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**Afghanistan-Pakistan in a security Puzzle
(Past, Present and Future)**

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1- This research has been conducted by Syed Muhammad Abbas under the Supervision of Ambassador Soltanieh

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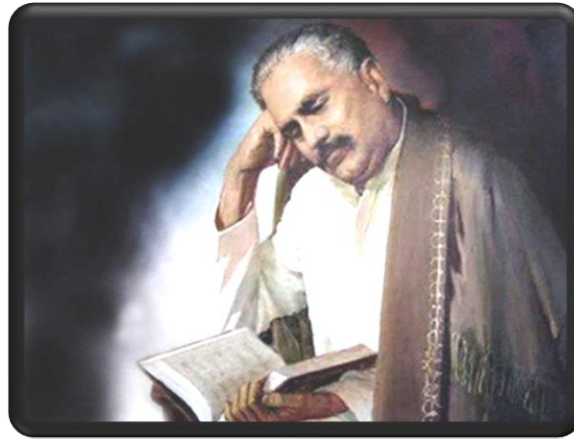
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The esteemed scholar and known as Poet of the East, Allama Muhammad Iqbal, underscores the significance of Afghanistan by metaphorically referring to it as the heart of Asia in one of his notable poems. The following presents the original verse along with its translation:



خاک را بیداری و خواب از دل است	در نهاد ما تب و تاب از دل است
در مسا ما تش عرق خون می شود	تن زمرگ دل دیگر گون می شود
ده بردل بند و جز بر دل می پیچ	از فساد دل بدن هیچ است هیچ
مَدّت افغان در آن پیکر دل است	آسیا یک پیکر آب و گل است
درگشاد او گشا د آسیا	از فساد او فساد آسیا
ورنه گاهی در رهی باد است تن	تا دل آزاد است آزاد است تن
مرده از کین زنده از دین است دل	همچو تن پا بند آین است دل
وحدت ار مشهود گردد مَدّت است	قوت دین از مقام وحدت است

Translation:

*Asia is a body of water and clay,
Of which the Afghan nation forms the heart.
The whole of Asia is corrupt,
If the heart is corrupt,
Its decline is the decline of Asia;
Its rise is the rise of Asia,
The body is free only as long as the heart is free,
The heart dies with hatred but lives with faith. (2)*

Abstract:

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been a complex one, shaped by a range of historical and political factors. This research paper aims to explore this relationship, examining the impact of key events and developments on security in the region. The paper is divided into eight phases, beginning with the period of constitutional monarchy and subcontinental colonialism in the early 20th century, and ending with the Taliban government in 2021-2023 onwards.² Throughout each phase, the paper analyzes the political and security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and how this has been impacted by external factors such as the Soviet and US/NATO occupations.³

The paper also examines the role of intelligence agencies in shaping the relationship between the two countries, and the impact of border disputes and identity issues such as Pashtun nationalism. The current situation in Afghanistan, including the Taliban takeover in 2021, is also discussed, along with potential future scenarios. The paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, shedding light on the complex factors that have shaped security in the region over the past century.⁴

Keywords:

Afghanistan, Pakistan, security, insurgency, terrorism, intelligence agency, Pashtun, Durand Line, Soviet occupation, US/NATO occupation, Taliban government, international relations.

Introduction:

The intertwined narratives of Pakistan and Afghanistan, two neighboring nations in South Asia, have been characterized by a complex and multifaceted security puzzle that has evolved

over the decades.⁵ This intricate dynamic encompasses a historical backdrop steeped in colonial legacies, regional power plays, and international interventions. The security challenges faced by both nations transcend mere borders, encompassing the entire spectrum of political, military, economic, and societal facets. This research paper delves into the Pakistan-Afghanistan security puzzle, embarking on a journey that traverses through distinct phases, ranging from the constitutional monarchy era to the current government in Afghanistan.⁶ Each phase encapsulates a unique set of events, conflicts, and collaborations that have shaped the security landscape of this region. The chronology begins with the colonial influence in the early 20th century, extending through the Soviet occupation, the U.S./NATO interventions, and the emergence of the Taliban government. To unravel the intricacies of this security puzzle, we explore the historical context of the conflict, the current security challenges that include terrorism, drug trafficking, and political instability, and the humanitarian impact on the local population, including displacement, human rights violations, and economic hardship. We further investigate possible solutions, spanning diplomatic negotiations, economic development, and military interventions, considering the roles of international actors and the regional implications of these endeavors. Throughout this journey, we rely on an array of authoritative sources and scholarly insights. The paper draws from official documents, academic publications, reports from international organizations, and the wisdom of leading experts and statesmen who have grappled with the challenges and complexities of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. As we embark on this research expedition, we are guided by the voices of those who have illuminated the past, navigated the present, and charted the course for the future of this enduring security puzzle.

Part I – Bilateral Pak-Afghan Relationship

- **Durand Line:**

The Durand Line has been a contentious issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan since it was drawn up by British colonial officials in 1893. The border has never been officially recognized by Afghanistan, and many Afghans feel that it unfairly divided their country. In recent years, there has been renewed tension over the Durand Line, with Pakistan building a fence along the border to try to prevent cross-border attacks by militants. However, this has been met with resistance from some Afghan officials, who argue that the fence is a violation of Afghan sovereignty.⁷ In addition to the issue of the Durand Line, the presence of foreign forces in Afghanistan has also been a contentious issue. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan to oust the Taliban and hunt down al-Qaeda militants. While the initial mission was successful, the conflict has dragged on for over two decades, with no clear end in sight. Many Afghans feel that the continued presence of foreign forces is a violation of their sovereignty, and there have been numerous protests and demonstrations against foreign troops in the country. Despite this, the U.S. and its allies have continued to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan, until 08th July 2021, President Biden announced that the official conclusion to the war in Afghanistan would be on 31 August 2021.⁹

Phase 1: Constitutional Monarchy vis a vis Subcontinental Colonialism (1926-1947)

During Phase 1 (1926-1947), Pakistan did not exist as a separate entity, and Afghanistan was ruled by a constitutional monarchy under King Amanullah Khan. This era was marked by Afghanistan's efforts to modernize and assert its sovereignty as a nation. In 1926, King Amanullah Khan introduced a new constitution, aiming to centralize power, establish a modern state, and initiate social reforms, including women's rights and education.

However, Afghanistan's aspirations for modernization and independence were met with challenges from subcontinental colonialism. The British Empire sought to maintain control over its neighboring territories, including the Indian subcontinent, and viewed Afghanistan's strategic location as crucial for safeguarding the North-West Frontier region (present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) of British India. Consequently, Afghanistan faced significant pressure to align its policies with British interests and refrain from supporting anti-British movements within India.¹⁰

The contentious issue of the Durand Line, a border demarcation imposed by the British in 1893, further complicated bilateral relations between Afghanistan and British India (later Pakistan). Afghanistan refused to recognize the Durand Line as a legitimate international border, and the presence of Pashtun and Baloch



ethnic communities living on both sides of the border added to the complexity of the issue.¹¹

Despite the challenges, Afghanistan managed to maintain diplomatic relations with British India and later Pakistan after the latter's independence in 1947. This phase laid the foundation for future interactions between the two neighboring countries, setting the stage for a complex and multifaceted bilateral journey in the years to come.

Phase 2: The Fated Start of the Bilateral Journey (1947-1970)

Phase 2 of Pak-Afghan bilateral relations began in 1947 with the independence of Pakistan and marked the beginning of a complex journey between the two neighboring countries. Afghanistan was among the first nations to recognize Pakistan's sovereignty, and both countries expressed a desire to cultivate friendly and cooperative relations.

Despite the initial goodwill, disputes over the Durand Line remained a prominent issue, defining much of the bilateral relationship. Afghanistan continued to assert its claims over Pashtun-inhabited areas within Pakistan, advocating for the rights and interests of the Pashtun ethnic community. This stance resulted in tensions and disagreements, as Pakistan considered the Durand Line as an internationally recognized border.¹²

The issue of Afghan refugees in Pakistan emerged during this phase as political instability and conflicts within Afghanistan led to significant refugee flows across the border. Pakistan faced challenges in accommodating and providing assistance to Afghan refugees, which had profound social, economic, and security implications for the country. Efforts to address the contentious issues and foster cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan were made through diplomatic channels. In 1960, the two countries signed the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) to facilitate trade and transit, aiming to promote economic cooperation and connectivity.

During this period, Afghanistan also faced internal political challenges, including a series of coups and political instability. These domestic issues impacted the country's foreign policy dynamics and interactions with neighboring countries.¹³

Phase 3: During the Soviet Occupation (1970-1989)

Phase 3 of Pak-Afghan bilateral relations unfolded during the tumultuous period of the Soviet-Afghan War, which began in 1979. This phase witnessed Afghanistan becoming embroiled in a brutal conflict that drew in regional and global actors. Pakistan played a crucial role during this period as a frontline state and a major supporter of the Afghan resistance, known as the Mujahideen.¹⁴

In the 1970s, Afghanistan experienced significant political upheaval. The communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) came to power in 1978, leading to internal divisions and opposition from various Afghan groups. The Soviet Union intervened in December 1979 to support the communist government, triggering a decade-long occupation. Pakistan provided sanctuary and support to Afghan resistance fighters, facilitating the training, arming, and transit of Mujahideen groups through its territory. The United States, Saudi Arabia, and other countries also supported the Mujahideen, making the conflict a proxy war between the Soviet Union and the international community. During this phase, Pakistan's involvement in the conflict brought complex challenges. While officially supporting the Afghan resistance, Pakistan faced difficulties in managing the inflow of refugees and dealing with the spillover of violence and extremism. The massive influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan had significant socio-economic and security implications for the country.¹⁵

The Soviet-Afghan War led to immense suffering for the Afghan people, with millions being displaced or seeking refuge in neighboring countries, including Pakistan. The conflict also deepened divisions within Afghan

society and had long-lasting consequences on the stability of the region.¹⁶

Phase 4: Post Soviet Withdrawal (1989-2001)

Phase 4 of Pak-Afghan bilateral relations began with the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. The Soviet Union's decision to withdraw came amid mounting international pressure and internal challenges in Afghanistan. The departure of Soviet troops left a power vacuum in Afghanistan, leading to continued internal strife and factional conflicts among different Mujahideen groups. During this period, Pakistan's role remained critical in shaping the post-withdrawal political landscape in Afghanistan. Islamabad supported certain Afghan factions in the hope of securing a government in Kabul that would be friendly to Pakistan's interests and address the contentious issue of the Durand Line. The situation in Afghanistan remained volatile, with various Mujahideen factions fighting for control of the country. The absence of a central authority and the disintegration of governance structures contributed to further instability and violence.¹⁷

Pakistan faced challenges in managing the flow of refugees returning to Afghanistan and dealing with the spillover of the conflict, including cross-border militancy and insecurity along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Moreover, during the phase of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which lasted from 1989 to 2001, Pakistan's bilateral relations with Afghanistan underwent significant changes. The withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 marked the end of a decade-long conflict that had deeply impacted both countries.¹⁸

After the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan descended into a civil war with various factions vying for control. Pakistan, during this period, continued to be involved in Afghanistan's internal affairs, providing support to certain Mujahideen groups. However, Pakistan's involvement and the support to the Taliban drew criticism from the international community due to concerns about the stability and security in the region.¹⁹

Phase 5: US/NATO Occupation (2001-2014):

The phase of US/NATO occupation in Afghanistan, which began in 2001 following the 9/11 attacks, significantly shaped Pakistan's bilateral relations with its neighbor. After the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan was called upon to cooperate in the global War on Terror.

Pakistan aligned itself with the United States in the fight against terrorism and became a key ally in the region. The country allowed the use of its territory for logistical support to the U.S. forces in Afghanistan. However, the U.S. and NATO also put pressure on Pakistan to do more in combating terrorism and preventing cross-border infiltration of militants into Afghanistan. It was a transformative period in the region's history. This phase witnessed a range of challenges and transformations, from the initial invasion and the overthrow of the Taliban regime to the subsequent resurgence of the insurgency and the eventual withdrawal of foreign combat forces. The legacy of this period continues to shape the security puzzle in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.²⁰

1. 2001: U.S.-Led Invasion

The United States, with NATO's support, launched Operation Enduring Freedom on October 7, 2001, leading to the swift ousting of the Taliban regime.²¹

2. 2001-2002: Taliban Regime Ousted

The Taliban regime was overthrown, and efforts began to rebuild Afghanistan and establish a stable government.

3. 2003-2008: Counter - insurgency Efforts

U.S. and NATO forces engaged in counterinsurgency campaigns against the Taliban and remnants of Al-Qaeda, seeking to stabilize the country.²²

4. 2004-2009: Nation-Building and Reconstruction

Comprehensive nation-building initiatives aimed to rebuild Afghanistan's infrastructure, institutions, and security forces, accompanied by governance and development projects.²³

5. 2008-2010: Challenges and Insurgency Resurgence

Despite early successes, the Taliban staged a resurgence, capitalizing on governance gaps and regional complexities. The insurgency escalated in many parts of Afghanistan.²⁴

6. 2009-2012: Evolving U.S. Strategy

The U.S. adopted various strategies, including troop surges and diplomatic overtures, to address the evolving security landscape.²⁵

7. 2001-2014: Regional Dynamics

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border remained porous and challenging, with insurgent sanctuaries on both sides contributing to cross-border militancy.

8. 2014: Transition and Withdrawal Plans

International discussions began to focus on transitioning security responsibilities to Afghan forces and planning for the eventual withdrawal of foreign troops.²⁶

9. 2014: End of Combat Mission

In December 2014, NATO officially ended its combat mission in Afghanistan, marking a significant shift in the security landscape.²⁷

II. FATA Conundrum: Bridging Security Divides:

FATA stands for Federally Administered Tribal Areas, which was a semi-autonomous tribal region in north-western Pakistan that existed from 1947 until 2018 when it was merged with the neighboring Pakistani province of Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa. The region served as a buffer from unrest in Afghanistan and had a unique administrative system and relationship with the national capital under the rule of the British Raj and even later when tribal areas became a part of Pakistan in 1947. The Pashtun tribes who always resisted control from outside were granted autonomy in running their internal affairs and were governed by the Frontier Crimes Regulation established by the British through appointed political agents and maliks. Since the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the United States and its NATO allies have been pressing Pakistan to do more to stop the Afghan Taliban and al-Qa`ida.

A concise summary of the key aspects related to the FATA region, its historical significance, and the challenges it has faced, particularly in the context of international pressure and efforts towards integration and peacebuilding are as follows:

1. Unique Administrative Status:

- Semi-autonomous tribal region in north-western Pakistan.
- Served as a buffer from unrest in Afghanistan.

2. Strategic Importance:

- Geopolitically significant due to its proximity to Afghanistan.
- Used as a buffer zone to prevent spillover of unrest from Afghanistan.

3. International Pressure:

- US and NATO allies pressuring Pakistan to combat Afghan Taliban and al-Qa`ida.
- Calls for Pakistan to take stronger action against militant groups operating in the region.

4. Resilience of Pashtun Tribes:

- Pashtun tribes historically resistant to external control.
- Maintained their autonomy and traditional governance structures.

5. Merger with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:

- FATA merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in 2018.
- Aimed to mainstream the region into the national governance framework.

6. Challenges of Integration:

- Integration process faced challenges due to differences in governance structures and systems.
- Efforts needed to address socio-economic disparities and infrastructure development.

7. Legacy of Colonial Rule:

- Frontier Crimes Regulation legacy persisted, impacting governance and legal systems.
- Transition to mainstream governance required reforms and adjustments.

8. Cultural Identity:

- FATA region home to diverse Pashtun tribes with rich cultural heritage.
- Preservation of cultural identity important during integration process.

9. Peace and Stability Efforts:

- Peace-building initiatives aimed at fostering stability in the region.
- Emphasis on dialogue, reconciliation, and development to address underlying grievances.

Phase 6: Afghan Presidential Government (2014-2020):

During this phase, Afghanistan witnessed a transition of power through presidential elections. Ashraf Ghani became the President of Afghanistan in 2014, marking the first democratic transfer of power in the country's history.²⁸ The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remained complex during this period.

While both countries emphasized the importance of bilateral ties and regional stability, there were persistent challenges. Cross-border terrorism and security concerns

continued to strain the relationship, with both sides accusing each other of harboring militants.^{29 30}

Phase 7: Post US/NATO Withdrawal (2019-2021):

The phase of U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, which took place from 2019 to 2021, had significant implications for Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations. As the U.S. announced its intention to withdraw troops from Afghanistan, Pakistan was once again called upon to play a role in facilitating the peace process.³¹

Pakistan supported efforts for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, encouraging dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan government.³² The U.S. and Pakistan worked together to facilitate the peace talks that culminated in the Doha Agreement in February 2020.³³

Phase 8: The Taliban Resurgence: Governance and Challenges in the New Era (2021-currently):

As of September 2021, the current phase of Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations involves ongoing challenges and uncertainties. Afghanistan is now under the control of the Taliban following the U.S. withdrawal, and the situation remains fluid. Pakistan has emphasized the importance of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan and called for an inclusive government that represents all Afghans³⁴. However, there are concerns about the implications of the Taliban's takeover on regional security and the potential for cross-border instability.

The relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban has evolved against the backdrop of geopolitical changes in the region, and the two countries now view each other differently than they did prior to 9/11 and the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan³⁵. Pakistan's security woes have been attributed to the assistance provided by militants in Afghanistan,

indirectly blaming the Afghan Taliban³⁶. The alliance between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban seems stronger than ever, and there are signs of integration across the Durand Line.

Tensions between Islamabad and Kabul continue to rise, with clashes along the disputed Afghanistan-Pakistan border increasing in frequency. Pakistan's security forces are facing direct attacks from the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), leading the government to complain about terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan³⁷. Despite multiple friction points, both sides are aware of the consequences of a further deterioration in relations, and Pakistan has called for giving the Afghan regime more political space³⁸.

Part II – Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Interactions

- **Regional Politics of Pakistan-Afghanistan (1960s till date):**

The regional politics of Pakistan-Afghanistan has been characterized by a complex interplay of historical ties, territorial disputes, security concerns, and geopolitical interests. Over the decades, the two neighboring countries have faced numerous challenges and opportunities in their bilateral relations.

1. Territorial Disputes:

The contentious issue of the Durand Line, a border demarcation imposed by the British in 1893, has been a longstanding point of contention between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghanistan has refused to recognize the Durand Line as a legitimate international border and has claimed Pashtun-inhabited areas within Pakistan. This dispute has been a recurring theme in their bilateral relations, contributing to tensions and

disagreements between the two countries.³⁹

2. Refugee Crisis:

Political instability, conflicts, and wars in Afghanistan have resulted in significant refugee flows into Pakistan. The influx of Afghan refugees, especially during the Soviet-Afghan War and the subsequent civil war, has had profound social, economic, and security implications for Pakistan. Hosting millions of refugees has posed challenges for Pakistan in terms of humanitarian assistance, infrastructure, and managing cross-border movements.

3. Support for Afghan Factions:

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have at times supported different factions within each other's territories to advance their interests. During the Soviet-Afghan War, Pakistan supported the Afghan resistance (Mujahideen) against the Soviet occupation, while Afghanistan accused Pakistan of backing certain factions during the Afghan civil war.

4. Geopolitical Considerations:

The region's geopolitics have also influenced Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Afghanistan's geographic location as a land bridge between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East has made it a focal point for major powers' interests. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have sought to balance their relations with regional and international actors, including the United States, China, Russia, and Iran.

⁴⁰

- **International Politics of Pakistan-Afghanistan (1960s till date):**

The international politics of Pakistan-Afghanistan has been shaped by the dynamics of the Cold War, the War on Terror, and efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. Various international actors have been involved in mediating conflicts, providing aid, and shaping the region's political landscape.

- 1. Cold War:**

During the Cold War era, Afghanistan's politics became entangled in the broader geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) saw Afghanistan becoming a battleground for the superpowers, with the United States supporting the Mujahideen resistance against the Soviet occupation. Pakistan played a critical role as a frontline state and a conduit for U.S. military aid to the Afghan resistance.

- 2. War on Terror:**

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the focus of international involvement in Afghanistan shifted to combating terrorism and ousting the Taliban regime, which had harbored Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. The U.S.-led invasion in 2001 and subsequent NATO military presence in Afghanistan reshaped the dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Pakistan faced challenges in managing cross-border militancy and was pressed by the international community to do more to combat terrorism.⁴¹

- 3. Peace Efforts and Regional Cooperation:**

International efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan have involved various multilateral forums

and initiatives. Conferences such as the Bonn Conference (2001) and the Moscow Format talks have aimed to bring together Afghan factions and regional stakeholders to find political solutions to the conflict.⁴²

- 4. China's Involvement:**

China's rising influence in the region has also impacted Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. China has sought to play a role in mediating between the Afghan government and the Taliban, as it is concerned about regional stability and the potential for terrorism spillover in its western region of Xinjiang.⁴³

Part III – Afghanistan and Pakistan International Relations

Pakistan Foreign Policy vis a vis Afghanistan:

The following is the short review of 2 phases of foreign policy of Pakistan, namely:

1. **Phase 1 (1958-1979)**
2. **Phase 2 (1979-present)**

Phase 1:

During the early years of Pakistan's independence, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan was marked by tension and disputes over issues such as border demarcation and the rights of Pashtun communities living on both sides of the border. The two countries also had differing views on regional and global affairs, which further complicated their relationship. Despite these challenges, there were also some positive developments in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan during this period. For example, in 1950, the two countries signed the **Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement**, which allowed for the free movement of goods and people between the two countries. This agreement helped to promote economic cooperation and trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁴⁴

The foreign policy of Pakistan and Afghanistan from President Ayub Khan to Prime Minister Imran Khan has evolved based on various factors, regional dynamics, and geopolitical considerations. Below is an overview of their foreign policy approaches during this period:

1. **President General Ayub Khan (1958-1969):**



Afghan King Zahir Shah and Pakistani President Ayub Khan conducted a joint review of the Punjab Regiment and Pakistan Air Force during the Afghan monarch's state visit to Rawalpindi on February 17, 1967.

During Ayub Khan's tenure, Pakistan pursued a pro-Western foreign policy and aligned itself closely with the United States during the early years of the Cold War. The United States saw Pakistan as a valuable ally in countering Soviet influence in the region. Ayub Khan's regime sought to strengthen ties with the Western bloc and enhance military cooperation with the U.S.

2. **President General Muhammad Yahya Khan (1969-1971):**



The relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan during Yahya Khan's presidency further strained due to the unfolding events of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Afghanistan supported the independence movement in East Pakistan, which ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. This period marked a significant deterioration in bilateral relations between the two countries.⁴⁵

3. **Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1971-1973):**



Sardar Mohammed Daoud Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who served as the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan, had a complex relationship with Afghanistan during his time in office. While there were some positive developments in the relationship between the two countries, there were also periods of tension and conflict. In 1973, Afghanistan's King Zahir Shah was overthrown in a coup, and the country became a republic. Bhutto was one of the first leaders to recognize the new Afghan government, and he visited Kabul in 1974 to meet with Afghan President Sardar Mohammed Daoud Khan. During this visit, the two leaders discussed issues such as trade, security, and cultural exchange, and they signed several agreements to promote cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan emerged in the late 1970s over the issue of Pashtun nationalism. Afghanistan accused Pakistan of supporting Pashtun separatist movements in Afghanistan, while Pakistan accused Afghanistan of supporting Pashtun separatist movements in Pakistan. These tensions eventually led to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which further complicated the relationship between the two countries.

During Bhutto's tenure, Pakistan continued to have strained relations with Afghanistan. The pro-Soviet communist regime in Afghanistan, which took power in 1978, further complicated the relationship between the two countries.

Worth noting that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was executed, by hanging, on April 4, 1979. His execution followed a controversial trial and verdict that found him guilty of conspiracy of committing murder of Advocate Ahmad Kasuri.

Bhutto's execution remains a deeply polarizing and contentious event in Pakistan's history. It marked the culmination of a power struggle and political turmoil in the country. The decision to execute Bhutto was made during the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq (read the next section). The circumstances surrounding Bhutto's trial and execution have been a subject of debate and scrutiny, both domestically and internationally, with many questioning the fairness of the judicial process.⁴⁶

4. President General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1978-1988):



General Zia-ul-Haq welcomed President Mohammad Daoud of Afghanistan at Islamabad airport on March 5, 1978.

Zia-ul-Haq's regime marked a critical period for Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan. After the Soviet invasion in 1979, Pakistan became deeply involved in supporting the Afghan Mujahideen, who resisted the Soviet occupation. It is said by the historic figures that the CIA and Saudi Arabia provided substantial military and financial assistance through Pakistan to the Afghan resistance.

During his time in office, Zia-ul-Haq supported the Afghan Mujahideen in their fight against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. This support included providing weapons, training, and safe havens for Afghan fighters in Pakistan.

The political analyst of the view that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked the beginning of a long and bloody conflict that lasted for over a decade. During this period, Pakistan became a major player in the conflict, and it played a key role in supporting the Afghan Mujahideen. The conflict also had a significant impact on the security situation in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, as violence and instability spread across the region.⁴⁷

Phase 2:

During the tenures of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and President Asif Ali Zardari, the foreign policy of Pakistan and Afghanistan was shaped by regional security challenges, internal dynamics, and evolving geopolitical circumstances. Below is an overview of their foreign policy approaches during this period, supported by relevant references:

1. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto (1988-1990, 1993-1996):



Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Turkish President Suleiman Demirel walk with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto at the 3rd Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) summit in Islamabad 15 December 1995. They engage in informal discussions during the second day. The photo, captured by AFP, features Bhutto in green attire. (Photo credit: Getty Images)

Benazir Bhutto served as the Prime Minister of Pakistan from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996. During her two terms, Bhutto's relationship with Afghanistan was marked by complex dynamics, shaped by regional and geopolitical considerations. In her first term, Bhutto faced the challenge of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which had a significant impact on Pakistan's security and regional stability. Bhutto's government supported the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union, providing them with arms, training, and logistical support. However, the

Afghan conflict also had negative consequences for Pakistan, including the influx of Afghan refugees and the rise of militant groups such as the Taliban.

In her second term, Bhutto's government recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, a decision that was criticized by many in the international community. Bhutto's government also faced challenges from ethnic clashes and regional tensions, as well as allegations of corruption and mismanagement. Despite these challenges, Bhutto's government made efforts to promote regional cooperation and address shared security challenges, such as terrorism and extremism.

Overall, Bhutto's relationship with Afghanistan was shaped by complex regional and geopolitical dynamics, with her government facing significant challenges and opportunities during her two terms. While her government supported the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union, it also recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan, a decision that had significant implications for regional stability. Despite these challenges, Bhutto's government made efforts to promote regional cooperation and address shared security challenges, highlighting the importance of collaboration and engagement in addressing the Afghanistan-Pakistan Security Puzzle.

3. President Ghulam Ishaq Khan (1988-1993):



March 1993 - Islamabad: Afghan PM Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Afghan Burhanuddin Rabbani with Ghulam Ishaq Khan, former President of Pakistan during a bilateral visit

During Ghulam Ishaq Khan's presidency, Pakistan continued to be involved in Afghanistan's internal affairs. The Soviet-Afghan War had ended, but the country was facing political turmoil with various Mujahideen factions vying for power.⁴⁸

4. Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif (1990-1993, 1997-1999):



August 26, 1999 Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif receives Afghan Foreign Minister Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund (R) in Islamabad. The Taliban announced Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund as the leader of their new government in Afghanistan on September 7, 2021.

Under Nawaz Sharif's leadership, Pakistan continued to seek better relations with Afghanistan. Sharif emphasized the importance of a stable Afghanistan for regional security and economic cooperation. During these periods, Pakistan continued to be involved in Afghanistan's internal affairs, supporting certain groups over others to advance its interests. Tensions and suspicions between the two countries persisted.

5. President General Syed Parvez Musharraf (1999-2008):



Afghanistan interim Prime Minister Hamid Karzai, right, welcomes Pakistan President Gen. Pervez Musharraf at Kabul International Airport in Afghanistan, on April 2, 2002. (Suzanne Plunkett/AP)

Foreign relations during Musharraf's regime were marked by Pakistan's strategic alignment with the U.S. in the War on Terror, efforts to balance regional relationships, and attempts at conflict resolution in South Asia. However, these years also saw complex challenges in Pakistan's relations with some countries particularly Afghanistan and India.⁴⁹ It's important to note that these dynamics evolved over time and were influenced by shifting geopolitical realities and regional conflicts. General Pervez Musharraf as the President of Pakistan, and considering the concurrent period in Afghanistan, there were several noteworthy developments in the foreign relations of both countries. Here are some key points:

I. Post-9/11 Alliance:

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, General Musharraf's government aligned Pakistan with the U.S. in the global War on Terror. Pakistan became a crucial ally in the U.S.-led coalition against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.⁵⁰

II. Afghanistan Relations:



President George W. Bush meets with Presidents Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, left, and Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan at the United Nations General Assembly Tuesday, Sept. 21, 2004

After the 9/11 attacks, the Taliban government was toppled, and President Hamid Karzai took the power introducing a new political system in Afghanistan was established.

Despite the cooperation with the U.S., there were complex dynamics in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. While Pakistan officially recognized the Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai, there were still allegations of Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban as well.

III. **Taliban Issue:**

Pakistan faced criticism for not doing enough to curb the activities of the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network, which were believed to operate from Pakistani territory. This issue strained relations with Afghanistan and the U.S.⁵¹

IV. **Kashmir Conflict:**

The Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan remained a major point of contention in the region during Musharraf's tenure. Despite efforts at peace talks and the 2003 ceasefire, tensions persisted.⁵⁸

V. **Balancing Act:**

Musharraf's government attempted to balance relations between the U.S. and China while maintaining its historical ties with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan also sought to enhance economic relations with countries in the Gulf region.⁵²

VI. **Regional Diplomacy:**

Pakistan played a role in facilitating the Bonn Agreement (2001) on Afghanistan and later the Afghan reconciliation process. It participated in regional forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and maintained relations with Central Asian states.⁵³

VII. **Indo-Pak Relations:**

There were efforts toward Indo-Pak rapprochement during Musharraf's regime, including the 2004 India-Pakistan peace process. This led to initiatives like the Composite Dialogue, aimed at resolving long-standing disputes, including Kashmir.⁵⁸

VIII. **U.S. Aid and Assistance:**

Pakistan received significant U.S. aid during this period, primarily for its support in the War on Terror. The aid was intended to bolster Pakistan's economy and strengthen its counterterrorism capabilities.⁵⁴

IX. **2007 State of Emergency:**

During General Pervez Musharraf's presidency in Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, the Chief Justice of Pakistan, was initially

suspended from his position by General Musharraf on March 9, 2007. He was eventually arrested on November 3, 2007. General Musharraf's government had been at odds with Chief Justice Chaudhry, primarily over issues related to his judicial independence and a case challenging Musharraf's eligibility to run for re-election while still serving as Chief of Army Staff. Chaudhry's arrest was seen as an attempt to curb judicial activism and ensure Musharraf's political survival. It triggered widespread protests by lawyers, civil society, and political activists who demanded Chaudhry's release and the restoration of the judiciary's independence.⁵⁵

On 3rd November 2007, General Pervez Musharraf, declared a state of emergency in Pakistan. He cited rising extremism and judicial interference in the government's policies as the primary reasons for the emergency. The declaration led to the suspension of the country's constitution, the removal of the judiciary's independence, and the imposition of severe restrictions on media. Many political leaders, lawyers, and civil society activists were arrested. The emergency declaration was met with widespread protests and international condemnation.⁵⁶

In this crucial time junction, with some permissible agreement with General Musharraf, Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan on October 18, 2007. Bhutto's return marked re-entry into Pakistani politics after several years in self-imposed exile. Her return was part of a power-sharing deal with Musharraf, with hopes of forming a political alliance against radicalism and extremism. Bhutto's arrival was met with both enthusiasm and concerns for her safety. Tragically, her return was marred by a suicide bomb attack on her convoy in Karachi on October 18, 2007, which resulted in a large number of casualties but left Bhutto unharmed. She continued her political activities in

the run-up to the 2008 elections. However, she was assassinated on December 27, 2007, in Rawalpindi, which further destabilizing Pakistan's political landscape.

These events, in the backdrop of the state of emergency, had profound implications for Pakistan's politics and security. The arrest of Chief Justice Chaudhry symbolized the erosion of judicial independence, while Benazir Bhutto's return and subsequent assassination contributed to political turbulence and uncertainty in the country. The period surrounding the state of emergency in 2007 remains a critical chapter in Pakistan's modern history, marked by political upheaval and complex developments. This state of emergency and its aftermath had significant political and legal implications in Pakistan's recent history. It marked a turbulent time in the country's politics and further complicated Pakistan's relations with the international community.⁶²

X. End of Musharraf's Regime:

The state of emergency lasted until 15th December 2007, when it was officially lifted due to domestic political pressures, including protests and legal challenges. Musharraf stepped down from his position as Chief of Army Staff on 28th November 2007 but remained as the President. Elections were held on 18th February 2008, leading Pervez Musharraf to resign from the post of President under impeachment pressure from the coalition government on August 18, 2008.⁶³

6. President Asif Ali Zardari (2008-2013):



Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai (L), Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari (C) and Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. - REUTERS/Mian Khursheed

During President Zardari's presidency, Pakistan aimed to improve bilateral relations with Afghanistan. The two countries signed various agreements, such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), to enhance economic cooperation and trade.⁶⁴

7. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (2013-2017):



Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (L) and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif shake hands at the Prime Minister House in Islamabad on November 15, 2014.

During Nawaz Sharif's third term as Pakistan's Prime Minister from June 2013 to July 2017, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations were marked by various developments. On May 12, 2015, President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan made his first official visit to Pakistan, signaling a positive shift in bilateral ties. The visit aimed to strengthen cooperation in various areas, including counterterrorism and economic development. However, challenges persisted, including border clashes and allegations of cross-border militancy. Additionally, Pakistan continued its efforts to facilitate peace talks

between the Afghan government and the Taliban, participating in initiatives like the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) alongside the United States, China, and Afghanistan.⁶⁵

8. Prime Minister Imran Khan (2018-2022):



Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan (L) and Afghan President Ashraf Ghani attend their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Kabul on November 19, 2020. (AFP)

Under Imran Khan's leadership, Pakistan expressed a commitment to pursuing peaceful relations with Afghanistan and supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Imran Khan emphasized the importance of a negotiated settlement to the conflict and sought to engage constructively with Afghanistan. Imran Khan's government and after his ouster from power, Pakistan and Afghanistan's foreign relations have been influenced by various factors, including the changing regional dynamics and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.⁶⁶ Here is a brief overview of the relationship during these periods:

I. Focus on Peace Process:

Imran Khan's government emphasized the importance of a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict and supported the initiation of a peace process involving the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan's interest in maintaining a good relationship with the Afghan government was driven by the need for

cooperation in addressing terrorism and security challenges along their shared border.⁶⁷

II. Efforts to Improve Trade and Connectivity:

Imran Khan expressed a desire for "open borders" with Afghanistan, like the European Union, and highlighted the importance of improving trade and commercial ties between the two countries to benefit their economies and reduce poverty.

III. Challenges in Cooperation:



Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Amir Khan Muttaqi calls on Prime Minister Imran Khan in Islamabad on November 12, 2021.

Despite the initial efforts to improve relations, there were challenges in cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the Pakistani government expressing dissatisfaction with the Afghan Taliban's support in fighting terrorism.⁶⁸

IV. US/NATO Withdrawal:

U.S. 'really messed it up' in Afghanistan, says Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan!

The withdrawal of US/NATO forces from Afghanistan has had a significant impact on the region and Pakistan's relations with key stakeholders, including Prime Minister Imran

Khan. Here's an analysis of the impact, reactions, and Pakistan's role during this time:

i. Impact on the Region:

The withdrawal has exposed the fragility of Pakistan-US relations, with growing concerns over Pakistan's role and its commitment to the relationship with the United States⁶⁹. Pakistan's official stance emphasizes a preference for a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan, advocating for a power-sharing arrangement reached after an intra-Afghan peace deal. Pakistan's historical role in supporting the mujahideen in the 1980s and serving as a safe haven for the Taliban insurgency has given it unusually strong leverage on both sides of the war, impacting the region's stability⁷⁰.

ii. Reactions and Quotations from Imran Khan:

Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed concerns about the relationship between the United States and Pakistan, describing it as "lopsided" and emphasizing the need to renegotiate the terms of engagement with Washington⁷⁰

Imran Khan has also highlighted the impact of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, stating that the United States "really messed it up" and expressing the need for a trading relationship with the US⁷¹.

iii. Pakistan's Role during the Withdrawal:

Pakistan has been navigating its stance on the evolving situation, emphasizing a preference for a peaceful outcome in Afghanistan and attempting to distance itself from the Taliban while advocating for a power-sharing arrangement.

In conclusion, the withdrawal of US/NATO forces from Afghanistan has had a complex and multifaceted impact on the region, with Pakistan's role and its relations with Imran Khan being central to the evolving dynamics.⁷³

9. Pakistan Democratic Alliance PDM (06 April 2022- 13 August 2023):



Pakistan's Minister of State Hina Rabbani Khar welcomed by the acting Afghan foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)]

1. Continued Importance of Good Relations:

Pakistan's new government, following Imran Khan's ouster, also recognized the significance of maintaining a good relationship with Afghanistan, considering their shared border and the need for cooperation in addressing security challenges.

2. Challenges in Cooperation Persist:

The Pakistani government expressed concerns about the Afghan Taliban's support in fighting terrorism, highlighting the need for improved cooperation between the two countries.

3. Focus on Regional Stability:

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have a shared interest in regional stability, and efforts to

address their differences and work towards a more cooperative relationship are crucial for the overall peace and security in the region.

Overall, the foreign policies of Pakistan and Afghanistan have been influenced by regional security concerns, the Soviet-Afghan War, internal dynamics in Afghanistan, and geopolitical interests of major powers. The relationship between the two countries has been marked by periods of cooperation and tensions, with ongoing efforts to find common ground and work towards regional stability and peace.

10. Anwaar Ul Haq Kakar - Interim Government (14 August 2023-Present):



ISLAMABAD: August 24 – A delegation of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam led by Senator Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri called on caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar.

The acting Caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan, Anwar ul-Haq Kakar, linked the government's decision to expel the Afghan refugees and asylum seekers to the Taliban-led government's inability to stop extremists⁷⁴. The Taliban leaders have denied giving shelter to the militants of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) or other groups and have reiterated that the country's territory is not used against any other state⁷⁵. However, Pakistan has experienced a 60% increase in terror incidents and a **500% rise** in suicide bombings since the Taliban returned to power in Kabul two years ago, killing nearly 2,300 Pakistanis. The strained relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is likely to further deteriorate, and vitriol on both sides could foreclose on any remaining opportunities to reach a negotiated settlement.⁷⁶

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has become more strained due to the forced expulsion of Afghan refugees from Pakistan.

As of November 1, 2023, the Pakistani interim government has asked Afghan refugees to leave the country, citing security concerns and the presence of undocumented foreigners, mostly Afghans, as a threat to national security. The government has announced a crackdown on undocumented foreigners and has started to arrest and deport individuals without proper documentation. The deadline for these "illegal" refugees and migrants to leave was set for October 31, 2023.

Pakistan is home to over four million Afghan migrants and refugees, with approximately 1.7 million of them being undocumented. The Afghan Ministry of Refugees has set up a high commission to assist forcibly returned Afghan refugees with temporary accommodations and other services, while the Taliban government has pledged to facilitate their rehabilitation. However, there are concerns about the impact of thousands of deportees on Afghanistan's struggling economy.⁷⁷

Human rights groups, the United Nations, and some former U.S. leaders have criticized Pakistan's decision, expressing concerns about the safety and well-being of the deported individuals. Amnesty International has called on the international community to help Pakistan with the cost of hosting Afghan refugees, highlighting the importance of education for many of these individuals.⁷⁸

The Pakistani government has stated that the 1.4 million Afghans registered as refugees will not be affected by the deportation efforts. The government is also setting up deportation centers in all four provinces to detain foreigners until they are sent back, with officials assuring that no one will be mistreated. However, there have been reports of Afghan refugees facing an

uncertain future and having to leave with nothing.^{78 79}

Pakistan's policy and actions:

Pakistan has started arresting and deporting Afghan refugees who missed the deadline to leave the country. The government has set up multiple deportation centers and has stated that those who are deported will not be mistreated.⁸⁰ However, there are reports of police harassment and abuse of both illegal and legal refugees. The UN and human rights organizations have criticized Pakistan's plan, expressing concern for the safety and well-being of the Afghan refugees.⁸¹

The situation in Afghanistan

The UNHCR and IOM have reported that 78% of Afghans returning from Pakistan cited fear of arrest as the reason for leaving. The uncertain future in Afghanistan is a significant concern for many Afghan refugees who have been living and working in Pakistan for years.^{82 83}

The role of the international community

Some analysts argue that the responsibility for Afghan refugees lies not only with Pakistan but also with the Western countries that should have done more to relocate those who worked for them before the Taliban takeover. The UNHCR has called for the protection of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and raised concerns about the deportation plan.⁸³

The potential for human rights violations

The UNHCR and human rights organizations believe that many of the Afghan refugees facing deportation will be at grave risk of human rights violations if returned to Afghanistan, including arbitrary arrest, detention, torture, and other inhuman treatment. The Pakistani government's use of threats, abuse, and detention to coerce

Afghan asylum seekers without legal status to return or face deportation has been criticized.

The impact on Afghan refugees

Many Afghan refugees in Pakistan face major financial losses, as the Pakistani government is limiting the amount of cash migrants can take out of the country. The closure of opportunities and the fear of deportation have had a significant mental and emotional toll on Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.⁸⁴

Considering these points, as a researcher or author, you should approach this issue with a focus on human rights, the potential for a humanitarian crisis, and the need for a coordinated international response to protect the rights and well-being of Afghan refugees.⁸⁵

Part III: Regional Politics & Foreign security complexed with the stake holders

The confluence of regional politics and foreign security interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan constitutes a multifaceted tapestry shaped by historical legacies, geopolitical imperatives, and contemporary strategic considerations. Against the backdrop of a shared border, these nations find themselves entwined in a complex interplay involving neighboring states, global powers, and various stakeholders. The enduring security challenges faced by both Afghanistan and Pakistan draw in regional actors, each with distinct interests and roles, creating a geopolitical landscape where the ambitions of nations converge and sometimes diverge. As we delve into this intricate dynamic, we unravel the influences that have sculpted the regional politics and foreign security strategies, examining the nuanced roles of stakeholders that contribute to the security puzzle of this critical South Asian region.

Regional Stake holders in this equation:

A general overview of the narratives and perspectives often expressed by these actors regarding Pakistan and Afghanistan's regional security and overall relations.

- **Pakistan:**

1. **India:**

Pakistan's interaction with India is characterized by a complex and largely hostile relationship rooted in historical and political events, most notably the partition of British India in 1947. The India-Pakistan border is one of the most militarized international boundaries in the world, and the two countries have a history of territorial disputes, particularly in the Kashmir region. Despite these tensions, both countries have recognized the importance of regional collaboration and have attempted to foster diplomatic ties.⁸⁶ For instance, they have participated in various bilateral and multilateral forums, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).⁸⁷ However, their contentious rivalry and mistrust have hindered substantial progress in economic, environmental, and security cooperation.

Fostering cooperation between India and Pakistan remains challenging due to historical disputes, leadership mistrust, and nuclear arsenals. The potential for collaboration between the two countries and the promotion of stability in the South Asian region depend on their joint efforts and commitment to addressing bilateral tensions. If India and Pakistan can acknowledge the prospective advantages of collaboration and undertake tangible measures to foster peace, they have the potential to serve

as a noteworthy model for global cooperation.

2. Iran:

The relationship between Pakistan and Iran is characterized by a mix of cooperation and competition. Both countries have long-standing relationships and have cooperated on various topics, including the Afghan peace process and the fight against terrorism, due to their shared interest in fostering regional stability. However, the relationship between Iran and Pakistan has faced certain difficulties, particularly due to the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which has occasionally strained ties. Both nations have competed for influence in the region, leading to occasional conflicts. Despite these challenges, positive changes have occurred, contributing to the relationship's improvement. The two nations have recognized the necessity of cooperation for ensuring regional security and have attempted to negotiate regional issues to maintain peace and avoid larger crises. However, the relationship between Pakistan and Iran is complex due to the diverse character of geopolitics. Iran's strained ties with the West, particularly the United States, and Pakistan's strategic alliances with the US and Saudi Arabia have occasionally resulted in differences in their stances on regional and international matters. The triangular interactions between Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia have further complicated the relationship, as Pakistan attempts to maintain close ties with Saudi Arabia without upsetting Iran. The literature on Pakistan–Iran relations emphasizes the impact of regional and domestic security issues on this relationship. Pakistan's foreign and security policies towards Iran are influenced by the Indian variable, while Iran's relationship with Pakistan is similarly impacted by the Saudi

variable. The disordering of the Afghan political environment and the involvement of different regional actors have connected the geopolitics of the Middle East with South Asia, further influencing the Pakistan–Iran relationship. The lack of politico-economic engagement between the two countries has been a core issue, as it has been challenging to bypass their national security concerns and the sectarian connection between the two sides. Additionally, Pakistan's proximity with Saudi Arabia and Iran's engagement with India have remained troublesome for the bilateral relationship. The relationship between Iran and Pakistan improved after the removal of the Taliban in 2002, but tensions remain. Pakistan has been under a strong influence of Saudi Arabia in its competition with Shia majority Iran for influence across the broader Islamic world, which it already has in its allied nations Lebanon and Syria.⁸⁸ Iran considers northern and western Afghanistan as its sphere of influence since its population is Persian Dari speaking. The regions that comprise today's Iran and Pakistan have been under the rule of contiguous Eurasian polities at various points in history, as Pakistan straddles an intermediary zone between the Iranian Plateau and Indian subcontinent. However, disputes over trade and political position have led to difficulties in their relationship.⁸⁹ While Pakistan's foreign policy maintains balanced relations with Saudi Arabia, the United States, and the European Union, Iran tends to warn against it and has raised concerns about Pakistan's absolute backing of the Taliban during the fourth phase of the civil war in Afghanistan in the last years of the 20th century.⁹⁰

In summary, the relationship between Pakistan and Iran is multifaceted, influenced by regional and domestic

security issues, geopolitical complexities, and the involvement of other regional actors. The historical, political, and security dynamics continue to shape their interactions, with both cooperation and competition characterizing their relationship.

3. China:

Pakistan's regional interaction with China is characterized by a strong and multifaceted relationship that encompasses various areas of cooperation. Established in May 1951, diplomatic ties between the two neighbouring states have transformed into a strong friendship and partnership, with both countries seeking to assert their role in regional and international arenas.⁹¹ China and Pakistan maintain a strong relationship that is credited as a threshold alliance. Both sides have formed a strong bond as they sought to assert their role in regional and international arenas. Pakistan faced two full-scale wars in the early decades (in 1965 and 1971) and received critical and much-needed support from China, which cemented the bilateral relationship. China's support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, notwithstanding its changing stance on the dispute, and its decision to fund infrastructure projects in the disputed areas exhibit the depth of its partnership with Pakistan.

In the early 2000s, Beijing and Islamabad broadened their ties by agreeing to develop Pakistan's Gwadar Port and signing a free trade agreement in 2006. The 2015 launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) further strengthened their relationship, with CPEC effectively improving Pakistan's infrastructure and boosting its socio-economic development. Pakistan is the largest recipient of Chinese arms, acquiring almost 40 percent of Chinese arms exports. In terms of military collaborations,

military interactions between China and Pakistan during 2017 and 2021 surpassed China-Russia military engagements, making Pakistan's military the top collaborator with the PLA during this period.⁹²

China plays a crucial role in maintaining a balance of power in South Asia. Pakistan is the largest recipient of Chinese arms, acquiring almost 40 percent of Chinese arms exports. In terms of military collaborations, military interactions between China and Pakistan during 2017 and 2021 surpassed China-Russia military engagements, making Pakistan's military the top collaborator with the PLA during this period.⁹³

In summary, Pakistan's regional interaction with China is marked by a strong and multifaceted relationship that encompasses various areas of cooperation, including military, economic, and diplomatic ties. Both countries have a history of supporting each other in times of conflict and working together to assert their roles in regional and international arenas.

4. Russia:

Pakistan's regional interaction with Russia has evolved significantly over the years, marked by a complex history and a recent warming of relations. After the Soviet Union's troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, relations began to normalize with Pakistan. In the wake of the fall of communism, Russian-Pakistan relations rapidly improved. The relationship was further strengthened after the September 11, 2001, attacks, when Pakistan denounced the Taliban and joined the NATO coalition to hunt down jihadist organizations and al-Qaeda. This decision led to a significant improvement in Russia-Pakistan relations. The two countries have agreed to enhance high-level contacts

and closely coordinate on regional and international developments. Russia has played an integral role in easing tensions between India and Pakistan, particularly during the 2001 Indo-Pakistan nuclear standoff. The relationship has also seen an increase in military cooperation, with Russia delivering four Mi-35 gunship helicopters to Pakistan under a landmark Defence Cooperation Agreement signed in 2014. However, it is important to note that Pakistan does not fall into the first, second, or third tier of Russia's important relationships, as seen in the "The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," published by the Russian Foreign Ministry in early 2023. While the relationship has seen improvements, it is essential to judge relations by the quality and quantity of interactions, engagements, and shared objectives.⁹⁴

In summary, Pakistan's regional interaction with Russia has seen a significant improvement, with both countries aiming to forge a long-term multi-dimensional strategic partnership. The relationship encompasses various areas of cooperation, including trade, energy, culture, defence, security, and people-to-people contacts. The two countries have a shared interest in regional stability and harbour similar aspirations for regional peace and security.

5. United States of America:

Pakistan and the United States have had a long and complex relationship since Pakistan's independence in 1947. During the Cold War, Pakistan allied itself with the Western Bloc led by the United States against the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union. Following the 1958 Pakistani military coup, President Muhammad Ayub Khan established a strong military alliance with the United

States. During the Bangladesh Liberation War and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, the United States aided Pakistan. However, the relationship has been described as a "roller coaster" due to periods of close coordination and deep bilateral estrangement.

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship is broad-based and profoundly important for both countries, the region, and the world. The United States is Pakistan's largest single export market and one of Pakistan's largest sources of foreign investment. Trade and investment relations between the two countries have been growing, with the U.S. government organizing business-to-business trade delegations and providing technical assistance. Thousands of Pakistanis have studied in the United States and returned to Pakistan to assume key roles in business and government, while U.S. companies employ hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis.

The U.S. and Pakistan have a history of working together on counterterrorism and border security, and the United States has been urging Pakistan to take decisive action against terrorist groups. The U.S. and Pakistan have been involved in regional diplomacy related to Afghanistan, with the U.S. supporting Pakistan's efforts in stabilizing the country. The U.S. has also provided humanitarian aid to Pakistan during crises such as the Kashmir earthquake of 2005 and the floods of 2010 and 2011.⁹⁵

In recent years, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has faced challenges, including the fallout from the Afghanistan withdrawal and the Taliban takeover. However, there have been efforts to broaden the bilateral relationship beyond security concerns and focus on areas such as trade, regional integration, and climate change. In February 2023, high-level U.S. government officials visited

Pakistan to support the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, and the Pakistani commerce minister visited Washington to hold meetings under the U.S.-Pakistan Trade and Investment Framework.

6. Saudi Arabia:

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a long history of cultural, religious, and economic ties that date back centuries. These ties have formed the foundation for a strong relationship between the two countries, characterized by mutual cooperation and support in various fields, including economic, social, and humanitarian aspects.

Key aspects of the relationship include:

- I. **Historical ties:** Both countries have a shared history that spans centuries, with common cultural and religious roots. Pakistan is the only state founded on Islamic identity while Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of the Prophet (PBUH) and home to the two holiest sites of Islam, Quran and Sunnah, which play a significant role in the constitutional framework of both countries.
- II. **Economic cooperation:** Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a history of economic cooperation, with both countries benefiting from trade and investment opportunities. Saudi Arabia gave full support to Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965.
- III. **Humanitarian assistance:** Saudi Arabia has provided significant humanitarian aid to Pakistan during various crises, including floods and earthquakes. This assistance has taken the form of food, medical supplies, and other forms of relief, as well as airlifts of humanitarian supplies, land convoys

of supplies, and the provision of medical facilities.

- IV. **Religious connections:** Both countries have a strong religious connection, as they share the same Islamic faith. This connection has led to a close relationship between the two countries, with both nations supporting each other in times of need and crisis.
- V. **Political cooperation:** Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have a history of political cooperation, working together on various issues, including regional security and stability. This cooperation has been characterized by mutual respect and a shared commitment to promoting regional peace and stability.
- VI. **Military cooperation:** The military forces of both countries have a history of close cooperation, with joint military exercises and training missions. This cooperation has helped to strengthen the ties between the two nations and has contributed to their ability to work together on various regional security issues.⁹⁶

In recent years, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have continued to strengthen their ties, with both countries exploring new opportunities for economic and cultural cooperation. This includes the potential for increased trade, investment, and collaboration in various fields, such as energy, technology, and education.

- **Afghanistan:**

1. **India:**

Afghanistan's regional interactions with India have been historically

significant, rooted in shared cultural ties and mutual interests. The two countries have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links, which has been further strengthened by the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in October 2011. This agreement encompasses various areas, including assistance in rebuilding Afghanistan's infrastructure and institutions, education, technical assistance, investment in natural resources, and support for an Afghan-led, broad-based process of peace and reconciliation. India has also been involved in numerous development projects in Afghanistan, such as the construction of highways, parliament buildings, and power projects, as well as providing training for Afghan police officers, diplomats, and civil servants. However, India's growing influence in Afghanistan has been viewed as a threat by Pakistan, leading to regional rivalries and concerns about stability in the war-torn country. Despite the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, India has maintained a careful balancing act, seeking to build pragmatic, if not cooperative, relations with the group, while continuing to provide developmental assistance and maintain goodwill among ordinary Afghans. Overall, Afghanistan's regional interactions with India have been characterized by historical, cultural, and strategic ties, as well as India's significant involvement in Afghanistan's development and reconstruction efforts.

2. Iran:

Afghanistan's regional interactions with Iran have been multifaceted, encompassing trade, economic development, and geopolitical dynamics. Iran and Afghanistan share an extensive border region, making them major trading partners and facilitating economic cooperation. Iran

has played a pivotal role in Afghanistan's post-Taliban development, providing foreign direct investment, assistance in critical national infrastructure, road construction, energy supplies, and agricultural and communications development. Additionally, Iran shares ethnic, linguistic, and religious links with millions of Afghan Shia, particularly the Hazara community, residing in central and northern regions of Afghanistan. Despite these positive connections, Iran's relationship with the Taliban has been complex, with Iranian-made armaments discovered in the hands of Afghan Taliban fighters, raising questions about Tehran's overall strategy in Afghanistan. The two countries have also faced tensions over shared water resources, particularly the Helmand River, which passes through Afghanistan before flowing into Iran. One of the most contentious issues between the two countries has been the sharing of water resources, particularly the Helmand River, which is a critical source of drinking water, irrigation, and fishing for both countries. The dispute over the Helmand River intensified in 2021 with the opening of the Kamal Khan Dam in Afghanistan's Chahar Burjak district, which Iran claims will interrupt the water supply that feeds the Hamoun wetlands. The situation has been further complicated by the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, with Iran and the Taliban bumping heads on transboundary water issues. In May 2023, two Iranian security personnel and a Taliban fighter were killed in a border clash, escalating tensions between the two neighbors. The dispute has been ongoing for decades, with both countries accusing each other of violating water rights and taking a belligerent stance on the sharing of water supplies. Despite these tensions, Iran has played a pivotal role in Afghanistan's post-Taliban development, providing foreign direct

investment, assistance in critical national infrastructure, road construction, energy supplies, and agricultural and communications development. Overall, Afghanistan's regional interactions with Iran have been characterized by both collaboration and undercurrents of friction, with the Helmand River dispute being a significant point of contention between the two countries. Overall, Iran's strategic interest in Afghanistan is motivated by ideology, economic expansion, and security concerns, leading to a relationship characterized by both collaboration and undercurrents of friction.

3. **Russia:**

Afghanistan's regional interactions with Russia have been influenced by historical ties, geopolitical considerations, and strategic interests. During the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), Afghanistan became a focal point in the broader Cold War struggle. The Soviet Union, seeking to expand its sphere of influence, intervened in Afghanistan to support a communist government facing resistance from Afghan mujahideen fighters. This period witnessed a complex interplay of regional dynamics, with the United States and Pakistan supporting the Afghan resistance against the Soviet forces. In the post-Soviet era, Russia maintained diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, navigating the country's evolving political landscape. Economic interests, counterterrorism efforts, and regional stability have been central to Russia's engagement with Afghanistan. The two nations share concerns about the threats posed by extremism and drug trafficking, leading to collaborative efforts on security issues.

Moreover, Russia has been part of multilateral initiatives involving

Afghanistan, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO provides a platform for regional cooperation, addressing shared challenges and fostering economic integration. Russia's involvement reflects a broader strategy of engaging with Central Asian nations, with Afghanistan occupying a pivotal place in the regional security puzzle.

4. **China:**

Afghanistan's regional interactions with China have evolved as both nations recognize the strategic importance of cooperation in various domains. China has increasingly played a significant role in Afghanistan's economic development and regional stability. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure and economic development project initiated by China, has extended its reach into Afghanistan. This initiative aims to enhance connectivity and trade routes, benefiting both Afghanistan and China.

Economic collaboration between Afghanistan and China has expanded through investments in infrastructure projects, including energy, transportation, and telecommunications. The China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Cooperation framework further underscores the importance of regional connectivity for economic growth.

Beyond economic ties, China has also been involved in diplomatic efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. As a neighboring nation, China has participated in various multilateral forums and discussions concerning Afghanistan's future,

emphasizing the need for an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Security cooperation has become increasingly relevant, with both countries sharing concerns about terrorism and extremism. China's involvement in the Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (QCCM) on Counter-Terrorism with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan reflects a collaborative approach to address common security challenges.

5. United States of America:

Afghanistan's relationship with the United States has been central to its recent history, particularly in the context of the U.S. military intervention that began in 2001. The U.S. has played a significant role in Afghanistan's political, economic, and security landscape. Initially driven by the need to counter terrorism and dismantle the Taliban regime, the U.S. engagement evolved into a nation-building effort.

The United States has been a major contributor to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development, investing in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Moreover, the U.S. has been a key partner in Afghan security, training Afghan forces and conducting joint counterterrorism operations. The Bilateral Security Agreement signed in 2014 outlined the U.S. commitment to supporting Afghanistan's stability post-NATO withdrawal.

However, the U.S. presence has also been a source of contention, with challenges ranging from allegations of civilian casualties during military operations to questions about the effectiveness of nation-building efforts. The withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2021 marked a significant shift in the

dynamics, leading to the Taliban's swift return to power.

This complex relationship has been marked by both cooperation and challenges, reflecting the intricacies of external involvement in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

6. Saudi Arabia:

Afghanistan's regional interactions with Saudi Arabia have historically been characterized by diplomatic engagements, economic ties, and cultural exchanges. Saudi Arabia has been a prominent supporter of Afghanistan's reconstruction and development efforts, contributing to various infrastructure projects and humanitarian initiatives. The Kingdom has played a role in fostering diplomatic ties and participating in regional forums focused on stability in Afghanistan.

Economically, Saudi Arabia has contributed to Afghanistan's development through investments in sectors such as energy and education. The cultural ties between the two nations have been strengthened through educational exchanges, scholarships, and cultural programs. Saudi Arabia has been involved in supporting educational institutions and initiatives to enhance human capital in Afghanistan.

Additionally, both countries have shared concerns about regional security, particularly in the context of counterterrorism efforts. Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia have engaged in discussions on how to address common security challenges, reflecting a shared interest in promoting stability in the region.

Part VI: Narratives of Regional & International Leaders on this equation:

Some regional leaders and foreign experts and their sayings on the Pakistan and Afghanistan security issue:

1. Narendra Modi: Indian Prime Minister,

"India stands with Afghanistan in ensuring security and rebuilding the country."

2. Recep Tayyip Erdogan: Turkish President,

"We will continue to support Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism and in its efforts to achieve peace and stability."

3. Xi Jinping: Chinese President,

"China supports Afghanistan in achieving peace and stability and will work with the international community to help Afghanistan in its reconstruction efforts."

4. Mohammad bin Salman: Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia,

"We support the efforts of the Afghan government to combat terrorism and extremism, and we stand with the Afghan people in their pursuit of peace and stability."

5. Abdullah Abdullah: Chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan,

"We are committed to a peaceful, stable, and prosperous Afghanistan, and we will continue to work with our regional and international partners to achieve this goal."

6. Richard Holbrooke: Former US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan,

"We're not leaving Afghanistan. We're staying and building and fighting, together with Afghans who want the same things we do."

7. Hillary Clinton: Former US Secretary of State,

"We know that if Afghanistan were to revert to the Taliban, it would be a direct threat to our security."

In a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations on **December 15, 2003**, Hillary Clinton stated that the United States had made al Qaeda [2]. She said,

"September 11th gave us the opportunity as well as the obligation to do what there had been no domestic or international consensus to do before we were attacked on our own shores: to go into Afghanistan and to try to root out both the Taliban and al Qaeda."

This statement suggests that the U.S. had not previously rooted out al Qaeda before the attacks on September 11th, 2001.

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8. Imran Khan: Pakistani Prime Minister,

"Pakistan is committed to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process, which is the only viable path to a peaceful and stable Afghanistan."

9. Hamid Karzai: Former President of Afghanistan,

"The war on terrorism is not in the Afghan villages. It is in the sanctuaries, it is in the training grounds, it is in the motivation centers outside Afghanistan."

10. Ashraf Ghani: Former President of Afghanistan,

"Peace with the Taliban is not possible without a national consensus."

11. John Kerry: Former US Secretary of State,

"The United States is committed to a strong and enduring partnership with Afghanistan."

12. Kofi Annan: Former Secretary-General of the United Nations,

"Pakistan is a country of great potential and promise, and we are committed to supporting its efforts to build a stable and prosperous future."

13. Barack Obama: Former US President,

"We will disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaida, while preventing Afghanistan from again serving as a base for terrorists."

14. Stephen Cohen: Brookings Institution Senior Fellow,

"The United States has been too close to Pakistan for too long, and it has been too distant from India for too long."

Part V. Pakistan Future Inclusion with Afghanistan's Security Puzzle?

Pakistan's future inclusion in Afghanistan's security puzzle has been a topic of discussion for many years. Here are some key points and references that shed light on this issue:

1. Pakistan's security concerns:

Pakistan has long sought to exclude Indian influence from Afghanistan, considering it part of its security perimeter. This has led to a complex relationship between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, with each country trying to secure its own interests in the region.

Strategic depth: In the past, Pakistan has used its support for the anti-Soviet mujahideen and later the Taliban to ensure that in the event of a conflict with India, Afghanistan would provide Pakistan with support and use of its land and airspace if needed. This was referred to as the quest for "strategic depth".

2. Bilateral relationship with the United States:

Pakistan has recognized the need to redefine its bilateral relationship with the United States, which was previously focused on Afghanistan, as the U.S. withdrawal from that country drew close. Pakistan's government has pitched the need for a comprehensive relationship with the United States, based on "geo-economics" - trade, investment, and connectivity.

3. Distrust and challenges:

Distrust between the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, born out of the last four decades of the U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan triangle, will

take time to overcome, despite attempts to broaden the relationship. The Biden administration's approach to other neighbors, such as India, while restricting, to some extent, its relationship with Pakistan.

- **Future development and integration as of 2023**

Desolate but rich in mineral resources and hydrocarbons, Baluchistan is important to Pakistan's future development. This province provides Pakistan with opportunities for integration into its national politics and administration, as well as assured access to Pakistani ports and transit facilities for Afghanistan.

The future inclusion of Pakistan and Afghanistan in each other's security puzzles can be analyzed through the following scenarios:

1. Pakistan's Decision on Afghan Refugees:

Pakistan has been hosting a large population of Afghan refugees since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. However, the Pakistani government has recently called for all undocumented migrants to leave the country by November 1 or face deportation [2]. According to Moniza Kakar human rights lawyer representing Afghan Refugees in Pakistan's Court, *in recent months, though, she's noted a sharp increase in her caseload—in Karachi alone, more than 1,500 Afghans have faced arrest since September, 80% of whom were legally registered refugees.*

The uptick in the city comes as Pakistan's government has called for all undocumented migrants to leave the country by November 1 or face deportation. The decision largely stands to impact the 1.7 million Afghan refugees who live in the country without documentation, though experts tell TIME that

many Afghans with proper documentation have found themselves swept up in the enforcement as well. (2)

However, since the Taliban administration has urged Pakistan to give undocumented Afghans more time, the above claim is in question.

2. Pakistan's Decision on Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP):

Pakistan has accused India of to fuel unrest in Pakistan through TTP, which orchestrates attacks on Pakistan from inside Afghanistan [1]. The decision on TTP could impact the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the broader regional dynamics in the region.

3. Reaction of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to Pakistan's Decision:

The Taliban's reaction to Pakistan's decisions on Afghan refugees and TTP could be crucial in shaping the future of the region. Engaging India could be a sign that Pakistan no longer wields a preponderant influence in the Taliban-led Afghanistan [1]. The Taliban's response to Pakistan's decisions could determine the extent to which the two countries' security puzzles interlock and the potential for regional instability. If the Taliban perceives Pakistan's decisions as a threat, it may escalate tensions between the two countries, further complicating the regional security landscape.

4. Narcotic Drug Production and Border Security:

According to UNODC the production of Narcotics Drugs in Afghanistan and transboundary trafficking is a serious challenge to the regional security. There is high expectation from the new government of Islamic Emirates of

Afghanistan to combat seriously with this global menace. A vital component to prevent and counter transnational organized crime, terrorism, and illicit trafficking is enhanced cross-border cooperation. In this regard security cooperation of Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as other regional neighbours, Iran in particular, is essential. (6)

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Part VII:

Conclusion:

- The recent developments in Afghanistan, including the Taliban's takeover of the country, have added new dimensions to the security puzzle. The Taliban's unity and cohesiveness have been a significant factor in their success, and any peaceful resolution to Afghanistan's conflict will depend on inclusiveness.
- The Afghanistan-Pakistan Security Puzzle has been a complex and multifaceted challenge, with both countries experiencing unique opportunities and challenges over time. The occupations of Afghanistan by Soviet Union and then US/NATO have had serious impacts on this security puzzle.
- Narcotics Drug production in Afghanistan and illicit trafficking to other countries around the globe is a serious regional security challenge particularly for the transit countries.
- The future of their security puzzle will depend on the independent decision made by both countries with political determination on mutual security with specific attention to combat extremism and terrorism.
- By actively engaging with other regional actors, such as India, Iran, China, and Russia, they could contribute to enhancing regional security which is pivotal for sustainable development.

Recommendations:

- Both Afghanistan and Pakistan should work towards fostering stronger ties with each other and other regional actors, focusing on areas of mutual interest such as economic development, trade, and security cooperation. This could involve regular diplomatic meetings, joint development projects, and initiatives to address shared security challenges.
- Afghanistan and Pakistan should collaborate to address shared security challenges, such as terrorism, extremism, and the threat posed by groups like TTP. This could involve sharing intelligence, coordinating border security efforts, and implementing joint counter-terrorism strategies.
- Afghan Government is expected to be inclusive, to promote policies that respect human rights, uphold the rule of law, and promote regional stability. This could involve supporting institutions such as the Election Supervision and Monitoring Authority for Afghanistan (ESMA) and the Independent Election Commission (IEC) in Afghanistan, and promoting policies that respect human rights, uphold the rule of law, and promote regional stability. The applicable provisions are expected to be drawn for Pakistan.

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