

## PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC DEPTH IN AFGHANISTAN AMBIVALENCE AFTER THE TALIBAN-US AGREEMENT OF 2020

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to examine how Pakistan's choice of strategic depth affected the security environment between Afghanistan and Pakistan. After analysing the changing geopolitical landscape in Afghanistan in the wake of the US-Taliban agreement on February 29, 2020, this study also outlines numerous Pakistani strategic challenges and rational choices. Data was collected and processed using primary documents, such as draughts of agreements between the United States of America and the Taliban, draughts of joint declarations of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for bringing peace to Afghanistan, and official statements from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the United States, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and India. Research papers, think tank studies, newspaper sources, official statements from key players, and other secondary sources will be used to collect data. The prior research did not examine how Pakistan's rational decision to pursue strategic depth affected the Afghan-Pakistan issue, how this understanding is interpreted by defence policy stakeholders, or what other rational options Pakistan might have. This study has overcome this gap.*

**Keywords:** Strategic, Ambivalence, Taliban-US Agreement, Pakistan

### INTRODUCTION

The "graveyard of empires," commonly known as Afghanistan, is strategically located at the intersection of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Before the split of the Indian subcontinent, the British troops attacked Afghanistan. China and Pakistan, two nuclear-armed nations, border her. The sole superpower in the world with nuclear weapons, the United States, has had military forces stationed in Afghanistan since 2001. The former Soviet Union, which is now Russia, occupied this area for about ten years. Another nuclear-armed country in South Asia, India, has influenced Afghanistan. Iran, a significant regional power in the Middle East, borders Afghanistan.

Six of the world's seven nuclear-armed nations and four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council have had direct involvement in Afghanistan. This brief overview is adequate to understand Afghanistan's importance as a crucial geopolitical theatre for regional and global powers.

Afghanistan has established itself as a vulnerable state for global and regional proxy wars due to its landlocked location, difficult terrain, sparse infrastructure, weak economy, and ethnic conflicts. The world has witnessed a conflict involving the Soviet Union and the United States of America in Afghanistan (Karim, 2017). In order to resist any anticipated Indian assault, Pakistan's national

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security officials created a doctrine of strategic depth in Afghanistan, taking advantage of the role that the United States had assigned to Pakistan in battling the Soviet Union through jihadists. As a result, Pakistan and India, two hostile South Asian nations, used Afghanistan as a proxy theatre.

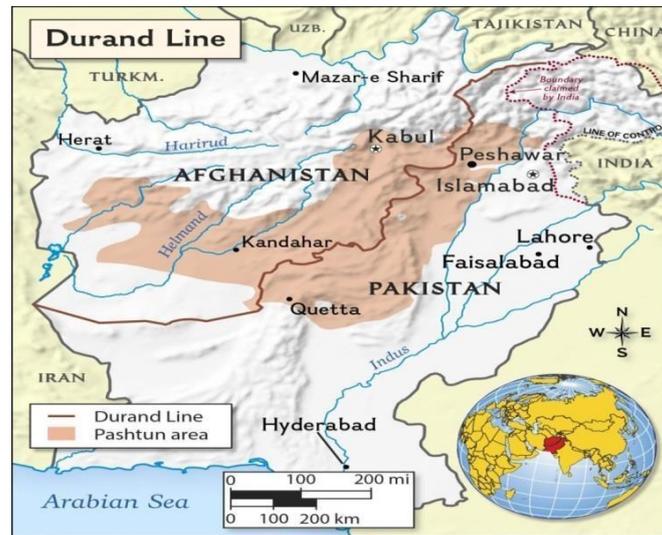


Fig.1 Durand Line

India, on the other hand, has historically had cordial diplomatic ties with the Afghan governments. India expanded her influence in Afghanistan when the Taliban regime in Kabul fell in 2001. India has contributed investments and help to Afghanistan totaling more than \$650 to \$750 million in a variety of areas. In addition, India built the Afghan parliament building, the Salma hydroelectric dam in the province of Herat, trained Afghan police, and gave hundreds of Afghan students scholarships to study at Indian colleges. It also gave the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) weapons and training. Due to these initiatives, India's standing in Afghanistan has improved. It became clear that the US could no longer keep India out of the Taliban talks. Zalmay Khalilzad, the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, visited India during the peace talks with the Taliban in order to gain India's trust. India's use of soft power tactics has established her role in any future solution to the Afghan problem. It was also clear that, since President Barack Obama announced the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan on June 22, 2010, various regional and international peace initiatives have been launched, with India being invited to participate in some of them. Even after the Taliban-US agreement, India was asked to chair three key UN Security Council committees; including the Taliban, Terrorism, and Libya, according to a news source (Zaafir, 2021). Let us now consider the nature of the proxy conflict in Afghanistan between Pakistan and India. India linked Pakistani influence in Afghanistan to regional terrorism, specifically the insurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir. Pakistan associates India's presence in Afghanistan with terrorism and insurgency in Baluchistan, a Pakistani province.

It is also worth noting that, even in Pakistan, major nationalist Pashtun political parties, in particular, and the Pakistani Pashtun population in general, has strongly opposed this doctrine. There has also been an increase in extremism and terrorism in Pakistan, which is directly related to Pakistan's policy of supporting the Afghan Taliban Movement, which is Deoband by sect. These so-called jihadist policies caused significant damage to Pakistan's social fabric. Regional powers such as China, Russia, and even Iran had strong reservations about Pakistan's policy. China was concerned because of the Islamic insurgency and the Taliban's expected support in Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. Russia was concerned about spillover security and extremism in Central Asia, while Iran was concerned about Saudi influence on the Taliban.

Whether Pakistan's security elite is fully aware of these reservations of regional powers, the ongoing hostile situation in Afghanistan for Pakistan, international defamation as a result of Pakistan's links with extremist groups such as the Taliban, Laskhr-i-Tayba, Jeash Muhammad, and others, whether this awareness translated into the development of other better rational choices to counter the security challenges for Pakistan, how does the emerging geopolitical situation in

Afghanistan after the Taliban's defeat affect the security situation in Pakistan. This study tries to explore the answers of these questions.

### **Historical Background**

On the tenth anniversary of the USA's ouster of Taliban from power in Afghanistan in 2001, already many peace initiatives were launched by regional and international actors in order to keep the peace in Afghanistan since the President Barack Obama announced a plan to withdraw from Afghanistan on June 22, 2010. There was no significant progress reported. In order to pave the way for direct negotiations with the Taliban, US policy has shifted from time to time (Sargana, 2020). Towards a major shift in the policy of the US and her allied states, the London Conference was very important. Sixty countries attended the London Conference in 2010 and demanded a distinction between good and bad Taliban (Soherwaordi, 2012). Later eight different peace initiatives were taken which are as follow:

- i.High Peace Council (Afghan Government and Taliban)
- ii.Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process (Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan and Turkey)
- iii.Murree Peace Dialogue (Pakistan and Taliban)
- iv.Quadrilateral Coordination Group (China, USA, Pakistan and Afghanistan)
- v.Trilateral talks (China, Pakistan and Russia)
- vi.Six Nation Talks (China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan)
- vii.Peace Treaty with Hizb-e-Islami Gulbadin (Afghan National Government with Hezb-e-Islami)
- viii.United States-Taliban Dialogues (Direct talks between US and Taliban) (Sargana, 2020).

There is a clear distinction between previous USSR and US withdrawals from Afghanistan and the current withdrawal of ISAF or US forces from Afghanistan. According to some studies, such as (Zia, 2020), Trump's administration introduced a regional dimension to the Afghan problem, which may imply a greater role for regional actors and the accommodation of their strategic concerns. The text of the agreement between the Taliban and the United States clearly shows how much effort was put in before reaching this point.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Strategic depth is a geographic gap between a state's frontline and its heartland that improves defense capacity and poses problems to the opponent (Khan, 2015). The phrase was used as a protective concept in the twentieth century (Parkes, 2019). Historically, the rulers of India like Mauryans, Kushans, Guptas and Mughals had been safeguarding Afghanistan to protect India (Ahmad, 2020). After the partition of the subcontinent, Pakistan and India fought full scale wars against each other in 1965 and 1971 while two limited wars in 1948 and 1999. Afghanistan and India had cordial relations at state level after the independence which raised fears in Pakistan and was taken as encirclement of Pakistan from the East and the West sides (Owais, 2020). Due to this historical rivalry and narrow breadth between her eastern and western border Pakistan had developed strategic depth policy in Afghanistan during post –cold war era considering large area of Afghanistan at her disposal if there would be any future armed conflict with India but that could only be possible if there would be a friendly government in Kabul (Parkes, 2019). Parkes viewed strategic depth as was used by the British imperial contest against Czarist Russia for having influence in Central Asia and the same was inherited by the Pakistan military as a pre-existed colonial policy. He further argues that Pakistan blended this pre-colonial existing strategic policy with her common cultural and Islamisation policies related to Afghanistan (Parkes, 2019). The era of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan provided General Zia-ul-Haq an opportunity to gain strategic depth in Afghanistan as Pakistan was the only state in the neighborhood of Afghanistan which allied with the US campaign against USSR Kamal, M. (2020).

After 9/11 the security situation changed in the region. Many studies found out that there was a realization in the security apparatus in Pakistan that the strategic depth is a flawed idea and instead of it “Reaching out Afghanistan” policy was replaced which is based on mutual respect and territorial integrity. Studies like this one points to alternative rational choices for Pakistan to counter the Indian strategic and security threats as this study observes that Pakistan acknowledges that the peace with Afghanistan can’t be achieved without cooperation and improving bilateral relations (Elharathi, 2020). Recent studies have found out that policies like strategic depth or to have dominance over Kabul through Pashtun Taliban have failed and created trouble in the region. Different factors like

external pressure, ruining image, terrorism having huge impact on economy, China's persuasion pressed Pakistan to change its Afghan policy (Ali, 2020). Similar studies explore that Pakistan started realizing during 2010s that peace in Afghanistan linked with her own stability and this realization matured in so called Bajwa Doctrine." The doctrine is associated with Pakistan's army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, proposing the country's new strategic realignment bringing peace for all (Ali, 2020). A recent statement of Pakistan's army chief "It is time to extend hand of peace in all directions," confirmed the finding of the studies that Pakistan has changed its strategic position in the region (The Newspaper's Staff Reporter, 2021).

Iran and Russia have reportedly supported Taliban financially and materially for preempting Daesh/ISIS in the region as Taliban and ISIS may again be destined to push Afghanistan to civil war. The situation will be alarming for Iran and Russia (Tariq, 2020).

An important recent study has explored China's interests in Afghanistan as religious extremism originating from Afghanistan affected China's key interests which could also spill over to adjacent Xinjiang and incite separatist tendencies. Secondly, Afghanistan's abundant and unexplored natural resources and finally China wanted a bigger role in the region (Ali, 2020).

The relevance of regional and international parties is demonstrated by the Taliban-US agreement. Based on their rational choices, these actors are readjusting and realigning their roles in Afghanistan, but there is a gap in existing studies that do not include such analysis to predict what new rational choices actors involved in Afghanistan will make, and how these choices will affect Pakistan's strategic depth policy in Afghanistan.

### **Problem Statement**

After two wars with India in 1965 and 1971, most studies consider strategic depth doctrine to be a pivot in Pakistan's defense policy. The majority of research focuses on the same traditional viewpoint; however, such studies do not examine the efficiency of Pakistan's strategic depth doctrine or how this thinking is implemented in the arena of defense policy and its stakeholders. Existing studies also fall short of grasping alternative rational choices following regional and international players' realignments and policy shifts in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Taliban-US agreement on February 29, 2020.

Instead of employing a standard realist power politics lens, an alternate theoretical framework of realist rational choice is necessary in the recent emergent scenario following the Taliban-US deal in Afghanistan. Focusing on the various logical options open to regional and international actors in Afghanistan can assist in the exploration of more alternative strategic and security options for Pakistan.

### **Research Design**

This study has used documentary and qualitative content analysis methods to analyze primary data which will be the documents as official draft of agreement between Taliban and US, official drafts of joint declaration of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and United States of America for bringing peace to Afghanistan, official statements of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of USA, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran and India. Secondary data has also been collected through research articles, think tank reports, newspaper sources and official responses of the concerned actors.

The primary data set for this study includes documents such as the official draught of an agreement between the Taliban and the United States of America, official draughts of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for bringing peace to Afghanistan, and official statements from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the United States, China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, and India. The information for this study was gathered between 2011 and 2021. This time frame is suitable for this study.

On June 22, 2011, the United States announced her intention to withdraw from Afghanistan for the first time. This sparked speculation among the security elites of actors involved or related to Afghanistan about the impending security vacuum and their future security engagements in the country. The United States left Afghanistan completely on August 30, 2021. As a result, this time frame is best suited to investigate how the actors involved in Afghanistan's crisis make decisions based on rational cost and benefit analysis.

All significant official statements of neighboring countries, Russia and the US, speeches of officials related to security, and press briefings are available on the websites of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. As a result, primary data is easily accessible, and sources are less expensive.

All official statements, press briefings, and speeches by security elites, as well as drafts of agreements, are the result of extensive deliberations among the parties involved. The data set for this study was carefully chosen in order to determine rational choices and their expected costs. This well-chosen data can reflect the reasonable choices made by actors in Afghanistan. As a result, the suggested data collection is justifiable in light of the research questions.

Documentary analysis is the best method for conducting thematic analysis. This research has used this method for extracting themes and their analysis. Gorsky et al report when interviews or ethnographies are inconvenient or impossible to conduct, documentary analysis methods may be used instead of or in addition to them. It includes a variety of documents that can be employed as primary sources (Gorsky, M., & Mold, A. 2020).

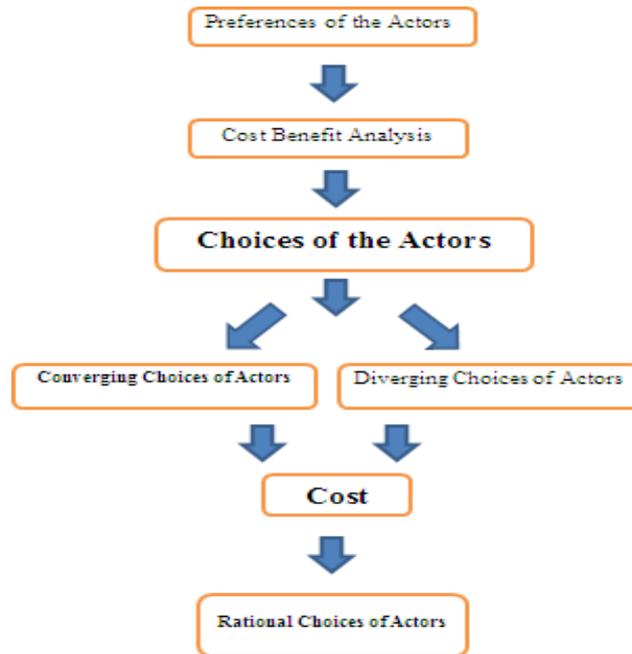


Figure: 2 Rational Preferences Model (RPM)

## ANALYSIS

To explore the answer of the first research question let us explore strategic depth in Pakistan's perspective. Strategic depth is a geographical distance from the frontline of a state to its heartland. In the 20th century the term was taken as a defensive idea. Studies reveal that Pakistan had developed a strategic depth policy in Afghanistan during the post-cold war era. The same was inherited by the Pakistan military as a pre-existed colonial policy. After the subcontinent was partitioned, Pakistan and India fought full-scale wars in 1965 and 1971, as well as two minor wars in 1948 and 1999.

On the other hand, following independence, Afghanistan and India developed good state-level relations, which alarmed Pakistan and these relations were interpreted as an encirclement of Pakistan from the east and west (Owais, 2020). Due to this historical rivalry and the narrow width between her eastern and western borders, Pakistan developed a post-Cold War strategic depth policy in Afghanistan, considering a large area of Afghanistan at her disposal in the event of a future armed conflict with India, but only if a friendly government in Kabul exists (Parkes, 2019).

Parkes goes on to say that Pakistan combined this pre-colonial strategic objective with its cultural and Islamization policies in Afghanistan (Parkes, 2019). The era of Soviet participation in Afghanistan allowed General Zia-ul-Haq to establish and promote the idea of strategic depth in Afghanistan. Pakistan was the only state in the region to support the US battle against the Soviet Union hence benefited from having this space (Kamal, M. 2020).

There is another angle of this strategic depth policy which some studies, like (Rashid, 2010), have found that it was Pakistan that provided strategic depth to the Taliban. The Taliban did not provide such depth to Pakistan (Ahmed, 2010). During the Soviet invasion Zia incorporated Islamisation into the strategic depth strategy to strengthen it. ISI collaborated with Jammaat-e-Islami,

which established Madrassas in Pashtun districts of KPK and Baluchistan to train Afghans from both Afghanistan and Pakistan for jihad. With the assistance of the United States and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's ISI is thought to have trained 80,000 to 90,000 jihadists (Rashid 2010).

Following the Geneva Accords, the US lost interest in Afghanistan, and the country devolved into a horrific battle ground for jihadists later termed as terrorists trained by the US and Pakistan. A civil war erupted in Afghanistan, shattering Pakistan's strategic depth policy in the face of an Indian security threat (Kamal, 2020). The civil war in Afghanistan and the absence of a strong central government in Kabul was a blow to the strategic depth policy for Pakistan.

Following Zia's dictatorship, subsequent civil governments led by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif pursued the same strategic depth policy, which ultimately backfired and began undermining the country's social fabric with the introduction of Kalashnikovs and heroin (Talboot, 2000). Rise of fundamentalism and extremism blocked the way to enlightenment and progress for Pakistani society. Political rights of different fractions of Pakistani society were suppressed in the name of so-called Islamic ideology. Islamic ideology was then equated to Pakistani ideology. The purpose was to suppress the Pashtun identity on both sides of Durand Line and to assemble Pashtuns on Islamic ideology.

Due to heavy expenditures on defense and perusing jihadist's policies in Afghanistan, the vast majority of Pakistan's 180 million population remained in poverty. Many people were driven to extreme ideas or jihadi missions because they might be profitable. The Taliban's power was bolstered by the population's economic hardships and the Taliban's promise of "quick justice" (Siddique, Q. 2010). People from tribal areas of Pakistan became the first victim of this imbroglio. A wave of extremism gripped the whole area. Tribal chiefs were killed, their traditions were undermined, suicide bombing and killings of opponents of the extremists were all time high. Extremists started infiltrating the urban and remote areas of Pakistan. They found shelter in the Madrassas which were established by Saudi funding during the Soviet invasion. Such madrassas were also used for their recruitment centers and training camps for suicide bombing missions. Poverty of the population and extremist propaganda made their goals easy. Resultantly in a very short span of time no area of Pakistan was left from their subsidy bombers.

The level of violent Islamic militancy in 2010 remained high, with 7,199 people killed. Within inhabited areas, violence against Security Forces and state symbols has persisted. The establishment of the Punjabi Taliban has resulted in sectarian violence against minorities, particularly Shias (Siddique, Q. 2011). The radicalization was becoming a lava which the international community had no idea at all. It was unfortunately 9/11 which shocked the world and forced them to draw attention to what was happening in their own left and neglected part of the world. The radicalization of Islam endangers not only US interests and global security, but also Pakistan's own viability and unity (Haqqani, H. 2007).

Another view regarding Pakistan's strategic depth policy is that gaining strategic depth was merely a concept that never became official policy. A desire for a stable, friendly neighbor does not and cannot provide Pakistan with "local military supremacy" over India Jaffery, (S. A. Z. 2020). However the effort Pakistani security elite put towards the establishment of a pro-Pakistan Kabul government seemed to contradict this view. Whether this was official policy or not, Pakistan's support to Taliban was not merely a support instead it was more than support.

This clearly indicated the intentions of the Pakistani security elite. Pakistan's desire for "strategic depth" over Afghanistan's Durand Line and a "Muslim Space" in India's Jammu and Kashmir has backfired. The army delegated its disastrous strategy to jihadi organizations and religious institutions. The breakdown of the state apparatus fosters an environment of impunity, which leads to the breakdown of the rule of law. The current state of fragility appears to be a precursor to a failed state (Meher, J. 2012).

Domestic security, on the other hand, has been subordinated to the Strategic Depth framework, with unfathomable socio-cultural consequences. The continued need for Deobandi-Wahabi schools for Jihad has resulted in an increase in religious extremism, militarization, and criminality in society, as other sects have followed suit in preserving their own communities. Sectarianism and violence, which were previously limited to Sunni-Shia, have taken on a new dimension, with the Bareilvi sect (Sufi saint mausoleums and Eid Milad-un-Nabi) now being targeted as well (ul Haque, R. 2011).

As a result of the discussion on the first part of the study question, the strategic depth policy has shown to be a complete failure in the face of any expected Indian aggression. This policy has a high price tag for Pakistan's security forces, society, and possibly the state itself. The importance of the second portion of the study question increases now. Is there any awareness within Pakistan's security establishment about the failure of strategic depth policy? How do they react to this realization? The answers to these questions will be investigated in this study.

This research will now look at the answer to the second research question. The first half of this inquiry examines the role of regional powers in filling Afghanistan's security vacuum. The analysis of the answer to this component of the research question is critical. The study will be guided by the response to this issue in order to determine Pakistan's strategic alternatives in Afghanistan. Through rational choice analysis, the study will determine if Pakistan would stick to its old strategic depth policy or try new approaches. For both Pakistan and India, the existing literature has taken into account traditional strategic depth doctrine and Pakistan-centric approaches. Afghanistan's geopolitical environment is continuously shifting. In the situation of Afghanistan, the Rational Choice model is appropriate. According to a recent study, the preceding is not subjectivity but the explanatory potential of a perspective that considers actors, agency, rational calculus, and context (Hussain, 2015). In fact, it is states' rational choices versus their costs that dominate policymaking; as a result, a rational choice method is the ideal way to explore the complicated subject of Afghanistan's imbroglio in terms of strategic options.

All of the players in Afghanistan have their own goals. A thorough examination of such goals will lead to sensible choices and prices, from which we may forecast the long-term effects of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan on the Afghan actors. Some research has looked at the realization that Afghanistan has remained a victim of India and Pakistan's counter-strategies, and that their soil has been utilized for proxy warfare between South Asian governments. As a result, both South Asian countries benefit from a balanced and stable Afghanistan (Owais, 2020). Iran and Russia are said to have provided financial and material support to the Taliban in order to prevent Daesh/ISIS from gaining a foothold in the region, as Taliban and ISIS may once again seek to plunge Afghanistan into civil war. Iran and Russia will be concerned about the situation (Tariq, 2020).

Iran is concerned about an increase in ISIS terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, particularly against the Hazara minority. Iran is eager to assist the Hazaras and other Shiite populations in Afghanistan's center and western regions. Teheran has formed the Hazara military movement "Fatemiyoun," which is actively involved in the Syrian crisis. Iran sees ISIS as the United States' proxy in Afghanistan. Iran has held a series of conferences and discussions with delegates from its neighboring nations in order to recognize and respond collectively to the ISIS danger in Afghanistan (*Iran Expresses Concern over Increased Terrorist Activities in Afghanistan*, 2021). Uyghur parties were allowed to function in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule in the 1990s. Beijing blames the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), also known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, for insecurity in its western province of Xinjiang. The Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) is claimed to be among the Uyghur fighters who have been relocated inside Afghanistan (ETIM). The Taliban has now shifted Uyghur fighters from a location near Afghanistan's border with China, indicating growing cooperation between Beijing and the Taliban group, according to observers. The Taliban's move is a big step forward in their relationship with Beijing because it is the first time since seizing control in August that the Taliban has taken strict action to satisfy Chinese security worries (*Taliban "Removing" Uyghur Militants From Afghanistan's Border With China*, 2021). Terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism have been designated as the "three evils" by China. China faces a threat from non-state actors such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). China is concerned about the repatriation of battle-hardened fighters to Afghanistan from northern Syria (Andrew Small, J. O. 2021).

The new development in Afghanistan poses a severe threat to the security of Russia and Central Asian states. Russia has focused its efforts on reducing Afghan-related dangers such as terrorism and drug trafficking. Russia has also warned Central Asian countries against falling into Western pressure to accept Afghan migrants, even if just briefly before being sent to the US, claiming that doing so could allow "militants dressed as refugees" to enter Russia and Central Asia (*Central Asia's Taliban Surprise*, 2021).

The security implications of a politically unstable Afghanistan have been a source of concern for India. Another round of conflict is the last thing the vulnerable region needs. In Afghanistan, India's interests have become more aligned with the US's, even if they are not always complementary. Pakistan and Afghanistan are culturally, religiously, economically, and politically linked. Expecting a restoration to the earlier era of friendly Indo-Afghan relations would be wishful thinking. Since the Doha peace negotiations, India has been negotiating with the Taliban in Afghanistan (*India's Search for a New Role in Afghanistan*, 2021).

The Afghan Taliban's control of Kabul has bolstered extremist forces in the region and raised anxieties. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an insurgent group based across the Afghan border, has intensified its attacks against Pakistani security forces. Pakistan has implicated TTP for the suicide strikes that killed Chinese officials, and this could put more pressure on the Pakistani government. TTP still maintains the capability to carry out operations in many locations of Pakistan, and it is protected by the Afghan Taliban. On the other side, if the Afghan Taliban pursue Pakistan's policy and objectives against the TTP, they have the option of joining (ISIS-K), posing a direct security threat to the newly constituted so-called Taliban government, whose legitimacy has already been questioned (*Islamabad Deeply Alarmed by Rise in Pakistan Taliban Terrorism*, 2021).

The security vacuum caused by the US withdrawal has prompted Afghanistan's surrounding neighbors to take proactive efforts to fill or face the void in their own way. China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have recently developed a structure of constant dialogue at the foreign minister level in order to align policy on Afghanistan's evolving security situation.

This research will examine both perspectives and analyze the implications. The US authorities' repeated demands for Pakistan to "do more" have led to a strong hypothesis of post-withdrawal security obligation. This hypothesis will be examined in light of Pakistan's history, as well as its current security and foreign policy. One may argue that in the past, Pakistan's overwhelming allegiance to the Afghan Taliban alone, while disregarding other Afghan factions, was a source of US distrust. "Do more demand" was usually a result of this suspicion.

Because of Pakistan's tight ties to the Taliban, the initial perception of the state's support for Jihadists in Afghanistan was formed. This is also due to the fact that Pakistan has traditionally been viewed solely through the security prism of Afghanistan. The above shift in Pakistani policy reflects recognition of the need to alter this created image. This also underscores the importance of portraying Pakistan as a regular state that functions in all aspects of statehood, not just in comparison to Afghanistan.

There is no doubt that Pakistan exerts significant influence over the Taliban, but evidence suggests that this control is not absolute. Pakistan's failure to persuade the Taliban leadership to deliver Osama Bin Laden to any neutral country demonstrates that the Taliban were not subjected to external influences or influence in their essential decision-making. In the international world, the Taliban's military actions are thought to be backed by Pakistan's security apparatus. This point of view is not supported by any empirical evidence. No such study has ever been conducted to determine the volume of annexes present in both forces.

It addresses both traditional and nontraditional security issues, such as the economy, food, and water, military security, terrorism, population growth, and interactions with the rest of the world, particularly major powers. The document emphasizes economic diplomacy as the focal point of Pakistan's foreign policy in order to avoid being dragged into bloc politics in a changing world order. Economic security will be at the heart of the national security policy ('Historic Achievement': NSA Announces Cabinet's Approval of Pakistan's First National Security Policy, 2021). National Security Adviser of Pakistan Moeed Yusuf told the media that the program is "citizen-centric" and prioritizes economic security (New Security Policy, 2021).

Pakistan is unable to cut ties with the Afghan Taliban under the current conditions. Her commitment to them, on the other hand, is both challenging and demanding both inside and outwardly. Internally, the Afghan Taliban's backing for the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP), as well as incidents of the Pakistani army blocking the fencing of the Af-Pak border and refusing to acknowledge the Durand Line as an international border, have sparked outrage in Pakistan. Externally, the international community is increasing its pressure on Pakistan to utilize its leverage against the Afghan Taliban. This conundrum will force Pakistan to make a sensible choice between adhering to international expectations and advocating for the Afghan Taliban so that a solution can be

found as soon as feasible. Only in this scenario will the burden of responsibility be transferred as a collective responsibility. The international community, international institutions, regional powers, and neighboring countries will share responsibility for the Afghan crisis in accordance with their respective roles.

## **CONCLUSION**

According to this study, there has to be a change in how the world views Pakistan and its contribution to the security issue in Afghanistan. Pakistan has acknowledged this, as evidenced by the recent changes to its security and foreign policy, but the true challenge is how to come to an agreement and put these ideas into practice. Pakistan will need to improve ties with the regional powers. Pakistan has a wonderful opportunity here. The United States has transformed the Afghan issue into a regional one, as this paper has already stated in its main premise. Regional superpowers like Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and India were attracted by the United States. Regionalization would ensure the region's continued peace through cooperation, investment, and non-interference in domestic matters.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As was previously mentioned, putting into practice the four pillars of Pakistan's emerging new geo-economic policy could undermine long-standing perceptions of Pakistan as being involved in the Afghan security situation. The security and political upheaval in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of ISAF could affect Pakistan if these perceptions in the eyes of the international community are not refuted. The progress of Pakistan's socioeconomic system would always be constrained by this problem. Here are a few tiny suggestions to complement the aforementioned geo-economic policy strategies.

1. Pakistan should use its clout with the Taliban to persuade them that the only long-term solution to the Afghan crisis is for all groups of Afghan society to be represented in the government. Similarly, the Afghan Taliban should respect the rights of women and minorities.
2. In the best interests of peace and tranquility in Afghanistan, Pakistan should create ties with other key Afghan stakeholder groups without enraging the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan will be perceived as a soft power as a result of this.
3. Pakistan, in connection with other regional countries, should act collaboratively and support the international community in finding a final, acceptable solution to the Afghan situation.
4. Pakistan should take advantage of this chance to urge on the US and other regional nations for defining the parameters of Indian participation and may seek the required security guarantees in order to resist Indian aims in Afghanistan.
5. Consensus must be reached over the new security choices and alignments. All political parties should be represented in the discussion. The initiative must come from the Legislature. The new paradigm shifts must be owned by all political and military leaders, and a plan for putting them into action must be created by consensus.

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