the bombing campaign to promote a compromise.⁹

Reconciliation in this period, amongst researchers, was mainly concerned with issues of transitional justice, impunity, and ethnic alienation, rather than any serious consideration of political engagement with the Taliban. Research and analysis similarly focused on the details of typical post-war reconstruction activities. Some observers warned of a rising threat from the insurgency, but the prevailing opinion was that a little more attention on the security and peace-building fronts would lead to stability and undermine any Taliban comeback.¹⁰

Felix Kuehn claims in "Taliban: A History of War and Peace in Afghanistan" that no group can survive in Afghanistan without local support. This reality is abundantly clear from the failure of every Afghan government, and it shows that the Taliban's narrative of the conflict in Afghanistan is not an alternative version of Afghanistan's history, but rather a missing piece of the larger puzzle of how to administer the country peacefully—a piece that remains ignored by much of the West. Thus disagreement exists as to how Pakistan can directly cause insecurity in Afghanistan.¹¹

Roots of conflict and war in Afghanistan

Prior to the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union has caused immense violence, destruction, and displacement of masses from the country. After the Soviet war was over, the new elements of extremism and violence embarked, the victory of the *Mujahideen* and the emergence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban's intellectual and ideological roots go back to religious schools in Pakistan. The *Mujahideen* was formed during the course of which the Pakistani intelligence agency and the American information society played significant roles in shaping it. In order to train the military and ideology of these *Mujahideen*, camps were set up on Pakistani soil, mainly in the provinces of Frontier and Baluchistan, and also in Peshawar, Pakistan.¹²

The September 11, 2001, incident was a turning point in the political development of the international system, especially in Afghanistan. The US attack on Afghanistan, aimed at fighting *Al-Qaeda* and the Taliban, with the support of Western countries, especially Britain, and the challenges that the Taliban created for Russia, China, Iran, and even India, created an international consensus to overthrow the Taliban from power.¹³

In the 1980s, the US and Soviet military exercises used Afghanistan as a battleground for world-class competition. In the 1990s, Pakistan, India, Russia, and Iran supported the Afghan

⁹ Dobbins, James F., and James Dobbins. *After the Taliban: nation-building in Afghanistan*. Potomac Books, Inc., 2008.

¹⁰ Waldman, Thomas. "Reconciliation and research in Afghanistan: an analytical narrative." *International Affairs* 90, no. 5 (2014): 1049-1068.

¹¹ Kuehn, Felix. "Taliban history of war and peace in Afghanistan." *Accord: International Review of Peace Initiatives*, 27 (2018).

¹² Ataei, Farhad, and Shahrad Shahvand. "Sectarian extremism in Pakistan (1979-2001)." *Bi-Quarterly Political Knowledge* 8, no. 2 (2013): 83-106.

¹³ D'Souza, Shanthie Mariet. "Afghanistan: Tipping Point." In *Armed Conflicts in South Asia 2009*, pp. 19-41. Routledge India, 2020.

Army factions to expand and sustain their influence in the region.¹⁴ The plethora of events and circumstances (either internally or externally) had a visible role in the promulgation and inflexion of conflict in Afghanistan. Since both internal and external roots of conflict exist in Afghanistan, the external roots are stronger, so peace and reconciliation should be sought abroad.

Personal, Psychological, and Identity

According to the theory of constructivism, the social and political world is more of an interdisciplinary context, meant for the people who made it, live within it, and understand it.¹⁵ In other words, the beliefs, norms, and perceptual perceptions of actors are always constructive indicators, such as "identity" and "interests." Extremism, which leads to war, in politics is considered to be a semantic and socially constructed structure that has been gradually consolidated and strengthened by its identity, normativeness, cultural, and historical motives.¹⁶ In this cultural structure, the assumptions are the core elements, upon which cultural values and norms, speech and behavioural artefacts are based.¹⁷

According to the constructivists, the most basic motivators of activists are their ideas and thoughts. In fact, the system of semantics and beliefs defines and determines how interpreters around the world interpret. Based on this, it is said that if one can change the type of belief and thought of security actors about a phenomenon and situation, their behaviour will also be changed.¹⁸ The theory of psychoanalysis is based on the analysis of hidden motives in humans. It seems that contrary to what is claimed and in the theory of realism as the central axis of the nature of individuals, these kinds of satisfying needs, although material authenticity, are temporary and achievable, and after reaching them and obtaining relative satisfaction, the radical and war-seeking behaviour is moderated. On this basis, the source of war should also be sought from other sources.¹⁹

Today, the fight against terrorism, which is heavily influenced by US global goals, has become a sort of security-security norm and has an important role in shaping the interests, thoughts, and ideas and, consequently, the behaviour of governments. In order to understand the role of politics and power structures in supporting, directing, or exacerbating extremism, one must observe the interference of a powerful element of politics in the formation and continuation of *Talibanism*.²⁰

Islamist groups conflicting with Afghanistan emphasize the concept of the *Ummah* against nationalism because, in principle, Muslim relations with the homeland and even their family are based on the belief in God, and "the Muslims behold only the belief in *Dar al-Islam*."²¹ It does not have a nationality or race. For this reason, the extreme Salafist identity was formed with a utopian background in opposition to the invasion of the Muslim world by Muslims.²² For this, Salafist groups such as *Al-Qaeda* focused their attention on the concept

¹⁴ Dobbins, James F., and James Dobbins. *After the Taliban: nation-building in Afghanistan*. Potomac Books, Inc., 2008.

¹⁵ Atwater, Mary M. "Social constructivism: Infusion into the multicultural science education research agenda." *Journal of Research in Science Teaching: The Official Journal of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching* 33, no. 8 (1996): 821-837.

¹⁶ Qazizada, Yalda, and Nassir Ul Haq Wani. "Terrorism as a Challenge to Good Governance in Afghanistan: An Evaluation." *Kardan Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2020): 1-13. DOI: 10.31841/KJSSH.2021.37.

¹⁷ Haas, Ernst B. *Beyond the nation state: Functionalism and international organization*. ECPR Press, 2008.

¹⁸ Al-Qazwini, Jawdat K. *The religious establishment in Ithna'ashari Shi'ism: A study in scholarly and political development*. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom), 1997.

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ Yusuf, Imtiyaz. "The Southern Thailand conflict and the Muslim world." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 27, no. 2 (2007): 319-339.

²² El-Shall, Maryam. "Salafi Utopia: The Making of the Islamic State." *Cultural Logic: A Journal of Marxist Theory & Practice* 13 (2006).

of the Islamic *Ummah* and *Darussalam*, stipulating that the bond of the Muslims is the brotherhood of faith, not the attribution of a tribe or a country or a group.²³

Economic and Social Factors

Although Afghanistan is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of underground resources, it is now economically weak and has one of the lowest per capita incomes.²⁴ The country's economy continues to rely heavily on foreign aid, and many of its people rely on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood. The deep gap between cost and effect has led to a budget deficit and a large gap between the amount of savings and investment costs and the current account deficit of the country. This factor has been adding to the domestic economic problems of the country. This has jeopardized Afghan national security.²⁵ Consequently, the growing political instability in Afghanistan has created this mentality among the people that the government cannot maintain law and order and led them to become more oriented toward extremist groups in order to establish law and order.²⁶

In decades of war, educational centres were either closed down or destroyed, and the illiteracy that spread among the younger generation provided a good platform for the penetration and acceptance of political thoughts centred on the *Taliban* and *Al-Qaeda*. In recent years, there have been noticeable developmental changes in the education sector, albeit problems including but not limited to: economic problems; lack of educational facilities; rural population; lack of educational spaces; the impossibility of training for 50% of the Afghan population over the past decades.²⁷

Factors such as insecurity and educational poverty, the lack of appropriate education, cultivation, production, and trafficking of drugs, the media, and cyberspace have had a profound impact on the promotion of extremism. Political instability and social instability have led to the consolidation and continued backwardness of the country. With the war with the former Soviet Union, the collapse of the communist regime, the formation of the Mujahedeen regime, and the continuation of the civil war, the economic foundations have weakened, which has provided a platform for furthering poverty in Afghanistan.²⁸

Economic weaknesses, increasing insecurity, corruption, drug production and trafficking, lack of welfare and comfort, the inefficiency of the state, lack of establishment of order and security, unemployment, poverty, and the existence of ethnic, racial, and other disputes have caused distrust of the Afghan government by the people. These factors altogether squeezed people's hopes, and as a result, the political movements slowed down the Afghan government's efforts for stability and security.

Stakeholders and their National Interests

The Taliban's intellectual and ideological roots go back to religious science schools in Pakistan. For this reason, in the wake of the US attack on the group in Afghanistan, the people of Pakistan, led by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* groups and the Muslim community, supported the Taliban and Bin Laden fighters and held rallies and demonstrations, expressing solidarity and support for their Afghan partners.²⁹

²³. Gharagzloo, Mohammad, *The Rise and Fall of Fundamentalism (Afghanistan)*,7.

²⁴. Bagheri, Ismail, *Afghanistan and the Taliban Rise (Strategic Studies of the Islamic World, 1386)*,106.

²⁵. Ghafouri, Mahmoud and Davood, Mohammad, *Assessing and Analyzing the Threats of Extremist Islamism in Pakistan ((1394): 51.*

²⁶. *Ibid*, p. 52

²⁷. Kola'i, Elaheh, *The Fields of Islamic Fundamentalism in Central Asia ((1384): 217*

²⁸. Sardarniye, Khalilullah and Hosseini, Sayyid Mehdi, *The Social Challenges of Modern State-Building in Afghanistan:*

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²⁹. Soltani, Ali Reza, *US Military Operations in Afghanistan and Its Consequences ((1380): 75*

The level of Pakistani official complicity in the resurgence of the Taliban has been somewhat controversial. Most are believed to have close ties with the Pakistani intelligence community, the Pakistani border forces, and other armed groups. Officials in Islamabad deny the highest level of any form of official communication that they have come across.³⁰

Taking a deep understanding from the phenomenons in Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia soon realized the positive role of Pakistan's religious schools in favour of its policies, and it did the same for Central Asian countries.³¹ The reality is that Saudi Arabia used its experience in establishing and supporting private schools in Pakistan and implemented a similar policy in the newly independent Central Asian states through Afghanistan.³² Efforts were projected to restrict the expansion of Iran's influence in Afghanistan and the expansion of influence through the network of schools of thought and *Sunni* Muslim scholars from Saudi Arabia to circumvent Iran's influence.³³

Some regional and international powers have repeatedly used religious parties and groups to seize the situation and find the opportunity to interfere in the affairs of certain regions, and sometimes they have been using this tool for the sake of targeting their political rivals.³⁴ *Talibanism*, like some of the other religious factors or means, was baked and launched into politics, whether it was bitter or sweet.³⁵

Role of Pakistan in Peace and Reconciliation

The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have always been unamiable. Afghanistan opposed Pakistan's membership in the United Nations (UN) after the latter's independence, mainly due to Afghan claims on the Pashtun territories located on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line. Afghanistan had started to promote the idea of annexing Pakistan's Pashtun-dominated areas immediately after the founding of Pakistan and continued troubling Pakistan in this regard through the 1950s and 1960s to the late 1970s. Afghanistan rejected the July 1947 Pakistan referendum, saying it offered no choice to the Pashtuns of the erstwhile North-West Frontier Province, now *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, other than that of becoming part of either India or Pakistan.³⁶

The *Pashtun*-dominated *Parcham* (Flag) party in Afghanistan made a few feeble attempts to promote the idea of a greater *Pashtunistan* as an independent country comprised of *Pashtun*-dominated areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Although the idea never became popular in either country, it heightened Pakistan's security concerns about its western border. Nonetheless, Afghanistan continued to challenge Pakistan over the Durand Line "through diplomatic pressure, tribal incursions, and support for secessionist movements" in Pakistan.³⁷ Pakistan's Afghan policy in the 1980s and 1990s largely remained focused on seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan and countering the traditional Afghanistan-India alliance, which had been creating trouble for Pakistan by supporting the *Balochi* insurgents and promoting the idea of a greater *Pashtunistan*.³⁸

For understanding the role of Pakistan in reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan, the historical analysis and evolution are sought to justify the results. Starting from the Soviet

³⁰ Dobbins, James F., and James Dobbins. *After the Taliban: nation-building in Afghanistan*. Potomac Books, Inc., 2008.

³¹ Smith Finley, Joanne. "Chinese oppression in Xinjiang, Middle Eastern conflicts and global Islamic solidarities among the Uyghurs." *Journal of Contemporary China* 16, no. 53 (2007): 627-654.

³² Abramson, David M. *Foreign religious education and the Central Asian Islamic Revival: Impact and prospects for stability*. Washington, DC: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2010.

³³ Gallis, Paul. "NATO in Afghanistan: a test of the transatlantic alliance." *Connections* 6, no. 3 (2007): 10-32.

³⁴ Coleman, Gabriella. "Anonymous in context: The politics and power behind the mask." (2013).

³⁵ Ali, Tariq. *The duel: Pakistan on the flight path of American power*. Simon and Schuster, 2009.

³⁶ Grare, Frederic. "Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the post-9/11 era (2006): 40.

³⁷ Tellis, Ashley J. "Creating new facts on the ground (2011), 11.

³⁸ Sardarnia, Khalilollah, and Seyed Mehdi Hoseini. "Social challenges of modern state-building in Afghanistan." (2014): 37-63.

Afghan War to the democratic regime; post-Musharraf period, the events are described through the discourse analysis.

The Soviet-Afghan War and the Zia Regime

The subsequent Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89) allowed Pakistan to counter the notion of a greater *Pashtunistan*, limit India's interests and Soviet influences in Afghanistan, and attempt to install a friendly government there. Although the war was called a "*Jihad*" against the Soviets, there is a near consensus among political analysts that Pakistan's decision to support the Afghan Islamist resistance groups in the 1970s and 1980s was strategic and not ideological. Immediately after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the U.S. started providing secret military aid to the *Mujahideen* fighting against the Soviets, which was later converted into a combined effort by the U.S., Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and China to train, fund, and equip the *Mujahideen*.³⁹ Pakistan's role was very significant in the provision of guerrilla training, weapons, and funds to the *Mujahideen*.⁴⁰

A countrywide campaign to raise funds was undertaken and, in particular, the *Deobandi Ulema* undertook the task of recruiting students from the madrassas (religious schools), schools, and colleges. A network of welfare and charity organisations soon emerged from Chitral in Pakistan's erstwhile North-West Frontier Province to *Chaghi* in the Baluchistan province that served as a financial lifeline for the Afghan *Jihad*. By the 1980s, Pakistan witnessed a sharp increase in the growth of religious organizations with sectarian and *Jihadist* agendas, mainly because of state patronage of the so-called Afghan *Jihad*.

The seven-party (*Mujahideen* coalition) was formed by Gulbadin Hekmatyar's *Hizb-e-Islami*, Burhanuddin Rabbani's *Jamiat-e-Islami*, Abdul Rabb Rasool Sayyaf's *Ittehad-e-Islami*, Maulvi Yunus Khalis' *Hizb-e-Islami-Khalis*, Syed Ahmed Gillani's *Mahaz-e-Milli Islami*, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi's *Jebh-e-Nijat-e-Milli*, and Muhammad Nabi Muhammad's *Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami*, were funded, trained and equipped by Pakistan, the U.S and others to fight the Soviets and the communist regime in Afghanistan.⁴¹

Not all of the Afghan *Mujahideen* groups received equal treatment from Pakistan in terms of the channeling of funds and weapons to them and training. Pakistan expected that extremist *Pashtun* groups and those friendly to Pakistan would be able to transcend ethnic divisions and denounce the traditional Afghan claim on *Pashtunistan*.⁴² Pakistan's former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, described the strategic purpose of the Zia regime's selective treatment of *Mujahideen* as "*There were significant elements within it that were more open to cooperation and civility with the West, and there were hardliners. But the hard-liners were supported by General Zia ... the ISI, looking beyond the end of the war, seemed keen on developing close working relations with these elements within the Mujahideen whom they would try to empower to rule the new Afghanistan and give Pakistan strategic depth by extending Islamabad's influence northward to counter Kabul's traditional ties with India*".⁴³

Apparently, all the stakeholders were busy securing their respective strategic interests there instead of focusing on the security and stability of the country. Some analysts have argued that neither the U.S. nor Pakistan worked on the political aspects of the war, particularly how to deal with the post-war situation, including the transfer of power to a representative body of all groups and sections of Afghan society. Others also assert that Zia's

³⁹ Sopko, John F. "What we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction." (2021).

⁴⁰ Ostermann, Christian Friedrich, *New Evidence on the War in Afghanistan* (2003), 121.

⁴¹ Sial, Safdar. "Pakistan's role and strategic priorities in Afghanistan since 1980." *Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center* 1 (2013): 1-10.

⁴² Grare, Frederic. "Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in the post-9/11 era." (2006).

⁴³ Bhutto, Benazir. *Reconciliation: Islam, democracy and the West*. Simon and Schuster, 2014.

policy of selective treatment kept the Afghan *Mujahideen* divided, which also became one of the key factors leading to the post-1989 civil war in Afghanistan.⁴⁴

Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif Regime

During the 1990s, four democratically elected governments, two each of the Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, alternately ruled Pakistan. Pakistan's Afghan policy remains more or less the same as during the Soviet-Afghan war, although now with limited resources and leverage on political stakeholders in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the communist regime of Najibullah attempted to put an end to *Mujahideen* resistance, but the discontinuity in political, economic, and military support from the Soviet Union after its dissolution in December 1991 and Pakistan's continued support of the *Mujahideen* made the regime too vulnerable to confront the threat. Eventually, the *Mujahideen* entered Kabul on April 27th, 1992 and executed Najibullah. Sibghatullah Mojaddedi became the first president of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in 1992, with the support of Pakistan. Challenged by Burhanuddin Rabbani's newly established leadership council, Mojaddedi resigned within about two months of assuming the presidency, which resulted in a worse civil war among various groups of Afghan *Mujahideen*, mainly those led by Rabani, Hekmatyar, Masood, and Dostum.⁴⁵

The Taliban emerged as a direct consequence of this civil war. Under the leadership of a seminary teacher, Mullah Omer, the Taliban drew up a minimum agenda: to restore peace, disarm the population, enforce *Shar'ia* law, and defend Islam in Afghanistan. On a short-term basis, Pakistani groups were assigned by Mullah Omer to recruit students from seminaries in *Haqqani* and take on the responsibility of training the recruits from Pakistan. Pakistan's ISI played a key role in these arrangements to support the Taliban.⁴⁶

Eventually, in 1996, the Taliban captured Kabul. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was another high point for Pakistani *Jihadist* groups, who at the time enjoyed the complete support of the Taliban and expanded their camps to train not only Pakistani militants but also Taliban recruits against the Northern Alliance.

Besides this support, Pakistan also provided political support to the Taliban regime in collaboration with Saudi Arabia. During Benazir Bhutto's second government in 1993, *Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam* leader Maulana Fazlur Rahman "made several trips as chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states to seek financial and military help for the Taliban".⁴⁷

Benazir Bhutto claimed in her book, "Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy, and the West", that her government encouraged the Taliban to work with the international community. The Taliban entered into negotiations with the U.N special envoy to Afghanistan to create a broad-based government, and the treaty was to be signed by the Taliban on November 6, 1996. However, with the overthrow of the PPP government in Pakistan on November 4, the Taliban took advantage of the political turmoil in Pakistan and the treaty was not signed.⁴⁸

The Pakistan Muslim League, led by Nawaz Sharif from 1990 to 1993 and 1997 to 1999, did not make any difference as far as Pakistan's Afghan policy was concerned. According to some accounts, Nawaz liked, admired, and wanted to emulate the Afghan Taliban and even tried to pass legislation during his second term that would grant authoritarian powers to the

⁴⁴ Piacentini, Matteo. "Afghanistan, the Taliban and the "Great Game"." *How much of the past in the new future.*

⁴⁵ Spear, Wesley M. *Lessons learned from the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan: examples for US policy concerning Central Asia and Afghanistan after 2014.*

⁴⁶ Rana, M. Amir & Rohan Gunaratna, *Al-Qaeda Fights Back* (2007): 230

⁴⁷ Sial, Safdar. "Pakistan's role and strategic priorities in Afghanistan since 1980." *Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center* 1 (2013): 1-10.

⁴⁸ Bhutto, Benazir, *Reconciliation: Islam, Democracy and the West* (2008): 115

Pakistani chief executive similar to those held by Mullah Omer in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ However, the efforts of Pakistan's military and political leadership to further the cause of strategic depth in Afghanistan through supporting the Taliban not only led to an unabated "destabilizing" proxy war in Afghanistan but further militarized and radicalized the Pakistani-Afghan border areas. Pakistan was one of the three nations that recognized the Taliban government.⁵⁰

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Post-2001

Developments in the following years revealed that decreasing conflict in Afghanistan and bringing reconciliation was not an easy path. Pakistan did not have the required will, capacity, or public support to counter the threat of militancy and terrorism. Nonetheless, the divergent strategic interests and widespread mistrust among key stakeholders in Afghanistan, despite their mutual coordination and collaboration in the war on terror, offered little prospect for a coherent and constructive counterinsurgency policy in Afghanistan and the Pakistani-Afghan border areas.

The September 11th, 2001 terror strikes in the United States of America revealed the intensity of the danger the Taliban regime in Afghanistan posed by its sheltering of *Al-Qaeda*. Pakistan once more turned into the frontline ally of the U.S. in the ensuing war in Afghanistan, but this time against the Taliban regime that it had groomed and supported. By joining the U.S.-led "war on terror", President Pervez Musharraf tried to avoid Pakistan's isolation from the world and being bracketed with the militants; counter India's possible rise in Afghan politics; and secure political legitimacy and financial assistance for his regime.⁵¹ Musharraf reaffirmed his resolve time and again to break Pakistan-based terrorist groups and to pull the country away from the brink of a theocratic state to give a message to the world that Pakistan had revised its policy towards Afghanistan and *Jihadist* groups.⁵²

However, there was widespread support for the Afghan Taliban and anti-US sentiments in religious, political, and public discourses, as well as fear of losing and turning hostile to militant groups viewed as strategic assets by Pakistan. Even then, the Musharraf government delivered significant successes as a coalition partner in the war on terror in terms of arrests and killings of *Al-Qaeda* militants; the provision of logistical and intelligence support to allied forces fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan; and cooperation in CIA-led drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas targeting militants creating trouble in Afghanistan.⁵³ Pakistan did not take action against the Afghan Taliban present in Pakistan, including those in the *Quetta Shura* and members of the *Haqqani* network. Pakistan was deeply concerned that any action that enraged the Afghan Taliban would exacerbate the militant threat within the country, as well as jeopardize Pakistan's future strategic position in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

While Parvez Musharraf was in power, the key political priorities of Pakistan's Afghan policy included achieving peace and security in the Pakistani-Afghan border areas; ensuring fair representation of Pashtuns in the Afghan government; securing Pakistan's legitimate interests vis-à-vis India's growing political, military, and financial ambitions in Afghanistan;

⁴⁹ Sial, Safdar. "Pakistan's role and strategic priorities in Afghanistan since 1980." *Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center* 1 (2013): 1-10.

⁵⁰ Rashid, Ahmed, *Pakistan's coup: planting the seeds of democracy?* (2014): 78

⁵¹ Sial, Safdar. "Pakistan-Afghanistan ties in the changing regional dynamics." *Conflict and Peace Studies* 8, no. 1 (2016): 61-86.

⁵² Haqqani, Hussain, *The role of Islam in Pakistan's future* (2004): 87

⁵³ Goswami, Arvind. *3 D Deceit, Duplicity & Dissimulation of US Foreign Policy towards India, Pakistan & Afghanistan*. AuthorHouse, 2012.

⁵⁴ Siddique, Qandeel. *Pakistan's future policy towards Afghanistan: A look at strategic depth, militant movements and the role of India and the US*. No. 2011: 08. DIIS Report, 2011.

and ensuring that Afghan land was not used to fuel the insurgency in Balochistan and Pakistan's tribal areas.⁵⁵

At the first Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in 2001, Pakistan wanted the inclusion of some moderate Taliban leaders in the new Afghan setup, but the Northern Alliance, Russia, India, and Iran were against this option. Although the Musharraf government was disturbed by the possible rise of the Northern Alliance, it had fewer options in the post-9/11 situation to assert its likes and dislikes.⁵⁶

One of the fundamental factors behind the Musharraf government's decision to join the war-on-terror coalition was fear of a potential U.S.-India alliance in Afghanistan that could further cement the traditional Northern Alliance-India alliance against Pakistan.⁵⁷ Secondly, India could have placed Pakistan under immense pressure with support from the international community over the issue of militancy in Kashmir by Pakistan-based groups. Musharraf's regime remained worried over Indian policy and activities in Afghanistan. Pakistan thought India's economic and political linkages were building up Indian capacity to destabilize Pakistan through supporting Baluch insurgents.⁵⁸

There is no denying the fact that Musharraf's policy towards militants and his counterterrorism campaign neither countered the militant threats facing Pakistan nor significantly contributed to Afghanistan's counterinsurgency drive. Pakistan's government was challenged by local groups of Taliban in the FATA and their associates because of Pakistan's alliance with the U.S.⁵⁹ During Musharraf's rule, between 2003 and January 2008 the Pakistani army launched as many as seven small and major military operations in the FATA, mainly against tribes sheltering and supporting *Al-Qaeda* and Taliban fleeing Afghanistan, and Pakistani Taliban militants attacking the Pakistani army and people.⁶⁰ Until 2006-07 a division of pro-and anti-Pakistan Taliban had emerged and the focus of military operations was largely on the anti-Pakistan Taliban, particularly the *Tehrik-i-Taliban* Pakistan, an umbrella organisation comprising about 40 Pakistani Taliban groups in the FATA and *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* (KP) established in 2007 – and its affiliated groups.⁶¹

After coming to power in 2008 the Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led coalition government provided full support to the army in its counter-militancy campaign in KP and the FATA. As in the country's internal security activities, the army also had the leading role in the security and defence aspects of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan and the U.S.-led war on terror.⁶² Concerning the Afghan Taliban, Pakistan's traditional approach of inertness continued despite repeated requests from the international allies in Afghanistan for Pakistan to act against the Taliban and threats to force it to do so. Meanwhile, Pakistan continued to regard India's political, economic and military activities in Afghanistan with

⁵⁵ Tellis, Ashley J. "Pakistan and the War on Terror." *Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance*. Washington, DC (et al.): Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 10 (2008).

⁵⁶ Fields, Mark, and Ramsha Ahmed. "A review of the 2001 Bonn Conference and application to the road ahead in Afghanistan." (2011).

⁵⁷ Malik, Mohan. "The China factor in the India-Pakistan conflict." *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 33, no. 1 (2003): 8.

⁵⁸ Malik, Mohan. *Dragon on Terrorism: Assessing China's Tactical Gains and Strategic Losses Post-September 11*. Strategic Studies Institute, 2002.

⁵⁹ Bacon, Tricia. "Pakistan: Friend or Foe in the Fight Against Terrorism?." *Hampton Roads International Security Quarterly* (2016): 7.

⁶⁰ Tellis, Ashley J. "Pakistan and the War on Terror." *Conflicted Goals, Compromised Performance*. Washington, DC (et al.): Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 10 (2008).

⁶¹ Abbasi, Ishrat Afshan, Mukesh Kumar Khatwani, and Mazher Hussain. "An overview of major military operations in the tribal areas of Pakistan." *Journal of Academic and Social Research* 1, no. 1 (2018): 1-14.

⁶² Ghosh, Samarjit. "Insurgency in the FATA & NWFP: Challenges & Prospects for the Pakistan Army." *Manekshaw Paper* 6 (2008): 18.

suspicion. Afghanistan's signing of a strategic partnership with India in October 2011 further increased Pakistan's fears that it was being marginalized in Afghanistan.⁶³

The increasing threat from an assortment of militants frequently attacking Pakistan's security forces, political leaders and civilians significantly contributed to creating a realization among Pakistani policymakers, including the political and military leadership, that a militarized or *Talibanism* Afghanistan and Pakistani-Afghan border would add to insecurity and violence in Pakistan.⁶⁴ Over the years, Pakistan – particularly its embassy in Kabul – launched extensive efforts to reach out to non-Pashtun Afghans to demonstrate that Pakistan's Afghan policy was no longer entirely focused on Pashtuns. Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan has made extensive visits to northern Afghanistan and inaugurated several Pakistan-funded development projects there. Pakistan's (then) foreign minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, told journalists on July 24th, 2012 following her briefing on Pakistani-Afghan relations to the Parliamentary Committee on National Security that Pakistan favoured no particular ethnic group in Afghanistan and that it wanted to establish relations with all groups equally.⁶⁵

The political priority of the PPP-led coalition government was to enhance bilateral trade and economic ties with Afghanistan. The two countries signed the Afghan-Pakistani Transit Trade Agreement on October 28th, 2010, in terms in which Pakistan would facilitate Afghan exports to India up to the *Wagha* border, Lahore, in Afghan trucks. On December 11th, 2010 Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India agreed to proceed with the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. These two major projects, along with CASA-1000, a high-voltage DC/AC transmission system between the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, could lead the partnering countries to a shared sense of security and economic interdependence.⁶⁶

The Pakistan policy during the period of President Asif Ali Zardari was based on the policy narrative that "peace in Afghanistan means peace in Pakistan". In an interview with "The Guardian" in April 2011, President Zardari made it clear that instability in Afghanistan leads to destabilizing Pakistan's economic prosperity and undermining Pakistan's democratic institutions.⁶⁷ During that period, the government and political parties urged an inclusive and Afghan-led Afghan peace process. Pakistan has promised to play its role in such a process consistent with its national interest.⁶⁸ On the international forums, President Zardari called on the Muslim countries to help Pakistan in appealing to all the factions in Afghanistan to join a reconciliation process that could lead to a stable Afghanistan. In his address to the 4th Islamic Summit in Makkah in 2012, Zardari recalled the era of Afghan Mujahedeen resistance against the Soviet Union, which he believed haunted Pakistan for decades. During this summit, he assured Pakistan's support for a reconciliation which is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned and remarked that peace and stability in Afghanistan are important for peace in Pakistan, the region and the world.⁶⁹

⁶³ Kronstadt, K. Alan. "Pakistan-US relations." Library of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service, 2009.

⁶⁴ Wirsing, Robert. *Baloch nationalism and the geopolitics of energy resources: The changing context of separatism in Pakistan*. Strategic Studies Institute, 2008.

⁶⁵ Rana, M. Amir and Safdar Sia, *Afghanistan and Pakistan: a common security perspective* (2013): 14

⁶⁶ Grawert, Elke, Rabia Nusrat, and Zulfiqar Ali Shah. "Afghanistan's cross-border trade with Pakistan and Iran and the responsibility for conflict-sensitive employment." (2017): 46.

⁶⁷ Simon Tisdall, "War in Afghanistan is destabilising Pakistan, says president," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2011. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/10/asif-ali-zardari-guardian-interview>

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ APP, "Zardari urges Muslim countries to help in Afghan reconciliation," *DAWN*, August 16, 2012. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/742587/zardari-urges-muslim-countries-to-help-in-afghan-reconciliation>

On the other hand, the Zardari government was also closely involved with the Afghan government to speed up the process of reconciliation and help in making contact between the then Afghan government and the Taliban. To promote stronger bilateral relations, in February 2013, Pakistan hosted a summit which was attended by former Afghan President Hamid Karzai and other senior Afghan delegations. It was aimed at addressing the issues of extremism and instability, promoting regional peace and bilateral relations between two states.⁷⁰ The two sides expressed their commitment and stressed the brotherly relations of both states. President Zardari assured the Afghan delegation of the full support of Pakistan for reconciliation and stability in Afghanistan. In a goodwill gesture, former President Karzai and Zardari agreed on some sort of coordination on the release of Afghan Taliban from Pakistani prisons to support the Afghan peace process.⁷¹ This summit was an important development in the bilateral relations of both states where a range of other issues was also discussed, including economic relations, security, people-to-people contact, border management, and the refugee crisis.⁷²

The period of President Zardari was not more challenging regarding Afghan reconciliation. However, with the coming of Imran Khan's government, the need and efforts for a settlement between the Taliban and then President Ashraf Ghani's government have increased. However, at that period of time, as a result of some historical events (Soviet war) and mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the relations between both governments were shaky and unstable as usual, which lead to minimum cooperation between both states.⁷³ During 2018, the government of Imran Khan played an important role in the Afghan peace process by facilitating US-Taliban negotiations that led to the Doha peace deal in February 2020. Khan called this historic deal a means to end the Afghan conflict.⁷⁴ To minimize the trust deficit and promote bilateral relations, Imran Khan's government endeavored to bring the Taliban and the then Afghan government to the table of negotiations for an intra-Afghan peace process after the Doha deal. Moreover, a Taliban delegation visited Islamabad in September 2020, and on the official invitation of PM Khan, a delegation of the then Afghan government led by Dr Abdullah Abdullah visited Pakistan.⁷⁵ PM Imran Khan also visited Afghanistan for the first time in November 2020. Its goal was to bolster the then-ongoing Afghan peace process and to reassure Pakistan of its commitment and support.⁷⁶

In the mid-2021, when the Taliban had major military takeovers, Khan's government tried to engage the then Afghan government in Kabul for an intra-Afghan conference in Pakistan, but this effort failed due to shaky relations between the two governments. With the takeover of the Taliban over all of Afghanistan's territory, the government of Imran Khan still called for an inclusive Afghan government and started the policy of wait and watch regarding the recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.⁷⁷

One of the major policy implications of Imran Khan's government after the Taliban takeover was advocating for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in international forums,

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Pakistan, "Chequers Summit Joint Statement", February 4, 2013. Retrieved from <https://mofa.gov.pk/chequers-summit-joint-statement/>

⁷¹ *ibid*

⁷² *ibid*

⁷³ Perspectives from Pakistan on Afghan Peace and Reconciliation PIPS quarterly monitor-1 (2021). www.pakpips.com

⁷⁴ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan hails Doha accord as harbinger of peace in Afghanistan," Dawn, March 01, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1537462>

⁷⁵ *ibid*

⁷⁶ Rahim Faiez, "Pakistan's Prime Minister Khan on 'Historic' First Visit to Afghanistan," The Diplomat, November 20, 2020. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2020/11/pakistans-prime-minister-khan-on-historic-first-visit-to-afghanistan/>

⁷⁷ *ibid*

calling for the releasing of the Afghanistan reserves, and providing humanitarian aid.⁷⁸ This policy was based on the rationale that peace in Afghanistan is linked with the peace and economic prosperity of Pakistan and the region. Instability in Afghanistan could lead to a refugee crisis, an increase in militarization, and a spillover of high-level violence in the case of a civil war in Afghanistan.⁷⁹ During the annual session of the UN General Assembly in September 2021, Afghanistan was the main issue of PM Imran Khan's address. He called on the international community to stabilize the Taliban government for the sake of the Afghan people.⁸⁰ Pakistan also hosted a virtual meeting which was attended by FMs of China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, which resulted in China's announcement of \$31m as emergency aid to Afghanistan.⁸¹

Pakistan "Peace Builder or Spoiler" in Afghanistan

It is believed that Afghanistan is part of a greater game that is far bigger than the Indian and Pakistani security dilemmas. Pakistan and other regional actors have to understand that the forces at play in Afghanistan are transnational and various groups benefit from the current instability. Regional actors must therefore widen their understanding of the conflict in Afghanistan beyond the India-Pakistan conflict and thereby engage in mutual trust-building with this in mind.

It is agreed that the insurgent groups in Balochistan are not related to the Afghan government and that the Afghan government has no interest in the instability that these groups create. Every Afghan has hope for peace, and the Afghan government supports this in its policies. The importance of the different positions relates to how the current conflict in the region is understood, as it reveals the indicators that each party views as the largest obstacle to enhanced regional cooperation. This lesson is very important in designing and executing future projects aimed at increasing impact on or influence in the region. At present, Pakistan is struggling to build confidence and establish good relations with Afghanistan. Apart from ensuring a peaceful, stable and non-hostile Afghanistan, which is imperative for and directly linked to Pakistan's internal security, such efforts also form part of Pakistan's emerging foreign policy outlook, which largely builds on its economic and energy needs and internal pressures to counter extremist and militant threats. Failure to develop and implement a coherent policy and methodology for reconciliation in Afghanistan could have grim consequences for the security and stability of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the wider region.

Pakistan's stance on the Afghan government's relations with India has always held paramount importance in deciding their policies towards Afghanistan. To understand Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan, it is important to consider that Afghanistan, geographically, is part of the same regional context wherein the Indian-Pakistani security issue resides.⁸² Pakistan has no problem with Indian-Afghan trade and economic cooperation, but when the cooperation is about security, from a Pakistani point of view it is perceived as an Indian effort to create a second front with Pakistan, which Pakistan simply

⁷⁸ *ibid*

⁷⁹ US Department of State, "Joint Statement on Extended "Troika" on Peaceful Settlement in Afghanistan," March 18, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-extended-troika-on-peaceful-settlement-in-afghanistan/>

⁸⁰ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "PM solicits world support for new Afghan rulers," Dawn, September 25, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1648252/pm-solicits-world-support-for-new-afghan-rulers>

⁸¹ *ibid*

⁸² Threlkeld, Elizabeth, and Grace Easterly. *Afghanistan-Pakistan ties and Future stability in Afghanistan*. United States Institute of Peace, 2021.

cannot accept. In the past, India has used Afghanistan to challenge Pakistan, which has affected the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan negatively.⁸³

Revisiting the history of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which better determines the role of Pakistan in peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been hosting about three million Afghan refugees since the 1980s. At present, the number of such refugees in Pakistan is around 2.7 million, of whom 1.7 million are registered with the authorities.⁸⁴ Pakistan considers this a significant contribution towards sharing the burden of Afghanistan and continues to do so. Thus, the road to peace in Afghanistan always runs through Pakistan; and a safe Pakistan guarantees a safe future for Afghanistan.^{85, 86}

Conclusion

The past four decades of war and disorder have had a devastating impact on the Afghan people. Millions have been killed, millions more have been forced to flee their homes and the country's infrastructure and forests have all but been destroyed. The social fabric of the country is fractured and state institutions are fragile and weak. Since both internal and external roots of conflict exist in Afghanistan, the role of external stakeholders is stronger, compared to economic and social factors along with personal, psychological and identity dimensions. The efforts by Pakistan in peace and reconciliation have some sketchy appearances. The most important factor of all the above was roots, which could be found in the region, especially in the neighbouring countries such as Pakistan. The Taliban's intellectual and ideological roots go back to religious science schools in Pakistan. For this reason, in the wake of the US attack on the group in Afghanistan, the people of Pakistan, led by the *Jamaat-e-Islami* groups and the Muslim community, supported the Taliban and Bin Laden fighters and held rallies and demonstrations. They expressed support for their Afghan partners.

Pakistan did not take action against the Afghan Taliban present in Pakistan, including those in the Quetta *Shura* and members of the *Haqqani* network. Musharraf's military operations against the Pakistani Taliban were also selective and were mostly directed against the groups involved in terrorist activities inside Pakistan. While some observers regard this selective action against Afghan and Pakistani militants as linked to capacity and internal socio-cultural and political constraints, others see it as a strategic choice.⁸⁷

Pakistan was deeply concerned that any action that enraged the Afghan Taliban would exacerbate the militant threat within the country, as well as jeopardize Pakistan's future strategic position in Afghanistan. So, during the changed post-9/11 environment and the subsequent war on terror, Pakistan was not in a position to continue its earlier pro-Taliban and pro-jihadist policies. However, it did not compromise on its legitimate interests in Afghanistan that related in particular to countering India's growing ambitions there and ensuring that Afghan land is not used to fuel the insurgency in *Balochistan* and Pakistan's tribal areas. However, increasing internal threats from the Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups and Pakistan's growing concerns about its western borders with Afghanistan have eventually made it imperative for the country's policymakers to prioritize the establishment of a peaceful, stable, remilitarized, and neutral, if not friendly, Afghanistan.

⁸³ *Ibid*

⁸⁴ Ghufuran, Nasreen. "Afghan refugees in Pakistan current situation and future scenario." *Policy perspectives* (2006): 83-104.

⁸⁵ Sial, Safdar. "Pakistan's role and strategic priorities in Afghanistan since 1980." *Norwegian Peace Building Resource Center* 1 (2013): 1-10.

⁸⁶ Borthakur, Anchita. "Afghan refugees: The impact on Pakistan." *Asian Affairs* 48, no. 3 (2017): 488-509.

⁸⁷ Barve, Madelina. "Careless Peacebuilding: A Post-structural Policy Analysis of the Afghanistan Study Group Final Report: A Pathway for Peace in Afghanistan (2021)." (2021).

Pakistan's underlying objectives in terms of its endgame in Afghanistan are to ensure that there is a degree of peace and stability in Afghanistan – which is imperative for Pakistan's peace and stability – and an inclusive government in Kabul that fairly represents all sections of Afghan society is not hostile to Pakistan and limits the Indian presence in Afghanistan to only development activities.

Recommendations

Peace and reconciliation are important factors for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Moreover, reconciliation in Afghanistan will bring peace, economic stability, and security to the region and its neighboring countries, especially Pakistan. The plethora of events and circumstances (either internally or externally) had a visible role in the promulgation and inflexion of conflict in Afghanistan. The external roots are stronger, so peace and reconciliation should be sought abroad. So, based on the findings of the research, here are some recommendations for reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan regarding the role of Pakistan. This study proposes that Afghanistan and Pakistan should:

- Bring in initiatives that can be used to support joint military operations;
- To avoid conflict escalation, educate military forces on non-kinetic operations;
- Creating reconciliation pathways between Afghanistan and Pakistan;
- Develop joint Afghan-Pakistani institutions that can coordinate the war against drugs and smuggling in the border areas between the countries and agree on specific groups and individuals that should be jointly targeted by both countries;
- Facilitate economic cooperation at a bilateral level between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which can improve the security situation and living conditions for people in both countries;
- The international community's engagement in Afghanistan should, to a higher degree, focus on strengthening the quality of military forces through their training and equipment rather than expanding force numbers;
- Launch initiatives that can examine whether the international community's engagement in Afghanistan plays a proxy role in the deteriorating relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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