

IMPACT OF THE US WITHDRAWAL ON PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN SECURITY COOPERATION: A POST-2021 ANALYSIS

Nabeel Abbas^{*1}, Humera Ambareen², Aleesha Abbas³, Mustafa Ali⁴, Hamid Hussain⁵

^{*1}Federal Urdu University of Arts Sciences and Technology Karachi Pakistan

²PhD Scholar at Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology

³Alumni the University of Punjab, Lahore

⁴Higher School of Economics Moscow, Russia

⁵Ahlul-Bayt International University Tehran - Iran

^{*1}nabeelbarma@gmail.com, ²humera.ambareen@gmail.com, ³aa.aleeshaabbas@gmail.com,

⁴mustafaali77777@gmail.com, ⁵hamidashina16@gmail.com

⁵<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4849-5913>

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the post-withdrawal contours of security cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The objective of this study is to dissect and unravel the complex bilateral dynamics in a better manner for tackling the threat landscape of militancy evolved after the 2021 US withdrawal and intelligence sharing needs to deter attacks. The methodology synthesizes insights from scholarly publications, think tank articles, official statements, and regional developments using qualitative secondary analysis of existing literature categorized along historical tensions, strategic interests, current initiatives, regional powers' roles, and partnership challenges/opportunities. For instance, very key results are very telling: deep-rooted trust deficits continue to burgeon from proxy interventions and terror sanctuaries fostering suspicion between agencies and the public. However, promising cooperation targeting militant groups has emerged lately. This means that in a lasting partnership, both sides have to provide tangible results by dismantling networks through coordinated raids. Incremental developments in Afghan peace talks, limitation of proxy wars through regional consensus, socioeconomic projects binding border communities, and enduring dialogue are fundamental confidence measures. Usefulness is actually in outlining cooperation areas and risks that still cloud potential with implications for regional stability.

Keywords: Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, Security cooperation, US withdrawal, Counterterrorism, Taliban, Border management, Peacebuilding

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a long border spanning over 2,600 km across uneasy geographical terrain, a colonial legacy of the Durand Line border demarcation, and deep cultural, historical and ethnic overlaps between border communities. This complex relationship has witnessed periods of close partnership as well

as mistrust and accusations. Core background issues provide vital context. Pakistan and Afghanistan have historically accused each other of harboring and supporting militant groups to undermine security. Afghanistan alleges Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence covertly supported the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani

Network by providing safe havens, training camps and reinforcements during the post-2001 insurgency against NATO forces (Saeed, 2022). Elements in Pakistan's security establishment viewed a pliant Taliban government as providing strategic depth against Indian influence in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan blames Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security for harboring anti-Pakistan militants like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that conduct cross-border terrorist attacks within Pakistan while maintaining sanctuaries on Afghan soil (Tahir, & Hussain, 2022). Weak governance capacity enables Afghanistan to become a regional hub of terrorism.

The Pakistan-Afghan border areas have historically remained porous allowing movements of militants that damage the security of both nations. The border was drawn by the British through Pashtun tribal areas without considering ground realities. Its terrain with mountain passes and cave hideouts makes surveillance difficult (Zulfqar, 2022). Lack of coordination between both militaries prevents control of cross-border infiltration. Terrorism, guns, drugs and human trafficking thrive due to this porosity - enabling criminal and insurgent groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K to exploit lack of oversight. Spillover violence as groups conduct cross-border raids is an enduring threat, further weakening the writ of the states in peripheral areas and energizing non-state actors (Akhtar, & Iqbal, 2023).

Conflict-induced displacement and migration, with Afghans seeking refuge in Pakistan due to violence while some Pakistani Pashtun communities relocate to Afghanistan, has also been a contentious issue. This places strains on both nations. Recurring Taliban violence saw peak Afghan refugees into Pakistan reaching 1.5 million in 2001 (Shah, & Azam, 2021). Criminal activity in refugee camps and austerity fuels local resentment against Afghans. Pakistan leverages refugee flows to extract aid, while coerced returns by removing refugee status frequently occur (Baqai, & Wasi, 2021). Sustainable repatriation and management of migration remains elusive despite the weight of numbers and economics affecting relations.

The United States' departure from Afghanistan serves as the backdrop for this investigation. This momentous event's occurrence set off a chain of related reactions throughout the area, which had repercussions for the region's politics, economy, and security. The complex connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan is crucial in the post-conflict situation, especially when it comes to cooperation in the security sector. Additionally, this partnership may be seen in the perspective of how Pakistan and Afghanistan's relationship has changed through time (Humza, A., & Khan, 2022). There has been a long and complex history of diplomatic interactions, mutual security concerns, and shared cultural values between these adjacent organizations. This paper recognizes the significance of historical background while emphasizing the contemporary requirement for security cooperation, particularly in light of the United States' recent disengagement.

The current study seeks to accomplish two main goals. With a focus on the interactions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the primary goal of this study is to assess the probable effects of the United States' planned departure from Afghanistan on regional security. This paper will look at the many security-related dangers and issues that might develop, as well as how the security environment changes after withdrawal. In order to strengthen the analytical rigor of this study, another goal of this research is to evaluate the strategic relevance of Pakistan and Afghanistan's security cooperation. This calls for a review of potential areas of cooperation as well as an examination of the nature and scope of shared risks. This research examines the topic from a variety of angles. The discourse covers both the possibility for regional and bilateral collaboration in security concerns in the wake of the United States' exit as well as the historical causes of the current tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This study adds to the body of knowledge already available on the complex dynamics of security cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It does this by looking at how historical elements, present problems, and future possibilities all come together.

Method

This paper undertakes a comprehensive review of existing literature on the impact of the US withdrawal on Pakistan-Afghanistan security cooperation. As a literature review, this paper synthesizes and analyzes previous research from scholarly journals, reports, and policy documents. The literature search strategy involved identifying relevant papers in academic databases such as, Google Scholar, and SciHub using keywords such as "Pakistan-Afghanistan relations," "security cooperation," "US withdrawal," "counterterrorism," and "intelligence sharing." Priority was given to recent papers published within the last 5 years to ensure an up-to-date understanding of this evolving partnership. However, seminal older papers providing critical historical context were also included. The literature was analyzed using a framework that examines the key aspects of Pakistan-Afghanistan security relations: historical background, post-US withdrawal threat landscape, Pakistan's strategic interests, and current cooperation initiatives, role of regional actors, challenges and opportunities. Relevant literature was categorized based on this framework to identify common themes, debates, and knowledge gaps across the existing research. Particular attention was paid to identifying primary data sources in the existing literature, such as government reports and official statements that provide direct insight into Pakistan and Afghanistan's security priorities and policies. Furthermore, the regional dynamics and interests of other actors like China, India, and Iran were mapped through analysis of their respective strategic publications. By undertaking a structured review of prior research, this study synthesizes the current state of knowledge on this topic. It also identifies critical areas for further investigation, such as assessing early impacts of recent cooperation agreements and exploring public perceptions shaping the partnership. The methodology provides a model for conducting exhaustive literature reviews on complex and evolving policy issues.

Historical Context of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

The interactions between Pakistan and Afghanistan throughout history have shown a variety of cooperative attempts, conflicts, and complex dynamics. Due to their close proximity to one another and shared cultural heritage, these two countries' destiny are deeply entwined. However, historically, their interactions have been marked by a mix of harmony and discord, depending on a number of variables (Bashir, 2023). Over the course of several centuries, the two countries have engaged in major cultural and economic interchange, which has strengthened their bonds. Societies have created a feeling of common identity throughout history by adopting similar linguistic, religious, and tribal practices (Maulida, 2022). However, the establishment of these connections has given rise to certain challenges, as tribal loyalties occasionally transcend national boundaries and lead to tensions along international borders (Shah, & Ismail, 2023). The Durand Line, a demarcation line established during the era of British colonialism in the late 19th century, remains a subject of ongoing contention. Disputes occasionally arise due to Afghanistan's failure to formally recognize this border as the official demarcation between the two nations.

As per Khalid et al. (2023) Pakistan and Afghanistan have occasionally collaborated on security matters, despite their intricate historical backgrounds. Pakistan played a pivotal role in facilitating the ultimate withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan through the provision of assistance to Afghan resistance factions, particularly during the course of the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s. Nevertheless, these periods of collaboration have commonly been succeeded by challenges. The emergence of the Taliban during the 1990s, purportedly with assistance from factions within Pakistan, intensified the existing tensions between the two countries and furthered their global marginalization (Muzaffar et al., 2023). Furthermore, a shift in dynamics occurred subsequent to the events of September 11th, 2001. The post-Taliban period and subsequent international involvement in Afghanistan have

ushered in a new phase of collaboration between Pakistan and Afghanistan, driven by mutual security interests. Nevertheless, the progress of these endeavors was impeded by accusations of providing sanctuaries for extremists on either side of the border and by conflicting goals in the counterterrorism campaign (Noreen, & Junaid, 2022).

Post-US Withdrawal Security Dynamics

The withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan will give rise to novel security considerations. The Afghan government's security forces will face significant challenges in their efforts to deter the resurgence of the Taliban and other extremist groups following the withdrawal of foreign troops from the nation (Ahlawat, & Izarali, 2022). The absence of a reassuring international presence may potentially enhance the self-assurance of these individuals and exacerbate the state of security. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are confronted with the dual imperatives of combating insurgency and maintaining national security and tranquility. The transition from a security environment mostly led by NATO to one where Afghan forces play a dominant role has significant implications for both Afghanistan's internal stability and its relationships with neighbouring countries (Malik, 2023).

According to Humza, & Khan, (2022), Pakistan is strategically positioned to potentially experience the adverse consequences of the changing security dynamics in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the United States. The potential for heightened security concerns in Pakistan may be exacerbated if the ongoing deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan persists. Pakistan's security and stability are jeopardized by the incursion of extremist elements over its borders and an escalation in the influx of those seeking shelter within its territory (Faheem et al., 2022). The somewhat unpredictable nature of the situation may make Pakistan reassess its security posture along the western border. Pakistan would face a tough challenge in its post-withdrawal situation because it attempts to attain a delicate balance between its objective to stabilize and secure from security threats (Nisar et al., 2023).

As per Raz, (2023), Terrorist organizations have been utilizing the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan as a haven, through which they are conducting different functions like recruitment, training, and strategizing. This may be because foreign soldiers withdrawing from Afghanistan could eventually cause a serious escalation in threats against the security of Afghanistan and its neighbours. That would be because a vacuum of power can emerge after a power shift, which is such an opportunity for terrorist groups to take advantage of. Taliban's resurgence is one cause for concern, in addition to others. As their operations expand, they may eventually end up hosting other transnational extremist groups in the provinces that they control in different parts of Afghanistan (Mahmood et al., 2023). The contact and potential collaboration of different entities can modify the security environment in unpredictable ways.

Pakistan's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan

As per the study of Akram, (2020), the national security challenges faced by Pakistan are closely intertwined with its numerous strategic interests in Afghanistan. The proliferation of instability emanating from Afghanistan and its subsequent impact on Pakistan is a significant source of worry. Militant organizations provide a significant threat to the security of Pakistan, mostly attributable to the traditionally porous border shared between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Akram, & Riaz, 2023). Pakistan aims to avoid the emergence of a hostile government in Afghanistan due to the potential formation of an alliance between Afghanistan and Pakistan's regional adversaries. This alliance has the potential to encircle Pakistan and thus undermine its strategic position (Humza, & Khan, 2022). Pakistan's foreign policy is confronted with the intricate task of effectively managing the dual objectives of safeguarding its own interests while concurrently fostering a harmonious and amicable relationship with its neighboring countries (Noreen, & Junaid, 2022).

Pakistan's strategic approach towards addressing the evolving security dynamics in Afghanistan places significant emphasis on the implementation of effective border control measures. The

complexity of the situation is heightened by other factors, including as the ongoing Durand Line dispute, the movement of refugees across borders, and the enduring cultural connections between neighboring regions (Shah, & Ismail, 2023). In order to mitigate illicit activities and deter the emergence of extremist elements, it is imperative to enhance border controls and foster enhanced cooperation with Afghan authorities inside the border region. The movement of individuals, commodities, and concepts across national borders yields cultural, economic, and social ramifications for both the sending and receiving regions (Bashir, 2023). Striking a balance between stringent security measures and ongoing human interaction poses a challenging endeavor. The significance of Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts inside the framework of Afghanistan has immense weight. The military operations conducted by Pakistan against many militant organizations have led to a decline in internal terrorist threats. Nevertheless, Afghanistan continues to have safe havens and sanctuaries for some organizations (Khalid et al., 2023). Pakistan has always emphasized the imperative of a tranquil and secure Afghanistan in order to mitigate the influx of terrorists transgressing the shared border. Pakistan adopts a comprehensive strategy to safeguard its national security, which encompasses collaborative efforts with other nations to counteract terrorism and promote peace in the region of Afghanistan (Ahlawat, & Izarali, 2022).

Evolving Security Cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan

The security cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan has undergone modifications and adjustments after the withdrawal of United States soldiers from the latter nation. To mitigate the potential threats presented by extremist organizations and preserve regional stability, it is imperative to foster a partnership between the two nations (Malik, 2023). In recent times, there have been instances of high-level diplomatic engagements, discussions surrounding collaborative policy frameworks, and the establishment of bilateral agreements aimed at enhancing security cooperation (Noreen, &

Junaid, 2022). The emergence of these recent developments serves as evidence of the prevailing consensus on the imperative nature of collaborative endeavours in effectively addressing security challenges.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have initiated a collaborative effort to combat terrorism and extremism, indicating a promising development in their security cooperation. Both nations acknowledge the imperative of dismantling the support structures of terrorist groups that present a threat to their respective national security (Raz, 2023). Considerable efforts have been undertaken to tackle this common concern using coordinated sharing of intelligence, cooperation initiatives in counterterrorism, and joint military operations along the border. The ongoing establishment of this relationship also encompasses endeavours to engage with Indigenous communities to counteract extremist propaganda and promote the cultivation of stability (Akram, & Riaz, 2023).

The timely and correct exchange of intelligence plays a critical role in facilitating successful security cooperation. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan recognize the need of intelligence cooperation as a means to prevent and respond to security situations (Faheem et al., 2022). Potential assaults can be mitigated by the implementation of preventive measures, while the surveillance of militant organizations' whereabouts can be facilitated through collaborative intelligence efforts. Enhancing military collaboration is necessary in order to effectively address emerging security challenges in a timely manner (Maulida, 2022). Regular consultations and joint exercises between the armed forces of both nations are advantageous as they promote mutual confidence and enhance interoperability. Pakistan and Afghanistan have a mutual objective of effectively managing the complex security environment that will emerge following the withdrawal of the United States (Bashir, 2023).

Geopolitical Factors and Regional Players

According to Hussain et al. (2023) the security collaboration between Pakistan and Afghanistan is situated within a complex network of regional entities, each with distinct aims and objectives. The security dynamics between the two nations

are very vulnerable to the actions and strategies of these entities. Neighboring countries to Afghanistan, China, India, and Iran, set up an important regional view of the context. All these countries have unique geopolitical interests in the region (Gul et al., 2022). The external variable effect might lead to shifts in the nature and intensity of cooperative security initiatives between Pakistan and Afghanistan (KAURA, 2021). The regional landscape is already complicated. However, it can be more complex when the entities interact with the additional entities involved.

China's Role and Interests in the Region

The emergence of China as a global player has spread its influence to the land of Pakistan and Afghanistan. For China, winning control of the Afghan region is highly essential to successfully implement the BRI designed to interconnect the regions and economies for better integration of their economy into a stable entity (Hanif et al., 2021). Instability might cause setbacks to regional infrastructure projects and China's tremendous economic interests. Therefore, China has a significant interest in keeping both countries stable and peaceful (Irfan et al., 2023). China's decision to join the QCCM would demonstrate its seriousness in regional security and commitment to counter-terrorism activities. The involvement in security-related activities would most probably translate into positive outcomes in furthering cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Zulfqar, 2022).

Impact of India and Iran on the Security Dynamics

Another set of influencers in Afghanistan's security dynamics involves the presence of India and Iran. India's economic initiatives and diplomatic endeavours have aimed to establish a favourable governance structure and limit the influence of political parties that it perceives as antagonistic (ÇAKIR, 2023). The implementation of this approach adds complexity to Pakistan's interests, hence exacerbating the challenges associated with managing regional security. Iran's involvement in the matter is primarily driven by apprehensions over its borders, drug trafficking,

and the potential for unrest to extend into its territory (Durrani, 2022). The collaboration between Pakistan and Afghanistan occurs within a regional context that is influenced, to some extent, by their interactions with each other.

Challenges and Opportunities

While Pakistan and Afghanistan have undertaken some promising initiatives to cooperate on security issues post the US withdrawal, several deep-rooted challenges remain that can severely impede building deeper collaboration unless consciously addressed.

Trust Deficit

The foremost obstacle is the persistent trust deficit plaguing relations between the two neighbors, shaped by decades of suspicion, blame games, and false promises. Pakistan believes that successive Afghan governments have harbored and given safe havens to anti-Pakistan militants like the TTP that carry out deadly attacks on Pakistani civilians and security forces (Khalidi, 2021). Meanwhile, Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of playing a "double game" and covertly supporting, training and giving strategic depth to the Afghan Taliban insurgency that has kept Afghanistan unstable (Altaf et al., 2022). This atmosphere of mutual mistrust and suspicion runs deep through the security establishments and wider public opinions shaping policies across the border. It has made both sides highly hesitant to share intelligence, cooperate on border security operations, or coordinate counter-terrorism responses due to fears of information leaks (Tahir, & Hussain, 2022).

Rebuilding confidence requires consistent and open-ended bilateral dialogue between civilian and military leadership, transparency measures in counter-terrorism efforts, and sustained actions that demonstrate good faith over time. Small tactical gestures of cooperation such as coordinating watch-lists, sharing forewarning of threats, or apprehension and extradition of wanted criminals can pave the way for larger joint operations as trust accrues (Baqai, & Wasi, 2021). Regional third parties like China and the US also need to provide reassurances and mediation where necessary. Insulating security cooperation from

political upheavals and maintaining institutional contacts across changing administrations is also essential (Saeed, 2022).

Differing Priorities

Pakistan and Afghanistan also differ significantly in their national security priorities and threat perceptions which impedes collaboration. For instance, Pakistan is more immediately concerned about tackling the resurgence of TTP militants in its border areas that directly target Pakistani civilians and security forces (Kosar, 2021). Meanwhile, the new Taliban government in Afghanistan is focused on neutralizing internal opposition militias like the NRF to consolidate power, as well as countering the local Islamic State affiliate which challenges Taliban primacy in the insurgency (Malik et al., 2022). These differing priorities have prevented effective coordination of policies, intelligence sharing, and joint special operations against militant groups that exploit the lack of unified response across the long and porous Pakistan-Afghan border.

Finding common ground on jointly targeting the most dangerous terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS-K that plan cross-border attacks would help align priorities for both neighbors. A joint bilateral threat assessment detailing mutual high-risk security threats followed by coordinated targeting of top militant leadership planning international plots would facilitate such shared understanding (Akhtar, & Iqbal, 2023). This can later expand to countering ethnic insurgent groups creating unrest on either side. Sequencing and compartmentalizing cooperation areas based on urgency and mutual risks can help overcome the differing priorities dilemma.

Cultural and Operational Barriers

There are cultural, linguistic, and institutional barriers between Pakistani and Afghan security agencies that pose obstacles for day-to-day cooperation. Interpretation and language issues during exchanges of time-sensitive intelligence have resulted in miscommunications and coordination errors allowing targets to escape capture (Shah, & Azam, 2021). Jihadist militants also exploit these inter-agency divides by selectively sharing intelligence with one country

to target assets of the other. There is still no bilateral counterterrorism cooperation treaty that defines protocols for intelligence sharing, joint investigations, extraditions arrangements, etc. Furthermore, there is a lack of interoperability between military forces patrolling border areas in terms of communications, drills, and rules of engagement which poses risks of accidental skirmishes (Irfan et al., 2023). Joint training programs, officer exchanges, standardization of communication protocols and transfers of border surveillance technologies through sales and aid can help overcome these issues over time. Deepening inter-personal and institutional links will also emerge by developing better cultural fluency through embedding language training and accent familiarization in professional training programs on both sides (Shah, & Ismail, 2023).

To fulfill the promise of closer cooperation, patient confidence-building measures and persistent efforts are imperative to build trust, better align priorities, and bridge the cultural-institutional divides between the security agencies across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Regional powers like the US and China also need to incentivize cooperation (Noreen, & Junaid, 2022).

Humanitarian Challenges and Refugee Management

The security situation in Afghanistan may give rise to humanitarian problems, namely the migration of communities. This situation has the potential to prompt a significant number of individuals to seek refuge in the adjacent nation of Pakistan, so exerting further strain on the country's already constrained resources (Malik, 2023). Effectively managing this challenge will need cooperation between the two countries as well as collaboration with external partners. The history of Pakistan and Afghanistan has always been tense as waves of Afghan migration towards the country have been largely motivated by both economic challenges and security concerns (Raz, 2023). Success in overcoming these challenges will require both a humanitarian-informed approach as well as one that takes into consideration security aspects at large (Akram, & Riaz, 2023).

Potential Areas of Enhanced Collaboration

While this may not be a smooth ride, there are avenues of increased cooperation that will further the region's quest to achieve more safety and stability.

Joint Counterterrorism:

It is through this counter-transnational action that extremist groups unleash that the involved nations benefit from. Regional security can be improved through information sharing, collaborative operations, and efforts to destroy terrorist networks (Mahmood et al., 2023).

Border Management and Cross-Border Trade:

Effective border barriers can hugely diminish the militants who are entering with illegal goods (Tahir, & Hussain, 2022). Facilitating legal cross-border business may boost economic relations and thus contribute to the creation of peaceful societies.

Multilateral platforms:

Another channel through which security cooperation could be expanded is participation in international forums and cooperative activities. Participation in regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) might give birth to potential avenues for the implementation of coordinated security policy (Humza, & Khan, 2022).

Cultural and Educational Exchange:

Enhanced global security can be achieved through heightened intergroup comprehension facilitated by expanded avenues for individuals to engage in cultural and educational exchange initiatives (Bashir, 2023).

Diplomatic Initiatives and Future Prospects

As per Baqai, & Wasi, (2021) Pakistan's diplomacy has been crucial to the success of the Afghan peace process and the stability of the surrounding region. After seeing how similar the security concerns of the various factions fighting in Afghanistan are, Pakistan has been attempting to utilize its influence to mediate discussions between the various parties. Pakistan has risen to a key role as a participant in the peace talks as a result of its hosting of negotiations and

collaboration with foreign partners (Saeed, 2022). Pakistan's commitment to Afghan stability is seen in the country's backing of an inclusive political settlement and its efforts to bridge differences among Afghan parties (Akhtar, & Iqbal, 2023). This diplomatic initiative has the potential to foster conditions conducive to collective defence. The security relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been bolstered not just by bilateral efforts but also by international and regional initiatives. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are two examples of regional communication, confidence-building, and collaboration mechanisms. Furthermore, international actors recognize the significance of Afghanistan's stability to regional security (Shah, & Azam, 2021). The Istanbul Process and the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) are two examples of initiatives that have attempted to coordinate interests and methods in the face of common issues.

Future Prospects for Security Partnership between both states

While Pakistan and Afghanistan have managed to restart efforts at cooperation post the US withdrawal, the future trajectory of this nascent partnership depends on managing ongoing peace processes and easing regional tensions.

Progress in Afghan Peace Talks.

The current cooperation is predicated on the assumption that the reinstatement of the Taliban in Afghanistan will not witness a descent into a full-blown civil war with resistance groups like the NRF. Pakistan's ability to leverage its links with the Taliban depends on the latter maintaining control (Noreen, & Junaid, 2022). If a civil war ensues, collaborating with the Taliban would place Pakistan in confrontation with other Afghan factions. Similarly, the Taliban cannot devote resources to bilateral security cooperation if they are embattled internally. This likelihood will impede the partnership. As such, constructive progress in intra-Afghan peace talks leading to a negotiated settlement with minority factions and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of militants is pivotal (Humza, & Khan, 2022). The

form of the future Afghan polity and governance structure will also shape the scope of the security partnership.

Tackling Terrorist Sanctuaries

The durability of Pakistan-Afghan security collaboration also rests on demonstrable efforts to deny safe havens to terrorist groups that could undermine the other. This is the bare minimum requirement for the partnership to remain functional and not be derailed by a spectacular cross-border terrorist attack like in the past (Mahmood et al., 2023). Both sides will need to see concrete outcomes of intelligence cooperation in terms of counter-terrorism raids, arrests and extraditions of high-profile militants. Confidence erodes quickly without such tangible results. Joint border patrolling and installation of robust border surveillance technology to prevent unchecked movements can also shore up coordination (Akram, & Riaz, 2023).

Regional Support Structures

The Pakistan-Afghan partnership cannot be isolated from regional geopolitics, especially the role of traditional patrons shaping Afghan stability like India, Iran and the US. China is also an emerging player (Hussain et al., 2023). Managing tensions that can enable proxy wars on Afghan soil will be crucial e.g. Pakistan cannot afford an expanded Indian security footprint in Afghanistan. This requires astute diplomacy. But a shared threat like border instability can also foster regional consensus e.g. the centrepiece SCO-CCMT forum to coordinate Afghanistan policy should be fully utilized by Pakistan and relied on to align regional stakeholders (Zulfqar, 2022).

Socioeconomic CBMs.

Collaborative socioeconomic projects linking border communities can solidify long-term security partnerships by raising the costs of conflict and providing peace dividends. Joint infrastructure initiatives like rail-road connectivity, facilitating bilateral trade flows, cooperating on dams and climate adaptation, and safe refugee return management are key confidence-building measures (CBMs) that should

accompany security initiatives (Khalidi, 2021). Regional organizations like the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process should be fully leveraged for this purpose.

Conclusion

The paper examines in depth the dynamics of Pakistani and Afghan security cooperation as they have changed over time, taking into account the recent American exit from the area. The article provides a thorough investigation of the historical links between the parties, illuminating the complex web of interconnections, frictions, and unanticipated allegiances that have formed their cooperation through time. The recent trend of events envisages an image of dynamic security correlations, which are characterized by joint actions in the struggle against extremism and terrorism, intelligence sharing, and military cooperation.

The future security alliance has far-reaching ramifications extending beyond the borders separating Pakistan from Afghanistan. The outcome may spill over the lines of US borders and influence and therefore impact neighboring nations, with a wider regional and global impact on security and stability. It is essential to secure Afghanistan for regional and global impacts in combating transnational threats, handling refugee flows, and combating extremist groups trying to establish themselves across national borders. The nascent collaborative effort from Pakistan and Afghanistan, through understanding the security imperatives presently common to both countries, carries an important message a collective move for common goals, even in the face of long-standing animosities and other formidable hurdles, has the potential to bring peace to the region. The collective determination to address common threats serves as a paradigm for future endeavours aimed at fostering collaboration beyond historical divisions.

The results of this study establish the basis for a series of recommendations aimed at enhancing and broadening the security collaboration between the two nations. The establishment of confidence is of utmost importance, necessitating ongoing diplomatic endeavours and effective channels of communication. The facilitation of security plan

coordination across several nations is achieved through the utilization of regional and international institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as through bilateral initiatives. Two further advantages of addressing humanitarian concerns and supporting economic activities are the mitigation of pain and the promotion of a more stable environment. The achievement of mutual prosperity is facilitated when the imperative of maintaining safe borders is effectively reconciled with the imperative of promoting genuine cross-border commerce.

The paper effectively integrates historical context, persistent challenges, and prospective future developments within the broader framework of Pakistani and Afghani relations. The individuals in question bear the responsibility not just for their prospects but also for the preservation of peace and security within their respective regions as these nations progress. By internalizing and implementing the advice and recommendations provided, individuals have the potential to cultivate a more optimistic and secure future grounded upon reciprocal assistance and personal development.

Research Limitations

While this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of the US withdrawal on Pakistan-Afghanistan security relations, there are some limitations: As a literature review, the analysis is constrained by the availability of published research on this contemporary issue. There are very few peer-reviewed studies examining the early impacts of the 2021 US withdrawal, given how recent these developments are. As such, the paper has to rely more heavily on grey literature like think tanks and policy publications. The paper is heavily focused on state-level dynamics and official security cooperation initiatives. There is less insight into public and civilian perspectives, inter-societal linkages, and human security issues shaping this partnership. More research is needed to capture popular perceptions.

Recommendation for Future Research

The regional analysis of actors like China, India and Iran is based on reviewing their respective strategic publications. However, this official viewpoint may not fully capture their on-ground activities and informal ties with various groups inside Afghanistan. As the situation in Afghanistan remains fluid, with the Taliban attempting to consolidate power, it is difficult to predict how the regional security environment might evolve. Emergent threats arising suddenly are unlikely to be captured in the current literature. This paper focuses primarily on security issues in the western border regions of Pakistan, which have faced the greatest spillover from the conflict in Afghanistan. Impacts on Pakistan's other borders and wider internal security are not explored in detail. The limitations of this paper, such as the need for further research, will continue to unfold as fallout from the US withdrawal surfaces. More contemporary primary data collection and interviews would shed light on the exact state of cooperation and coordination between Pakistan and Afghanistan in this rather uncertain atmosphere. Regional perceptions beyond the security establishment must also be explored

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