

Issues and Challenges in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations after 9/11

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ABSTRACT

The study examines various issues in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the context that emerged after 9/11. It argues that security maintenance and various development pursuits (political and economic) of both Pakistan and Afghanistan considerably rely upon cordial and mutually cooperative relations between these two immediate neighbours. However, there exists trust deficit and the war against terrorism has itself become an issue of major concern between the two countries. Afghanistan urges Pakistan to do more to defeat and stop the alleged extremist infiltrations into Afghan territory while Pakistan repeatedly denies such charges and holds Afghan government itself responsible for its failure to check cross border incursions and rebuilding of Afghan nation-state. Foreign powers especially Indian involvement, into Afghan internal affairs has affected her relations with Pakistan a lot. According to some analysts the situation has worsened to such an extent that its long term national interests has damaged especially in the post 9/11 era. This study argues that Pakistan and Afghanistan have unquestionable significance for each other. Geo-strategic, political, economic and other reasons make it compulsion for both the countries to have cordial relations in their respective vested interests and larger interests of peace in regional and international context. They can defeat and remove many ills being faced by the two potential nations of South Asia. But such a prospect would be neutralized by foreign powers if leadership of both the countries unsuccessfully tackles all outstanding issues in their bilateral relationship.

KEY WORDS: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, Post 9/11 Terrorism, India, Refugees, Durand line.

Introduction

Talking to time magazine representative of Afghan President Hamid Karzai said Afghanistan cannot achieve peace or prosperity without achieving friendly relations with Pakistan (Quoted in The Post, 2008). Security maintenance and

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various development pursuits (political and economic) of both Pakistan and Afghanistan considerably rely upon cordial and mutually cooperative relations between these two immediate neighbours. This is especially due to their specific geo-strategic location and complexity of regional and global politics. In the present context, however, Pakistan and Afghanistan fighting terrorism are having trust deficit, both blaming each other for the improvised security and bad economic conditions. Afghanistan urges Pakistan to do more to defeat and stop the alleged extremist infiltrations into Afghan territory while Pakistan repeatedly denies such charges and holds Afghan government itself responsible for its failure to check cross border incursions and rebuilding of Afghan nation-state.

Incapability of Afghan political system and lack of efficiency on the part of Afghan leadership compounded with foreign powers involvement into Afghan internal affairs have badly affected her relations with Pakistan. According to some analysts the situation has worsened to such an extent that its long term national interests in the post 9/11 era have damaged a lot. The war against terrorism has itself become an issue of major concern between the two countries.

Indian maneuvering and improvement of its relations with Afghanistan at the cost of Pak-Afghan relations has also been a major source of concern between the two neighbouring countries. The American installed Karzai government in Afghanistan has also enthusiastically concentrated upon building its relations with India ignoring Pakistan's serious concerns. According to many circles Indian hectic and proactive diplomatic activities on the soil of Afghanistan are also aimed at alienating Pakistan from Afghanistan.

The present study is an effort to analyse major issues that bedevil and hamper the continuity and improvement of Pakistan Afghanistan relations. Relationship between the two countries has acquired increasing importance in the present scenario where international community is involved in tackling the menace of terrorism and Pakistan and Afghanistan role is crucial in this regard. If present problematic pattern of relations between the two countries continues terrorism related turmoil and anarchy cannot be properly dealt with at the regional and international level. Realisation of all this makes it extremely important to analyse and appropriate tackling of the following irritants in Pak-Afghan relations.

Background

Pakistan and Afghanistan are immediate neighbors having 2240 km common border formally known as Durand Line (Durani, 2002). Despite shared geography, ethnicity and faith, relations with Afghanistan have never been smooth. Rather, they have been problematic. With the Indian threat looming from the East, Afghanistan's hostile attitude has further aggravated the fragile security environment that even challenges the very existence of Pakistan. Ian Stephon termed such a security scenario enveloping simultaneously from the East and the

West as a 'pincer movement' aiming to crush still born Pakistan (Stephon, 1963: 108).

A secure and friendly North-Western border has always been Pakistan's desire and security requirement vis-à-vis India could never get materialized because of Afghanistan's hostile attitude. With the sole exception of the four years of Taliban rule over Afghanistan (1997-2001), successive governments in Kabul have displayed varying degrees of disaffection towards Islamabad (Hussein, 2002) Issues of Pakhtoonistan and Durand line have been at the heart of such hostile/unfriendly attitude and antagonistic relations, resulting from Afghanistan's ambitions over certain areas in the north west of Pakistan that, for a brief period, remained part of territories conquered by Ahmad Shah Abdali from 1747 to 1773 (Burke, 1990: 68-69).

Overall, the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have been complex despite the fact that the two countries have several things in common: religion (Islam), ethnic groups like Pashtuns and Blochs, and more than two thousand kilometres common border. It is also important to note that the shared border region has never come under the true control of any government. During 1980s, the US and others used this as a factor of advantage while finding 'mujahideen' groups in the region easily crossing back and forth between the two countries in decade long fighting against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

However, fighting started among these groups during the ensuing civil war causing further destruction in the country until an ultra-conservative group Taliban took hold of power after mid-1990s. In 2001, the Taliban regime was ousted by the US led international coalition, and the past few years have been spent by these regrouping in the border regions between the adjoining countries. The Taliban and their supporters have largely remained involved in efforts to dislodge the US forces from Afghanistan and to attack Afghanistan, Pakistan and US governments (Their, 2008).

It is in this context several quarters argue that the insurgent's capability to use Pakistan's territory as a 'safe haven' has been making the fighting task very difficult. Afghanistan and Pakistan are also found blaming each other upon the issue that insurgency has continued. However, chances of increased cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan remain intact as elimination of terrorism has emerged as a challenge for both the governments and which might not be handled single-handedly.

Fight Against Terrorism

The event of 9/11 compelled Pakistan to pursue anti Taliban policy that Pakistan had been supporting politically and diplomatically during the 1990s. Pakistan committed itself to fight global war against terrorism and to reconstruct war ravaged Afghanistan. It actively participated and mustered support during and after the donor conferences aimed to rebuild Afghanistan. Pakistan deployed more than 80,000 troops to stop alleged infiltrators crossing into Afghan territory.

However, in the long run this cooperation on terrorism has entered an era of trouble. Key Afghan Officials in Kabul have been pointing their fingers at Pakistan for some time, accusing it of turning a blind eye to cross-border terrorism targeting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) forces and Afghan central government. Many observers also put forth the idea that much of the former Taliban regime's leadership, along with leaders of Al-Qaeda, are present and operating from the lawless Afghan-Pakistani border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Tarzi, 2009).

Repeatedly Afghan officials have also been blaming involvement of Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI in aiding and abetting of extremists and terrorists. When Indian embassy in Kabul was attacked on July 14, 2008 Karzai, without wasting time, accused the ISI of being behind the terrorist attacks which rocked Afghanistan and caused heavy casualties and destruction (Khan, 2008). He continued with same tune and alleged that the killing, destruction, and insecurity in Afghanistan have been caused by the intelligence institutions of Pakistan (Khan, 2008). When NATO forces were attacked by the militants killing scores of soldiers earlier on July 13, 2008 Afghanistan government intensified the blame game, and put the entire responsibility on Pakistan (Khan, 2008).

Pakistan's response to these charges has been that a prosperous and developed Afghanistan is in the larger interest of Pakistan and it has no role in any destructive activities of the militants to sabotage the peace of Afghanistan (Khan, 2008). The PPP government led by Prime Minister Gilani has rejected Afghanistan's allegations and it holds the opinion that stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interest, and Karzai's statements may contribute in hampering development work in the region (Khan, 2008). Pakistan foreign ministry has also denied the accusations as baseless, urging the Kabul government to stop playing the blame game (Khan, 2008).

There is also very strong relevant argument that how Pakistan can identify a person going to Afghanistan whether he is an Afghan national or militant? Pakistan's belief is that Afghanistan itself and international forces present in Afghanistan are responsible for this entire predicament. To detract from their own colossal failure and incompetence, the embattled Afghan officials are blaming the insurgency on Pakistan (Qarabaghi, 2005). Afghan administration and officials are too weak and incompetent to take care of the problems in the country and when they fail to tackle them they simply put the failure on Pakistan (Qarabaghi, 2005). They try to show the world that Pakistan is responsible for all their failure in Afghanistan.

The relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have further deteriorated due to NATO strikes into Pakistan's territory. These strikes have significantly alienated Pakistan as it considers it blatant violation of its sovereignty. It is also against the principles and rules of international law. Afghan government's *carte blanche* to NATO forces to conduct strikes inside the territorial frontier of

Pakistan has brought the relationship between the two countries to the lowest ebb.

The current state of relationship urges the two countries to revert back to the original objectives of war against terrorism which were aimed to cooperate but at the same time to respect each others sovereignty and not to allow foreign elements to use any of their territories against each other's interests. Until now it has been observed that, despite Karzai's provocative accusations, Islamabad desires cordial relations with Kabul and it must pursue the policy of peace with Afghanistan vigorously (Khan, 2008).

Indian Factor

The pattern of Indian and Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan is generally analyzed in terms of zero-sum game where India's gain have been considered the loss of Pakistan and Pakistan's gains have directly been affecting the gains of India. In the present circumstances it is India that has fully capitalized upon the changed conditions and new realities in the aftermath of 9/11, where it has found favorable opportunities to establish and develop relations with Afghanistan at the expense of Pak-Afghan relations. It has pursued proactive diplomacy and has become able to create pro Indian lobbies in Afghanistan. They have established numerous diplomatic missions in the major and strategically important cities of Afghanistan, which have been allegedly busy to pursue Indian gains harming Pakistani interests.

The Pakistan's government has been officially expressing its serious concerns regarding the Indian activities and endeavors along the Pakistan Afghanistan frontier. Its allegations concerning India include charges of printing forged Pakistani currency and operations involving acts of terrorism and sabotage on Pakistan's territory (Grare, 2006: 12). Pakistan has been accusing India of establishing networks of terrorist training camps located in various cities of Afghanistan, including at the Afghan military base of Qushila Jadid, north of Kabul; near Gereshk, in southern Helmand province; in the Panjshir Valley, northeast of Kabul; and at Kahak and Hassan Killies in western Nimruz province (Grare, 2006).

Pakistan believes that these Indian consulate offices in Afghanistan are involved in a conspiracy against the Pakistan's western provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former NWFP) and tribal areas to sabotage the peace and process of development in these regions. It was on August 13, 2004 that former Chief Minister of Balochistan, Jam Muhammad Yusuf, declared that the Indian intelligence services had been maintaining forty terrorist camps all over Balochistan territory (Grare, 2006).

India was subjected to more accusations by Pakistan whereby it was accused of inciting troubles in its Waziristan territory, where the Pakistan military was confronting significant resistance from Al Qaeda and the local Taliban. Pakistan's government claims that India is involved in flaring up unrest in North and South

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Waziristan and the Indian consulate offices in southern Afghanistan have been contributing negatively to the trouble and militancy in the tribal region by providing money as well as weapons and ammunition to the militants (Grare, 2006).

Thus it is also believed that the foreign elements present in Afghanistan are using Afghan territory against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan. Former Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Mushahid Hussain stated in July 2006 that RAW had been training 600 Baluchs in Afghanistan, arguing that India had been fomenting the Baloch insurgency and denounced Afghan intelligence agency connections with RAW (Grare, 2006).

Pakistani authorities consider that all this has overall shaken the confidence of Pakistan on Afghanistan and has resultantly affected its efforts to contribute in war against terrorism. Afghanistan should think seriously on Pakistan's concerns and try to remove its reservation regarding foreign elements involved in anti-Pakistan activities from the Afghan soil. The reservations of Pakistan have the potential to incline policy makers to rethink its Afghan policy, and can make Pakistan indifferent to the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Afghanistan should realize that its long term interests are linked with Pakistan. Afghanistan should behave realistically in its relations with Pakistan vis-à-vis India. Need of the hour is that Afghanistan should try to remove Pakistan's concerns for the betterment and prosperity of this region. If India continues anti-Pakistan activities with Afghan support the prospects of cordial relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan appear dim.

A possible scenario where America withdraws itself back and leaves Afghanistan has to be seriously considered as Afghanistan's interests might not be better served by having deteriorated relations with Pakistan. This is especially significant in the context that it is a land locked country and does not have any direct frontier link with India. Pakistan on the other hand should also step up its diplomatic efforts for the revival of amicable relations with Afghanistan.

Refugee's Factor

Afghan nationals seeking shelter in Pakistan have been a source of concern between the two since 1980s when former Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and Pakistan not only welcomed Afghans coming to her territory but also accommodated almost three millions refugees. This was despite the historical fact that the same Afghans had blocked their border for the aspiring Muslims of Subcontinent when these sought refuge in Afghanistan in their times of crisis during Khilafat movement in early 1920s. Anyhow, the Afghan refugees had put extra burden not only on Pakistan's economy but also created many social and political problems. The second wave of refugees came after 2000 due to drought, continuing civil war and Taliban repression, etc (Hussain, 2002: 72).

However, this time Pakistan denied the availability of its territory to the new

refuge seekers mainly due to ethnic, political, social and economic reasons. Moreover, international community was also not willing to share the burden. There is an urgent need to repatriate already residing refugees in Pakistan that number almost 2.6 million. Such a huge number includes some militants who criss-cross Afghan border creating troubles both for Pakistan and Afghanistan (Nuri, 2007: 36). The Afghanistan government perceives it mismanagement on the part of Pakistani government. On the other hand, Pakistan on its part clarifies these charges that it tries its best to scrutinize all such elements and tackle the matter appropriately.

Durand Line Issue

The international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan namely Durand line has been a source of serious tension. It is as old as their relationship. It was due to the issue of Durand line that Afghanistan, the only Muslim country, opposed entry of Pakistan into the United Nations. It remained major irritant in their bilateral relations till the end of 1970s. However, consequent to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and influx of almost 3.15 million Afghan refugees, mostly Pashtuns, the issue relatively calmed down during 1980s. The immediate post Soviet withdrawal phase also did not experience revival of tension of earlier decades between the two countries. However, the regime change after the event of 9/11 has radicalized Afghan foreign policy on this matter and Karzai government has been issuing proclamation of non acceptance of already settled boundary line between the two countries.

When Afghan authorities tended to refer to illegal infiltration (alleged) into Afghanistan territorial borders, Pakistan gave the idea that the Durand line should be shut by sealing the border with fence to stop any such infiltrators. On March 9, 2006 Aftab Ahmed Khan Sherpao, Pakistan's interior minister, said that Pakistan wanted fencing of its border with Afghanistan and install landmines to stop the infiltration of foreigners (Dawn, 2006). However, Afghanistan has remained not willing to accept any such proposal of Pakistan. Afghanistan claims Durand line is not an international border that got concluded between Abdur Rahman, King of Afghanistan, and the British Indian government, predecessor of Pakistan represented by Sir Mortimer Durand in 1894. Some strategists argue that this revival of Afghan revisionist stance is also influenced by outside powers which tend to exploit the situation in their own vested interests.

Pakistan always considers the Durand Line a valid and recognised international boundary and claims that the Afghan authorities have also recognised it as such on several occasions (Grare, 2006: 9). It rejects the Afghan claims on the basis that it to be a valid document should be signed between the representatives of two sovereign entities (Grare, 2006: 9). It even doesn't agree with the argument that this treaty is valid for one hundred years only.

Generally it is argued that this treaty was signed in a cordial and free

environment. While addressing audience which included military, civil and Afghan tribal representatives, incumbent King of Afghanistan Abdur Rahman gave an overview of the understanding and agreement that had been reached between the parties, outlined the signed provisions, and advised them firm adherence towards the British alliance (Pakistan-Afghanistan Border is a Settled Issue, 2009). The King, moreover, informed the audience that it was for the first time that Afghanistan had become able to demarcate its proper frontier and that of course would contribute in preventing future misunderstandings and would also make Afghanistan stronger (Pakistan-Afghanistan Border is a Settled Issue, 2009).

Anyhow, the continuing irritant of Durand line between Afghanistan and Pakistan should have been settled earlier. It is a serious hurdle in the way of their cordial relationship which is hampering development and prosperity not only in their bilateral relations but in other fields as well.

Both the countries should realize the urgency of settlement of this issue so that they can utilize their energies to other aspects of common interests. Afghanistan should fulfill its historical commitments and follow the rules of international law. On the other hand Pakistan should try to avoid any confrontation with Afghanistan and should remain stick to diplomacy to resolve all outstanding issues with Afghanistan.

Link between Al-Qaeda and Taliban

Another challenge in the way to establish smooth relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is the support provided by Al-Qaeda to Taliban in Afghanistan. It is also important to note that Al-Qaeda provides support to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is considered responsible for conducting suicide bombing in Pakistan.

Al-Qaeda has generally endorsed and heavily influenced the TTP and its two leaders, Baitullah Mehsud and Hakimullah Mehsud. Many analysts argue that Osama bin Laden's organization is pushing the Pakistani 'militants' to conduct its operations (Allbritton, 2010). After Al-Qaeda and Taliban were driven out of Afghanistan by U.S.-led forces in 2001, Al-Qaeda regrouped in North Waziristan under the protection of the Haqqani network led by Jalaluddin Haqqani, an old ally of Bin Laden. While the command structure of al-Qaeda has been smashed by a combination of military actions and drone strikes, its several leaders remain at large and influential.

Al-Qaeda also provides suicide bombers for the Haqqani network to use in Afghanistan, including the Jordanian double agent who killed seven CIA employees near Khost, Afghanistan, in December. Hakimullah Mehsud appeared alongside the bomber in a video released after that attack, indicating a close link between Haqqani's group, Al-Qaeda and the TTP (Allbritton, 2010). Mehmood Shah, a former security official in Pakistan's tribal areas, said "there is no doubt

that a link between the Haqqani network and the Pakistani Taliban exists” (Khattak, 2010).

Jalaluddin Haqqani took refuge in North Waziristan after the Soviet invasion on Afghanistan in 1979. He started setting up training camps and opening recruitment centres there and became able to establish a guerrilla war base against the Soviet military. Soon the Haqqani network emerged as the strongest group especially in Khost, Paktia and Paktika provinces of Afghanistan. Haqqani came closer to Osama bin Laden during the Afghan war and the Pakistani Taliban also consider them allies. Thus it can be argued that the Haqqani network has links with al-Qaeda and the TTP. Each one of them is considered supportive of each other across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The governments of both the countries, Afghanistan and Pakistan, have taken steps to counter the support of Al-Qaeda to Taliban. Pakistan conducted military operations in Northern Areas and endeavored to establish the writ of the government. Afghan forces along with the coalition forces are conducting operations to counter insurgent networks. These steps would provide help to both the countries to run their relations on a smooth way.

Conclusion

Pakistan and Afghanistan have unquestionable significance for each other. Geo-strategic, political, economic and other reasons make it imperative for both the countries to have cordial relations. Establishing cordial relations between these two can contribute a lot in making this strategically important region prosperous besides defeating and removing many ills being faced by the two potential of South Asia countries. But such a prospect would be neutralized by foreign powers if leadership of both the countries remains unable to tackle all outstanding issues in their bilateral relationship. Role of any such external elements have to be coped with in order to avoid jeopardizing of their short and long term interests.

The destiny of Afghanistan to prosperity is linked with Pakistan. Construction of Gawadar port would not only benefit Pakistan but same is true for Afghanistan as it would link the land locked Afghanistan to outside world. It needs Pakistan’s help for continuity and success of war against those elements that are common enemies of both the countries. This issue needs immediate attention of both the countries. They should try to remove all suspicions in their mutual relationship. In case of refugees issue both the countries should work for the safe return and rehabilitation of the Afghans residing in Pakistan for decades. Afghanistan can also seek support of Pakistan in its reconstruction pursuits.

Keeping in view the vital energy needs of Pakistan, it needs Afghanistan in many ways. It is situated at doorstep of Central Asian states that are affluent in hydrocarbon resources. Pakistan should not forget that access to hydrocarbon resources of Central Asian states is possible only through Afghanistan’s support. The proposed natural gas pipeline of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan and Pakistan is

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highly dependent upon the relationship of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The proposed gas pipeline would initiate from the Turkmenistan/Afghanistan border region in southeastern Turkmenistan to Multan, Pakistan (790 miles, 1,271 kilometers), with an extension to India comprising 400 miles (640 kilometers). The project was estimated to cost US\$ 2.9 billion for the segment to Pakistan and an additional US\$ 600 million for the extension to India (Independent Bangladesh, 2008).

Both the countries should realize that this pipeline would not only bring peace and prosperity but a significant development in their relationship as well. A commentator on Pak-Afghan relations stated that the pipeline would be offering a much-needed financial boost to war-devastated Afghanistan in terms of transit fee (Independent Bangladesh, 2008). He further stated that despite various security repercussions once Afghans start realizing meaningful economic benefits in terms of jobs and huge transit fee, they would themselves be ensuring the pipeline's safety (Independent Bangladesh, 2008).

In addition, Pakistan also needs Afghanistan's strategic support to neutralize increased Indian diplomatic activities in Afghanistan. It can also assist in checking cross-border infiltrations which try to damage development and infrastructure in the two frontier provinces of Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Together both the countries can fight firmly and resolutely against drug trafficking which is one of the common social issues faced by Pakistan and Afghanistan. They can jointly guard and monitor the international border to stop this illegal trade.

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