

Pak-Afghanistan Relations During Imran Khan ERA: An Analytical Perspective (2018-2022)

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Abstract

Pak-Afghanistan relations during Imran Khan's era were marked by complexity and tension. The relationship was already strained due to historical disputes over the Durand Line, a border established by British colonial powers in 1893. The problem statement revolves around the deteriorating relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, primarily due to trust issues, border disputes, and the presence of terrorist groups operating within Pakistan. The Imran Khan government's failure to address these concerns effectively exacerbated the situation. Understanding the dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during Imran Khan's era is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, the relationship has significant implications for regional stability and security. Secondly, it affects the lives of millions of people living in the region. Finally, it has important geopolitical implications, given the involvement of external powers such as the United States and China. This analysis employs a qualitative approach, relying on historical context, expert opinions, and primary sources to examine the complex dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during Imran Khan's era. The findings suggest that Imran Khan's government struggled to improve relations with Afghanistan due to various factors. Mutual distrust and suspicion hindered efforts to establish meaningful dialogue and cooperation. The Durand Line remained a contentious issue, with Afghanistan refusing to recognize it as an official border. The presence of terrorist groups operating within Pakistan, such as the Taliban and Haqqani Network, further complicated relations. External powers, including the United States and China, exerted influence over the region, often to the detriment of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Overall, the analysis highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the complex factors driving Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during Imran Khan's era. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for establishing a more stable and cooperative relationship between the two nations.

Key Words: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Foreign Policy, Durand Line, South Asia

Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan, two neighboring states in South Asia, share more than a 2,250-kilometer border they share intertwined histories, deep cultural linkages, and mutual security concerns. Yet their relationship has been among the most complex and turbulent in the region. Since Pakistan's creation in 1947, the two countries have rarely enjoyed prolonged periods of trust. Historical disputes, competing geopolitical alignments, and mutual accusations of

harboring militant groups have shaped a relationship defined as much by rivalry as by cooperation. The roots of this complexity can be traced to the Durand Line, demarcated in 1893 between British India and Afghanistan. For Pakistan, the Durand Line is the internationally recognized border inherited at independence. For Afghanistan, it represents an imposed colonial boundary that divided Pashtun tribal territories without their consent. This disagreement has remained a recurring source of diplomatic tension, fueled cross-border unrest and shaping national narratives on both sides (Harrison 1981; Gupta 2003). During the Cold War, Pakistan aligned itself with the United States through defense pacts such as SEATO and CENTO, while Afghanistan maintained close ties with the Soviet Union. This strategic divergence was further aggravated by Kabul's advocacy for "Pashtunistan," an irredentist claim that Islamabad viewed as a threat to its territorial integrity (Lieven 2011; Rashid 2008). Such historical experiences created an environment of suspicion that endured beyond the Cold War's end. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked a transformative moment. Pakistan became a frontline state, channeling U.S. and Saudi assistance to Afghan mujahideen resisting Soviet forces. While this policy yielded strategic gains, it also set the stage for the militarization of the Pakistan–Afghanistan borderlands. Following the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan descended into civil war, enabling the Taliban's rise in the mid-1990s with substantial political and logistical support from Islamabad (Maley 2002; Haqqani 2005). This period entrenched Pakistan's "strategic depth" policy, aimed at securing a friendly government in Kabul to counterbalance India's influence. The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan reshaped the bilateral relationship. Pakistan officially abandoned support for the Taliban and joined the War on Terror, yet allegations of its covert backing for Taliban elements persisted (Haqqani 2005). In turn, Islamabad accused Kabul of allowing anti-Pakistan militants particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to operate from Afghan territory. These mutual accusations contributed to a cycle of mistrust that even formal agreements could not fully resolve. Against this backdrop, Imran Khan's rise to power in 2018 offered an opportunity to recalibrate bilateral relations. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government articulated a foreign policy vision grounded in "peaceful neighborhood" diplomacy. Khan publicly emphasized the need for stability in Afghanistan, recognizing that peace across the border was essential for Pakistan's own security and economic growth. His administration pursued structured frameworks like the Afghanistan–Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) to facilitate cooperation on counterterrorism, border management, and trade. Pakistan also played a high-profile role in facilitating U.S.–Taliban negotiations, culminating in the Doha Agreement of 2020. However, the period from 2018 to 2022 also witnessed significant challenges. Cross-border militant attacks persisted, and disputes over Pakistan's border fencing efforts led to armed skirmishes. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted trade and people-to-people exchanges, undermining economic diplomacy. Most critically, the Taliban's return to power in August 2021 dramatically altered the political and security landscape. While Islamabad initially welcomed the end of prolonged conflict, the new Afghan government's approach to militant groups like the TTP quickly emerged as a contentious issue. This study examines the trajectory of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations during the Imran Khan era within the broader historical and geopolitical context. It analyzes how historical grievances interacted with contemporary diplomatic initiatives, security imperatives, and economic cooperation or the lack thereof. By focusing on this specific period, the research seeks to assess whether Imran Khan's stated vision for a cooperative bilateral relationship achieved tangible results, and to identify lessons for future policymakers in both Islamabad and Kabul. The importance of this analysis lies in its timing. The years 2018–2022 were marked by extraordinary regional change: the conclusion of two decades of U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, a shift in Afghan political leadership, and evolving strategic competition among global and regional powers such as China, India, Russia, and Iran. Understanding Pakistan–Afghanistan relations during this period is therefore not only relevant for bilateral diplomacy but also for grasping the changing security architecture of South Asia.

Literature Review

Imran Khan's government in Pakistan has also been the focus of the literature in recent years. Many scholars argue that Khan's government has been following a more aggressive foreign policy particularly in regards to Afghanistan for example, Khan's government has condemned the US-led intervention in Afghanistan and demanded more regional involvement to resolve the crisis the literature on Pak-Afghan relations also underscores the very complex and multilateral nature of the relationship between the two nations. The theme of the role of history and identity, security concerns, presence of militant groups, involvement of external powers, and the impact of the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, emerge at different levels in the literature. Imran Khan's government in Pakistan has been the subject of literature in the recent past and, more particularly, with respect to his more aggressive foreign policy. According to Jalal (2014) in his book *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*, Pakistan's foreign policy has been shaped by its experiences as a Muslim homeland and its relationships with other nations. One of the key themes in the literature on foreign policy is the country's relationships with its neighbors, particularly India. She also focused on the initial relations of Pakistan with neighbors, global powers and Muslim world and highlights the existing problems inherited by new born Islamic state. According to Ganguly (2001) in his book *Conflict Unending: India-Pakistan Tensions Since 1947*, the India-Pakistan conflict has been a defining feature of Pakistan's foreign policy. It is a seminal work that provides a comprehensive analysis of the India-Pakistan conflict. This book is a detailed study of the tensions between India and Pakistan since their independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Cohen (2013) writes in his book *The Idea of Pakistan* that Pakistan's relations with its neighbours are shaped by its identity as a Muslim homeland. This book provides a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the complex and multifaceted nature of Pakistan's identity and relations with its neighbours. Cohen argues that Pakistan's identity as a Muslim homeland has been a central factor in shaping its relations with its neighbours, including India, Afghanistan and Iran. He claims that Pakistan's leaders were driven by aim to create a separate homeland for Muslims and that this desire has shaped the country's foreign policy and relations with its neighbours. Through Pakistan's history, politics and culture, Cohen provides a balanced understanding of the complex factors that have shaped Pakistan's relations with its neighbours and provides valuable insight into the challenges and opportunities that have arisen in the course of these relations. Andrew Small (2015) writes in his book *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* that Pakistan's relationship with China has been shaped by a shared desire for economic cooperation and regional stability. Andrew Small provides a deep overview of the growing relationship between China and Pakistan and its implications for regional and global geopolitics. Small argues that China-Pakistan relations are based on a shared desire for economic cooperation and regional stability, with China seeking to expand its economic influence in the region and Pakistan seeking to counter the influence of its rival India. Khatoon, S. Khan (2023) "Between Allies and Adversaries: A Critical Review of Pak-Afghan Relations", *Global International Relations Review*, a review of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan under the PTI administration. The information is carefully researched and collected from reliable sources, such as primary research studies. The PTI government faced many challenges and setbacks in its relations with Afghanistan during its tenure in 2018. By increasing diplomatic engagements and economic cooperation, the PTI government sought to improve bilateral relations. Strengthening economic cooperation was one of the many objectives of the Imran Khan administration. This included improving financial distribution, business and economic activities, and bilateral relations. In addition, efforts were made to improve trade relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The peace talks between Afghanistan and the United States were facilitated by the PTI government. Moreover, they made resolving this issue a top priority. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan through

political channels continue to be fraught with complications, nuances, and despite many efforts. Khatoon, S. Khan (2023) "Between Allies and Adversaries: A Critical Review of Pak-Afghan Relations", *Global International Relations Review*, a review of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan under the PTI administration. The information is carefully researched and collected from reliable sources, such as primary research studies. The PTI government faced many challenges and setbacks in its relations with Afghanistan during its tenure in 2018. By increasing diplomatic engagements and economic cooperation, the PTI government sought to improve bilateral relations. Strengthening economic cooperation was one of the many objectives of the Imran Khan administration. This included improving financial distribution, business and economic activities, and bilateral relations. In addition, efforts were made to improve trade relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the realist and neorealist paradigms of international relations. The realist perspective emphasizes that states are primarily motivated by self-interest and security concerns, and their interactions are shaped by the anarchic nature of the international system. This perspective posits that states are homogeneous actors pursuing their national interests in a competitive and often adversarial environment. The neorealist perspective further highlights the role of structural factors in shaping state behavior, such as the distribution of power and the presence of security concerns. According to Neorealists, the international system is characterized by anarchy, which creates a self-help environment where states must rely on their own capabilities to ensure their security. This perspective emphasizes the importance of relative advantages and disadvantages in pursuing national interests. In the context of Pak-Afghanistan relations, the realist and neorealist paradigms offer valuable insights into the dynamics of relations. Both countries have historically been driven by selfishness and security concerns, which have often led to tensions and conflicts. The chaotic nature of the international system has created a competitive environment where both countries have pursued their national interests at zero-sum. The distribution of power has also played a significant role in shaping Pak-Afghanistan relations. Pakistan's greater military and economic power has often given it the upper hand in the relationship, while Afghanistan's weaker position has made it vulnerable to Pakistani pressure. The presence of security dilemmas has further complicated the relationship, as both countries have sought to ensure their security in a region of instability and conflict. In addition to the realist and neorealist paradigms, this study shed light on the concept of a "security complex" to analyze Pak-Afghanistan relations. A security complex refers to a group of states whose security perceptions and concerns are intertwined, and whose security policies are often shaped by their relationships with each other. The concept of the security complex in the context of Pak-Afghanistan relations highlights the interconnected nature of security concerns in the region and the need for a comprehensive approach to address these concerns.

Sources and Methods

The research study on Pak-Afghanistan relations during the Imran Khan era (2018-2022) use a qualitative research approach, utilizing both primary and secondary sources to collect data. Official documents, speeches, and statements of the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan are used as primary sources, as well as international organizations such as the United Nations. Secondary sources include academic literature, research articles, and books on Pak-Afghanistan relations, as well as media reports and newspapers.

Imran Khan's Foreign Policy and Pak-Afghanistan Relations (2018-2022)

Imran Khan's foreign policy has been of interest and controversy since his ascension to power in 2018. One of the most important components of his foreign policy strategy was to reboot relations with the United States, emphasizing trade rather than aid and calling for

diplomacy over war in regional conflicts. This was reflected in his early diplomatic interactions with the US, where he attempted to better relations and coordination on matters like Afghanistan and counter-terrorism. Khan's government battled several challenges during his first year in office, including a nadir in Pakistan-US relations, strained relations with India, and a restive neighborhood with the Afghan civil war-like scenario. Nevertheless, in spite of these problems, Khan's administration managed to further relations with long-time friends like China and Gulf states and resumed building confidence with the US with cooperation in Afghanistan. Khan's international reputation as a World Cup-winning cricket team captain and charity worker created a positive goodwill, and his initial appointment of a full-time foreign minister was appreciated.(Shazad Akbar,2019). Khan's policy towards Afghanistan was one of 'open borders', with an emphasis on bilateral .economic cooperation and bridging the trust deficit. He signaled his government's support for facilitating the peace initiative of the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani with the Taliban and reemphasized the point that peace and stability in Afghanistan would mean the same in Pakistan. But closing the trust gap between Pakistan and Afghanistan would be difficult, considering the mutual incriminations regarding the alleged support of terrorists against one another. As far as relations with India are concerned, Khan's administration pursued "continued and uninterrupted dialogue" to resolve all outstanding issues, including Kashmir. The bilateral relations further worsened, with Khan excluding the possibility of talks with India in the foreseeable future on account of Indian reluctance to make genuine efforts for talks. Khan's approach to America was also viewed in the context of Afghanistan. His administration aimed to rejuvenate strained relations with America, with specific emphasis on cooperation in Afghanistan. The US's highest ask from Pakistan was to persuade the Taliban to agree to the current peace negotiations, and if Khan delivers on that score, it would pave the way for greater US cooperation with the country on various fronts, including the provision of advanced weapons and the resumption of security aid to Pakistan. The most heartening feature of Khan's administration was its unprecedented emphasis on socio-economic development of the ordinary citizenry and requesting Pakistani expatriates to create effective lobbies overseas. It was also synergizing with the local media to enhance Pakistan's narrative-building overseas as a moderate, dynamic, peaceful, and progressive nation. Still, the PTI government remained in its nascent stage, and its foreign policy had to be further tweaked in harmony with events across the globe. Overall, Imran Khan's foreign policy during 2018-2022 was characterized by a combination of challenges and opportunities. Although he had serious challenges in his relationship with India and the US, he was successful in consolidating relations with China and other traditional allies. His government's emphasis on economic interaction and socio-economic development was a welcome step, but it had to be further evolved and honed to meet the intricate nexus of relationships in the region.

Imran Khan Foreign Policy Towards America

The Pakistan-US relationship under Imran Khan's regime, which lasted from 2018 to 2022, was characterized by both cooperation and tension. In 2018, when Imran Khan came into power, the two countries' relationship had hit rock bottom, with the US halting security assistance to Pakistan and applying sanctions on some Pakistani organizations. But Khan's administration was eager to enhance ties with the US, and he appointed a new foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, to handle the nation's foreign policy, including its relationship with the US. One of the major areas of cooperation between the US and Pakistan under Imran Khan's government was the Afghan peace process. The US had been looking to use Pakistan's assistance in facilitating the talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, and Khan's administration was also ready to contribute positively towards this process. In 2019, the US and Taliban sealed a peace deal, opening the way for the American troop exit from Afghanistan. The role played by Pakistan in facilitating this deal was viewed as a positive sign in its relations with the US.(Tahir Khan,2020).But even with this

cooperation, tensions also existed in Pakistan-US relations during the Imran Khan period. The most significant area of conflict was terrorism, with the US blaming Pakistan for not acting sufficiently against terrorist organizations based in the country. The US further applied sanctions to some Pakistani entities, such as the Haqqani network, which the US blamed for enabling terrorism. Pakistan, meanwhile, blamed the US for failing to give enough economic assistance and for overlooking its sacrifices in the war against terrorism. Another source of tension in the Pakistan-US relations during Imran Khan's period was the Kashmir issue. The US had been traditionally neutral regarding the Kashmir issue, but during Imran Khan's period, it started taking a more assertive role in facilitating a dialogue between India and Pakistan on the matter. But this move was opposed by India, as it accused the US of interference in its domestic affairs. The US move, however, was embraced by Pakistan and was regarded as a development for good between the US and Pakistan. The Pakistan-US relationship under Imran Khan's time was characterized by the increased economic cooperation between the two nations in the form of a large hike in trade. The US was one of Pakistan's biggest trading partners, and there was a substantial trade deficit in the US' favor. Yet, under Imran Khan, Pakistan's exports to the US rose considerably, and the trade deficit started shrinking. In spite of these encouraging developments, Imran Khan's Pakistan-US relations were not free of problems. One of the biggest problems was the question of drone attacks, which the US had been conducting in Pakistan's tribal regions for years. The drone attacks were extremely unpopular in Pakistan, and Imran Khan's administration had been vocal in its criticism of them. Nevertheless, in his time, the drone strikes dropped by a considerable amount, and the US started taking a more refined approach towards counter-terrorism in Pakistan. The Pakistan-US relations in Imran Khan's time also had far-reaching implications for the region. The two countries' collaboration on the Afghan peace process facilitated the establishment of a peaceful resolution to the war, and the boost in trade between the two nations assisted in driving economic growth and development in the region. But the stresses in the relationship, specifically on points like terrorism and Kashmir, also could destabilize the region and erode the efforts of both nations to foster peace and security.

Imran Khan Foreign Policy Towards China

The 2018-2022 Pakistan-China relations under the Imran Khan government were marked by a remarkable deepening of bilateral relations with an emphasis on economic cooperation, strategic partnership, and regional security. The bilateral relationship has been termed "all-weather" and "iron-brotherly," showing the close ties between the two nations. CPEC is a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure development project with the objective of linking China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Gwadar port, a strategic trade route between the two nations. CPEC has been described as a game-changer for Pakistan's economy, offering the potential for the creation of thousands of new jobs, generating economic growth, and enhancing the infrastructure of the country. Under Imran Khan's administration, CPEC kept progressing in leaps and bounds, with various major projects nearing completion or having been completed. These involved building highways, railways, and pipelines for energy, as well as the establishment of special economic zones and industrial parks. The project has also attracted huge investment from Chinese firms, with many opening up shop in Pakistan to exploit the nation's strategic location and business-friendly climate. (Syed, Bakir Sajid, 2019). The Pakistan-China relations under Imran Khan's administration were also characterized by a great boost in diplomatic interaction, with frequent high-level exchanges and summits between the two nations. In 2018, Imran Khan went to China, where he had an audience with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. The trip was highly regarded as a success, as the two nations agreed to further enhance their collaboration in many sectors. In 2019, Xi Jinping traveled to Pakistan, where he held meetings with Imran Khan and other high-ranking officials. The trip was viewed as a milestone in the relationship between Pakistan and China, with the two nations pledging to strengthen their cooperation in many areas. In general, the relationship between Pakistan and China during Imran Khan's time

was marked by the strong deepening of bilateral relations, with an emphasis on economic cooperation, strategic partnership, and regional security. The relationship has been described as "all-weather" and "iron-brotherly," reflecting the strong bond between the two countries.

Foreign Policy Towards India

The Pakistan-India relations under Imran Khan, who was in power from 2018 to 2022, were characterized by a combination of tensions and diplomatic efforts. Imran Khan, when he became the prime minister in 2018, indicated that he wanted to enhance relations with India and address the long-standing issues between the two nations, including the Kashmir dispute. Nonetheless, the two nations' relationship continued to be complicated and problematic, with a number of incidents and events contributing to the tensions. One of the key incidents that impacted the Pakistan-India relations during Imran Khan's tenure was the Pulwama attack in February 2019, where more than 40 Indian security personnel were killed in a suicide attack in the Indian-administered Kashmir. India accused Pakistan of the attack, and this resulted in a major heightening of tensions between the two nations. Pakistan had denied any role in the attack, but the incident resulted in a worsening of relations, with both nations engaging in a war of words and imposing trade sanctions on one another. The Imran Khan period also saw the relations between Pakistan and India influenced by the Kashmir issue, which has long been a source of tension between the two nations. Pakistan has remained committed to the Kashmiris' right of self-determination, whereas India has held that Kashmir is part of its own territory. The Kashmir issue has been a central cause of friction between the two nations, with both sides exchanging a war of words and diplomatic initiatives to secure international backing for their respective causes.(Rajesh Basrur,2014).Apart from the Kashmir issue, the relations between Pakistan and India under Imran Khan were also influenced by other aspects, such as trade and economic cooperation. The two nations have a considerable trade relationship, with India being among Pakistan's biggest trading partners. The trade relations between the two nations have, however, been influenced by the tensions and restrictions by both nations. The Indian government's imposition of tariffs on Pakistani products and the restriction of trade with Pakistan only increased the tensions between the two nations. In spite of the difficulties, there were a few positive aspects of the Pakistan-India relationship in the Imran Khan government. In general, Imran Khan's Pakistan-India relations were characterized by a combination of tensions and diplomatic efforts. While the two nations achieved some progress in the reduction of tensions and enhancement of ties, the core issues and problems were not addressed. The bilateral relationship between the two nations remains complicated and challenging with a requirement for continued diplomatic efforts to address the outstanding issues and strengthen ties.⁸¹ The Pakistan-India relations during the Imran Khan regime also had far-reaching implications for regional and global security. The hostilities between the two nations can easily spill over into a full-blown war, which will have far-reaching implications for regional and global stability. The global community has repeatedly urged restraint and diplomacy between the two nations and has urged them to sit together and resolve their differences. Pakistan's foreign policy towards India has significantly impacted its relations with Afghanistan.

Regional Security Dynamics

The regional security dynamics of the Imran Khan era, from 2018 to 2022, were marked by a complex and dynamic setting. The region, which includes South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, is a diverse group of nations with their own unique security challenges and concerns. During this period, the region witnessed a significant shift in the global power balance, with new players joining and old players changing. The most significant regional security dynamics under Imran Khan's time were the Afghan conflict. The ongoing conflict, which has lasted over two decades, has had a major impact on the regional security context. The Taliban, who have been fighting the Afghan regime and their international patrons,

have managed to maintain a robust foothold in the nation, even when the international community was bent on defeating them.⁸² During the Imran Khan era, the United States and the Taliban negotiated, and the negotiations culminated in the signing of a peace deal in February 2020. The deal has, however, been fragile, and the conflict in Afghanistan continues to be a main regional security concern. Another significant regional security trend during the Imran Khan era was growing tensions between India and Pakistan. The two countries, which have a long-standing rivalry, have been engaged in a series of conflicts and diplomatic exchanges, particularly regarding the disputed territory of Kashmir. The tensions between the two countries have been sparked by several issues, including the Indian government's action to repeal Article 370 of the Indian constitution that granted special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The move was considered a grave provocation by Pakistan, which has always been in support of the right to self-determination of the people of Kashmir. (Husain Haqqani, 2011). The regional security dynamics of the Imran Khan tenure, spanning 2018 to 2022, were defined by a complex and dynamic situation. The region covering South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia is made up of a mixed array of countries with their respective unique security concerns and challenges. During this period, the region witnessed a significant shift in the international balance of power, with new players entering and old ones evolving. One of the most significant regional security dynamics of the Imran Khan era was the war in Afghanistan. The war, which has been ongoing for over two decades, has had a profound impact on the regional security landscape

Pakistan's Role in Facilitating the Afghan Peace Process

Pakistan was a key role in moving the Afghan peace process during Imran Khan's time. Pakistan's actions coaxed the Taliban onto the negotiating table, and its role continues to be important in using pressure on the Taliban to relinquish the gun as a method of advancing their agenda in the negotiation process. The Imran Khan government succeeded in persuading the Taliban to enter into negotiations for peace with the US and the Afghan government, which was a critical breakthrough in the process. The US had been attempting to persuade Pakistan to assist it in getting the Afghan government and the Taliban onto the negotiating table, and the Imran Khan government was ready to play a positive role in this regard. The US and the Taliban had reached a peace deal in 2019 that opened doors for the US troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan. This was welcomed by Pakistan as much as the relationship with the US is concerned because it acted as a middleman for the deal to be finalized.⁸⁷ The Afghan peace process remains complex and susceptible, and there are questions regarding Pakistan's approach towards it as well. The nation needs to balance its interests and the necessity of helping bring an end to the war in Afghanistan peacefully. Pakistan has also been accused of its supposed backing of some groups in Afghanistan, which has strained relations among other nations in the region. The peace process in Afghanistan has been long and complex, with different actors and interests involved. The Afghan war has continued for over four decades, with different groups and factions vying for power and influence. The Taliban, who were ousted from power in 2001, have been one of the strong drivers of the conflict, and its engagement with the peace process has been pivotal to success. Pakistan's role in carrying forward the Afghan peace process began in good earnest during Imran Khan's tenure. The new government, which came to power in 2018, was keen to ensure regional stability and security and saw the Afghan peace process as part of its quest. Pakistan's role in facilitating the Afghan peace process has been a significant part of its foreign policy under the leadership of Imran Khan. Pakistan's role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table and achieving the peaceful conclusion of the war in Afghanistan has been widely recognized and appreciated by the international community. The Afghan peace process has great regional stakes for security and stability, and the role Pakistan has played in facilitating it has been pivotal in ushering in a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The future prognosis of the Afghan peace process is uncertain.

The Taliban continue to attack Afghan government forces and civilians despite the peace agreement. The group has also declined to negotiate with the Afghan government directly, which has strained relations between the two parties. Despite these problems, Pakistan remains committed to brokering a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. The government of the nation has been in close collaboration with the US and other parties to ensure the peace process and has been attempting to convince the Taliban to engage in direct negotiations with the Afghan government. The international community is also still committed to brokering a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. The US, in particular, has been attempting to promote a peaceful resolution of the war, and has been cooperating with Pakistan and other interested nations in an effort to achieve this.

Counter-Terrorism Efforts

The Imran Khan era, which began in 2018, has seen earnest efforts at curbing terrorism in Pakistan. Terrorism has plagued the nation for several decades, with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Haqqani Network, and the Islamic State (ISIS) carrying out attacks on civilians, security forces, and government buildings. When Imran Khan's administration came to power, they committed to eradicating terrorism and extremism in all its forms. The response of the government to anti-terrorism has been supported by a comprehensive National Action Plan (NAP) which was formulated in 2014. The NAP aims at eliminating the menace of terrorism and extremism from the country through an integrated mix of military, police, and socio-economic measures. One of the key counter-terror operations of the Imran Khan regime has been Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad (RuF) launched in 2017. (Cronin, Audrey Kurth, 2006). The Imran Khan government has also taken steps to strengthen the counter-terrorism laws and regulations of the country. In 2020, the government passed the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, which imposes stricter sentences on terrorist offenses and enhances the powers of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute terrorist cases. Apart from these, the Imran Khan government has also been working on the root causes of terrorism and extremism in the country. The government has introduced several programs that seek to promote education, economic development, and social inclusion for marginalized groups and areas vulnerable to terrorist recruitment. The government also has been engaged in promoting interfaith tolerance and harmony, as well as countering the narrative of terrorist groups to exploit the sectarian and ethnic divide to employ for their political objectives. The efforts against terrorism of the Imran Khan administration have been all-encompassing and have gone a long way at a glance, the role of Pakistan in regional and international matters has been a significant one, particularly under the leadership of Imran Khan. The country has been a key to bringing peace and stability to the region, and the world at large has appreciated its role. One of the most significant aspects where Pakistan made a significant impact is in terrorism war. The country has taken the lead among nations in combating the global war on terror and its efforts helped significantly in unsettling and destroying terrorism networks. Pakistan's military has conducted operations against terror groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Haqqani Network and has registered significant success in neutralizing the threat posed by these groups.

Conclusion

The position of Pakistan in regional and global affairs has been a major one, especially in Imran Khan's era. The nation has played a major role in generating peace and stability within the region and has been appreciated by the international community for their efforts. One of the major areas where Pakistan has made a major input is against terrorism. The nation has contributed majorly in eradicating terrorism from the region. Pakistan has been at the forefront of the war on terror globally, and its efforts have played a pivotal role in breaking up and dismantling terrorist networks. Pakistan's armed forces have launched various operations against terrorist organizations, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Haqqani Network and have achieved great success in weakening the threat

posed by these organizations. Besides its contributions towards combating terrorism, Pakistan has also contributed significantly to regional stability. The economic relationships between Afghanistan and Pakistan have long been multifaceted and interdependent, reflecting the impact of geography, politics, and culture. Although exposed to several hurdles, such as security threats, trade obstacles, and lack of infrastructure, they have sought ways to expand the economic relationship bilaterally as well as in transit. The examination of the dynamics of bilateral trade, transit trade, and regional connectivity programs emphasizes the prospect of development and collaboration in Pak-Afghanistan economic ties. The expansion of cooperative joint energy ventures, agricultural trade and cooperation, and investment in human resources and infrastructure can boost the economic growth and development of the two countries. But to fully exploit the potential of Pak-Afghanistan economic relations, it is important to overcome the different challenges to trade and economic cooperation. This involves enhancing security, lowering trade barriers, and investing in infrastructure development.

Recommendations

1. Pakistan and Afghanistan ought to concentrate on expanding their economic cooperation and commerce. Improving border control, lowering tariffs, and putting trade agreements into effect can all help achieve this. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has the potential to develop into a commercial and trade hub, can be advantageous to both nations.
2. Pakistan should keep backing a peace process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. This strategy highlights how crucial it is for Afghans to take charge of their peace talks, with Pakistan serving as a facilitator.
3. In order to advance regional cooperation and stability, Pakistan and Afghanistan ought to collaborate. This may entail working together with other nations in the area to tackle shared possibilities and problems
4. Improving relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan requires efficient border management. To strengthen border security, ease trade, and ease tensions, both nations should cooperate.
5. In order to create a plan for future peace and stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan should promote comprehensive intra-Afghan dialogue. This strategy can guarantee that the peace process is sustainable and that all parties involved are represented.
6. Pakistan and Afghanistan ought to concentrate on fortifying their bilateral relations by means of consistent diplomatic interaction and collaboration in domains including trade, education, and security.

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