

Pak-Afghan Relations after 9/11: Irritants and Prospects of Cooperation

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore the irritants and opportunities of Pak-Afghan relations after 9/11 period. The paper found that the post 9/11 period involved Pakistan deeply in the peace process and eradication of terrorist activities in the region due to the strategic depth of Pakistan. As a result, Pakistan relations with Afghanistan suffered badly. For the sake of regional peace and harmony, Pakistan's role in US led coalition against terrorism in Afghanistan has been inevitable, however, it resulted counter-productive in respect to Pak-Afghan relations. The paper is qualitative in nature which has focused the historical facts and events of Pak-Afghan relations to trace out the question which factors remained the main hindrance towards to establishment of friendly Pak-Afghan relations. The paper also suggests that friendly Pak-Afghan relations are in the larger interest of both states since collaboration and cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan does not ensure peace in the region, they also can be the greatest economic and political partners of the region.

Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan share common geographical region, ethnicity, faith, religion, tradition and culture. However, despite of these common interests, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan never witnessed permanent amicable phase. The Durand Line issue, Refugees issue, cross border terrorism and Indo-Afghan ties certain areas of divergence of Pak-Afghan ties (Qassem & Durand, 2008). After the independence of Pakistan in August 1947, Afghanistan was the only country which had objections on Pakistan's admission in United Nations and did not recognize Pakistan as a legitimate country for certain period of time (Abid, 1997). Afghanistan also opposed the entry of Pakistan into United Nations in September 1947 (Mahmood, Nasir, Zubair, & Ahmed, 2016). The early phase of Pak-Afghan relations portrayed the seeds of contention and conflict between two neighboring Muslim states. However, Pakistan remained positive in context of strong Pak-Afghan relations. For stance the political leadership's reconciliatory efforts of Pakistan resulted the establishment of diplomatic relations and promotion of bilateral trade with Afghanistan. Afghanistan is well-learned about the role of Pakistan in promoting Afghanistan's economy since Afghanistan is a landlocked state, so any kind of hostility with Pakistan can lead to economic repercussions for Afghanistan.

Since 1950s, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan faced many ups and downs due to internal and external nature of the region and world politics. However, these relations touched to lowest ebb during 1970s and 1980s due to bloodless coup of Daud, then the Prime Minister of Afghanistan against King Zahir Shah, Saur Revolution in 1978 and Soviet-US conflict in Afghanistan since Pakistan supported US against Soviet forces in Afghanistan (Hilali, 2017). Moreover, after one decade conflict between Soviet forces and US in Afghanistan, finally Soviet withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989. However, the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan did not bring peace in Afghanistan, rather situation went from bad to worse as civil war among the Mujahideen factions continued in Afghanistan. Meantime, Pakistan intended to ensure the settlement of Mujahideen in Afghanistan for the regional peace. Therefore, Pakistan recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

The terrorists attack on United States on September 11th, 2001 brought a paradigm shift in the foreign policy of major states in the world (Ehteshami, 2007) as US declared war on terror with the help of international coalition. With the parallel of international law and world politics for the sake of world peace, Pakistan opted to support U.S led international coalition forces to fight war on terror (Fani, 2005). To end the terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan was made a frontline state due to its strategic depth, and fully supported the international coalition by providing logistic and transit facilities (Akhtar, 2010). Despite the honest efforts of Pakistan in respect to eradicate terrorism in the region, Afghanistan always suspected the role of Pakistan (Hilali, 2017). Moreover, soon afterward, Afghanistan was witnessed to ally itself with India and Iran to deter the efforts of Pakistan which has been the ever-biggest mistake of Afghanistan till now (Kiran, 2009). The closeness of India and Afghanistan created opportunity for India to maintain its ill-designed covert activities against Pakistan via Afghan soil (Kiran, 2009). Thus, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan became at the lowest ebb after the tragic event of 9/11.

Pakistan gave strategic support, intelligence sharing and logistic support to the international coalition against the Taliban and Al Qaeda for the sake of regional peace and harmony (Khan, 2013). Pakistan's commitment to the

war on terror has been noteworthy as it has been perceived that without the dynamic and genuine support of Pakistan, the win against terrorism have never been accomplished. Indeed, Pakistan cooperated with American aimed at preventing terrorism in the region. Pakistan had supported all UN resolutions as it was a signatory to ten out of twelve UN anti-terrorist representative.

War on Terrorism and Pak-Afghan Relations

The tragic event of the September 11th, 2001 brought a rapid change to the world politics. After the attack on World Trade Centre Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Pakistan withdrew their affiliation with Taliban Government in Afghanistan. Initially, Pakistan tried to convince Taliban regime to hand over the Osama bin Ladin to US so that the region avoids a military invasion. However, Taliban regime rejected the offer of Pakistan and stood to fight US led coalition. As with the nature and demand of world politics and for the sake of regional peace, Pakistan finally declared to support international coalition against terrorism. The war on terror, continued in Afghanistan which did not only affect Pak-Afghan relations, it also continued with no time framework that resulted the disturbance of the entire region. The full US military bombardment in Afghanistan killed many civilians (Herold, 2002).

After the end of Taliban region in Afghanistan, US installed a pro-American President, Hamid Karzai to ensure the peace and run the affairs of the state. Despite a pro-US regime in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan remained unable to address their mutual political and geographical differences. No doubt the post-9/11 scenario offered a golden chance to Pakistan and Afghanistan to reevaluate their policies and forge close relationship, but they remained unable to materialize the good ties. As President Hamid Karzai, the leader of the Afghan Interim Government in 2001 declared that Afghanistan and Pakistan have been on generally cordial terms with each other. However, a portion of the individuals from the Karzai administration had blamed Pakistan's role in the US-drove global war on terror, and looked Pakistan role with suspicious (Akhtar, 2008). Despite the allegation, the good gesture on both sides also continued. Afghan President Karzai visited Pakistan officially in February 2002. His visit was important to establish bilateral relations between the Islamabad and Kabul. The Afghan President visited Pakistan four times on various occasions. Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf also paid a subsequent visit to Afghanistan in April 2002 (Ikram, 2006). During that visit Pakistan announced US 100 million dollars help to Afghanistan to meet the requirements of rehabilitation and reconstruction (Ikram, 2006). The processes of normalization of relations had begun for combating terrorists. Kabul gave a quick response to the Pakistan to collaborate in this fight. Similarly, Pakistan was ready to cooperate with the Afghan government to bring stability, peace and prosperity through mutual understanding in the region.

Operation Enduring Freedom against Taliban and Al-Qaeda

During the Operation enduring freedom, Pakistan played very important role to abolish the training camps and groundwork of Taliban and Al-Qaeda to completely eliminate terrorists in Afghanistan. Pakistan took significant steps to counter Taliban who ran to the rough mountainous region near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border where they were reunited to conduct "hit and run" attacks against US-led international coalition forces. During this operation, America doubted that Osama bin Laden and other radical Islamic leaders including Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Taliban chief, Mullah Omer were concealed in the remote areas of Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Pakistan's support to American multidimensional efforts to eliminate Al-Qaeda and other Islamic militant groups in the region has been extremely important. Despite Pakistan's sincere efforts vis-à-vis terrorism in Afghanistan, US pressurized Pakistan to "do more" and as US suspected of the re-emergence of Taliban and Al-Qaeda and other Islamic terrorists on Pak-Afghan borders.

However, Pakistan fully cooperated to maintain check and balance on the terrorists' movement across the border. While cooperating in war on terror, Pakistan made a significant effort and conducted seven major military operations are as follows:

- i. *Al-Mizan Operation (The Balance) in South Waziristan in 2001-02.*
- ii. *Sherdil Operation (Lion-heart) in Bajaur in 2007.*
- iii. *Zalzala Operation (Earthquake) in South Waziristan.*
- iv. *Rah-e-Haq Operation (the True Path) was organized in Malakand and Swat in 2008.*
- v. *Rah- e- Rast Operation (The Correct Path) was launched in Malakand and swat in 2009.*
- vi. *Rah-e- Nejaat (The Path Salvation) was led by Army in South Waziristan in 2010.*
- vii. *Operation Zarb-e-Azb was conducted in North Waziristan (2014)*

Cost paid by the Pakistan due to Terrorism

The war on terror had brought much unsteadiness and disturbances in Pak-Afghan relations (Hussain & Latif, 2020). Moreover, the Al Qaeda terrorist activities posed real threat for the security of the region. No doubt, Pakistan played a unique role in war on terror, but it cost Pakistan the most in the region. It was US war in Afghanistan, however, for the regional peace and harmony, Pakistan supported US led forces. Leftists in Pakistan believed that Pakistan had not to join the war. However, they ought to understand that Pakistan's refusal to join US-led coalition could have disconnected Pakistan globally which could have prompted substantial financial and political cost in Pakistan. Even though India could have benefited much from this war as it allowed India to bring itself much closer with Afghanistan. Despite the fact that it was US war, but the Al-

Qaeda and its terrorist groups considered that Pakistan was one main contributor to fight war on terror. Those terrorist groups extended their networks against Pakistan. And they also carried out their subversive attacks on US and NATO troops across the border in Afghanistan (Qayum, Zaman, & Shah, 2018).

After becoming ally of US-led coalition forces, Pakistan became the first state to face the implications of terrorism of Afghanistan badly. In the post-9/11, terrorism in Afghanistan spreaded so deeply in the region that resulted the loss of human lives, devastation of property and a disturbed law and order. Moreover, Pakistan lost the lives of people and infrastructures (Johnson & Mason, 2007). To check terrorist activities on Pak-Afghan border, Pakistan deployed seven army divisions in South and North Waziristan. More or less 21,500 civilians have been killed in Afghan war after 9/11 (Rabbi, 2014). The unilateral US missile and drone strikes in Pakistan to target the terrorists sharply increased since 2008 had fueled anti-US sentiments among Pakistani public (Crawford, 2015). These drone attacks in Tribal areas of Pakistan were counter-dynamic to Pakistan's efforts against terrorism and had negative significances for the Pakistan-US long-period strategic partnership. The tribal areas of Pakistan continued to face militants' attacks which resulted the loss of property and lives (Christine Fair & Jones, 2009).

Impact of War on Terrorism on Pak-Afghan Relations

Pakistan has always played its positive role in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan in the post US invasion on Afghanistan despite of facing internal security problems. Pakistan has always intended to ensure peace in Afghanistan in order take part the regional trade activities. Pakistan has been well-learnt about the impacts of destabilized Afghanistan on Pakistan since the terrorists in Afghanistan have been creating disturbance on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Disappointedly, the US-led war on terror brought much instability in the region. Afghanistan has been witnessed in blaming Pakistan in disturbing Afghan's peace process (Jan, Hassan, & Abbasi, 2020). The Karzai Administration claimed that the terrorists moved and operated freely against Afghanistan with the support of Pakistan from the tribal areas (Zeb, 2006). These baseless allegations did not only create many problems in establishing Pak-Afghan friendly relations, they also paved the establishment of Indo-Afghan ties in Afghanistan. The Indian intentions in Afghanistan surely were meant to carry out its covert activities against Pakistan. Thus, closeness of Indo-Afghan created mistrust in Pak-Afghan relations. The war on terror brought many issues in respect to economy, politics and security of both states, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the region.

After 9/11, the main purpose of war on terror was meant to end the networks of terrorists in Afghanistan, bring peace and stability in the region, however, it was spillover and distorted the peace and security of the region. The war on terror brought much unsteadiness and insecurity in Pakistan and Afghanistan. No doubt, Pakistan joined the war for regional stability but it affected Pakistan the most in the region (Kayani, 2011).

On the other hand, Afghanistan became flash point of clashing interests among the different regional and extra regional powers. The interference of international powers in Afghanistan activated anti-Pakistani elements in Afghanistan. Pakistan faced worst security problems in last three decades due to presence of international powers in Afghanistan. The issues of security are major concerns for both neighboring nations.

Indian presence in Afghanistan has been another headache for Pakistan since India always adopted a strategy towards Afghanistan to counter Pakistan's regional interest. There is no denying the fact that Indian relations with Afghanistan have been cordial after 9/11 period which further expanded to influence Pakistan in the region. The Indian maneuvering in the region through Afghanistan created many security problems for Pakistan (Hassan, 2009). Since the independence of Pakistan, Afghanistan did not enjoy the cordial relations with Pakistan since Kabul always preferred India to establish good and friendly relations with.

Many preferential trade agreements signed between Afghanistan and India. The Indian cunning policies preferred bilateral trade and has become the largest donor for Afghanistan in post-2014 US withdrawal in order to influence the region to check Pakistan's development.

The US-led NATO and ISAF forces in Afghanistan did not only pose serious threats for the region, it also destabilized Afghanistan badly. Their presence has brought serious security issues and challenges for Pakistan. Pakistan suffered huge losses in all respects including lives and property, damages to infrastructure. Pakistan has been the most appropriate state in South Asia to encounter terrorists in Afghanistan, therefore, US opted for Pakistan to get its support in the mission of war on terror. However, India, being the key opponent of Pakistan, benefitted much in the mission and Pakistan suffered the most in the region. As perceived earlier New Delhi continued to pose many serious threats for Pakistan in the region. The US had played double game with Pakistan, on one hand demanded action against insurgents and on the other hand supported Indian approach in Afghanistan. Indian secret agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) played a major role in creating or supporting militants groups fighting against Pakistan's security forces and also attacking civilians through Afghanistan's intelligence agency Research and Analysis Milli Afghan (RAMA) (Ganguly, 2011).

Pakistani government believed that RAW has been funding terrorists through Afghanistan's RAMA and National Directorate of Security (NDS) to carry out terrorist activities in Pakistani tribal areas and sabotaging peace and security in the region (Ahmad, 2013).

Economic Implications of Afghan Refugees on Pak-Afghan Relations

The Afghan refugees who had fled Afghanistan in 1978 after Soviet backed Saur Revolutionaries took complete control of Afghanistan. When Soviet Union took over Afghanistan in 1979, this resulted into another huge influx of refugees in Pakistan (Safri, 2011). The Afghan refugees posed serious economic problems to Pakistan. Due to Saur Revolution and Soviet occupation on Afghanistan, large number of Afghan refugees started settling in Pakistan. The Afghan refugees' migration to Pakistan occurred subsequently due to the military coup in 1978 against the Daud administration by the Afghan Marxist political party named as People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). After intervention of Soviets in Afghanistan, the Afghanistan was considered very insecure compelled the Afghan refugees to relocate to neighboring countries, Pakistan and Iran. Despite having the economic problems, Pakistan was ready to accept those Afghan refugees and allow them to live in different tribal areas in Pakistan.

The second period of Afghan mass movement took place after civil war in 1990s and the Taliban's regime took power in 1996 (Safri, 2011). During the Taliban regime many felt a sense of insecurity and a huge number of Afghan refugees again settled in Pakistan. Various individuals were constrained to relocate under such situations, and these were chiefly non-Muslim religious subgroups and Shia Muslims who felt debilitated under the staunch Taliban Administration in Afghanistan. As starvation and ailments and water crisis spread, a large number of people were compelled to move to Iran and Pakistan. The estimation expected 2 million Afghan exiles escaped to Pakistan and around 1.5 million were compelled to move to Iran (Ghufraan, 2006). They also settled in different parts of world. During 2001, 900,000 Afghans fled from their country due to series of air attacks and combat ground operations by US-led coalition forces against terrorists in Afghanistan (Emery & Ruiz, 2001). It is fascinating to note that even after the removal of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan, US launched a very aggressive policy against terrorists in Afghanistan.

There was an evacuee emergency in Pakistan due to additional burden of refugees migrating to Pakistan in thousands. Additionally, various Afghans were already available in Pakistan in first and second phases of Afghan migration in Pakistan. About 100,000 refugees from the Eastern districts of Afghanistan (Emery & Ruiz, 2001) including Konar, Paktia and Nangarhar were shifted to Pakistan due to Operation Enduring Freedom. In other words, presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan created socio-political and security issues in Pakistan.

All political stakeholders, intellectuals, members of civil society in Pakistan believed that the repatriation of Afghan refugees would not only benefit Pakistan and Afghanistan, it also paves way for restoration of durable peace in the restive region.

Recommendation for the Study

Pakistan and Afghanistan are two important states of South Asia which have historical legacy, socio-cultural affiliation and common belief. In order to access warm water, Pakistan is the most appropriate state for Afghanistan for the enhancement and development its national economy. Unfortunately, Afghanistan has never trusted Pakistan due to which it has been exploited either by US or India. Therefore, Afghanistan needs to realize that without the political, geographical, logical and economically supports of Pakistan, peace and prosperity may not take place in Afghanistan. Instead of entertaining anti-Pakistan policies of US, Iran and India on its soil, Afghanistan needs to work with Pakistan to design a bilateral mechanism to end terrorism in the region. There are some suggestions that they can help to improve relations in future.

- i. In order work collectively for the regional peace, confidence building measure may be established on both sides.
- ii. Repatriation of Afghan refugees need quick and sincere efforts from both sides.
- iii. Afghanistan needs to deny the Indian involvement vis-à-vis Pak-Afghan relations.
- iv. Trade and commerce should be expanded between Afghanistan and Pakistan for regional social development.

Conclusion

The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have worsened due to many pertaining issues and challenges. Being two Muslim neighboring countries Pakistan and Afghanistan never enjoyed the smooth and cordial relations in the history since independence of Pakistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan have several things in common like common religion, history, culture and tradition. However, Durand line is the main factor of Pak-Afghan disturbed relations. Later on, the Afghanistan government also launched propaganda campaign with the support of Soviet Union and India against Pakistan to support anti-Pakistan elements in Pakistan. Pak-Afghan relations took a major shift after the 9/11 attack on US and it declared war on Taliban controlled Afghanistan for harboring terrorists. The main findings of this paper is to sum up that Afghanistan and Pakistan had never enjoyed a good relationship due to Durand line. However, Afghanistan's support to anti-Pakistan ill-designed policies of India, created mistrust and disturbance in Pak-Afghan relation.

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