

**Pakistan-Afghanistan Post-2021 Relations Under the Taliban 2.0: Challenges, Shifts, Recognition, and Strategic Realignments**

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**Abstract**

Pakistan and Afghanistan's post-August 2021 relations are marked by heightened tensions and complex challenges across security, political, and human domains despite a shared border, shared ethnicity, religion, and culture. The main reason is the trust deficit between the two, which has been shaped by several factors, including Indian influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan's support of a specific group as a strategy of strategic depth in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban, who are being considered as the protégés of Islamabad, did not prove to be as friendly as they were in the 1990s or as friendly as they were expected to be. The 2.0 Taliban are quite different from the 1990s 1.0 Taliban of Afghanistan. Most of their policies are based on contradictions to the expectations of Islamabad. The return of the Taliban in August 2021 has brought a new shift in the regional policies, including that of Pakistan. The Taliban's return has brought nothing to Pakistan but an increase in terrorism and illicit activities. The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan has once again reemerged with more strength and an increased number of terrorist activities. This article, based on both primary and secondary sources, will explore how the TTP emerged and its link with the Afghan Taliban. The study will further look into the soft return of the Afghan Taliban to Kabul and the current shifts and challenges regarding trade, security, cross-border movement, and, more particularly, the repatriation of the Afghan refugees.

**Key words:** Relations, the Taliban, Pakistan, Afghanistan, TTP, Kabul, Islamabad.

**Introduction**

The rise of non-state actors has significantly reshaped international security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among these, the Afghan Taliban have remained central to regional geopolitics, especially after their return to power in August 2021. However, little is known about how soft the Taliban returned and how their governance has evolved in the context of local resistance. Additionally, how the Taliban have developed their international relations with both global and international powers, including that of Pakistan. Although the Taliban are viewed as a pro-Pakistan faction in Afghanistan and Islamabad is blamed for their alleged return to power in 2021, yet very little cooperation has been witnessed between Kabul and Islamabad. The relationship has been through many ups and downs due to various reasons, but security is among the top ones. Reports show an incredible increase in the number of illicit and cross-border terrorist activities in Pakistan after the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban has reemerged and has

rescheduled its planning of lethal activities and recruitment in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban administration, despite world pressure, including that of Pakistan, has not yet taken any serious steps to curb TTP and 24 other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan. This article will investigate how TTP emerged and its link with the Afghan Taliban. Moreover, the article first reviews the relevant literature, then presents the field of data collected through interviews, and finally offers an inclusive analysis of the post-2021 Pak-Afghan relationship under the Afghan Taliban.

### **Taliban's Return to Kabul**

After the fall of the first regime of the Taliban due to the US-led war on terror in 2001, in reactionary insurgencies of the Taliban, the U.S. faced severe atrocities, offensives, and huge loss of human resources and economic loss of \$146 billion for security forces and reconstruction in Afghanistan, but it could not achieve the required results of human development and others, and the nation was yet impoverished and corrupt.<sup>1</sup> The US-led war on terror is said to be the longest war historically, which the U.S. was extremely tired of. Therefore, the then-President Barack Obama wanted to end the war in Iraq and put it limited to countering only Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, particularly in Afghanistan and the borders of Pakistan. The process of Peace Talks between Karzai-led Kabul government and the Taliban also ended without achieving success despite the U.S. signal via Hilary Clinton to have held talks with the leadership of the moderate Taliban<sup>2</sup> because the Taliban always viewed the Kabul government as a puppet of the U.S. and the U.S. itself a real stakeholder of Afghanistan so they would prefer to hold talks with the real power in Afghanistan; the United States.<sup>3</sup> In June 2012, the Taliban announced the establishment of a political office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Qatar for talks regarding peaceful solutions to the issues in Afghanistan and understanding with the United States. The office was led by Mullah Omar's former personal secretary, Tayyab Agha. After the U.S. pressure, Pakistan released Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar as well, who was also included in the Taliban's negotiation team for the US-Taliban Peace Deal, due to whom the process of the deal began to gain momentum. Respecting the preference of the Taliban, the U.S. directed Qatar to provide space for the Taliban's office. Since then, over two dozen high-ranking leaders of the Taliban, including their families moved to Doha. It is worth mentioning that these modifications took place without Omar's approval.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, when talks were to be held between the Taliban and the Kabul administration of Hamid Karzai ended before they started because the Taliban representative was speaking before a white flag of the Islamic Emirate rather than the Afghan flag, which outraged Karzai.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the official contact between the Taliban and the U.S. broke down. However, despite the breakdown in official contact, in 2014 the U.S. and the Taliban reached an agreement on a prisoner swap, which consequently resulted in the release of five Taliban inmates from Guantanamo prison of the U.S. and U.S. Army soldier Bowe Bergdahl, who had been kidnapped by the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2009. There were more expectations of further talks between the two, but very little materialized. The Taliban showed serious concerns over the 2014 elections, which resulted in Ashraf Ghani's election as the President and Abdullah Abdullah as the Chief Executive of Afghanistan. The Taliban viewed these modifications as more of the same: a corrupt and illegitimate administration backed by the U.S. and other foreign factors.<sup>6</sup> After Pakistan released Mullah Baradar from prison in 2018, the negotiation team of the Taliban gained momentum, and a peace deal between the U.S. and the Taliban in February 2020 further enabled and empowered the Taliban in a major way to return and rise to power.<sup>7</sup> The agreement between the Taliban and the U.S. was based on the complete withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the Taliban's promise not to use Afghan soil against the security of the United States and its allies, and also to engage the incumbent government of Afghanistan to achieve peace.<sup>8</sup> Before the arrival and return of the Taliban, Zalmay Khalilzad, who was leading the US-Taliban deal, tried to convince the then-President Ashraf Ghani

to work with the Taliban. Ghani outrightly rejected the suggestion, saying that this was inconceivable. Ghani had been informed that Hamid Karzai, Abdullah Abdullah, including Zalmay Khalilzad were maneuvering to oust him.<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that every leader of the Taliban was desirous of the complete withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan, and they focused on the same point every time, as this was the fundamental condition for them during any peace deal.<sup>10</sup> Subsequently, the Obama administration announced its plan for the withdrawal of forces in June 2014 in phases, the number of forces was reduced to 9,800 by 2015 and 5,000 by 2016, while 1,000 by the end of the year. After becoming President in June 2017, President Donald Trump first decided to curb the Islamic State and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Thus, he sent 3,000 more troops to Afghanistan. The Taliban also increased their insurgencies and offensives, which compelled Trump to rethink his Afghan policies, particularly regarding the Taliban. Consequently, he directed peace talks with the Taliban. To initiate the talks, Mike Pompeo visited Afghanistan and announced that facilitate peace talks. This was followed by a meeting between the six-member team of the Taliban and the U.S. Principal Deputy for South and Central Asia, Alice G. Wells. Hence, the process of peace talks resumed after a breakdown from the U.S.<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning that from 2003 to 2018, during the first phase, the Taliban regrouped, reorganized, and reframed their aims, and galvanized the cards from their bases in the regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, respectively. The strategies and plotting were being planned in Pakistan's city of Quetta, where the leadership council was comfortably housed. During the second phase from 2018 to 2019, the Taliban remained focused and engaged in negotiations with the U.S., while the third phase brought them to a deal with the United States in the modern rooms of Doha, Qatar.<sup>12</sup> The longest war in the history of terror in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and elsewhere came to an end, which had cost 8 trillion dollars to the United States<sup>13</sup> and its taxpayers still have to pay 93.26 billion dollars per hour for the total cost of the war on terror.<sup>14</sup> Several factors caused the fall of Kabul and helped the Taliban return. The Taliban had strategized their return through a combination of factors like hard bargaining on the negotiation table with the U.S., targeted suicide attacks, convincing various tribes and groups by force or bribe where necessary throughout the country so they could opt for a 'peace' deal with the Taliban and avoid any further reprisals and chaos. Apart from this, the Taliban also utilized social media to a great extent.<sup>15</sup> President Joe Biden announced on 14 April 2021 that the U.S. troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan in September of the same year. These were all Donald Trump's policies that Biden had to implement. Sensing the situation and realizing the withdrawal of the U.S. forces, the Taliban were about to knock at the gates of Kabul. Ghani's close associate, Amrullah Saleh was already missing amid the news of the Taliban's return to Kabul, however, Hassan Abbas mentions that in my conversation with an official of the White House after Hamdullah Mohib, Ghani's national Security Advisor, and Afghanistan's then-President Ghani's escape, I heard an interesting statement, "if these guys are still not ready to fight for their country and fleeing in every direction, are they really worth our support?". Similarly, the U.S. President, Joe Biden, also pointed out;

*"American troops cannot and should not be fighting and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves. He emphasized that we spent trillions of dollars to train and equip hundreds of Afghan National Security and Defense Forces, 2,448 Americans killed, 20,722 more wounded, and untold thousands coming home with unseen trauma to their mental health. He added that I would not send another generation of Americans to war in Afghanistan with no reasonable expectation of achieving a different outcome."*<sup>16</sup>

The events of mid-August not only stunned the Afghans but also the world; the Afghan Taliban themselves were surprised at the ease and speed with which they took over the country. Salute to their faith, their valour, and their grit. This was, indeed, their moment.<sup>17</sup> After a long and brutal insurgency that ran for two decades, the triumphant Taliban gradually entered Kabul on the 15th

of August 2021 unhindered and uninterrupted.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the 300,000-strong Afghan army, raised and trained by the U.S. and equipped with the most modern weaponry, was still unable to withstand the insurgents' coup de main.<sup>19</sup> The two Afghan leading Taliban figures namely Mulla Muhammad Yaqoob, and Jalaluddin Haqqani, son of Sirajuddin Haqqani, without U.S. military backup units to defend Kabul, heroically entered Kabul in the evening of 15 August rushing their forces to the ministries of Interior and Defense\_ the two control centers. The Taliban gradually entered the presidential palace and other government buildings in Kabul, where they found no resistance forces.<sup>20</sup> The only strong man of the Afghan Army, General Abdul Raziq, who enjoyed American support and patronage, had already been killed in 2018. Raziq was said to be the monster of the U.S. in Afghanistan who killed and tortured hundreds of the Taliban, including the Norzai tribe, which was supported by Pakistan in Afghanistan against the communists.<sup>21</sup> So, the Taliban had already cleared an obstacle in the name of Gen. Abdul Raziq which is why they came with a soft overcome over Kandhar, a stronghold of Raziq, and Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. In an interview with Al-Jazeera News after two years of their rule, flying in an Afghan National airplane, the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Najeeb Quraishi joyously that once there was a time when the airplanes used to chase us, now it feels great to be inside the plane and not to be afraid of it anymore. After his entry to the Palace in Central Kabul, and hoisting the white flag of the movement, Zabihullah said that the white flag is the symbol of freedom and jihad against America and corruption.<sup>22</sup>

### **Re-emergence of the Modern Taliban**

The Afghanistan de facto rulers, the Taliban 2.0 of 2021, are considered a little modern and different from 1.0 of the 1990s. After coming into power, the most important for the Taliban was to shape appropriate policies as they were going to face an alternatively educated, socially and politically conscious Afghan society along with pressure from the international community, particularly Western media, and feminist movements around the world. The Taliban showed little modernism during their second regime while adopting a lenient policy for women and education, particularly girls' education and work. Girls were seen going to schools and colleges, yet they faced rigorous restrictions in other parts of the country.<sup>23</sup> The fact cannot be denied that the Taliban are totally uneducated, inexperienced, and conservative, particularly concerning women.<sup>24</sup> At first, the Taliban showed a soft policy towards women and girls' education and portrayed themselves as different from those in the 1990s. But the combination of women's agitations and protests around Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan displays that they are the same ones, i.e., Taliban 1.0. Sandra Gathmann, a female reporter for Al-Jazeera interviewed many women after one year of the Taliban's rule, one of the women said that she was always out and about and was too active in society before the Taliban's takeover of August 2021, after the Taliban rule, she has been confined to the four walls of her home. Another woman, while expressing her views, said that instead of focusing on governance policies, the Taliban are obsessed with our hijab and clothing. The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice of the Taliban-led government issued particular rules and regulations for women in particular which consisted of women's long travel to be accompanied by a male member of her family, face to be covered in public places.<sup>25</sup>

The Ministry of Vice and Virtue has changed much from the one in 1996 which was harsh towards people. The Ministry is now kind and gentle towards people, said Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.<sup>26</sup> Reports show thousands of women being stopped from going to government jobs, and they are essentially being paid to sit at home.<sup>27</sup> As far as the question of girls' education is concerned, the Taliban repeatedly maintained that their ban on girls' education and women's employment is their internal matter.<sup>28</sup> The girls were allowed to go to primary schools and universities, but not secondary schools. Sadiq Akif Muhajid, a Taliban, said that the restrictions

on education are temporary. He also said that if Islam has allowed women to work and get an education, then who am I to ban them from doing so? The Taliban said they have objections to co-education and female uniforms, for which we are making policies, but a female interviewee who is a teacher pointed out that it has been a year the Taliban have had new reasons daily, and they are making excuses only. Additionally, another report portrays that almost 850,000 teenage girls have missed out on formal education since the Taliban takeover on 15 August 2021. Moreover, a former women's affairs official said that she wants to work outside the home the way she enjoyed before the Taliban government, however, she confessed that she still enjoys her payment at home without going out for work. Taliban's policy towards women is partially liked by some women and partially disliked by others who had enjoyed much freedom under democratic rules for the last 20 years after the fall of the Taliban in 2001.<sup>29</sup> After the Taliban's takeover, their spokesman answered Charlotte Bellis, an Al-Jazeera correspondent, that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is committed to women's rights within the framework of Sharia. He added that they can work in all sectors, but under the rules and regulations issued by our government. He further said that we are working on the reputation, respect, and character of women, and we are concerned about their security only; we want to create a safe way for them to go to work and study. Apart from this, when Mehbooba Seraj, a women's rights activist, met Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah, with her two hands closed together before Zabihullah, she appealed and requested him to please open girls' schools. She informed that it is impossible to see another Afghan generation that does not go to school. She also warned him of international reaction, due to which Afghans will suffer again. Zabihullah assured her to take her message to his elders.<sup>30</sup> The Taliban also banned music. An Afghan girl who was a musician playing Violin mourned that after the Taliban arrived in Kabul, I had to leave everything, including the institution where I had been playing orchestra. She said it felt like I was not living anymore. I am alive, but the Taliban have taken away my soul. Contrary to this, the custodian of a music institution of the Taliban-led government said that every instrument, including the institution, is safe and sound.<sup>31</sup>

As far as the Taliban's policy towards infrastructure and economy is concerned, little had been done till November 2022, and bilateral trade had been done informally at low cost with Iran and Pakistan, as the Taliban government was yet to be officially recognized by any country in the world.<sup>32</sup> Contrary to this, the Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told Al-Jazeera that both the Afghan masses and their government are under a severe economic crisis, however, his government has taken positive steps.<sup>33</sup> It seems true that the Taliban have taken some positive steps due to what the Afghan currency is now among the top performers. The value of Afghan currency increased by up to 14% in July 2023. Before the Taliban's return, the value of Afghani against the \$1 was 104.56 AFN while after their return, 78.2 Afghanis were equal to \$1 by September 2023.<sup>34</sup> By the 27th of May, the value of Afghan currency further increased its value and now 71.82 AFN are equal to \$1. During a Taliban official's visit to the Dam construction in Kandahar, Hafiz Noor Ahmed, Culture Minister for Kandahar of the Taliban-led government, said that people in Kandahar are satisfied and there are fewer crimes and kidnappings in the province. As far as the case of religious and ethnic disparities and clashes is concerned, the Taliban seem to be keen on solving the problems. Meeting an influential Shitte leader who complained about an increased riot against the Hazara community, which is by religion majorly Shitte. The Shia leader also proposed that if you set us on fire, you would be burnt too, so better to take a reasonable course of action and build together. Zabihullah assured him that such policies are not ours, nor our leader is of such low opinion with regard to the Shia community. He said he would deliver his message to his leader, too.<sup>35</sup>

## **Post-August 2021 Pak-Afghan Relations**

The international relations of the Taliban, particularly with its immediate neighborhood as well as Gulf states, have led to differences. Since their takeover, as mentioned earlier, the Taliban are divided into two factions: the ultra-autocratic conservatives and the moderates. The Kandahari Taliban have been leaning towards the east and influential Muslim majority states for its relationship building. However, the UAE, Iran, and Pakistan are also said to have their strong lobbies at work.<sup>36</sup> Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have been unstable and crucial since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in August 2021. Though the Taliban have long been considered to be the protégés of Pakistan, but they are no longer friendly to Pakistan. There are several reasons, like TTP, which has sought shelter in Afghanistan, terrorism, a number of exchanges of harsh allegations from the officials of both sides, refugees, and border fencing issue, and democrats who blame Pakistan for imposing the Taliban over them.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, most of the people, including some Afghans, publicly express that Pakistan assisted the Taliban's rise to power for the second time. India also perceives that the Taliban are under Pakistan's influence, and it supports and uses the Taliban as a proxy network to sponsor terrorism in India.<sup>38</sup> However, the Taliban are divided into two factions with regard to establishing ties with Pakistan. Mulla Abdul Ghani Baradar and his group do not seem in a position to build diplomatic ties with Pakistan. Despite Haibatullah's good health, Baradar believes to replace Mullah Haibatullah as the Supreme leader of the Taliban. However, neither Pakistan nor the Haqqani group is likely to support such an eventuality. However, waging anti-Pakistan feelings could help Mulla Ghani Baradar achieve this position.<sup>39</sup> The Taliban are truly divided, and there still exists pro-Pakistani Taliban inside their movement. Contrary to this, Pakistan, which was a key player supporting the Taliban both diplomatically and strategically and recognized their de facto rule in 1996, has consciously maintained a diplomatic stance with regard to granting potential recognition to the regime of the Taliban. The change in Islamabad's stance this time has been caused by reasons like Pakistan's dependency on Western aid and the U.S. pressure, which also blamed Pakistan for granting recognition to the Taliban in the 1990s, though the U.S. itself had remained in touch with the top leadership of the then Taliban. Pakistan supported the Taliban strategically in order to counter India in Afghanistan, unlike India and Iran would have supported their factions since the Taliban were not a powerful entity. Thus, Pakistan avoids promptly granting recognition to the de facto rulers, the Taliban, of Afghanistan, so it is not blamed for being pro-Taliban.<sup>40</sup>

## **International Recognition of the Taliban and Pakistan's Stance**

The current de facto rulers of Afghanistan, the Taliban, are anxiously seeking international recognition from the international community. It is noteworthy that when Kabul fell to the Taliban without firing a single shot, there, indeed, was an international consensus on the future of Afghanistan. The major powers like the United States of America, China, and Russia as well as the regional players like Pakistan, Iran, and others, conceded that the Taliban had to fulfill certain conditions before they were granted recognition. These conditions consist of the formation of an inclusive government, respecting human rights, including women's, and the protection of Afghan soil so it cannot be used again by the militant groups.<sup>41</sup> However, as far as the case of Pakistan is concerned with regard to establishing bilateral ties, the Taliban movement actually consists of two different factions: i) the hardliners or the conservatives who believe in remaining isolated in the international arena, and ii) the moderates. The ultra-conservatives or the autocratic hardliners are less interested in developing institutions that are representative and accountable. They have established a rigid monopoly undermining the works and ideals of moderates who put them back on the throne. The disorderly decision-making body puts at risk not only what they have fought for, but also the livelihood, security, and peace of the entire Afghan nation. Nonetheless,

optimistically, the group's former representatives in Doha, among whom some are in the current cabinet, are still likely to continue their struggle for better governance so as to seek international recognition and want to attract foreign investments and aid.<sup>42</sup> Relating to Pakistan, Hassan Abbas is of the view that both Pakistan and Iran have their own lobbies among the Taliban. Particularly the Haqqani group, which is thought to be a pro-Pakistani faction among the Taliban, as it had close ties with the establishment of Pakistan during the years of insurgency.<sup>43</sup> Particularly, Sirajuddin Haqqani is said to be the greatest ally of Pakistan. Similarly, Afghan Foreign Minister Moulvi Amir Khan Mutaqi has approached the Pakistani high command and made many strides as a highly influential Taliban representative.<sup>44</sup> The Taliban have unofficially begun their trade with Iran and Pakistan<sup>45</sup>, though they have not been recognized by these countries yet. Unlike the eastern border, the western border of Pakistan has unexpectedly met with clashes, particularly with the Taliban regime. On 11 December 2022, the Taliban launched a cross-border attack on Pakistan, which killed six Pakistanis and left 17 injured. Similarly, on 15 December 2022, the Taliban forces fired *mortar shells* across the Chaman border into Pakistan, which ultimately killed one Pakistani and injured 16. In November 2022, this was followed by another fire from an armed man standing with Taliban troops at the border who openly fired Pakistani security personnel at Friendship Gate, which resulted in the martyrdom of one while two others were injured.<sup>46</sup> After an increase in internal insecurity and extremism in Balochistan and KPK, the Apex Committee of Pakistan decided to close the western border of Chaman with Afghanistan several times. The committee ordered that any cross-border movement would require a valid passport and visa from November 1, 2023. The decision consequently resulted in waging a sit-in by the public and political parties of Balochistan, respectively.<sup>47</sup> According to a report by Mashal Radio's Facebook page, the sit-in began to sit since 21st October 2023 and it still continues to date. The above skirmishes have decreased the possibility of granting potential recognition to the Taliban. Although China has officially recognized the de facto government of the Taliban in Kabul in March 2024. Prior to this, when China held a Ceremony in Beijing on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024, it also received Bilal Karimi a diplomat from Afghanistan, among 309 diplomats from the rest of the world.<sup>48</sup> Answering a question, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Webin said that China is committed to the foreign policy of friendship towards all Afghan people and maintained diplomatic ties, exchanges, and cooperation in various areas with Afghanistan. He said it is normal to receive the new ambassador to China sent by the Afghan government to present his credentials to the Chinese leader. He further added that we hope the international community would also set up engagement and exchange with the Afghan interim government.<sup>49</sup> Apart from China, Russia has also hinted and shown eagerness to establish full-fledged ties with the Taliban and grant recognition to the Taliban interim government. The Russian Ministry of Justice and Foreign Affairs recommended that President Vladimir Putin remove the Taliban from the list of terrorist organizations. In May 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin had also expressed that the Taliban are “reality”. His statement was followed by Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of Russia’s Security Council, that Moscow was close to establishing full-fledged ties with the Taliban government. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 2025, Russia removed the Taliban’s “Terrorist Organization” designation in a symbolic gesture aimed at establishing friendly relations.<sup>50</sup> However, Pakistan has thoroughly taken a different stance this time. Unlike previously, Pakistan has not yet granted potential recognition to the Taliban interim government in Afghanistan; rather, it has aligned itself with the international consensus on the question of granting potential recognition to the 2.0 Taliban,<sup>51</sup> so it cannot be blamed for being pro-Taliban.<sup>52</sup>

## Trade Relations

Afghanistan is a landlocked country due to that it is dependent on the Transit Trade Agreement (ATT) with Pakistan to trade with the outside world.<sup>53</sup> Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are naturally agrarian countries, and both are economically dependent on the agriculture sector the most. During the first regime of the Taliban, Pakistan was keen to establish trade ties with Afghanistan, and thus, the government of the then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto wanted to have got access to Kabul for open trade so as to get access to Central Asian markets as well.<sup>54</sup> Pakistan has been willing to have continuous trade with Afghanistan, but the foreign interventions or sometimes the democratic governments in Kabul, have been causing hurdles that have severely affected the bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, during the second tenure of the Taliban, the bilateral trade has witnessed a record surge as Pakistan had imported 34.5 percent of the total products exported from Afghanistan by October 2021.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, the imports under Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) surged further to \$2.8 billion by October 2023, which was \$ 2.3 billion in 2022.<sup>56</sup> The trade link between the countries was cut off due to an exchange of fire from both sides on 6 September 2023, and both blamed each other for initiating it. Thus, the border remained closed for a couple of weeks. Amid these crises, on 7th September 2023, the Foreign Office of Pakistan also accused the Afghan Taliban government of misusing the ATT facility by doing illegal trade.<sup>57</sup> In order to stop illegal trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan, Pakistan decided to strictly implement the ATT facility, enforcing rules that allow cargoes to move through only previously agreed-upon routes and mandating registration of transport operators for the Temporary Entry Document (TED) pass. The TED is provided by the TTA offices situated in Peshawar and Quetta, respectively.<sup>58</sup> This decision of the Apex Committee of Pakistan has enraged the traders and the families living on both sides of the Durand Line. Hundreds of people in Chaman near the Pak-Afghan border are sitting in a sit-in that emerged after the decision of the Apex Committee demanding visas for cross-border trade and movement. They are demanding open cross-border movement for the purpose of trade via the Chaman border, which they have been doing since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. As the major population of both countries is dependent on agricultural products, peaceful and essential economic cooperation for better trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan is required, as it can help connect South Asia with Central Asian markets.

## Security Issues

For the last two years, since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan, the bilateral relations have become increasingly strained.<sup>59</sup> Pakistan's security concerns have further intensified as there has been an increase of over 50% in extremist activities in Pakistan since the return of the Taliban.<sup>60</sup> Former Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the return of the Taliban had provided us a chance to deal with the TTP as they had pressurized some 5,000 TTP members to go back to Pakistan and Imran Khan said that we had taken a number of steps to deal with them and planned to relocate them along with their families, but unluckily our government was ousted.<sup>61</sup> Apart from this, the clash on the border has further intensified the relations. On 11 December 2022, the Taliban launched a cross-border attack on Pakistan which resulted in six Pakistani casualties and injured 17. Additionally, on 15 December 2022, the Taliban forces directly fired *mortar shells* across the Chaman border into Pakistan, which consequently killed one Pakistani and left 16 injured. In November 2022, this was followed by another fire from an armed man standing with a Taliban troop at the border who openly fired Pakistani security personnel at Friendship Gate, which resulted in the martyrdom of one while two others were injured.<sup>62</sup> When the Defense Minister of Pakistan, Khwaja Asif, accused the Afghan Taliban was not abiding by the Doha agreement and that the soil is being used by militants for cross-border terrorism, the Taliban spokesman reiterated that we have signed the agreement with the US, not Pakistan. Zabihullah added that Afghan soil

is not being used against Pakistan. Pakistan is a brother Muslim country, and our government treats it that way.<sup>63</sup> As mentioned earlier, there has been a spike in cross-border terror attacks, particularly by TTP, since the Taliban reassumed power. The Taliban have not yet met Pakistan's expectations to secure and stabilize the western border.<sup>64</sup> Pakistan reminded the Afghan Taliban of its warning to secure the Pak-Afghan border. Pakistan informed the Taliban that Afghan soil was being used with impunity by the terrorists carrying out terrorist activities in Pakistan. The reason the Taliban are hesitant to take action against the TTP is due to their fear that the TTP's high cadres, currently hiding in Afghanistan, may join the ISK ranks, resulting in skirmishes and instability in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.<sup>65</sup> After an intense spike in militancy, terrorism, and cross-border terror attacks in Pakistan, particularly from Afghan-based militant groups, Pakistan began to build a fence barrier in March 2017 on its western porous border with Afghanistan in order to mitigate cross-border terror infiltration. The project is estimated to cost \$500 million.<sup>66</sup> Pakistan is about to reach the milestone of completion of the fence barrier as a counter-strategy in its fight against terrorism, and it has completed almost 90% of the fencing.<sup>67</sup> As far as my point of view is concerned, as per the Doha deal done with the U.S. in Qatar in February 2020, the Taliban must not allow Afghan soil to be used as shelter or base for extremists and they should also not let the soil be used against the neighbors of Afghanistan respecting their sovereignty and security so the bilateral relations can boost up and the Afghan de facto rulers can get recognition by international community. During the first-ever major official visit from Pakistan on 19<sup>th</sup> Apr., 2025, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar said, "We have requested our hosts that we have to work together for the progress, betterment, and peace and security of the region. For that, neither we nor you will allow anyone to use our soils for illicit activities."<sup>68</sup>

### **Issue of the Durand Line**

At the time of partition, when the British government presented the 3rd June Plan, the Afghan government claimed all the Pashtoon-dominated areas as part of Afghanistan, but the Indian government rejected the claim.<sup>69</sup> The fact cannot be denied that the demarcation of the Durand line did nothing other than splitting the Pashtun tribes into both sides, disregarding ethnic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics in favor of geographical or natural elements. Therefore, protecting the border has been quite difficult for both nations.<sup>70</sup> In My point of view, the border in fact divided the families residing on both sides of the Durand line who were having ethnic, historical, cultural, social, and emotional ties with each other which is why the Pashtun tribes on both sides of the Durand line do not agree to accept the border between the two countries. The issue of the Durand line is one of the most sensitive issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the beginning. Perhaps that is the reason, like other governments in Kabul, the Taliban did not recognize the Durand Line in 1996 and 2021 alike.<sup>71</sup> In the aftermath of the border clashes and when Pakistan conveyed its concerns to Kabul in January 2022, the acting information minister of the Taliban also said that the fencing of the border is causing the division of the Pashtun nation living on both sides of the border.<sup>72</sup> Pakistan expected that the return of the Taliban would result in the security of the border, but contrary to its expectations, tensions remained high after gun battles.<sup>73</sup> Pakistan, as often, is concerned that Pashtuns living on both sides of the Durand line might pursue the dream of creating a sovereign state, which is often named *Pashtunistan*; such a contingency would be Pakistan's nightmare, which is why it wants to avoid it at any cost.<sup>74</sup> It is worth mentioning that the Taliban of the lower ranks across the border had tried to remove the fence on the Pak-Afghan border on 18 December, right a day before Pakistan was to host a conference of OIC foreign ministers on Afghanistan's humanitarian situation. Videos circulating on social media a few months after the Taliban's return showed Taliban fighters breaking and removing polls one after another by using trucks. However, some Pakistani officials were of the view that the top leadership

of the Taliban was also concerned about the happening and it might be a tactic of anti-Pakistani elements who wanted to provoke army personnel deployed on the border. It is noteworthy that Pakistan has fenced almost 90% of its western border with Afghanistan, and its fencing will continue without any compromise, said the officials from Pakistan.<sup>75</sup>

### **Passport Issue and Public Reaction**

In October 2023, the interim Federal Government of Pakistan announced that Afghan citizens, alike others from foreign countries, would have to hold a passport as the only traveling document to enter Pakistan from 1st November 2023. The implementation of the visa and passport policy was to replace the previously practiced policy of granting special permits to individuals for cross-border movement.<sup>76</sup> The decision spread disappointment among traders as well as the divided tribes straddling the Durand Line border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Consequently, on December 21st, 2023, the Pashtunkhwa Mili Awami Party (PMAP) of Mehmood Khan Achakzai called for a sit-in near the Chaman border, which is still sitting even in 2025. The sit-in demanded cross-border movement on the basis of National Cards and Afghan Citizen cards issued by Pakistan. It's been more than a year since the sit-in consisting of more than 1,200 to 1,500 attendees on a daily basis, who faced both cold and hot weather, including hunger.

### **Repatriation of the Afghan Refugees**

#### **Background**

Being a Muslim neighbor of Afghanistan, Pakistan has always proved to be a true neighbor, often showing generosity and ambivalence towards its Afghan brothers, particularly vulnerable Afghan refugees affected by both external as well as internal rivalries in Afghanistan, whom Pakistan has hosted now for almost four decades. Pakistan was met with an influx of refugees as a result of a communist takeover by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. By June 1979, some 109,000 Afghan refugees had fled to Pakistan. The number then doubled in the following three months.<sup>77</sup> During 1980-1981, the number of refugees reached 8,000 to 9,000 a month, and an average of about 3,000 per day who had been visiting Pakistan since the war began. By 1982, the total number of refugees settled in Pakistan was nearly 2.7 million, while by 1983 it reached 3 million. Both the government of Pakistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which established its office in Pakistan in January 1980, were working on the registration, settlement, and provision of food, shelter, clothing, and security to the Afghan refugees.<sup>78</sup> However, the fact cannot be denied that the same refugees were recruited as mujahidin and later on the Taliban from within the same ranks for political maneuvering which has always been a part of Islamabad's policy towards Afghanistan.<sup>79</sup> During President Gen. Zia Ul Haq's era, therefore, he seized the opportunity, took control of the refugee camps, and began using them as safe havens for mujahidin. They supported his policy and the UNHCR did not display any reaction either.<sup>80</sup>

#### **The Prolong Repatriation of the Afghan Refugees**

Due to weak economic conditions, the decline in donor assistance, domestic constraints, refugee fatigue, and the growing threat of terrorism, refugees have become a major issue of concern for Pakistan. Pakistan wants the return of refugees to Afghanistan so it cannot face any further repercussions. After the mujahidin-led group under the leadership of Burhanuddin Rabbani came to power and Dr. Najeeb stepped down in April 1992, the refugees including Kabul and Islamabad wanted their return to Afghanistan. Thus, the repatriation began with the program of encashment giving dollars and wheat to the returnees. Pakistan closed its border in August 1992. After the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, more than 10,000 families migrated to Pakistan in 1997, and Pakistan

welcomed them. However, 1.7 million refugees had returned to Afghanistan by 2002 with the help of UNHCR.<sup>81</sup> Apart from this, from 2002 to 2009, some 3.5 million Afghan refugees had returned to Afghanistan as per the tripartite agreement between UNHCR, Kabul, and Islamabad in 2002.<sup>82</sup> After the APS attack in 2014, a major crackdown took place against unregistered Afghans who were later forced to return to Afghanistan after legal formalities. Similarly, after an escalation in the border clash between Pakistan and Afghanistan, some 350,000 Afghans were repatriated to Afghanistan by October 2016.<sup>83</sup> In short and long, the issue of the refugees has once again peaked after the return of the Taliban in August 2021. These Afghan refugees were afraid of persecution by the Taliban as many of them were anti-Taliban, musicians, sportsmen and sportswomen, beauticians, and other field experts. However, disappointingly, they have been subjected to waves of arbitrary detention, arrests, and threats of deportation to Afghanistan.<sup>84</sup> The issue of refugees has become a major tension between Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations from 2021 till May 2025. After having seen a spike in cross-border terror attacks, particularly in Pakistan, the Apex Committee of Pakistan, in October 2023, decided to evict all illegal migrants living in Pakistan.<sup>85</sup> The expulsion of the Afghan refugees is publicly viewed as Pakistan's answer to the Taliban's non-cooperative behavior on the issue of TTP, which has been actively involved in illicit activities across Pakistan.<sup>86</sup> A number of Afghans began to return to Afghanistan in October 2023 as the Pakistani government moved to remove 1.7 million illegal residents with a deadline in November 2023. By the end of 2023, more than 100,000 had left for Afghanistan. Abdul Mutalib Haqqani, Taliban Refugee Ministry spokesman, said the number of returnees is three times higher than that of the previous ones. A large number of Afghan refugees were not happy with the decision of the Pakistan Federal Government. A 58-year-old Afghan national, Muhammad Umar, expressed with sorrow that he was born in Pakistan, married a Pakistani woman and now he is forced to leave for Afghanistan with children raised in Pakistan because he has no official documents yet.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, a 20-year-old boy, Habibullah told me that I was born in Pakistan, and raised with many Pakistan children who are now my friends. It is too sad leaving them here along with my business and a house we had built here. There are hundreds of such cases I personally observed in my village Muslim Bagh, district Qilla Saifullah. Most of the Afghan citizens were not happy with the Apex Committee decision. Unfortunately, some heart-wrenching videos were also circulating on social media in which people claimed of being looted by local forces before they left for Afghanistan. Meanwhile, most of them sold their costly property at low cost. In October 2023, the **1st phase** of the "Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan" was announced with 30<sup>th</sup> November as a deadline for "undocumented" to either leave the country or be ready for deportation. **Phase two** April 2024 included the "repatriation plan" of Pakistan Issued Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders while **phase three** consisted of 800,000 who hold **UNHCR Proof of Registration (PoR)** to be expelled. UNHCR estimates that 1.5 million Afghan refugees live in Pakistan. In April 2025, almost 85,000 Afghan refugees left as a result of the deadline from Islamabad. Pakistan's decision to expel Afghan refugees puts the lives of 1.5 million refugees at risk. Amnesty International, in its report, expresses a complete lack of transparency, due process, and accountability in the detention and illegal deportation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. The repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan is becoming a major cause of tensions between the interim government of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The reported harshness of Pakistan towards Afghan refugees is due to the non-cooperative behavior of the Taliban towards Pakistan. The Taliban are not ready to act seriously against TTP, which helped them in the era of insurgency. Contemplating the miserable condition of Afghan refugees, Amnesty International has urged the government to reverse its decision of repatriation of Afghan refugees.<sup>88</sup> Both neighboring countries are tied by religion, ethnicity, language, and border. Therefore, a critically appropriate policy and mechanism should be devised regarding the safe and volunteer repatriation of Afghan refugees.

## **Issue of TTP and Terrorism**

Pakistan has been facing a rapid and relentless spike in terrorism since post -2001 and US-led war against terror. This can largely be attributed to the birth and evolution of home-grown Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al-Qaeda, and other affiliated organizations.<sup>89</sup> Although Pakistani military action backed by the U.S. drone warfare and factional rivalries had led to the decline of the TTP from 2014 to 2018, still the militant group backed by ten others, has been expanding and experiencing a strong resurgence since the Afghan Taliban signed the Doha Pact with the United States in February 2020 in Qatar.<sup>90</sup> Tehreek-e-Taliban is a terrorist organization, and its origin can be traced back to the anti-Soviet jihad in 1979-1989.<sup>91</sup> These Mujahideen had been financed by Saudi Arabia, managed, and trained by Pakistan while equipped by the United States to counter the Soviets in Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup> TTP claims that its armed struggle aims at establishing the Sharia in Pakistan, for which it was created in 1947. After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, many jihadists who had fought on behalf of the Pakistani government in Afghanistan as well as Indian Kashmir turned the tables towards Pakistan for its support to the so-called US-led global war on terror. These militants also began sheltering the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Pakistan.<sup>93</sup> In 2007, when other Iraq's Sunni insurgents had dealt with the U.S. to detach themselves from Al-Qaeda, there was no option left for Al-Qaeda but to return to the tribal areas of Pakistan, FATA.<sup>94</sup> It is worth mentioning that the FATA region had been serving as a hub and sanctuary to U.S.-Pakistan-backed militants since the Afghan-Soviet war.<sup>95</sup> Al-Qaeda believed that it had much deeper roots in the tribal areas of Pakistan than of Iraq. Al-Qaeda members were under the tribal asylum of Mullah Nazir, a Taliban commander in Wanna, South Waziristan of Pakistan, who considered Al-Qaeda members as his guests, and their protection was the responsibility of the local tribes under tribal laws. Al-Qaeda had raised the strength of the Pakistani Taliban to benefit the Afghan Taliban against not only the U.S. but also the Pakistan Army in order to compel it to withdraw its support for the US-led war on terror. However, the Taliban were not ready to fight the Pakistan army. When the difference of opinion was created over this approach, Mullah Omar's envoy, Muallah Dadullah came to FATA in 2006 to keep the focus of the fight on Afghanistan. Mullah Nazir informed Dadullah of the Uzbek fighters who had less experience in the Afghan jihad against the Soviets but were increasingly fueling the insurgency against Pakistan. Exploiting the situation, the Pakistani establishment supported Mullah Nazir, who had distanced himself from Al-Qaeda despite providing protection, with arms and money against Uzbek influence, which resulted in the massacre of Uzbeks.

At first, Al-Qaeda had no concerns over the internal conflicts of the Al-Qaeda affiliated militants, but soon it realized that and feared that the emerging contradictions and minor differences within the several factions operating under Al-Qaeda's banner could be exploited by the enemy, which would consequently spoil our hard-earned success.<sup>96</sup> Thus, all the factions in FATA and other parts of Pakistan that had been supporting the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda elements, who had escaped from Afghanistan as a result of the US-led war on terror, joined hands and formed a movement named Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan on 14 December 2007.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, Al-Qaeda came forward and gathered under the flag of TTP and Biatullah Mehsud was appointed as the Chief, and Hafiz Gull Bahadur and Molvi Faqir as his lieutenants.<sup>98</sup> The government of Pakistan banned the TTP in August 2008 on the grounds of declaring it as a terrorist organization involved in target killings of police and military personnel and suicide bomb attacks throughout the country.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, the lack of proper and self-defeated policies of Islamabad, like peace talks with militants and exploiting them for its own purposes, gave militant organizations further courage to expand their organizational activities in Pakistan, as a result of which TTP emerged as a violent and extremist group, which caused havoc all over Pakistan. The rise of regular bombings and intense violence was witnessed in Pakistan between 2007 and 2014. TTP is the group that attacked the Nobel Prize

winner Malala Yousafzai in 2012 and later on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014. In 2014, the Pakistani military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb to terminate the TTP reign of terror, which remained successful to some extent. However, the militant group of TTP has once again reasserted itself after the return of the Taliban in August 2021. Afghanistan, under the Taliban, became a shelter for TTP. After the US-Taliban Doha deal, TTP also adopted an Afghan Taliban-type centralized bureaucratic system, arguing that such a mechanism was best suited for quick expansion. TTP not only appointed shadow governors for different regions but also announced the first-ever centralized military training system in Pakistan. Additionally, they remained more engaged in mainstream politics to be relevant in the political discourse of Pakistan. TTP has called on the opposition parties to reconsider their non-violent approach if they want to end the meddling of the establishment in Pakistani politics.<sup>100</sup> TTP's such an approach is just for its political purposes, although it has obvious deep ideological differences with several political factions. In September 2022, during his speech at the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif highlighted the presence of militant groups like Al-Qaeda, ISK, TTP, and others, and asked the Global Community to comprehensively deal with the terrorist organizations operating from Afghan soil.<sup>101</sup> Contradictory this, the Afghan interim government Deputy Prime Minister Sher Abbas Stanekzai denied the presence of terrorist groups and added that it was Islamabad receiving millions of dollars, permitting the U.S. flights to fly over Pakistani airbases for operations in Afghanistan. Such an exchange of remarks had further intensified the already existing tensions between the two neighbors.<sup>102</sup> On various occasions, Pakistan has tried to hold peace talks with the TTP sponsored by the Taliban (since August 2021), but it has achieved very little. In November 2022, TTP called off the agreement agreed in June of the same year and directed its fighters to carry out terror attacks throughout Pakistan.<sup>103</sup> According to the UN Analytical Support and Sanction Monitoring Team on the Taliban, there are up to 30,000 TTP fighters and family members in Afghanistan as per the official estimates of Pakistan in July 2022 and more than 24 terrorist organizations in Afghanistan. In July 2023, after the terrorist attacks against security forces in Balochistan, which consequently brought 12 soldiers martyred, when Defense Minister Khwaja Asif tweeted on X, formerly known as Twitter, and said the Taliban are not abiding by the Doha Pact, and still the Afghan soil is being used by the militants. The Taliban spokesman Zabihullah said, "We have signed the Pact with the U.S., not with Pakistan. He added, Pakistan is a Muslim brotherly country and we deal with it in that way."<sup>104</sup> Sharaf Jehangir, a renowned columnist, is of the view that the Taliban government, long considered a protégé of Pakistan, is no longer friendly. He expressed that the Afghan Taliban see Pakistan's policy towards them as based on American interests which can change anytime with the US demand. He added that the Taliban's enemy at home is the Khurasan branch of the Islamic State and it cannot and will not treat the TTP as the enemy.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, the Taliban are hesitant to act against TTP due to their fear that its high cadres, hiding in Afghanistan, may join ISK ranks, resulting in skirmishes and instability in Afghanistan under the Taliban rule.<sup>106</sup> In my point of view, a proper counter-terrorism policy to terminate the TTP and other terrorist organizations within Pakistan and Afghanistan is a dire need at present for a peaceful environment in the region. It is only possible with dual cooperation between the Afghan interim government of the Taliban and Pakistan through an exchange of secret information between the secret agencies of both countries.

### **The Dismays of Pakistan during the Second Regime of the Modern Taliban**

Pakistan has often been desirous to build a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul so it can convert its dream pertaining to its national interests, linked with Afghanistan, into a reality. Pakistan is greatly interested in building a trade route to Central Asia via Kabul, which can positively boost its economy. Additionally, Pakistan's strategic depth is actually based on the import of gas and petrol

from Turkmenistan, and countering Indian influence in Afghanistan. Moreover, the issue of Pashtunistan, along with the border issue, has been one of the most sensitive issues since the formation of Pakistan. Pakistan is already facing conflict on the eastern border with India and sometimes on the northern border with Iran, which is why Pakistan is keen on protecting its western border. Therefore, Pakistan has almost fenced its western border, which is a part of the counter-terrorism strategy of Pakistan, and it further wants a peaceful completion of the fence as soon as possible, but there are several hurdles in its way of completion, particularly on the side of Afghanistan. Similarly, Pakistan wants to counter TTP and eradicate it thoroughly, while TTP's members have been currently provided with shelter in Afghanistan. But all these expectations of Pakistan do not seem to be met by the Taliban government in Kabul. After the Taliban's return, the border clash once again arose as the construction of fencing over the Pak-Afghan border was destroyed by the lower rank Taliban. Moreover, the Taliban officially denied the construction of the fence over the border, which they viewed as an obstacle between the families living on both sides of the border. Similarly, they do not seem interested in taking strict action against the TTP, which they fear can shake hands with ISK and create miseries for the Taliban government. Misfortunately, after the return of the Taliban, it feels like Pakistan has failed to meet its expectations. The Taliban are currently struggling to seek international recognition for which they are trying to build ties with other countries including India which attended the Regional Cooperation Initiative meeting held in Kabul on 29 January and Indian diplomates are trying to engage the Taliban on various formats<sup>107</sup> which is a disappointment for Pakistan. Pakistan's expectation from the Afghan Taliban to act against the TTP also seems not to be met in the near future. Pakistan also faces a rebalance with regard to trade during the Taliban interim government in Kabul. Though the Taliban were considered to be pro-Pakistani, their return to government in Kabul in August 2021, after 20 years of prolonged struggle, has brought nothing but disappointment for Pakistan, which was expecting much more from the Taliban's return.

## **Conclusion**

Islamabad and Kabul administrations to often been in conflict, and very rarely a friendly relation between the two has been witnessed. Islamabad has often expected Kabul to have acted following the will of Islamabad; unfortunately, it is often dismayed. The Taliban are viewed as the proxy of Pakistan, and Pakistan is blamed for its support to the Afghan Taliban even in their return in August 2021. Despite being considered as the protégé of Islamabad, the Taliban have been a hindrance to building good, friendly relations with Pakistan. Pakistan has not yet granted any potential recognition to the Taliban-led Afghan Government, for it has not fulfilled its promises to not let its land used by terrorist organizations, nor the Kabul government has brought any change in its domestic policies regarding women and their education. The Taliban were expected to have built friendly ties with Islamabad to counter terrorism, TTP, build trade ties, help Pakistan achieve its dream of the strategic depth, and let it reach the Central Asian markets to boost its economy. Still, unluckily, Pakistan has been dismayed as the current regime is not as friendly and cooperative as expected. Both Afghanistan and Pakistan should remove their reservations and enhance cooperation in socio-economic, political, and social spheres, but before that, both should eliminate the issue of terrorism with a joint venture, which is not only creating strains in the relations between the two but also posing a major threat to regional stability. The policies linked with supporting a specific group for personal gains and the incompletable dream of strategic depth should not be any more part of the Afghan policy of Islamabad to build smooth and better future relations with Kabul.

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