



## PAK-AFGHAN BORDER: ASSESSING PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN DURING ASHRAF GHANI ERA (2014-2020)

Hassam Ahmed Siddiqi  
PhD. Candidate

National University of Modern Languages (NUML)  
Islamabad – Pakistan  
[hassamsiddiqi@yahoo.com](mailto:hassamsiddiqi@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*Ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained controversial and strained during Ashraf Ghani era and much of it can be attributed to the fencing of Pak-Afghan border as well as Pakistan's foreign and security policies towards Afghanistan and vice versa. Policies of President Ghani over the course of his Presidency predominantly depicted an anti-Pakistan posture despite the fact that Pakistan facilitated Afghan Peace Process and played a crucial role in the conclusion of Doha Agreement. Several factors contributed to Afghanistan's opposition towards Pakistan during Ghani era. This included fencing of the border, Afghan refugees, militancy in the Af-Pak border region, Indian nexus with Afghan governments to create instability in Pakistan, attack on the security of Pakistan by TTP and TTA as well as the economic challenges faced by the traders of both sides. President Ghani's vocal support to PTM also infuriated the political and military establishment of Pakistan and hence series of conflicting issues added to the toxicity in the relationship. This research studies will critically analyze the challenges between Pakistan and Afghanistan during Ghani regime and how it impacted the nature of relationship between the two neighbouring states.*

**Keywords:** Pak-Afghan Border, Terrorism, Militancy, Tribal Region, Security Forces, Conflict.

### Introduction:

Afghanistan has been at the epicentre of the conflict for more than last four decades. Armed Conflict, impoverishment, nepotism, political instability, and extremism have all been widespread in Afghanistan. Due to the consequences of the situation in Afghanistan, the region as a whole remained in turmoil. Pakistan as the next-door neighbour of Afghanistan has also experienced violent extremism and terrorism, which has harmed its own development as well as the region's security and stability. Much of what has happened in Afghanistan has had its direct and indirect implications for Pakistan.

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a border line that stretches 2610 kilometres along Afghanistan's



southern and eastern borders. Afghan provinces of Badakhshan, Nuristan, Kunar, Nangarhar, Paktiya, Khost, Paktika, Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, and Nimruz, are bordered with Pakistani tribal administrative units, some parts of Chitral and Quetta (Jadoon, Mines, & Willis, 2020). There are three main border crossings between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This includes Torkham border adjacent to KP, Chaman-Spin Boldak border in Balochistan and Ghulam Khan border in North Waziristan (Affairs, 2011). In addition to that, Angoor Adda and Nawan Pass have also been established as the border crossings between the two states, yet they are primarily used for trade purposes. The Pashtun population and many tribal entities live on both sides of the border, who are ethnically interconnected with each other. The border passes through a variety of landscapes, including sandy deserts in the south and rugged mountains in the east. The Khyber Pass connects Peshawar and Jalalabad, and the Khojak Pass, connects Quetta and Kandahar (Siddique, 2014). To and fro movement of people from both sides of border is through Torkham and Chaman.

### **Specifics of Border Fencing**

The Eleventh Corps of the Pakistani Armed Forces is tasked with the responsibility of guarding the entirety of the borderline. The border has been constructed in such a way that fencing made of barbed wire is installed on top of approximately 3-meter-high chicken wire barriers with an additional 2-meter space between each one of them (Khan, 2021). Following Infographic highlights the area of boundary line that is adjacent to Pakistan's tribal administrative units.



It is crucial to note that a significant portion of the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is located in a rough, hilly landscape wherein fencing cannot be erected. Similarly, boundary lines in



some areas is positioned so high that there is neither a need for a fence nor a possibility of crossing them because doing so would be physically impossible. However, it should also be noted that the Pak-Afghan border at Dir is almost 13,000 feet above sea level. The Pakistan-Afghanistan boundary has traditionally been a geographic region instead of a line of demarcation. The area has transformed into a transitional zone with people representing a variety of origins and backgrounds living there, including migrants, businessmen, nomads, sedentary tribal groups, labourers, extremists, as well as law enforcement officials.

From 1947 until 2017, more than 2600 km long borderline connecting both states have been porous and unprotected, while citizens from both countries have consistently and without any trouble traversed it. Pakistan suffered greatly as a result of its role in the war on terror in Afghanistan, having been forced to take in roughly 3 million Afghan refugees. Additionally, Pakistan's border regions developed into a hotbed for terrorists, criminal organisations, and militants. Especially during the war on terror, cross-border, terrorism, violence, drug trafficking, as well as illegal trade between both nations remained a persistent phenomenon that severely damaged Pakistan's overall security situation. Former Pakistani President General (R) Pervez Musharraf first proposed the notion of fencing the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in 2006 following the Afghan government alleging some Pakistani extremist factions of entering Afghanistan to commit terrorist attacks.(Adeel, 2020). Although discussions between representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and ISAF took place in 2007 to discuss an integrated fencing project, yet no consensus was reached and the Afghan Government was hostile regarding the proposal. As a result, the problem remained unsettled. The Pakistani Armed Forces began fencing the border with Afghanistan on April 27, 2017, at an estimated expense of \$530 million, notwithstanding Afghanistan's adamant resistance.(Ahmed, Khan, & Fayaz, 2022). The price covered equipment and devices for tracking unauthorised border crossings. It is significant to note the scope of the project involved not only the task of fencing the Pakistan–Afghanistan border but also all the essential preparations for managing it, which includes the construction of checkpoints, fortifications, as well as surveillance cameras.

Pakistan has made relentless efforts towards finishing the fencing project in order to smoothly and completely safeguard the country's already enhanced security situation, which will facilitate business and cross-cultural communication between the two states by means of sophisticated and globally accepted processes. According to DG ISPR Maj. Gen. Asif Ghafoor, the construction of the fence was supposed to be finished by December 2019. Nevertheless, delays have occurred due to weather, security concerns from across the border, along with the intensification of hostilities with India on the eastern border, which forced the relocation of operational units from the Western to the Eastern border.(Desk, 2018). On 14th January,2022, then Interior Minister of Pakistan Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed announced that around 2600 kms of the border has been fenced by Pakistan while the remaining 20 kms would be fenced with the consent of Afghanistan(Saeed, 2022). Few complications regarding fencing of the border were quoted since Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, however both sides had agreed to address the issue through diplomatic channels.



Afghanistan has always opposed Pakistan's idea of fencing the Pak-Afghan border as it holds a claim on certain parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It needs to be mentioned that since 2016 as preparations to fence the Pak-Afghan border were being conducted, Afghanistan has attacked 41 times on the teams of Pakistan Army who are tasked to fence this border (Irfan, Khan, & Naqvi, 2022). In 41 attacks, around 75 persons lost their lives. The attacks were conducted from the borders connected with North Waziristan, Bajaur and Mohmand. In addition, militant groups conducted 36 attacks in these areas in which civilian population was targeted. While the opposition of fencing on Pak-Afghan border lies on the fact that it holds its claim on certain parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the former North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Pakistan-Afghanistan border is an internationally recognized and accepted border according to the Vienna Convention (Rahimov, 2023). In 1950, House of Commons of United Kingdom has also recognized it as an international border while Afghanistan's former President Sardar Daud Khan during his visit to Pakistan in August 1976 had recognized it as an International Border (Kaleem, Alvi, Imran, & Haq, 2023).

States need to honour international obligations and with the current situation Afghanistan must do it gracefully. Similarly, though the fencing has almost been completed, Government of Afghanistan needs to understand that a fenced border is in their interest too as issues concerning cross border terrorism and security will be significantly reduced and a better management of border can lead to tremendous opportunities for the people of both the states. Legal trade and cross border cultural exchanges will boost government revenues and help it increase the volume of trade on both sides. Afghanistan is a land-locked state and with religious, cultural and ethnic affinity of Afghan people with Pashtuns and Baloch people of Pakistan, affiliations will continue. Trade from Pakistan costs cheaper to Afghani people in comparison to China, India, Russia and Central Asian States. Keeping in view a cost-benefit analysis, both the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan need to collaborate a joint border-management mechanism in order to facilitate people of both the states and help them get accustomed to revived conditions.

### **Ashraf Ghani Era & Pakistan's Relationship with Afghanistan**

Afghanistan had its Presidential elections in 2014. A National Unity Government was formed in Afghanistan in which Ashraf Ghani became the President while Abdullah Abdullah became the Chief Executive of Afghanistan (Khalil, 2016). President of Pakistan Mr. Mamnoon Hussain was also invited at the Oath taking ceremony where leaders of both states expressed their commitment and willingness to work for a prosperous future. President Ashraf Ghani visited Islamabad with a hundred-member Afghan delegation, a month, after taking his oath (Idrees & Naazer, 2022). Finance Minister of both states met and agreed to enhance the bilateral trade from \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion during a time span of three years. President Ghani met with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and discussed bilateral trade, security, counter-terrorism and cooperation between the two sides in the war against terror. Pakistan also offered to train the Afghan national army soldiers. President Ghani also met with Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Shareef.

However, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan severely deteriorated when an attack at



Army Public School in Peshawar killed 150 children and school teachers. 16 December, 2014 is regarded as the saddest day in the history of Pakistan as the incident shocked the entire world. Condolences messages came from across the world while everyone condemned the brutality and barbarism displayed by the terrorist on that day (Mufti, Mufti, & Bresnahan, 2019). According to Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was involved in this attack, whose leaders Mullah Fazlullah was present in Kunar province of Afghanistan at that time. Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Shareef and DG ISI visited Kabul to share their intelligence report and strongly demanded the Afghan government to take action against TTP. President Ghani and ISAF Commander who attended the meeting assured Pakistan of their complete cooperation in this regard. A National Action Plan was formulated soon after, in which stakeholders from all segments of society gave their recommendations on how to tackle the issue of terrorism and extremism (Ullah, Rasool, & Salim, 2016).

In April 2015, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mr. Pervez Khattak visited Afghanistan to discuss the issue of Afghan refugees (Nawaz, 2016). Later, Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Shareef invited Afghan Chief of Army Staff as the Chief Guest in the passing out parade ceremony. Both leaders discussed at-length on how they can address the issue of terrorism. Later in the year, Prime Minister Nawaz Shareef alongside his cabinet members and Army Chief visited Afghanistan for a One-Day visit and met with President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. Relations between two sides were marking an uphill trajectory, however a bomb explosion at Kabul Airport in July 2015 in which 29 people lost their lives once again deteriorated the ties (Mickolus, 2016). Afghan President Ashraf Ghani furiously named Pakistan for harbouring terrorists and as Taliban's bomb making factories are still inside Pakistan. Government of Pakistan openly denounced Pakistan's involvement in the attack. While attending an economic conference 'September 2015' at Kabul, Mr. Sartaj Aziz met with Afghan President and Foreign Minister and provided them with documentary proofs of India's involvement in the anti-Pakistan activities using the Afghan soil (Syed, 2015). He assured the President Ghani that Peace in Afghanistan means peace in Pakistan and that his government wished stability and prosperity in Afghanistan.

On 10 December, 2015 Afghan President came to Pakistan to inaugurate the Heart of Asia Conference. A warm welcome was given to the Afghan President by the Pakistani Prime Minister (Sial, 2016). Later in the month, Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Shareef visited Afghanistan to meet the Afghan Army Chief and both sides assured not to use their soil against each other. Yet, fighting between the troops of the two nations at the Torkham border crossing in June 2016 shattered any prospects for a lasting Afghan-Pakistani security partnership. Often border closures remained a happening phenomenon during 2017 as Pakistan had initiated the fencing of border whereas both sides also alleged each other to be aiding insurgent groups. As the latest round of negotiations between the United States and Afghan Taliban initiated back in 2018, Pakistan played a pivotal role in mediating an agreement between the two sides. On 29 February, 2020 Taliban signed an agreement with United States following which the withdrawal of US forces initiated (Maley & Jamal, 2022). Though conflict between Afghan Taliban and Afghan



government persisted, which eventually ended in Afghan Taliban marching in to Kabul on 15th August, 2021 and overthrowing the Kabul regime, yet it was due to Pakistan's lasting efforts that United States evacuated from Afghanistan through a safe passage (Sakhi, 2022).

## **Issues of Enmity between Pakistan and Afghanistan**

### **A) Afghan Refugees**

Pakistan is not a signatory of UNHCR's 1951 convention related to status of Refugees and neither its 1967 protocol (Alimia, 2019). Both of these documents form the basic legal framework on which the international refugee regime, asylum systems and legal status of refugees are navigated across the world. Ironically Pakistan has hosted about 3.5 to 4 million Afghan refugees for around four decades; and this too despite a sheer lack of legislative action, administrative capacity and protective management system for both the refugees and host state (Hilali, 2017). As per the statistics of UNHCR, around 1.3 million registered Afghan refugees are still residing in Pakistan. Around 600,000 Afghan refugees have migrated to Pakistan since Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan while Defence Minister of Pakistan Khawaja Asif claimed that around 5 to 6 million Afghan refugees have been provided refuge by Pakistan over the last four decades (Desk, 2023). As per UNHCR, 90% of refugee population in Pakistan by 2015, had actually arrived in the country between 1979-85 and had resided here from since. And of the currently registered ones about 75% are children and youth of second to third generation born in Pakistan, and most had never been to Afghanistan. Because of the challenging Af-Pak border situation in the wake of ongoing Afghan conflict and the socio-cultural and ethnic kinship related mobility kept by tribals known as easement rights across FATA region in particular; it was of utmost importance that Pakistan differentiated between refugees and economic migrants coming from the other side of the border (Sunawar, 2017). An exercise which the state never observed. One of the primary repercussions of Pakistan's inability to legislate around Afghan refugee settlement, registration, mobility, work, marriage, education, property and livelihood related rights came about as this significant population's unregistered, unregulated and unscrutinized stay, followed by free integration and perpetual mobility on both sides of the border.

It wasn't until 2013 that Pakistan had adopted via its federal cabinet a National Policy on the Management and Repatriation of Afghan Refugees. This policy insisted in legalizing the stay of Afghans as opposed to previous cultural and humanitarian cushion basis of stay and integration of refugees (Ishaque, Gul, & Asghar, 2021). Though insisting at government level that refugees must repatriate back to Afghanistan, Pakistan has so far extended the leverage to stay for Afghans further around three times by 2018, via upgrading its Tripartite agreement with UNHCR.

Without having a clear legal status and a particular corresponding set of rights and duties of refugees towards host states; several negative implications may arise for both refugees and the host state. In case of Afghan refugees, periodic engagements of Government of Pakistan, Afghanistan and UNHCR to register and account for refugees, seem to be in context of not awarding a status



of refugees to Afghan nationals residing in Pakistan, but simply to register and account for them for the purpose of census and chalking a systematic repatriation policy. The rights mentioned in the Refugee convention of 1951; that comprises of subjects like right to education, health, shelter, livelihood and mobility already seem to have been granted to Afghan refugees residing for over four decades in Pakistan without them been granted asylum officially (Zimmermann, Dörschner, & Machts, 2011). Ironically, several European states that are now hosting Syrian refugees and happen to be signatories of the Refugee convention, have restricted refugees to camps and were unwilling to let them cross border in the first place in 2015.

Former Afghan President Ashraf Ghani made various speeches concerning Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Ghani promised to return all Afghan refugees to their homeland over the course of the twenty-four months, putting aside claims that Afghan refugees remained the root cause of instability throughout the region. During a televised speech in February, 2018, President Ghani asserted that,

*“We don't want them [Pakistanis] to say refugees do this or do that. [We know] refugees are innocent. So, let us resolve to bring them back to solve this problem once for all” (Gul, 2018).*

Though after the implementation of National Action Plan (NAP), return of Afghan refugees excelled, yet the situation changed quickly as the peace process initiated between Afghan Taliban and Afghan Government. Though UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees, yet the process reversed after Afghan Taliban came in to power as the rulers of Afghanistan in August, 2021. The issue continues to haunt the respective governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan and will continue to remain a bone of contention between the two states until and unless Afghan refugees return to their homeland.

### **B) Clashes along the Afghanistan-Pakistan Border**

Several clashes erupted along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border during Ashraf Ghani's tenure, as the ties between the two neighbouring states continued to deteriorate on regular basis. In February, 2017 an assault targeting three border checkpoints had been claimed by the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, who additionally succeeded to capture one of the posts (Faiez, 2017). The militants seized another of the checkpoints of Pakistani army in order to set it on fire. In May of 2017 the Pakistani military escorting the census delegation crossed the border into a contested area, sparking a clash that killed a minimum eleven individuals (Hashim, 2017). More than three innocent people died in an encounter between Afghan and Pakistani security forces on the border between the two countries in October 2019. The ensuing disputes have strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Because the physical boundary between these two nations remains contentious, there have been sporadic clashes involving the armies of both states. Civilians residing in border regions have been displaced, suffered casualties, bearded financial repercussions as well as psychological challenges as a consequence of these armed conflicts. In Pakistan, masses residing alongside the



north western region, close to the Afghan border have been severely affected due to regular incidents of uninterrupted clashes between the two states.

### **C) Unrest in Pakistan's Pashtun Belt**

While the Pashtun belt of Pakistan has been facing instability since 2001, military operations in the tribal region as well as the terrorist attacks across Pakistan seriously intensified relationship between the two states. Moreover, rise of Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) also led to socioeconomic unrest in the tribal region since a negative sentiment was created against the State of Pakistan. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also voiced his support for PTM and invited the leadership of PTM to Afghanistan on several occasions (Shah, 2020). Ghani also expressed his serious reservations when the members of PTM were apprehended by the security forces of Pakistan on multiple charges.

### **D) Direct Attacks from the TTP and TTA on Security Forces of Pakistan**

Tactical assaults against Pakistani law enforcement officials have been carried out by the two terrorist groups, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan (TTA) since their inception. The TTP primarily recruited from the erstwhile FATA and obtained funding for its activities by means of contributions, bribery, abductions, including extraction of resources. The gang uses suicidal acts of terrorism, bombs, surprise attacks, including executions and regularly threatened the security forces of Pakistan (Yousaf & FurrughZad, 2020). While the western experts have regularly interpreted Pakistan's relationship with TTA as influential, the reality is otherwise. Tehreek-e-Taliban Afghanistan has shared strained relationship with the successive governments of Pakistan since they have returned to power. Their cadres have been involved in attacking the security forces of Pakistan while they have been regularly supporting the leadership of TTP to take refuge in Afghanistan despite their assertion in Doha agreement that they will not allow or support any militant group to take refuge within their territorial boundaries. There have been fatalities as well as injuries among civilians as a consequence of deliberate strikes by the TTP and TTA against Pakistani security forces. The increase in aggression has made civilians feel unsafe and fearful in the tribal region. The violence has additionally interfered with commercial and trading activity between Pakistan and Afghanistan, harming those whose survival depends on the regular trade between the two sides.

### **E) Hurdles faced by Traders of Pakistan and Afghanistan**

It is a dilemma that Afghan citizens are conducting their businesses in Pakistan however neither they are working in accordance with the law nor there is any legislation to regularize them. 60-70% of these refugees reside in different areas of KP Province due to their cultural and linguistic affinity with the Pashtuns of Pakistan (Al Nahyan, Hussain, & ul Ghafoor, 2019). Due to illegal businesses of Afghan citizens in Pakistan, not only state but business community of Pakistan is facing billions of rupees loss per day. Moreover, they are leading the businesses in every sector that includes marble, textile, grocery stores, agriculture and farming. Rules and regulations for business community is necessary in order to give equal opportunities to small and large enterprises. Despite





the fact that state of Pakistan has given the Afghan citizens equal opportunities in health, education and every other sector, consequently Pakistani community is facing losses due to them. Resources that were allocated for Pakistani citizens were being spent on them. Not only they are using the Pakistani resources, several organizations are working for their welfare and hence they are receiving the foreign funding as well.

- a. The required truck-tracking systems and requisite insurance have been implemented in Pakistan, while the Afghan side has yet to install such systems on their own trucks.
- b. Frequent stalled shipments are another major hurdle for traders that needs to be effectively addressed if both countries intend to further their bilateral trade.
- c. Anti-smuggling security measures agreed in the APTTA are restrictive cost-prohibitive, and that banking guarantee fees are excessively high and time-consuming, ranging from 100,000 to 150,000 Pakistani rupees per carrier.
- d. Afghanistan also has not yet notified Pakistan of its customs transit rules required under the APTTA, despite repeated requests by Pakistan and assurances by the Afghan government.
- e. One particular fact to be mentioned is that bribes are taken on the border by the officials to allow Afghans to enter their trade convoys in Pakistan. Though Afghan citizens conduct their businesses in Pakistan freely and without any hustle and interruption, consequently Pakistani citizens are unable to do so in Afghanistan. They have to keep an Afghan citizen as the middle man with themselves to conduct their operations in Afghanistan.

Though there are number of issues that need to be addressed in bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the foremost should be the removal of unnecessary barriers for traders of both sides and improved facilities at the border check points will accelerate trade between the two countries. Managed integration will certainly put an end to the illegal activities that are being practiced and will positively contribute to the economy. Moreover, this will also provide relief to Pakistanis who have developed partnerships with Afghan citizens and are trading with Afghanistan through them. They have made investments through Pakistanis, which will certainly benefit both, if a coherent policy is adopted. It is undeniable that bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan has the potential to reach \$5 billion per year if trading facilities are modernized and governments in both countries focus on growing bilateral economic cooperation.

#### **F) Afghan Transit Trade to India**

Pakistan has served as a gateway for Afghan traders to reach the huge Indian market. However, due to troubled political relations between the South Asian neighbours in recent years, Pakistan has introduced a number of bureaucratic hurdles for Afghan traders to trade with India through Pakistan in addition to repeatedly closing the Chaman and Torkham borders. Such actions severely damaged Pakistan's trade ties with Afghanistan, cutting the two sides' trading in half and restricting the access of Afghan exporters to the Indian market. In order to avoid meddling of Pakistan with its in trade with India, it was crucial for the Afghan government to diversify its trading partners. Roughly half of Afghan exports are purchased by India, which is followed by Pakistan, the United



Arab Emirates, Iran, and China. Afghanistan's significant reliance on Pakistani transit ports created a number of issues and difficulties that had a negative impact on trade and country's economic development. As a result, Afghan national unity government (NUG) under President Ghani chose to identify alternate ways and significantly contributed to the opening of a number of new aerial transit channels that can help Afghanistan to pursue its trade with India. On the other hand, India has made numerous attempts to use Pakistan as a route to the markets in Afghanistan and Central Asia while Pakistan has consistently objected to India's official request to join APTTA (Akbari, 2021). As the finest option to access Afghanistan and Central Asian markets, India invested in Chabahar Port.

Additionally, Chabahar offered landlocked Afghanistan another route to the Arabian Sea than just relying on Pakistani route. Considerations better illustrate how Chabahar Port minimized the route from Karachi to Kabul by 700 kms, potentially saving the trader a substantial amount of \$1000 each container. Afghanistan has much more significant prospects in Chabahar as opposed to Karachi and Gwadar ports as it becomes a transit bridge linking the region to landlocked states. India also significantly benefits from booming trade in Afghanistan owing to lower costs and reduced import timeframes.

Keeping in view the current circumstances, transit trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan is further expected to decrease, as no state in the world has currently recognized the Taliban government in Afghanistan, while Pakistan does not allow the Indian trade of Afghanistan through Pakistan, except for humanitarian aid. Though the situation may improve following the recognition of Taliban government in Afghanistan, yet it is pertinent for Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan to coordinate and devise a strategy for improvement of bilateral and transit trade in the region.

### **G) Indian Involvement in Afghanistan**

Over the course of last two decades, India has made consistent efforts to defame Pakistan through multilateral strategies in Afghanistan, Pakistan and on the forums of regional and international organizations. India invested around \$3 Billion in Afghanistan in shape of developmental projects, funding to governmental entities and proxies and public diplomacy efforts. However, Minister of External Affairs of India Mr. V. Muraleedharan in Lok Sabha in February, 2022 said that such an investment was done in Afghanistan for the welfare of its people. He said that;

*"India has been engaged in a development partnership with Afghanistan, which includes more than five hundred projects spread across each of the 34 provinces of the country in critical areas of power, water supply, road connectivity, healthcare, education, agriculture and capacity building (Division)."*

He further stated that vast majority of the projects had been delivered to Government of Afghanistan before Taliban took over control of Kabul in August, 2021. Realist paradigm argues



that states are only concerned about their own national interest; hence such mega-investments of India in Afghanistan definitely had some ulterior motives. As earlier stated, Indian objectives in Afghanistan are primarily aimed at furthering its enmity with Pakistan through Afghan leadership and its people. Through these development projects, India made an effort to create soft image amongst Afghan masses while subsequently creating hatred against Pakistan. It had been very successful in attaining its objectives as despite hosting more than four million Afghan refugees for over four decades, a section of common Afghan people publically speak against Pakistan. Most of these Afghans have spent a good part of their lives in Pakistan, got education in Pakistani educational institutes, yet they blame Government of Pakistan and its institutions for conflict and instability in Afghanistan.

In addition to aiding and supporting the Afghan proxies against Pakistan, India has consistently supported Baloch and Pashtun separatist groups in Pakistan. Balochistan and tribal areas of Pakistan have remained the hub of conflict and instability since last few decades, primarily due to few insurgent groups who work against the national interest of Pakistan at the behest of India and United States. Baloch separatist leader Brahamdagh Bugti has regularly been funded by India and has fueled instability in the province. Similarly, Nawabzada Hyrbyair Marri, the leader of Free Balochistan Movement who was represented by an Afghan origin Balaach Pardili in New Delhi has also constantly asked for Indian support in Balochistan. Based in New Delhi, Mr. Pardili had also levied baseless allegations against Pakistan while subsequently accepted support of Modi led BJP leaders. Similarly, India has been supporting Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Daesh in Pakistan, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and several others. A public statement in 2020 by then Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and Spokesperson of Pakistan's armed forces, Major General Babar Iftexhar revealed that Indian Ambassadors in Afghanistan have been supervising terrorist activities inside Pakistan. The Foreign Minister said;

*“The evidence provided by Pakistan provides concrete proof of Indian financial and material sponsorship of multiple terrorist organizations, including U.N.-designated terrorist organizations Jamaat ul Ahrar, Bloch Liberation Army and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. There are documents, banking transactions worth millions of dollars, audio clips and details of contacts between Indian intelligence operatives and diplomats with fugitive Pakistani militants operating out of Afghanistan. We are now presenting irrefutable evidence to the world to demonstrate the Indian state's direct sponsorship of terrorism in Pakistan that has resulted in the deaths of innocent Pakistanis. The international community can no longer turn a blind eye to this rogue behavior(Gull, 2020).”*

Countless such attempts have been made by India through its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) over the years, yet Pakistan has successfully countered Indian aspirations. India will continue to pursue diplomatic ties with Taliban government in Afghanistan yet it can be expected that Taliban leadership will distinguish between Indian aspirations in Afghanistan and using Afghan soil



against Pakistan. Though future of this region seems to be shifting towards China centricity from Indian centricity, yet Indian strong influence in the geopolitics and geoeconomics cannot be overlooked and Pakistan may have to prepare a long-term strategy to counter any future Indian aspirations through its western border.

### **Concluding Arguments**

A controversial border between the two sides remained a bone of contention and served as a contradictory point on a number of issues, yet Afghan opposition to fencing of Pak-Afghan border followed by its involvement in creating instability in the Pashtun belt of Pakistan seriously deteriorated relationship between the two countries. Moreover, the objectives of international actors in Afghanistan including United States, the nexus of RAW and NDS as well as the strengthening of militant groups inside Pakistan due to their support from foreign actors can be termed as some of the influencing factors during the Ghani regime and his relationship with Pakistan.



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