U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan's Strategy

Abdul Ghafoor
Lecturer, Department of Political Science, University of Loralai, Zar Karaz Pakistan.
Email: abdul.ghafoor@uoli.edu.pk

Mirwais Kasi
Professor, University of Balochistan, Balochistan, Pakistan

Umbreen Javaid
Lahore School of Economics, Lahore, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its political-economic consequences on Pakistan in a changing regional environment. It underscores the U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan relations after 9/11 which started in the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, in operation enduring freedom on allegations that Taliban harbored Osama bin Laden. His subsequent demise in the year 2011 in Abbottabad, Pakistan, aggravated regional intricacies. Presidents of the United States Barack Obama and Donald Trump progressively sought troop withdrawal, which eventually saw the last withdrawal, August 21, 2021. The study examines the strategic and political-economic reactions of Pakistan especially its strategic depth seeking in Afghanistan. It also evaluates the potential of Pakistan to stabilize and contribute towards the political economy of Afghanistan. The methodology of the study is qualitative content analysis, with the help of NVivo-14 software. Under the Rational Choice Theory, the study examines the decision-making processes of states such as Pakistan to make strategic choices through cost-benefit analysis to navigate the region and enjoy the best avenue to foreign policy choices.

Key Words: **U.S withdrawal, Pakistan Foreign Policy, Strategic Depth, Afghanistan Political Economy, Rational Choice Theory, Regional Dynamics.**

Introduction

This paper examines the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent challenges and political-economic choices of Pakistan in the light of changing regional dynamics. It also examines the new stage of relations between the U.S., Pakistan and Afghanistan. The 9/11 attacks where hijacked planes crashed at the World Trade Center had a profound effect on global and regional politics. The U.S. blamed the Taliban government in harboring Osama bin Laden, and thus

initiated an operation called Operation Enduring Freedom in October 7, 2001. U.S. troops assassinated bin Laden in 2011, after ten years of war in Abbottabad, Pakistan. In 2014, President Obama announced the withdrawal of U.S troops, which Trump did not change until President Biden did in August 2021. The paper brings into the limelight the policy of strategic depth that was implemented by Pakistan and its contribution towards restoring the political economy of Afghanistan. It uses the Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to comprehend decision-making by states using the cost-benefit analysis. To ensure that the research was unbiased and to triangulate the data, the researcher has implemented NVivo-14 software to carry out content analysis of the qualitative nature.

Background of the Study

Pakistan and Afghanistan have experienced numerous issues earlier due to the great location of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has remained the source of great power rivalry as it was a buffer state between Russia and Britain. The Cold war brought closer together the U.S and Pakistan in the efforts of anti-communism such as SEATO (1954) and CENTO (1955). Such alliances made Pakistan allied with the west to defend the two nations against the USSR.

Problem Statement

The U.S withdrawal in Afghanistan created power vacuum that enabled other regional actors and organizations such as ISIS-K, and TTP to access power. Such groups could exploit the issues of the people in Afghanistan and leave the situation even more unstable which would pose a direct threat to the stability of the region, particularly Pakistan. The increasing involvement and unofficial interaction of India with Taliban regime complicates the strategic concerns of Pakistan.

Significance of the Study

The study is interested for policy makers, analysts, and future academics who wish to understand more about the geopolitics of South Asia. It provides us with a means of comprehending the role of Pakistan in the post withdrawal Afghanistan and its larger effects on the power relationships between the region involving India, China and the United States. The research also expands the outlook of the political scientists on the strategic and economic interdependencies in the region.

Research Questions

1. What policy options does Pakistan adopt toward Afghanistan after moving beyond strategic depth?
2. In what ways can Pakistan support the political economy of Afghanistan?"

3. What political challenges does Pakistan encounter amid shifting regional dynamics?

Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and its political-economic implications for Pakistan, focusing specifically on strategic depth, Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's recovery, and regional peace efforts. It does not cover other relevant areas such as Afghan-Russia relations, China's BRI in Afghanistan, the U.S.–India nexus, or an in-depth study of the Neo-Taliban regime, and Russian recognition of Neo-Taliban regime like areas that future researchers are encouraged to explore.

Literature Review

The evolution of **Afghanistan–U.S. relations** began with formal diplomatic ties in 1935 and deepened during the Cold War, especially after the Soviet invasion in 1979. Post-9/11, the U.S. launched *Operation Enduring Freedom*, shifting focus from counterterrorism to broader state-building objectives in Afghanistan (Jabeen , Mazhar , & Goraya, 2010). Despite major investments, challenges such as Taliban resurgence, drug trafficking, and weak governance undermined long-term U.S. objectives (America V. o., 2024).

The U.S strategic interest in Afghanistan was to check the militant groups, keep the influence of the rival powers (China, Russia, India) in check and control, and keep the region stable. Such projects as troop withdrawal talks and funding of Afghan troops were accompanied by wildly swearing relationships with the Taliban (Jones, 2017). The U.S.-Pakistan relations have always had a history of cooperation and mistrust. Pakistan was regarded as a strategic partner especially in the times of the Cold War and post 9/11. Nonetheless, there was friction on the part of the U.S. which criticized Pakistan because of its so-called militant connections especially with the Haqqani network (Chandran, 2018). The Trump policies in the U.S. placed more emphasis on India as an antidote to China, which only antagonized Pakistan (KAURA, 2017).

Geographically and security wise, Pakistan was strategically geographically and security relevant to continue its transactional but not discontinuous involvement with the U.S, which has largely focused on counterterrorism. Pakistan, on its part, stressed its sovereign right to be in line with such partners as China under CPEC, even though the U.S. is concerned about this (Spokesperson, 2023). Traditionally, the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been tense with the conflict over Durand line and the problem of Pashtunistan as well as mutual mistrust. The basis of a strained relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan was formed by alliance of Afghanistan with anti-Pakistan group like the

Pashtunistan movement and its refusal to recognize Pakistan in 1948 at the UN (Rubin & Siddique, 2006).

The Afghan policy of Pakistan has always aimed at having strategic depth against India, access to Central Asia and stability at the borders. The Salala incident and the Abbottabad raid worsened the relationships with the U.S., bringing Pakistan closer to China as a geopolitical opponent to the India-U.S. axis (Stobdan, 2019). The Pakistan views the regional processes as a threat to its national security such as the India-Afghanistan-Iran triangle. The post-U.S. strategy of Pakistan is based on the mix of neutrality, economic integration, and a strategic hedging. The activities like APTTA, TAPI, CASA-1000 are regarded as the means of promoting economic interdependence. The Royal Danish Defense College (2017) noted the aspects of border management, the repatriation of refugees, and trade as the primary areas that could enhance the bilateral trust.

Since the United States pulled out, China has become a major stakeholder on Afghanistan, seeking to satisfy its interests under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). RCT can also be used in this study to describe the decisions that Pakistan has made in the field of foreign policy as the strategic reactions to the changing balance of power in the region. States are considered to be rational actors whose interests are self-seeking economic interests, strategic richness, and national security in forging alliances or fighting competitors. This is why the relations between Pakistan, Afghanistan, U.S., China, and India are fluctuating, which is consistent with the concept of realist viewpoint that there are no permanent friends or enemies, but only permanent interests. China's focus includes infrastructure development, energy investment, and counter-extremism cooperation to protect its western frontier (Mosazai, 2019).

Identified Gap

Although there is plenty of literature on the relations among United States, Afghanistan and Pakistan, little of it focusses on the political-economic effects of the U.S. withdrawal on Pakistan and the strategic reorientation it requires. Existing literature frequently ignores Pakistan's changing place in the multipolar regional system. In order to fill this vacuum, this study uses qualitative methods such as content analysis and Rational Choice Theory (RCT) to examine Pakistan's reasonable policy options. It offers a locally based viewpoint on how Pakistan handles changing regional threats, alliances, and strategic opportunities in Afghanistan after withdrawal.

Theoretical Framework

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) is used in this study to examine Pakistan's political and economic choices in reaction to Afghanistan's shifting circumstances after the U.S. withdrawal. The rational choice theory's history traced back to Enlightenment era through Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), and further polished by scholars such as

Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith and later Gary Becker, RCT conceptualizes those states as a rational actors composed of judicious individuals who pursue utility-maximizing choices based on cost-benefit analyses (Oppenheimer, 2008).

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) holds three main assumptions: **individualism**, **optimality** and **self-regard**. Actors, that maybe individuals or states, act to maximize their self-interests (Triandis, 2001). While originated in economics, RCT is broadly applicable in sociology, international relations, and Political Science, especially in explaining policy preferences, voting behavior, and diplomatic strategy (Scott, 2000). The opponents of RCT are of the opinion that it often streamlines behavior, overlooking unreasonable or mutual motivations (Ogu, 2013). However, scholars like Quackenbush (2004), and Sato (2020) preserve its utility as a meta-theoretical framework having the potential of explaining macro-social phenomena, including, institutions, international diplomacy and norms. The theory has also evolved through insights from behavioral economics, evolutionary game theory, and empirical experimentation (Hodgson, 2012).

Main Argument

The political-economic policies and strategic issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan decelerate greatly, especially under the influence of the national interests in reaction to the changing regional dynamics.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design that is based on historical, exploratory and descriptive research methods to explore the political and economic implications of US withdrawal from Afghanistan on Pakistan. A linear model provides a path through which the process of research is taken; the formulation of research questions all the way to the data collection and analysis are carried out in a consistent and coherent manner.

Data Collection

This study contains secondary sources of data that includes political speeches, policy documents, media content, and scholarly articles. The analysis of these sources was carried out by qualitative content analysis and triangulation of them with manual and automatic codes in order to provide a deeper analysis and avoid biasness.

Qualitative Content Analysis and post-Positivist Framework.

Due to the influence of environmental conditions and subjectivity of the researcher on the creation of knowledge, the study is based on the post-positivist paradigm (Tripathi and Giri, 2024). This paradigm allows causal analysis and theoretical

testing together with promoting the application of qualitative methods. It impacted the application of the rational choice theory to the policy decisions and state behavior. Qualitative content analysis and NVivo-14 software were used in the analysis of manifest content based on political speeches, interviews, and official documents in this study. A directed content analysis technique that was guided by Rational Choice Theory informed and enabled the emergence of fresh ideas through use of the coding structure. The speeches delivered by the leaders of state of the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan were the major units of analysis. Thematic classification of these speeches was done by both automated and manual means.
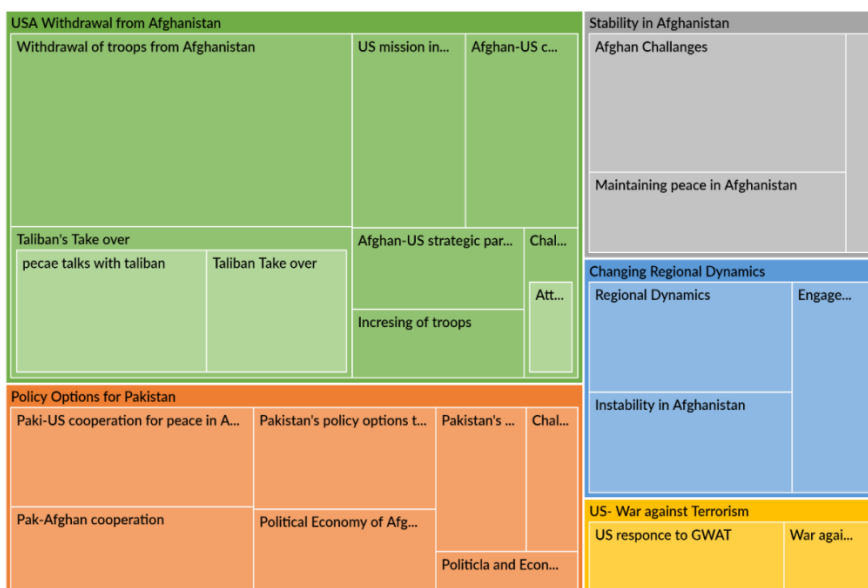
Open code helped with data labelling and classification by following the basic principles such as theoretical alignment, consistency, and clarity. Results were then divided into relevant themes using deductive coding. The universe consisted of all political speeches of the leaders of state of the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan of 2001-2021 that were acquired through the press outlets, YouTube, and TV programs.

Speeches broadcast by leading television networks such as Fox News, CNN, PTV, Geo News, Aryana, and Tolo News formed the study population. These channels were chosen due to their broad reach and significant influence on both domestic and international political discourse. The sample was drawn through purposive (judgmental) sampling and comprised speeches delivered by U.S. Presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden; Afghan Presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani; and Pakistani leaders Asif Ali Zardari, Nawaz Sharif, Imran Khan, and Shehbaz Sharif. The selection of these speeches was guided by their direct relevance to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and its ensuing political and economic implications for the region (Creswell, 2009).

Data Analysis

NVivo-14 software was used to perform qualitative content analysis to analyze the data. To begin with, speeches given by U.S., Afghanistan, and Pakistan heads of state (2001-2021) were transcribed manually by the researcher. Codes were first created manually by using the topic of the research and questions and later triangulated with the automatically created codes in NVivo. The codes were further sorted into categories and themes in NVivo under Matrix Framework Analysis after cross-verification. The process allowed the researcher to infer empirical information that can be used to substantiate the findings of the study and respond to the research questions.

Hierarchy Chart No.1, Imported from NVivo-14

Hierarchy Chart No.2, Imported from NVivo-14

Word	Length	Count	Weighted %
Afghanistan	11	365	2.45%
President	9	227	1.53%
Taliban	7	226	1.52%
Pakistan	8	223	1.50%
Afghan	6	202	1.36%
Ghani	5	108	0.73%
Government	10	96	0.65%
Peace	5	90	0.60%
Security	8	85	0.57%
Military	8	83	0.56%

Visualization of word Frequency table Imported from NVivo-14

Pakistan's Strategic Depth and Policy Choices toward Afghanistan

The foreign policy of Pakistan on Afghanistan has been seen to experience a conspicuous change, especially with the pullout of the U.S and Taliban resurgence. Historically, Pakistan had developed a policy of strategic depth to ensure that it was able to have influence in Afghanistan to counter the Indians. Nevertheless, the recent trends also indicate some changes in approach to be more inclusive and pragmatic in the region. First President Asif Ali Zardari insisted on the need to have close relationships with the new regime in Kabul. He argued that Pakistan should employ its influence to push the Taliban toward safeguarding fundamental rights and addressing terrorism, thereby enhancing Afghanistan's legitimacy and acceptance within the international community. His comments were directed on the possibilities of Pakistan as a mediator and facilitator of responsible governance in post withdrawal Afghanistan: credibility and support, he suggested that the Pakistan ought to utilize its power to convince the Taliban to compromise on counterterrorism and fundamental rights. His remarks stressed the ability of Pakistan to intervene and facilitate responsible leadership in Afghanistan after leaving it:

> "Although Pakistan is making no effort to break its links with the Taliban, the Pakistan government hopes to leverage its position to make the Taliban consider more internationally acceptable forms of government which may deliver economic and diplomatic advantages to Afghanistan (S7)".

Then-Prime Minister Imran Khan publicly announced his desire to forego the theory of strategic depth in a remarkable departure in strategy. He stressed a new policy of engagement with any Afghan administration backed up by the Afghan people and this meant that there was a change of focus to non-interference and regional cooperation:

> "Imran Khan announced a shift in Pakistan's stance, moving away from its traditional policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan. He further pledged that Pakistan would engage with any Afghan government enjoying the support of its people. This underscores the importance of Pakistan abandoning its previous approaches toward Afghanistan (S8)".

Imran Khan celebrated the move by President Biden to withdraw, dubbing it a rational outcome to a no-military war. Pakistan urged all Afghan stakeholders to
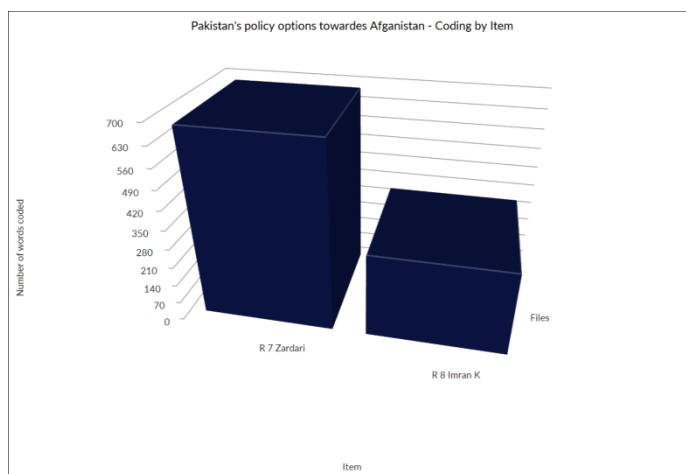
cherish human rights as they fulfilled the humanitarian and security problems that had arisen, especially in the Chaman border:

> "The president Joe Biden decided to keep drawing troops and this decision was praised by PM Imran Khan as it was a logical termination of the war (S8)".

The changing policy towards Afghanistan has various aspects in Pakistan with security coordination, diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and regional memberships such as CPEC, TAPI and APAPPS being some of them. These facilities are supposed to build bilateral and multilateral relations and enhance stability of the region. The recent diplomatic procedures, including the one where Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had a meeting with Taliban leader Amir Khan Muttaqi, showed mutual efforts on how to enhance the cooperation in the fields such as political dialogues, trade relations, transit, and handling of refugees:

> "A detailed and open discussion was conducted between Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Amir Khan Muttaqi on important issues. The meeting talked about political, economic, and transportation connections, besides issues that Afghanistan refugees face in Pakistan (S9)".

This change in Pakistan Afghanistan policy is a consequence of a wider reconsideration of the strategic priorities of the region, the idealistic support to the real involvement, the focus on the regional peace, economic integration and cooperative diplomacy.

Pakistan's policy options towardes Afganistan - Coding by Item

Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's Political Economy

Pakistan can take the forefront in the political economy of Afghanistan through facilitating commerce, joint ventures, development of infrastructure, investments and connectivity. These are economic activities that are essential to stability and prosperity in the region. The former Afghan President Hamid Karzai noted the importance of economic recovery such as alternative livelihoods of demobilized soldiers, structural reforms and government investment projects. It was aimed at the creation of employment and bettering living conditions, yet:

> "There were fears regarding the influence on the economy of Afghanistan because there were no financial sources (S4)".

Asif Ali Zardari, a former president of Pakistan suggested the application of a holistic counterterrorism approach that extends beyond military response. Mr. Asif Ali Zardari is of the opinion that long term peace and economic development depends on regional cooperation, economic integration, and diplomatic interaction:

> "Instead of using military options to curb terrorist activities and ensure stability, he proposes a holistic approach in this regard. The idea of regional cooperation and counterterrorism can be used in this strategy (S7)".

Zardari also highlighted the economic loss due to the sealing of the Torkham border which is an important trade route between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Diplomatic relations between the officials of the two states led to the reopening of the border, demonstrating the interdependence of the two in terms of commerce:

> "He emphasized that the closure of the Torkham border had disrupted supply chains, transport, and trade. The crossing was later reopened following the visit of Afghan officials led by Meer Muttaqi to Islamabad (S7)".

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan underscored Pakistan's strategic stake in Afghanistan's peace, linking it to broader economic collaboration with Central Asian states. He highlighted infrastructure initiatives, such as a proposed railway line connecting Pakistan to Uzbekistan via Afghanistan, as vital for enhancing regional connectivity and fostering economic growth:

> "Mr. Khan underlined the role of Pakistan in the peacekeeping in Afghanistan. Moreover,

> it would bring Afghanistan closer to Central Asian countries and advance economic projects in future. Furthermore, he emphasized that projects, such as a railway route with Uzbekistan via Afghanistan, are heavily reliant on restoring regional peace (S8)".

President Ashraf Ghani also campaigned for regional economic cooperation, citing the TAPI gas pipeline project (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) as a symbol of regional integration:

> "Dr. Ghani's speech emphasised peace, econ omic progress, and democracy. He Praised the TAPI project for a gas pipeline c onnecting Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakis tan, and India (S6")".

Karzai recognised issues such as narcotics, security instability, and governance ina dequacies, called for longterm international help in sectors such as energy, agricult ure, and infrastructure:

> "This address recognises Afghanistan's issue s in government, narcotics, and security. It emphasized the importance of long-term international cooperation in electricity, agriculture, and infrastructure (S 5).

The Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif reiterated the Pakistani desire to connect the region, fight terrorism and enhance climate resilience at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) conference. He noted that peace in Afghanistan is vital to the wider security of the region and that there should be international cooperation:

> "The speech of the Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit covered a range of subjects. Among these issues, he highlighted the role of international collaboration in ensuring peace and insecurity in Afghanistan (S9)".

Political Challenges for Pakistan in Evolving Regional Dynamics.

Pakistan being the neighbor of Afghanistan experiences a number of political challenges as the dynamics in the region change. These are border instability, the

emerging geopolitical crises, poor bilateral relations and conflicting international alignments. Obama, the former US president, stressed on the geo-strategic relevance of Afghanistan as a center of the global counter-terrorism infrastructure, which stretches through Africa to South Asia. Pakistan is under pressure to cooperate closely with regional and international actors:

> "The South Asia to Africa and the USA can use this type of cooperation in Afghanistan to counterterrorism which is pivotal (S2)".

President Donald Trump blamed Pakistan on failing to do enough to address terrorism, and further strengthened strategic relationships with India, which altered the U.S. regional policy:

> "To win the war on terror USA needs to redirect its focus towards India instead of Pakistan because USA needs to improve its strategic relationship with India, said Mr. Donald Trump, who admitted the increased power of China, Iran, and India in the area, and offered a more complex geopolitical equation (S3)".

The president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, also toured India which was considered a diplomatic measure to better relations as it would have been done by economic and security agreements. This created alarm in Islamabad but Karzai assured them that these accords were not targeted at damaging Pakistan:

> "It has been reported that there is frustration towards Pakistan although the visit of Mr. Karzai was an attempt to enhance relations with India on the diplomatic level (S5)".

Due to the increasing influence of India in Afghanistan and persisting security threats, Pakistan was forced to reassess its plans. This shift promoted further cooperation in counterterrorism and understanding of shared security problems in the region:

> "The statement also emphasizes the fact that a diplomatic process towards better relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is also confronted with security concerns of both parties, which is mainly in the field of extremism and terrorism (S7)".

China has also become a major player to protect regional stability. Growing multilateral cooperation is reflected by the diplomatic meetings held between
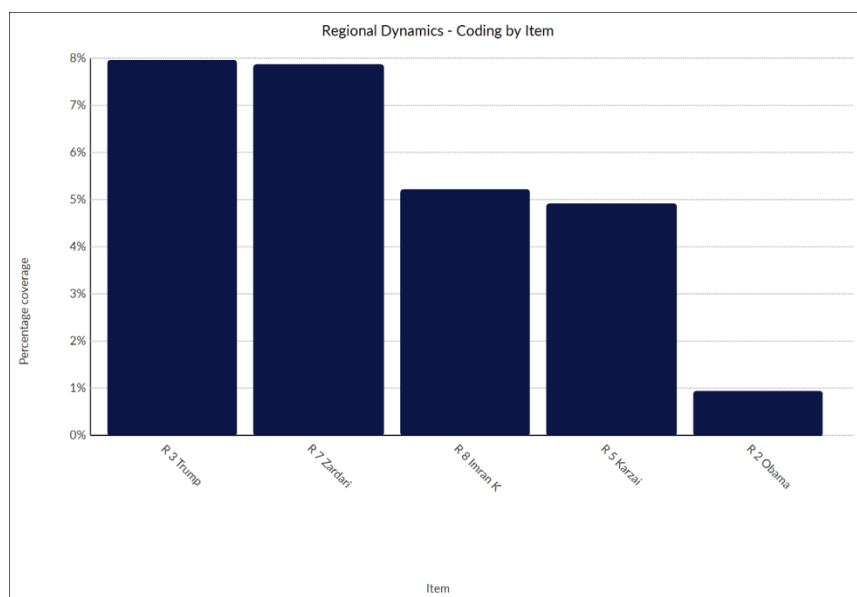
Pakistan and China as well as Afghanistan to discuss frequent security and political concerns:

> "The speech highlighted ongoing diplomatic efforts aimed at addressing multiple regional challenges, noting the involvement of key actors such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China (S7)".

The geopolitical reorientation, in particular, the growing Pakistan-China nexus which works against US interests, were embodied in the speech of Imran Khan. The concepts of regional development in CPEC and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) conflict and presented strategic differences through the following means:

> "Both The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have been described as a conflict of interest between the United States and Pakistan (S8)".

Regional Dynamics - Coding by Item

Findings of Qualitative Content Analysis

The results of the qualitative contents show that Pakistan has changed its policy course towards Afghanistan deviating off the classical doctrine of the strategic depth. Rather, Pakistan is now interested in positive interaction with any Afghan government that is backed by its population including the Taliban. This modified policy aims at motivating the Taliban to the internationally acceptable governance

through respecting human rights and anti-terrorism obligation. Pakistan stresses the fact that the Afghan war has no military way out, and promotes diplomacy, inclusive rule and humanitarian collaboration. It is through trade agreements, joint ventures, facilitation of transit routes, and infrastructure investments.

Pakistan has been taking an active role in the political economy of Afghanistan economically. The Pakistani economic stability and integration strategy in the region is exemplified by such missions as APAPPS, CPEC, and TAPI. It is noteworthy that such projects as the Trans-Afghan Railway will result in the enhancement of connection with Central Asia, which will have a positive impact on China, Iran, and Uzbekistan as well as on Pakistan and Afghanistan. The bilateral trade recorded an amount of $135.30 million in August 2023, although there have been many trade swings, where Pakistan recorded a slight decline in exports. The sectors where economic cooperation is prioritized are in the field of agriculture, infrastructure and energy due to the financial issues being faced by Afghanistan particularly following the freeze of assets by New York Federal Reserve amounting to 7 billion US dollars.

The country has several regional political challenges, such as complex relations with neighbors, insecurity of the borders, and changeable geopolitical environment with the regimes, new alliances, and power dynamics. In South Asia through to Africa, the geographic location of Afghanistan remains crucial in counterterrorism. Pakistan however doubts the U.S. policies, particularly its con-current counterterrorism partnership with Pakistan and its escalating strategic relationship with India. Islamabad fears the threats of insurgency and unstable situation in the region due to India increased involvement in Afghanistan including diplomatic relations with Taliban without recognition. On the other hand, China invites the Taliban to put the interests of neighboring countries into consideration in the quest to promote peace at the regional level. The trilateral China-Pakistan-Afghanistan diplomacy is a manifestation of common regional peace and economic goals. The geopolitical realignment has also led to the complexification of U.S.-Pakistan relations since it has brought conflicting strategic interests in the region, specifically the increasing China-Pakistan cooperation via the BRI and CPEC.

Conclusion

Historically, such issues as the Durand Line, the Pashtunistan movement, and the search of strategic depth of Pakistan made the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan tense. But, Pakistan is leaving the traditional paradigm of strategic depth, thus making a great shift in policy. The current policy has put great emphasis on engagement with any Afghan government that the citizens elect, support peace, maintain open borders, and promote trade and humanitarian assistance as a way of promoting stability and development in the region. To enhance its reputation in the international arena, Pakistan desires to leverage its power to induce Taliban to be more moderate, especially on their commitments

regarding the pursuit of human rights and the war against terrorism. Improved bilateral relations can also lead to opening of the sea trade routes to Afghanistan, which will become more integrated into the global market. The politics and economy of Afghanistan are largely reliant on the economy of Pakistan. Pakistan is trying to facilitate economic recovery and employment in Afghanistan by facilitating trade, developing infrastructures, investing and venturing together. The growth in the long term requires open trade, cross border cooperation and trust building efforts that address the social and psychological obstacles since both economies have been historically reliant on foreign aid and conflict.

There is the possibility of the further economic integration considering that bilateral trade totaled at 135.30 million in August 2023. Regional stability, peace, connectivity is essential to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to such a project as CPEC, TAPI, CASA-1000, APTTTA and BRI to create lasting peace. Nevertheless, when it comes to dealing with the shifting regional dynamics, Pakistan is confronted by several political challenges. These are changing geopolitical alliances, complex border security issues, as well as strained relations with neighbors. The fact that Afghanistan is expanding its relations with India is an issue that increases the security concerns of Islamabad to the perception that it is a strategic threat. Meanwhile, China continues its trilateral diplomatic activities with Pakistan and Afghanistan to control the issues of the region and accentuates the Taliban as having the duty to promote the interests of the neighboring states. Initiatives like the BRI and CPEC offer both prospects and points of dispute, as shifting geopolitical rivalries, especially among China, India, and the United States, shape the region's dynamics. In a nutshell, achieving peace in Afghanistan is essential not only for regional stability but also as a prerequisite for economic growth and geopolitical balance across South and Central Asia.

References

Agency , A. N. (2021, August 3). Afghan president blames 'abrupt' US withdrawal for worsening security | AFP. Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan. Retrieved december 17, 2023, from https://youtu.be/U5YtmlwXGWM?si=qd5khK9lq7KPwwkR

Ali, S. M. (, 2021, June 22). Recalibrating The US-Pakistan Partnership In Afghanistan. Islamabad, Islamabad, Pakistan. Retrieved from https://politact.com/recalibrating-the-us-pakistan-partnership-in-afghanistan/

America, V. o. (2019, July 23). Pakistan's PM Imran Khan and US President Donald Trump over Kashmir a Bilateral Meeting. washington, washington, USA. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/Hvs0bTg_8_o?si=RgZP4kpp3PiOP2hM

Archive, A. (2001, September 24). President signs order freezing assets of terrorists. Washington , Washington , USA.

Armitage, R. L., & Berger, S. R. (2010). *U.S. Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan.* USA: Council on Foreign Relations.

Bokhari, F. (2021, SEPTEMBER 30). A win for Pakistan': Imran Khan gambles on Taliban ties. Islamabad, islamabad, pakistan. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/search?query=china+pakistan+economic+corridor

Collective, T. A. (2020, June 16). A path to peace in Afghanistan with President Ashraf Ghani | The TED Interview. Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan. Retrieved 13 december, 2023, from https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/president-ghani-assesses-current-status-of-peace-prospects-in-afghanistan/

D , F., & M. , H. (1988). The Contribution Of Rational Choice Theory. *Sociological theory*, 201-218.

E, R. I. (2021, September 25). *E-International Relations*. Retrieved from positivism-post-positivism-and-interpretivism: https://www.e-ir.info/2021/09/25/positivism-post-positivism-and-interpretivism/

Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 107-115.

Ghani, A. (2021, May 4). Afghanistan's Moment of Risk and Opportunity. Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan. Retrieved from https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/afghanistan/2021-05-04/ashraf-ghani-afghanistan-moment-risk-and-opportunity

House, T. (2010, 16 December). Statement by the President on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Annual Review. Washington, Washinton, USA. Retrieved from https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/statement-president-afghanistan-pakistan-annual-review

International, I. (2021, August 18). President Biden's Remarks on Afghanistan. Washington, Columbia, USA. Retrieved December 15, 2023, from https://youtu.be/6DWcNCjab3g?si=kxB1g1pEpp8BBQoY

Kakar, J., & Yousif, M. (2022). US Withdrawal & Taliban Regime In Afghanistan: Implications For Regional Stability. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 1-2.

Karzai, H. (2014, march 2). Karzai says 12-year Afghanistan war has left him angry at U.S. government. (K. Sieff, Interviewer)

Khan , M. (2010). *President Obama's speech on a new strategy for the war in Afghanistan – messages sent across.* iSLAMABAD: Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad. Retrieved from chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/1299130610_15211630.pdf

Khan, I. (2012, January 10). USA withdrawal. islamabad, islamabad, Pakistan. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/ImranKhanPTI/status/156698849023492096

Mashaal, R. (2023, June 30). Former Pakistani PM Imran Khan Accuses Powerful Army Of Crackdown, Failures. Islamabad, Islamabad, Pakistan. Retrieved from https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-khan-interview-military/32483777.html

Mohydin, R. (2021). US-Pakistan Relations Post-US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: A Shift in Dynamics? *Journal of Political Science*, 1-8.

News, C. (2011, June 22). Obama's plan to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan . Washington, Washington, USA.

News, F. B. (2023, July 1). Reporter Asks Biden: 'Do You Admit Failure In Afghanistan?'. Washington DC, New York, United States Of America. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/JZL61NFGG9k

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* . Newyork: sage publisher.

Peshimam, G. N. (2020, Febrary 4). Pakistan seeks Afghan settlement before foreign troop pullout. Putrajay, Putrajaya, Malaysia. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-seeks-afghan-settlement-before-foreign-troop-pullout-khan-2021-06-04/

Quackenbush, s. L. (2004). The rationality of rational choice theory. *Taylor & Francis, Inc.*, 87-107.

Siddique , Q. (2011). *Pakistan's Future Policy Towards Afghanistan*. Denmark: Qandeel Siddique and DIIS.

Soherwordi, S. S. (2012). Withdrawal of American Forces from Afghanistan (Endgame): Issues and Challenges for Pakistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 129.

Square, D. (2023, June 25). Introduction to Content Analysis - Understanding the Basics - Urdu/Hindi - 2/2. Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/BzpnAOt8wRs?si=BDiAyaP1FNcijcON

Stobdan, P. (2019). The Afghan Conflict and Regional Security. *Strategic Analysis:*, 1-16.

Stumpf, A. (2023 , April 24). *Fox News*. Retrieved from Former Navy SEAL corrects Biden after blaming Trump for Afghanistan withdrawal: https://youtu.be/0CxqHryH_VA?si=hAqSbixmTwsm2lHK

ullock , G. (1976). *The Vote Motive.* London: Hobart Press.

Tytler, W. F. (1962). *Afghanistan: A study of Political Development in Central.* London: Oxford University Press.

Ul-Haq, M. S. (2023, June Monday). (A. Ghafoor, Interviewer)

Vestenskov, D. (2017). Mutual Trust Building and Reconciliation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Beyond. *Igniting Paths Of Reconciliation Between Afghanistan And Pakistan* (p. 61). Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College.

Vox. (2003, March 19). Why is the Guantánamo Bay prison still open? washington , washington , USA.

White House. (2015, June 23). President Obama's Statement on General McChrystal and Afghanistan. Washington, Washington, USA.

White house, O. (2012, May 2). Remarks With President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan on Signing the Strategic Partnership Agreement in Kabul, Afghanistan. Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan. Retrieved december 9, 2023, from https://youtu.be/G41PCqeiwhA?si=-JEpK4od2lX9kIbH

Wildemuth, B. M., & Freund, L. (2009, October 23). *HCIR*. Retrieved from Proceedings of the Third Workshop on Human-Computer:

https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=a4d218e8c f9eb35151a93b2b221486ee0cacb267#page=23

World, T. (2021, August 14). Afghan president vows to stop bloodshed. Kabul, Kabul, Afghanistan. Retrieved december 17, 2023, from https://youtu.be/BMVTXe1LUb8?si=D5SYNfyboXhaGBfJ

Zahid, F. (2022). Dealing with Afghanistan after the US Withdrawal: Challenges and Options for Pakistan. *NUST Jounal of Imternational Peace and Stability*, 1-10.

Zeb, R. (2013). Pakistan and Afghanistan, 2014 and Beyond: Not Friends, Not Yet Enemies? *Journal of South Asian Development*, 165-183.

_____