

# Afghanistan and Pakistan Relations: What Issues Matter?

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## Abstract

Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have been mostly tense. This paper analyzes the trajectory of these relations and elements that have contributed to their hostility. A qualitative approach has been adopted, and in-depth interviews were conducted with respective experts of the region. Six issues were identified. Namely, they are the Durand Line, the Taliban (Afghan and Pakistani) and Baloch people, India's partnership with the Afghan government, Pashtunistan, water and its management, and the Afghan refugee in Pakistan. The study also examines ways and their implication for mitigating and bridging the widening gap between the two countries. The research's systematic presentation is expected to contribute to understanding the very complicated relationship between the two countries.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Afghan refugee, Durand line, India, Pakistan, Pashtunistan, South Asia, Taliban

## Introduction

Afghanistan, though not officially recognized, shares its longest border (around 2500 km) with Pakistan. However, the two countries have very rarely experienced good state to state relations since Pakistan's establishment in 1947. It was only during the Taliban government (1996-2001), and during the Soviet intervention when most of Afghan *Mujahidin's* leaders sought refuge in Pakistan where the government and army of the Pakistan established friendly relations with these leaders; however, the later was not state to state relationship.

Durand Line and Pashtunistan were the main elements at the beginning. In 1949, after Pakistani forces bombed *Moghulgai* village in Afghanistan, the Afghan government convened *Loya Jirga* (grand assembly), including national assembly on 26 July, which landed support for Pashtunistan and nullified all agreements including the Durand Line that were signed with British India in the past.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dupree, Louis. "Afghanistan Princeton University Press." Princeton, New Jersey (1980).

At the onset of the cold war, Afghanistan kept non-alignment status, whereas Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1954 and 1955 respectively. Relations soared in the early 1960s; however, Iran mediated, and their ties normalized. During the India and Pakistan war in 1965, amid speculation that the Afghan government may take advantage of the time and attack for reclaiming the Durand Line or liberating Pashtunistan, Afghanistan assured Pakistan not to have any concern about its western border. However, the rapprochement was not materialized to yield and last for a longer time. This was followed by political changes, first in Afghanistan and then in Pakistan.

A constitutional monarchy was replaced with a republic as a result of a bloodless coup in 1973 by Daud Khan, who declared himself as a president and had already established a good relationship with the Soviet Union. He started crushing dissidents who later fled to Pakistan, where they were warmly welcomed and trained by Inter-Service Intelligence – ISI, the spy agency of Pakistan's military wing.<sup>2</sup> Regime change in both countries further fueled fluctuating ties. Military general Zia-ul-Haq toppled Zulfikar Bhutto's government in 1977 in Pakistan. A year later, the pro-communist party – People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) – killed president Daud Khan in a bloody coup. The following year witnessed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that resulted in millions of refugees moved into Pakistan. In collaboration with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and other anti-Soviet countries, Pakistan's government helped, regrouped, trained, and mobilized Afghan refugees led by religious leaders who later became known as *Mujahidin*.

Soviets, after about 11 years of a deadly war, were forced to withdraw, and the *Mujahidin* ousted the left behind government of Najibullah in 1992. The ties, though for a short time after the Taliban emerged and took over Afghanistan in 1996, changed, and the relations between the two countries improved and peaked during the Taliban regime 1996-2001. It was mainly because of two reasons: a) most of the leadership, and rank and file of the Taliban were *madrassa* (religious school) students and graduates who studied in Pakistan; b) the government of Pakistan, primarily its military wing, generously supported the Taliban (for details, see Misdaq, 2006; Rashid, 2010). After the regime change following the September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attack (9/11) in the United States,

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<sup>2</sup> Misdaq, Nabi. *Afghanistan: Political frailty and external interference*. Routledge, (2006).

both countries were expected to build good relations. Pakistan supported and joined the so-called *war on terror* and hosted six military bases of the United States to combat al-Qaeda and the Taliban. However, relations soared, and distrust prevailed mainly due to the regrouping and remobilization of the Taliban in Pakistan who pose existential threat to the current government of Afghanistan. This paper tries to identify possible elements that have adversely affected the two countries' relationship. It starts with analyzing and surveying relevant literature and interviews conducted for this research.

## 2. Literature Review

Literature regarding the Afghanistan and Pakistan relations produced by respective experts is primarily pursuing their official policy direction within a larger framework of the zero-sum approach. Such a state-centric narrative does not help in understanding the complicated trajectory of the relationship. This is despite the fact that the two countries are highly interdependent (for detail about the concept, see Keohane & Nye, 2004, p. 7-8) and "in the modern world no two states share as much common destiny as Afghanistan and Pakistan".<sup>3</sup> Contributors on either side undermine the others' narrative. Take, for example, the Durand Line issue;<sup>4</sup> advocate Pakistan's government narrative. They try to invalidate the elements questioning whether Pakistan was a legitimate heir of British India, if one of the signatories has not used force or money to intimidate and force the other to accept the deal, and if the agreement was genuinely mutually consensual. They both back and argue that the Line is truly an internationally *de jure* border that has met all criteria required for sovereign borderline.

On the other hand, Tarakai, while examining a legal aspect of the Durand Line, nullified its existence.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Zirakyar questions the word 'frontier' used in the agreement. He argues that the term 'frontier' has nothing to do with the border; rather, it was only meant to outline the 'sphere of influence'.<sup>6</sup>

Disinformation and ungrounded rumors have also contributed to the already tense relationship. The role of India, for example, has

<sup>3</sup> Hasan, Khurshid. "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations." *Asian Survey* (1962): 14-24.

<sup>4</sup> Qassem, Ahmad Shayeq, and H. M. Durand. "Pak-Afghan Relations: The Durand Line Issue." *Policy Perspectives* (2008): 87-102.

<sup>5</sup> Omrani, Bijan. "The Durand line: History and problems of the Afghan-Pakistan border." *Asian Affairs* 40, no. 2 (2009): 177-195.

<sup>6</sup> Zirakyar, R. R. (2010, August 13). *The Durand Line*. [http://www.afghan-german.net/upload/Tahlilha\\_PDF/r\\_zirakyar\\_durand\\_agreement\\_examining3.pdf](http://www.afghan-german.net/upload/Tahlilha_PDF/r_zirakyar_durand_agreement_examining3.pdf)

been exaggerated, "a Pakistani student at Cambridge University [in the U.K.] told me that India has 18 consulates in Afghanistan." and another rumor is "India has border project in the country" (Interviewee 1). On the Afghan side, 'strategic depth' and 'Pakistan's influence on the Taliban' are the two exaggerated issues. An expert on the region agrees with such exaggeration and disinformation, "a Pakistan ambassador to Afghanistan confessed these phenomena and told me that the enemies of the two countries carry them out" (Interviewee 2). These state-centric narratives are spread by both local people, including the government, and media on either side. However, they may not know the 'enemies of the two countries' unless they know themselves first.

Internal shortcoming or weakness of the governments is another element that has adversely affected the relationships. To distract the public and hide their failures, governments in both countries have always tried to point fingers at the other one. Corruption in bureaucracy and difference between the two leading camps led by Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah, at least since 2014, has nothing to do with the government and army of Pakistan. On the other side, friction between civil government and the military exists. As a superior and lion-share holder in Pakistan, the latter has taken over the government in coup whenever the army deem it necessary. This 'military-dominated decision-making apparatus, particularly in foreign policy toward India and Afghanistan, persists. Ahmed Rashid argues this absurd approach makes Pakistan reluctant to develop a "rational policy toward Afghanistan" .<sup>7</sup>

Mutual distrust also plays its role. The two countries have organized multiple bilateral, trilateral, and quadrilateral meetings for issues they equally suffer. They are not sincere in relation with one another (Interviewee 1). Another expert (Interviewee 7) went further and is of the view that the previous president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai was convinced that Pakistan is trying to overthrow his government. Besides that, there are also more extreme commentators on both sides. Their opinions have intensified and worsen the countries' relations. An ex-chief of ISI, General Hamid Gul – once named 'father of the Taliban' – openly backs the Taliban, "I do support the Taliban because they are

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<sup>7</sup> Rashid, Ahmed. *Pakistan on the brink: The future of America, Pakistan, and Afghanistan*. Penguin, (2013).

fighting for freedom".<sup>8</sup> Retired general and ex-president Pervez Musharraf warns Afghanistan that Pakistan will need to take a 'countermeasure' if it [Afghanistan] becomes too close to India.<sup>9</sup> Another commentator questions the very existence of Pakistan and argued the country created to secure an interest of great powers (first UK and now the USA) and it should be disintegrated because its existence is mutually exclusive with that of Afghanistan (Interviewee 4).

Almost the same ideological contradiction exists regarding Pakistan's influence over the Taliban. Afghan experts argues that Pakistan is controlling the Taliban and anyone who tries to go uncontrolled is immediately imprisoned or killed (Interviewee 6). However, on the Pakistan side, it is the opposite. They contend that following the 9/11 incident, the government of Pakistan arrested and handed over a great number of Taliban to the United States and thus Pakistan betrayed the Taliban; therefore, Pakistan does not have much influence over the Taliban (Interviewee 7).

Apart from the state-centric narrative of the two countries, another element that affects the relations is the international community –particularly the United States. Prior to the September attacks, Pakistan and the Taliban had good relations. However, Pakistan outwardly broke ties with the Taliban and joined the *war on terror* after the U.S. warned them by 'either with us or against us.' Pakistan and the U.S. relations were relatively good until Pervez Musharraf and George W. Bush were in power. Relations deteriorated after the U.S. forces killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad around a mile away from the Pakistan military academy on 02 May 2011. The ties further worsened when Pakistan blocked the NATO supply route, following a *Salala Attack* in which NATO air forces allegedly killed 24 Pakistan soldiers the same year. However, Pakistan has remained a vital player in the *war on terror*. It played an important role in negotiation between the Taliban and the U.S. that resulted in Doha agreement in February 2020. Pakistan will continue to stay a vital player who can influence the Taliban during the intra-Afghan Talks stipulated in the agreement. Based on the extant literature and talks conducted with interviewees, main factors that have adversely affected the two

<sup>8</sup> Kotasthane, Pranay, Guru Aiyar, and Nitin Pai. "The Other Pakistan: Understanding the Military–Jihadi Complex." *Essay. In Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Pakistan: TAYLOR & FRANCIS* (2017).

<sup>9</sup> Tandon, S. (2011, October 26). Pakistan needs Afghan counter-measure [News Agency]. AFP. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gt1oc9MBWNtle3OyR4rvy9EyQwHg?docId=CNG.64f335a63a0a239e61cf0891c65a0c44.201>

countries' relationship are inducted and examined below. It begins with the Durand Land.

### **3. The Durand Line**

Afghanistan shares the longest border, around 2500 km, with Pakistan. The border, which was drawn on a map and has not been properly demarcated on the ground, is largely known as the Durand Line. After the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-80), British India was trying to block Russia's growing influence<sup>10</sup>. The British soldiers were repeatedly attacked by the tribal armed people who inhabited Pashtun-belt (today's southern and eastern Afghanistan, northwestern and western Pakistan). The British Empire was pursuing their *forward policy* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or during the so-called *Great Game* era. They invaded Afghanistan two times; 1838-42 and 1878-80. British India made twenty-three (1857-1881) attempts in response to the Pashtun tribal raid, but this military commandment brought no lasting improvement.<sup>11</sup> Although Afghanistan was recognized as a neutral country by Russia and Great Britain,<sup>12</sup> she became an Anglo-Russian rivalry venue. Britain tried to stop the Russian advance by seeking to make Afghanistan a buffer zone between or simply by occupying it. The Russians were persistently trying to harass British India through Afghanistan (Kapur, 1965), quoted in.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the second Afghan-Anglo war (1878-80), an agreement called *Gandamak Treaty* was signed on 26 May 1879 between Afghanistan and Britain. The former became a *protectorate state*, and the latter was entitled to lead foreign relations of Afghanistan. Article three of the treaty reads, "His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies agree to conduct his relations with the Foreign States in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British government. His Highness the Amir will enter into no engagements with Foreign States, and will not take up arms against any Foreign State, except with the concurrence of the British Government," The British government also demarcated northern boundaries of Afghanistan with

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<sup>10</sup> Russia attacked northwest of Afghanistan in 1885 and annexed Panjdeh.

<sup>11</sup> Omrani, Bijan, and Frank Ledwidge. "Rethinking the Durand line: The legality of the Afghan-Pakistani frontier." *The RUSI Journal* 154, no. 5 (2009): 48-56.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad, N. D. "The Survival of Afghanistan 1747-1979." *Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture* (1990).

<sup>13</sup> Wakman, Mohammad Amin. *Afghanistan at the Crossroads*. ABC Publishing House, (1985).

Russia,<sup>14</sup> It also tried to keep Afghanistan more dependent, so they gradually made it a landlocked country (Interviewee 3).

In the aftermath of the First Anglo-Afghan war, local people did not stop attacking the British forces; therefore, they envisioned another plan. In 1893, the foreign secretary of British India – Mortimer Durand – arrived in Kabul. On 12 December 1893, Amir Abdul Rahman and Mortimer Durand signed an agreement – the Durand Line. Since the Line separated the Pashtun belt, Pashtuns denounced and perceived it as a separation between their tribes. Reaction amongst the Pashtun tribes to the demarcation was generally (though with a few exceptions) negative. The *Mahsuds* (live in today's South Waziristan of Pakistan) attacked and burned the British Boundary Commission camp in Wana in 1894 and 1897. When the commissions concluded its work, a general uprising made Britain send 60,000 troops to quell it.<sup>15</sup>

After the 1894 and 1897 riots, the Durand Line issue was relatively calm until the British imperial role in the Indian subcontinent. Nevertheless, (Interviewee 3) argued that Habibullah Kalakani was the first ruler who formally nullified the Durand Line. The Durand Line rose again during the India and Pakistan partition (1947). The Afghan government condemned a British-sponsored referendum in July 1947 in Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) of India (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan). It advocated those options should have been given to the people if they want an independent state or join Afghanistan. A letter sent by the Afghan delegation to the British secretary of state for foreign affairs reads, "His majesty's government should be informed that the Royal Afghan Government cannot remain indifferent to any decision, which will be contrary to justice and the freedom of the Afghans of the Northwest Frontier Province, and will be obliged to consider the interests of this large Afghan community".<sup>16</sup> However, the referendum had only two options whether the people prefer to join India or Pakistan.

After her establishment in 1947, Pakistan applied for membership in United Nations, and Afghanistan cast a negative vote.<sup>17</sup> Although Afghanistan withdrew her negative vote 20 days later, its relations' future trajectory had already been made clear.

<sup>14</sup> Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Omrani, Bijan, and Frank Ledwidge. "Rethinking the Durand line: The legality of the Afghan-Pakistani frontier." *The RUSI Journal* 154, no. 5 (2009): 48-56.

<sup>16</sup> Ali, Mehrunnisa, ed. *Pak-Afghan Discord: A Historical Perspective: Documents, 1855-1979*. Pakistan study centre, University of Karachi, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> Wakman, Mohammad Amin. *Afghanistan at the Crossroads*. ABC Publishing House, 1985.

Two years later, a border clash erupted, followed by a bombardment of Pakistani jets in Afghanistan. The Afghan parliament issued a resolution nullifying all agreements signed by Afghanistan and British India.<sup>18</sup> In 1955, Pakistan restructured its administrative units on a one-unit basis by incorporating all the areas in the western part of the country as a West Pakistan province and eastern areas (today's Bangladesh) as an East Pakistan province. The Afghan government opposed the decision, and people staged protests inside Afghanistan. Both countries' diplomatic offices were attacked and then closed. However, they opened embassies.<sup>19</sup> Relations escalated again early in the 1960s but subsided with Iran mediation. Afghanistan assured and sided with Pakistan during the India-Pakistan war in 1965, and rapprochement lasted until regimes change in Afghanistan and later Pakistan in 1973 and 1977, respectively.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979, the country plunged into war, followed by a civil war till the Taliban emerged. During around these 20 years (1980-2001), the Durand Line issue was almost neglected because Afghanistan did not have a stable government. Although the Taliban had close relations with Pakistan, the Durand Line remained anathema. During the post-Taliban era, the Durand Line once again emerged. After Pakistan was criticized for not taking action against the Taliban in 2006, it came up with an idea to fence and the border. However, Afghanistan opposed it, which "provoked Afghan sensitivities regarding the Durand Line as the international border".<sup>20</sup> Later on, Pakistan started firing missiles for allegedly targeting the Pakistani Taliban in Kunar province of Afghanistan. However, it was also an attempt to put pressure on the Durand Line issue. When Marc Grossman, the U.S. representative for the two countries, stated that the Durand Line was an 'international border' in 2012, both the Afghan government and people reject it by protesting. Its foreign ministry quickly issues a statement saying that "The status of the Durand Line is a matter of historical importance for the Afghan people. Therefore, the Afghan government rejects and considers irrelevant any statement by anyone about the legal status of this Line."<sup>21</sup> Although Pakistan later in 2016 started fencing the border

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<sup>18</sup> Qassem, Ahmad Shayeque, and H. M. Durand. "Pak-Afghan Relations: The Durand Line Issue." *Policy Perspectives* (2008): 87-102.

<sup>19</sup> Durani, Mohib Ullah, and Ashraf Khan. "Pakistan-Afghan Relations: Historic Mirror." *The Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (2002): 25-61.

<sup>20</sup> Khan, Riaz Mohammad. *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, extremism, and resistance to modernity*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> MOFA, "Statement of MOFA of Afghanistan on the Durand Line" 22 October 2012.



and the Afghan government did not officially protest, the Line remains and will continue to remain a contentious issue between the two countries.

#### 4. Pashtunistan

The origin of Pashtunistan –literally the land of Pashtuns – is almost coeval to the Durand Line, and both emerged in the 1940s when the Indian subcontinent partition was inevitable. Pashtun is the second-largest ethnicity in Pakistan. Pashtun nationalist movement – *Khudai Khidmatgar* 'servant of God' – was struggling for independent sovereignty, particularly during the 1940s. They boycotted the 1947 referendum because voters were given only two options. After the creation of Pakistan, the government started suppressing those Pashtuns who were advocating for Pashtunistan. However, Afghanistan put forward a demand for creating an independent Pashtunistan, "The idea was that Pakistan should allow the Pashtuns in the northwestern part of their country to—if they so choose—secede and become an independent state."<sup>22</sup> Louis Dupree argued that Afghanistan denied Pakistan membership of the U.N because of Pashtunistan.<sup>23</sup> He further stated that the government in Afghanistan condemned any act of suppressing Pashtun. When Daud Khan, a staunch advocate of Pashtunistan, became a president, the dynamic of the relationship with Pakistan also changed. Pakistan developed a new plan "to create pressure within Afghanistan that could be used to reduce Daud's urge to pursue the Pashtunistan issue... Bhutto [Prime Minister of Pakistan] agreed to give protection and military training to Afghan Islamists whose explicit aim was to overthrow the regime in Kabul".<sup>24</sup>

In the 1970s, Pakistan was supporting Afghan dissidents, and Afghanistan was taking the measure. Daud Khan also promoted a 'directorate of tribal affairs' to the 'ministry of tribal affairs, which was perceived as a revival of Pashtunistan in Pakistan.<sup>25</sup> Free Pashtunistan Day (FPD) started to be officially observed, where leaders in Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan were invited. Furthermore, the government named 'Pashtunistan Square' in Kabul still exists (Interviewee 3). These developments

<sup>22</sup> Gartenstein-Ross, Daveed, and Tara Vassefi. "The forgotten history of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations." *Yale J. Int'l Aff.* 7 (2012): 38.

<sup>23</sup> Dupree, Louis. "Afghanistan Princeton University Press." *Princeton, New Jersey* (1980).

<sup>24</sup> Weinbaum, Marvin G. *Pakistan and Afghanistan: Resistance and Reconstruction*. Westview Press, 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmad, N. D. "The Survival of Afghanistan 1747-1979." *Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture* (1990).

further strained the situation and agitated many in the Pakistani government establishment.<sup>26</sup> Although during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Pashtunistan issue was almost forgotten, the Soviet backed-government of Afghanistan had contacts with Pashtun nationalists' leaders and members of Awami National Party (ANP) of Pakistan, "followers of the ANP were well rewarded by their paymaster in Moscow with trips, scholarships, party subsidies, and arms. Wali Khan made periodic trips to Kabul and the Soviet Union."<sup>27</sup> During the intra-Afghans wars, "the cause of Pashtunistan lost much of its appeal".<sup>28</sup> The post-Taliban government of Afghanistan neither openly supports the Pashtunistan cause nor celebrates the FPD. Still, there are civil societies in Afghanistan that organize gatherings, and sometimes governmental officials also attend, where they praise and support Pashtuns leaders of Pakistan. Although the Pashtunistan cause has lost its charisma recently, it used to be an element that had contributed to the tense relationship.

## **5. The Taliban**

The Taliban is another source of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Talib (plural is Taliban) is an Arabic word, literary means student or a person who seeks knowledge. After the Soviet's withdrawal in 1989 and a subsequent collapse of their backed government, in April 1992, a fragile agreement – the Peshawar accord – brokered by the Pakistani government and agreed upon the *Mujahidin* was reached but not abided. Thus, civil wars started among the seven parties of *Mujahidin*. The war divided people based on their political affiliations and ethnicity, and it inflicted heavy casualties and caused destruction. Chaos prevailed, and warlords emerged and started ruling their respective regions. This, in turn, paved the way for the emergence of the Taliban in Kandahar province in early 1994 under the supreme leadership of *Mullah Omer*. The war-weary public welcomed them at the beginning for their specific goals " [to] restore peace, disarm the population [warlords], enforce Sharia law and defend the integrity and Islamic character"<sup>29</sup> and were not favoring political power (Interviewee 3). After successfully

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<sup>26</sup> Khan, Riaz Mohammad. *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, extremism, and resistance to modernity*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Weinbaum, Marvin G. *Pakistan and Afghanistan: Resistance and Reconstruction*. Westview Press, 1994.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press, 2010.

crushing civil war commanders and capturing Kabul in 1996, the Taliban changed their vision and established a government - the *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*. From the very emergence, the government of Pakistan supported them, "students of a *madrassa* (religious school) equipped with weapons crossed the border and joined the Taliban [in 1994]" (Interviewee 3); "ISI [spy agency of the military of Pakistan] helped them and gave substantial bribe" and Pakistan provided weapons, ammunition, money, trained soldiers and office.<sup>30</sup>

During the Taliban reign (1996-2001), music and other entertainment, including watching movies and television, were banned. Media were curtailed to only a state radio. Women were restricted at home, and so did their education and employment. This was one of the reasons that the Taliban were criticized worldwide, and only three countries (Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) diplomatically recognized them. They strictly enforced their version of Sharia law, in which men were punished for cutting beards and shopkeepers for not closing shops during prayer time. They were severely punishing criminals; thieves' hands were cut off, and adulterers were stoned to death. However, ironically, an unprecedented peaceful environment prevailed. People could travel freely, and without fear, throughout areas, the Taliban were controlling. Their conservative religious orthodoxy is informed by *Deobandi* Islamic teaching, which is dominant in South Asia. Its religious schools are largely funded by Saudi Arabia; most of them consider Shia as non-Muslim.<sup>31</sup>

After the September attack of 2001, the United States ordered the Taliban to handover the founding father of *al-Qaeda*, who masterminded the attack - Osama bin Laden. This Saudi millionaire had been sheltered in Afghanistan after he was forced to leave Sudan in 1996. He helped and supported the Taliban in fighting against their rivals. The Taliban rejected the American request while insisting on a free trial or handing him over to a third party. The United States denied, invaded, and ousted the Taliban in late 2001. Subsequently, a new government was established. The Taliban were not only ignored during the formation of the new government but also their peaceful existence was denied in Afghanistan primarily by the United States, so most of them

<sup>30</sup> Rothstein, Hy, and John Arquilla, eds. *Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War*. Georgetown University Press, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, Thomas H., and M. Chris Mason. "Understanding the Taliban and insurgency in Afghanistan." *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 71-89.

sheltered in Pakistan, wherewith the Pakistani government's support, they regrouped within four years and started attacking the Afghan government and international coalition forces.<sup>32</sup> Since then, the Taliban kept and increased their attacks. Later on, the government tried to reconcile by offering various incentives, but the Taliban consistently deny and insisting on the full withdrawal of international forces. For the time being, negotiations are underway in Doha of Qatar to pave the way for the U.S. withdrawal and formation of a new inclusive government in Afghanistan. However, the war has already killed more than one hundred thousand civilians, and the official number of casualties inflicted on the belligerents is not made public yet.

### **5.1 Pakistani Taliban**

Another factor that functions as a catalyst in Afghan-Pak relations is the Pakistani Taliban –*Tahreek Taliban Pakistan* (TTP). Pakistan blames the Afghan government for supporting TTP, which declared war against the Pakistan government. The Pakistan government believes that the Afghan government has leverage on the TTP and using them against them. However, the Afghan government repeatedly denies any relations with the TTP, a militant group fighting against the government throughout Pakistan for implementing their version of Sharia. The group also attacks the NATO forces in Afghanistan. The colossal attack was the one in which seven CIA top members were killed in December 2009. Pakistan claims that the TTP has sanctuaries in Kunar province of Afghanistan. They fire missiles into Kunar and Nuristan provinces, where they believe TTP has trenches. However, these missiles mostly hit local Afghan houses and causing casualties.<sup>33</sup>

### **5.2 Baloch Fighters**

The TTP is not the only group that the Pakistan government accuses Afghanistan of having relation with; there is another separatist movement in Pakistan fighting for an autonomy of Baluchistan, the western province of Pakistan. Pakistan claims that the Afghan government, along with India, financial support and train these separatists in Kandahar, a neighboring province with Baluchistan. However, Afghanistan rejects these claims. The

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<sup>32</sup> Dam, Bette. "A Man and a Motorcycle." *How Hamid Karzai came to Power*. Utrecht: *Ipsa Facto Publishers* (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Salarzai, K. W. (2012). Pakistani Missiles Raindown Kunar [News Agency]. *Pajhwok*. <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/07/21/pakistani-missiles-rain-down-kunar> (accessed April 03, 2013).

separatist movement expanded, and increased their attacks after the Pakistan army started a military operation in Baluchistan and killed their leader Akbar Bugti in 2006. Supporting the Baluch separatists' issue emerged when the Afghan government demanded that Pakistan does more against the Taliban. This tit-for-tat and blaming game have already pushed the two countries' relations on the brink, and seemingly it will further prolong and deteriorate the ties.

More recently, a movement advocating for civil rights and denouncing enforced disappearance and terrorizing people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa called Pashtun *Tahafuz* (Protection) Movement (PTM) has been blamed for receiving Afghanistan support. The group has received great recognition both domestically and globally despite the fact that the government of Pakistan has banned media coverage of their activities. Two core members of the leadership of Pashtun *Tahafuz* Movement won national assembly seats.

## 6. India's involvement in Afghanistan

During the Cold War era, India sided with the *East Block*. During the 1950s, Pakistan blamed India and Russia for backing the Afghan government to support Pashtun nationalists inside Pakistan. Ironically, Afghanistan assured Pakistan about its west border during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. Pakistan and India have a hostile history of relations. Pakistan considers India a serious threat to their national interests and vice versa. Pakistan, whose east is entirely encircled by India, perceives India's greater involvement in Afghanistan as encirclement. However, Afghanistan as a sovereign country looks at Indian as an emerging political and economic power in the region, which is vital for the war-torn country and its development.

India has developed a friendly relationship with the Afghan government since 2002. During the 1990s civil war, Pakistan backed the Taliban while India kept supporting those fighting against the Taliban. India viewed the Taliban as a shadow government of Pakistan, "India backed Kabul simply because of Pakistani support to the Taliban"<sup>34</sup> and "India support for Rabbani and Masoud was primarily motivated by a desire for balance against Pakistan,"<sup>35</sup> Since India had friendly ties with Rabbani, who played an important

<sup>34</sup> Rashid, Ahmed. *Taliban: militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, Thomas H., and M. Chris Mason. "Understanding the Taliban and insurgency in Afghanistan." *Orbis* 51, no. 1 (2007): 71-89.

role in the post-Taliban government, this was a 'strategic disaster' for Pakistan, India has generously funded great projects in Afghanistan, e.g., the Salma Dam construction and a building for the Afghan parliament. It also facilitated and built a *Chabahar* port in Iran to lessen Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan transit routes. Besides that, India offers more than 500 scholarships for Afghan students each year, and its consortium significantly invested in *Hajigak* iron ore. The two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement in late 2011 as well. India pledged to help in Afghan capacity building in education, development, and people-to-people contacts.

Pakistan is concerned about India's involvement in Afghanistan, and "Islamabad viewed its Afghan policy through the prism of denying India an advantage in Kabul". It considers that "[India] is acting in opposition to Pakistan's attempt to convert Afghanistan into its dependence, thereby achieving multiples aims... to diminish India's large advantage".<sup>36</sup> Both countries deny each other, but their denial pivot is Afghanistan. India's presence in the country has upset and generated significant apprehensions in Pakistan.<sup>37</sup> The current president made some attempts to ease Pakistan's concerns when he first took office in 2014. He visited the general headquarter (GHQ) of the army and sent military cadres for training to Pakistan. However, it seems that did not yield the Pakistan desires.

India has multiple reasons to support and have friendly relationship with Afghan government. First, as a famous saying that *enemy of my enemy is my friend*. Second, a stronger state in Afghanistan is unlikely to be taken over by the Taliban; the latter are considered a strategic partner of Pakistan and have sympathy with Muslims in Kashmir. Third, a stable government in Afghanistan will sooner or later develop its infrastructure, namely water management, which potentially adversely affect hydro power in Pakistan. Fourth, a peaceful Afghanistan can also help India grasp natural resource both in the country and Central Asia; Tajikistan Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI) and Ainak copper mine in Afghanistan are just to name a few. Last but not least, Afghanistan through *Chabahar* port can provide an optimal route for India to develop trade with Central Asia.

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<sup>36</sup> Rothstein, Hy, and John Arquilla, eds. *Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War*. Georgetown University Press, 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Ganguly, Sumit. "India's Role in Afghanistan." *CIDOB Policy Research Project "Sources of (2011)*.

## 6.1 Water Issue

Afghanistan does not have a water management treaty with Pakistan. Since the two countries are highly dependent on agriculture, water management is a vital issue. Besides that, Pakistan lacks water resources and suffers due to shortages of power across the country. *Kabul River*, flowing in eastern Afghanistan, is and would-be another contested point in their relations. They have yet to discuss, let alone the settlement of water. The Afghan government plans to build a dam across the Kabul and its tributaries rivers,<sup>38</sup> which will affect the overall outflow of water to Pakistan. In the past, particularly after 2005, dams' related construction activities have been hampered by insecurity, and local authorities blame Pakistan for destabilizing and disturbing the relevant process. *Kabul River* and its tributaries such as Logar, Panjshir, Alingar, and Kunar rivers, pass through Kabul, Laghman, and Jalalabad provinces and enter Pakistan. Along with Bara and Swat rivers in Pakistan, the Kabul River joined the *Indus River* near *Khairabad* in Attack.

Although both countries openly argue that the water management is vital, it is still an unresolved issue. The countries have not prioritized it yet. Afghanistan will build dams over the *Kabul River* in the near future, which is certainly affecting Pakistan's current water resource. Afghan officials accuse Pakistan of fomenting insecurity in the region to halt dams and power constructing projects. Donor countries and institutions that support Afghanistan's infrastructures are reluctant to help, particularly in power and water management projects, because neighboring countries have concerns about Afghanistan's water flow to the neighboring countries. Amrullah Saleh, vice president and ex-head of spy agency of Afghanistan, wrote, "although water resources are good opportunities, meanwhile a great threat too for Afghanistan, the international community have spent billions of dollars, but could not dare to build a dam in *Kapisa*, because Pakistan does not want it".<sup>39</sup>

Since Afghanistan is for the time being not in financially strong enough to start building mega hydroelectric dam by its own, Pakistan enjoys free water inflow and is satisfied with the status quo. Any project affecting the flows of waters into Pakistan would

<sup>38</sup> Ghani, M. A. (2021, February 10). President Ashraf Ghani's Remarks at the Ceremony for Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between India and Afghanistan for Construction of Lalandar Dam in the Kabul River Basin/

<sup>39</sup> Saleh, A. (2013). *Short research about national threats for Afghanistan* [BBC Pashto]. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pashto/interactivity/2013/01/130104\\_ss-saleh-national-threats.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pashto/interactivity/2013/01/130104_ss-saleh-national-threats.shtml)

have repercussions. It seems rational that a stable Afghanistan will develop its infrastructures. Building dams and generating electricity will be a top priority because the country imports electricity from Central Asian countries now. The government in Afghanistan is convincing the international community and other donors that all aids should be spent and channeled through the government, where the government will prioritize and implement need-based projects. Besides that, Afghanistan is highly dependent on agriculture and needs to develop power-generating dams, while Pakistan is increasingly suffering from power shortage. Consequently, the water management problem will potentially adversely affect the relations, and further conflict is highly inevitable.

## **6.2 Afghan Refugees**

Afghan refugee is another element. About two million Afghan refugees live in Pakistan. United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) collaborates with the two countries to try to repatriate. The refugees fled to neighboring countries after the Soviet Union invasion, followed by the civil war in the 1990s. Pakistan has repeatedly been renewing the refugees' document to stay. Afghan refugees have been scapegoated in the past; whenever the Afghan government complained about the armed opponents crossing the border and attacking Afghan check posts, Pakistan often replied that it is hard to distinguish opponents and refugees. Both countries have concerns. Pakistan's concern is both economic and security. However, the former has the potential to contribute to its economy. In contrast, Afghanistan is worried that either the Taliban or some other armed opponent of the government may infiltrate and stimulate them against the government.<sup>40</sup> Pakistan has shut down some refugees' camps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad, Baluchistan, and tribal areas; thus, the refugees scattered mainly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan provinces.

The refugees remain an element of the matters between the two countries; however, it comparatively stays calm. Repatriation accelerated early in Ashraf Ghani's government but slowed down, and now it is stopped because of the coronavirus pandemic. Although refugees are not very much politicized compare to the other elements, it rises whenever Pakistan wants to put pressure

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<sup>40</sup> Margesson, Rhoda. "Afghan refugees: Current status and future prospects." Library of Congress Washington Dc Congressional Research Service, 2007.



on Afghanistan. Refugees will continue to be part of the issues that matter for the two countries. An optimal option to permanently resolve this issue would be a greater role and intervention of the UNHCR. Instead of supporting the refugees in Pakistan, the organization can repatriate them because it has the will and capacity to do so.

## **Conclusion**

Afghanistan and Pakistan have not had friendly state-to-state relations throughout history except during the Taliban. Their relationship is fluctuating. The dynamic of hostility has also been fueled by world order and great power, including regional ones. The two countries have multiple issues that are linked with each other. At the very beginning, the relations were looked through a state-centric, irredentist, and nationalistic lens. In other words, Afghanistan continued to advocate for Pashtunistan and Duran Line in the early days. Later on, the dynamic of power changed. The government in Afghanistan became weaker, particularly after the Soviet invasion. Using anti-communism block resources, e.g., the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan shattered Afghanistan's government and continues to keep this practice. Illusion, disinformation, and stereotype have driven bilateral relations. That is caused by state narratives, which have also influenced discourse narrated and promoted by intelligentsias in both countries. Indian involvement in Afghanistan and the influence of Pakistan on the Afghan Taliban have been exaggerated.

Duran Line is looked through nationalistic lenses in Afghanistan; therefore, is a sensitive issue more among Afghans than its government. However, it is an undisputed issue for Pakistan, at least on an official level internationally. As recommended based on oblivion approach of conflict resolution, the two countries shall better depoliticize and ignore it for the time being. The Pashtunistan cause is no longer an element as it is used to be. The issue of the Taliban, precisely the Afghan Taliban, is vitally important. It was the only regime in Afghanistan's history that Pakistan's government had a good relationship with. It should be accepted that Pakistan does have influence on the Taliban; subsequently, Pakistan can utilize this leverage to bring Taliban to start negotiation with Afghan government. Water is another issue that would dominate the relation unless great attention is paid immediately to address and produce mutually agreed agreement. The Afghan refugees, though calm for the time being, can be

settled through UNHCR who can accelerate and boost its capacity once the pandemic subsided.

The two countries have much room and potential for cooperation. They have shared identity, culture, and values mainly on either side of the Duran Line. Both countries suffer almost from the same problems: poverty, extremism, illiteracy, terrorism. Pakistan needs natural resources, e.g., gas and power, and a market for its products supplied to Central Asian countries through Afghanistan. As a landlocked country, Afghanistan needs to have the nearest route to the sea. This interdependency can be translated into cooperation. Considering the countries' current approach, these options and potentialities seem idealistic unless they understand each other's interests and genuine concerns. If utilized, the ongoing negotiation for peace is another optimal chance.

#### **About the Author**

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