

# Trajectory of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

## Post-August 2021

### Policy Brief

*In August 2021, the world witnessed the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Soon after assuming control of Kabul, the Taliban showed their willingness to uphold the country's relationship with the international community, including its neighbors. In this regard, Pakistan offered its good offices to the group in a bid to enhance its engagement with the international community. However, over the years, the trajectory of bilateral relations between the two neighbors encountered some hurdles, leading to the emergence of various issues. Given the re-emergence of such issues, this policy brief aims to highlight the mutual challenges that are adding to the instability and irritants in bilateral relations after August 2021. In this regard, an attempt has been made to understand Afghan culture in the light of historical and social dimensions. Subsequently, this policy brief examines the challenges while deliberating upon the issue of border management with its effects on Pakistan's security situation and the movement of people across the border, including the return of Afghan refugees. From the perspective of the current trajectory of bilateralism and its effects on transit trade, rule of law in the border areas, and transition of distrust and misperception, the interim setup is prone to the ingress of external actors, specifically Indian aspirations in Afghanistan with reference to Chanakya stratagem and Ajit Doval doctrine. Lastly, following the commentary on the process of foreign policy formulation and its execution vis-à-vis Afghanistan, a set of recommendations is provided with suggestions to undertake suitable steps to manage the bilateral relations and put them on a positive trajectory.*

#### Understanding Afghan Culture

It is common knowledge that no major powers involved in Afghanistan were aware or fully in knowledge of Afghan history, culture, and geography. Therefore, before discussing the challenges in the bilateral relations of the countries, it is better to have an overview of the Afghan culture and society. Even if the Afghan social fabric is divided along ethnic lines and geography, their common outlook towards the invaders is unified and focused on the common cultural bondages. The phenomenon of in-group and out-group morality is being practiced, but their approach towards the out-group is more violent, aggressive, and out of moral bounds. Though their in-group morality in the ethnic domains is also abrasive, the Afghan culture binds them to the mantra of one Afghan. Afghanistan's history and culture are also absorption of co-ethnicities even in the realm of

common religion and culture beyond geographical boundaries.

Being a tribal society, the people of Afghanistan are proud of their culture and way of life. Even though there are tribal and ethnic rivalries, the Afghans have always upheld their national identity and shown resistance to any imposed change in it. This is the reason that over the centuries, the Afghans have developed two principal traits to deal with any challenge. First, whenever the Afghans were drawn into the competition of great powers, they effectively utilized their resistive skills to not let any outsiders rule over their country. Second, by utilizing Afghanistan's position as a gateway of trade, the Afghans have honed the capability of skilled traders. Lately, the signing of the Doha Agreement with the US and the subsequent rise of the Taliban to power

further shows that the Afghans possess the capability and skill of astute diplomats as well.

While it is important for any country to keep the Afghans’ tribal principles in view and recognize their capabilities while dealing with them, it is also important to recognize that the Taliban have been able to maintain a relatively peaceful environment in the country. This is not only because the group left the path of violence, but also due to its relevance with and understanding of the Afghan societal norms. On the

other hand, since the Taliban operate both as a tribal entity as well as a security-oriented group, they have relatively little experience in providing services to the people under their rule. Likewise, it should be kept in view that the majority of the infrastructure and other development projects in Afghanistan are currently being funded by international organizations. Thus the virtual economic stability in Afghanistan owes to an extent to the inflow of dollars as the US alone has given \$2.8 billion between October 2021 and March 2024.<sup>1</sup>

**US Appropriations for Afghanistan Assistance – October 1, 2021, to March 31, 2024 (Million)**

Funding Category	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	Total
Humanitarian	\$1,077.69	\$656.20	\$237.88	\$1,971.77
Development	\$217.76	\$185.85	\$11.33	\$414.94
Agency Operations	\$229.19	\$57.41	\$27.82	\$314.43
Security	\$100.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$100.00
Total	\$1,624.65	\$899.45	\$277.03	\$2,801.13

Source: Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)<sup>2</sup>

**Challenges to Pakistan-Afghanistan Relationship**

***Border Management and Cross-Border Terrorism***

The issue of border management has become one of the principal challenges between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ranging from issues of cross-border terrorism to the return of Afghan refugees, the situation on the border has a direct as well as indirect impact on the bilateral relations of both countries. One of the fundamental challenges is that the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is captive to cross-border terrorism. Despite showing their capability to curb violence and capacity to bring stability inside Afghanistan, the Taliban interim government has been unable to thwart cross-border terrorism emanating from their soil, thus putting Pakistan at the forefront of bearing the brunt of terrorist activities.

Since August 2021, there has been a significant uptick – over 70 percent<sup>3</sup> – in the number of terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. This is partially attributed to Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is using its bondage and ideology with the Afghan Taliban for its operations in Pakistan. As per the UN, with a force of 6,000 to 6,500 fighters, TTP is the “largest terrorist group” in Afghanistan, and the Afghan Taliban do not consider them terrorists.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the resurgence of terrorist groups, which are using Afghanistan as a platform to attack Pakistan, has caused a rift between Islamabad and Kabul. The presence of TTP on Afghan soil with the covert cum-active support of the Afghan cadre-in-arms is a serious threat to Pakistan’s peace and economic stability.

<sup>1</sup> “63<sup>rd</sup> Quarterly Report to the United States Congress,” SIGAR, April 30, 2024, <https://www.sigar.mil/interactive-reports/sigar-quarterly-report-2024-04-30/>.

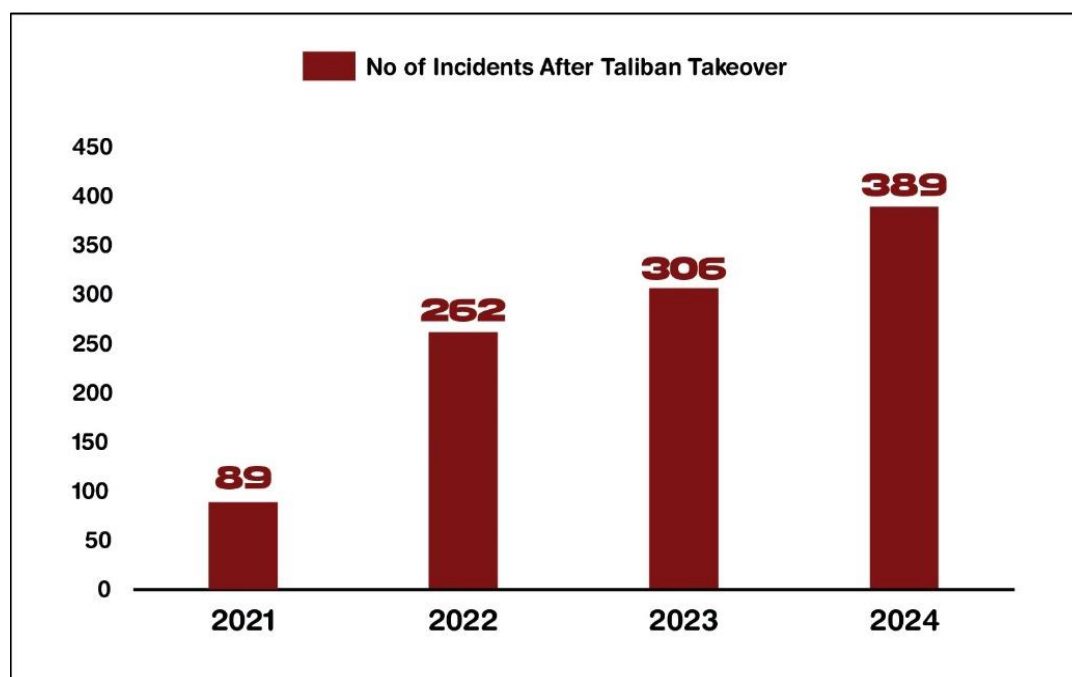
<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Terror attacks increased by 73 percent in Pakistan since Taliban takeover,” PIPS, May 31, 2023, <https://www.pakpips.com/article/7646>.

<sup>4</sup> Ayaz Gul, “UN: Afghan Taliban increase support for anti-Pakistan TTP terrorists,” VoA, July 11, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-afghan-taliban-increase-support-for-anti-pakistan-ttp-terrorists/7694324.html>.



## Terrorist Incidents after the Afghan Taliban Takeover (Year-by-Year)<sup>5</sup>



Source: Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)<sup>6</sup>

### Return of Afghan Refugees

Subsequently, another challenge between the two countries is the return of Afghan refugees, who have been hosted by Pakistan for over four decades. During this time, on many occasions, many Afghans took advantage of the porous border to enter Pakistan without legal documents. To repatriate such illegal migrants, in September 2023, Pakistan announced its “Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan,” which not only targeted Afghans but also took action against illegal migrants of non-Afghan origin. However, regarding the legally residing Afghans,<sup>7</sup> who have the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards – the validity of which was till June 30, 2024 – their stay has been extended for a period of one more year, i.e. till June 30, 2025.<sup>8</sup>

Under the repatriation plan, from September 2023 to June 2024, Pakistan noted that almost 95 percent of more than 610,000 Afghan refugees – both documented and undocumented – returned to their country voluntarily.<sup>9</sup> The UNHCR and IOM also noted that of the total 610,751 Afghans, who went back to Afghanistan from September 15, 2023, till June 1, 2024, only 32,148 (5 percent) were deported by Pakistan’s authorities. However, citing reasons for their voluntary return, 89 percent of the total undocumented refugees and Afghan Citizen Cardholders (ACC) called the fear of detention as a reason for their return. Similarly, among those returnees having PoR cards, 32 percent termed social and economic challenges and 17 percent cited strict border entry requirements as reasons behind their return to Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The trajectory of terrorist attacks includes those carried out by TTP, BLA, BLF, and others since 2021.

<sup>6</sup> “Digital Database on Conflict and Security,” PIPS, August 27, 2024, <https://www.pakpips.com/about-pips-database>.

<sup>7</sup> Legally residing Afghans include those having Proof of Registration (PoR) cards or Afghan Citizen Card (ACC). The Government of Pakistan, under its “Illegal Foreigners’ Repatriation Plan,” only targeted those Afghans having neither PoR card nor ACC, thus residing illegally in Pakistan.

<sup>8</sup> Tahir Khan, “Federal cabinet extends stay of registered Afghan refugees by 1 year,” *Dawn*, July 10, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1845011>.

<sup>9</sup> Ayaz Gul, “Taliban: Pakistan, Iran expelled over 400,000 Afghan refugees so far in 2024,” *VoA*, June 10, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/taliban-pakistan-iran-expelled-over-400-000-afghan-refugees-so-far-in-2024/7650196.html>

<sup>10</sup> “UNHCR-IOM Flash Update#21” UNHCR, June 7, 2024, file:///C:/Users/Malik%20Waleed/Downloads/UNHCR%20-%20IOM%20Flash%20Update%2021.pdf.

Pakistan's policy decision to deport illegal Afghan migrants was in recognition of the absence of the country's rule of law regarding the implementation of a document expiry regime for Afghan migrants in different parts of the country. It is a practical norm in all the countries of the world that one is not allowed to live beyond the expiry date of his/her visa, and is therefore deported to the country of origin. Since such provisions are part of international law, the extension of illegal Afghan migrants' stay in Pakistan cannot be justified by any means. Yet, the decision of Pakistan's federal cabinet to halt the return of registered migrants by extending their stay for 12 more months is in recognition of the humanitarian need of Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> It is pertinent to note that Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, and yet it is respecting international standards in its treatment of refugees.<sup>12</sup>

### **Trade Relations**

More recently, the trade ties between the two countries have faced constant fluctuations due to a fluid border situation. With a trade volume of \$1.8 billion in the fiscal year 2023, the two countries are immensely short of realizing the true potential of their trade ties, as the volume of trade in 2010 had reached \$2.5 billion.<sup>13</sup> Even though Pakistan is the largest export market for Afghan products – 47 percent of the total Afghan exports – the balance of trade is in Pakistan's favor with up to 80 percent of the bilateral trade. This is partly due to steps taken by Pakistan and Afghanistan to curb smuggling and encourage domestic production respectively.

In the first six months of this year, Afghanistan's total exports declined by 14 percent to \$700 million as compared to the first half of 2023. The decline was partially due to a decrease in the export of coal to Pakistan, which transitioned from imported coal power plants to local coal power plants in a bid to

reduce the import bill. This also contributed to the overall decline in Afghanistan's coal exports from \$179 million in April 2023 to \$43 million in June 2024 – a 76 percent drop.

Moreover, other than reducing the number of border crossings, Pakistan also withdrew concessions on the customs duties for fresh fruits and dry fruits, which added to a decrease in Afghanistan's total food exports from \$446 million to \$421 million. The culmination effect of these changes was an overall decline in Afghan exports to Pakistan. On the contrary, Pakistan remained the largest export market for Afghan products, i.e. 47 percent of the total Afghan exports, which was followed by India with 28 percent of the overall exports.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the first half of 2024 witnessed a diversion of the transit route of Afghan products from Pakistan to Iran. Iran was the largest import source for Afghanistan – 30 percent of the total Afghan imports – as in the first six months of the year, imports from Iran grew by 78 percent compared to the first half of 2023.<sup>15</sup> One of the main reasons for Afghanistan to utilize Iran's facilities could be to explore new avenues of transit routes for its products.

In addition to this, there is a lack of a concrete document, which regulates trade between the two countries. Though the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) was signed in 2010 to regulate the bilateral and transit trade, it expired in 2015 after the culmination of the original five-year agreement.<sup>16</sup> However, the document has been extended several times after its formal expiry,<sup>17</sup> yet no substantial agreement has been concluded on the finalization of a revised document for trade regulation. Despite this, Pakistan's trade with Central Asian Republics (CARs) – via Afghanistan – increased by

<sup>11</sup> Tahir Khan, "Federal cabinet extends stay of registered Afghan refugees by 1 year," *Dawn*, July 10, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1845011>.

<sup>12</sup> Maja Janmyr, "The 1951 Refugee Convention and Non-Signatory States: Charting a Research Agenda," *International Journal of Refugee Law*, June 2021, <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/33/2/188/6448830>.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Raza Khan, "Trading for Stability: Why Pak-Afghan Ties Should Pivot to Economics," *The Express Tribune*, October 8, 2023, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2439928/trading-for-stability-why-pak-afghan-ties-should-pivot-to-economics>.

<sup>14</sup> "Afghan Economic Monitor – July," World Bank, July 2024, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/0d1d30979ec71aaefff18558ad7c56c9-0310012024/original/Afghanistan-Economic-Monitor-July-2024.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> "A Framework for Renegotiating the Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement," The Pakistan Business Council, August 2020, <https://www.pbc.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/Framework-for-Renegotiating-the-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Transit-Trade-Agreement.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Zafar Bhutta, "APTTA extended as revised trade deal to take time," *The Express Tribune*, June 9, 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2304233/aptta-extended-as-revised-trade-deal-to-take-time>.

21.17 percent from \$130.45 million to \$158.07 million in eight months from July 2023 to February 2024.<sup>18</sup>

Despite an uptick in the transit trade, there remains uncertainty over the status of overall bilateral trade, which is obvious from different incidents of border closures and protests on both sides of the border. There are more than a dozen trade corridors on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border but due to the volatile border situation, even the Torkham and Chaman borders remain closed frequently, thus posing a detrimental effect on the overall trade relations.

### ***People-to-People Interaction***

The closure of the border not only affects trade ties but also takes a toll on the daily movement of people on both sides of the border. For instance, in October 2023, in a bid to regulate border movement due to rising security concerns, the federal government made the carrying of passports and visas mandatory for travelers. The decision was met with an outcry from locals and traders on both sides of the international border, who staged a 10-month-long sit-in in an effort to convince the center to review and change its decision. In light of this, after eight rounds of negotiations, the government accepted the demands of the locals on July 22, 2024.<sup>19</sup> It is to be noted that nearly 10,000 people cross the Chaman border for trade and travel purposes daily.<sup>20</sup> Many of these people have families and businesses, which require regular travel across the border. In such a case, the lack of a mutually agreed framework can pose hurdles for trade and communities on both sides of the border.

Pakistan has long argued that the unregulated flow of people across the border has offered free passage to terrorists as well. Such miscreants have contributed to the reasons for a volatile security situation, which subsequently has affected the rule of law in the border areas. Many of the terrorists crossing into Pakistan are difficult to trace due to their family patronage and linkages on both sides of the international boundary. This is obvious from the fact that the TTP has more than twenty groups, which are divided on tribal grounds. Historically, every home under these groups has given a man to fight or ransom money to TTP. Consequently, TTP has been using the homes of such

fighters as sanctuaries, thus making them difficult to locate. In this regard, the movement of people on both sides of the border needs more vigilance and digitization to better deal with such malicious infiltrators.

### ***Durand Line***

Even though the issue of the Durand Line is a settled one, still it serves as a controversy between both countries. The Durand Line is an internationally recognized border and a ground reality for all practical purposes. Though different Afghan administrations, including the Taliban, refused to accept it as an internationally recognized border, they do not enjoy the support of any international entity. Moreover, despite their fundamental difference over the status of the Durand Line, the Afghan authorities bilaterally broach the issue of only a few alleged incursion points at the border or the border pillars. Despite such low-key discussions on the issue, it remains a challenge for the two countries to manage their affairs smoothly. The constant drumming of the Durand Line as an imaginary line in the minds of Afghans by all their governments has created misperceptions; consequently, causing the violations of visa regimes and traveling documents by Afghans.

### ***Role of External Actors***

The role of external actors is to influence negatively the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan and has always been a constant challenge for the two countries. Traditionally, this role has been played by India, which utilized Afghanistan to destabilize Pakistan. Though there was a sigh of relief among Pakistan's policymakers about the limited role of India in Afghanistan after the Taliban came into power, with the re-entry of its diplomatic corps, including RAW agents, India has regained the lost ground.

Regarding its objectives in Afghanistan, India has been thinking strategically and is gradually establishing its foothold in Afghanistan. Such Indian aspirations are primarily motivated by one of Chanakya Kautilya's maxims, which advises a country to consider its immediate neighbor as a natural enemy

<sup>18</sup> Mubarak Zeb Khan, "Pakistan's exports to Central Asian states jumps 21pc in 8 months," *Dawn*, April 10, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1826777>.

<sup>19</sup> Syed Ali Shah, "Chaman border opens after 10 months," *The Express Tribune*, July 22, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2481737/chaman-border-opens-after-10-months>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

and the neighbor's neighbor as a natural ally.<sup>21</sup> If considered in the trilogy of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, then Kautilya's lesson serves as a driving force for India's foreign policy vis-à-vis Islamabad and Kabul.

More recently, this strategy has been religiously executed by India under its national security doctrine, widely known as the "Doval Doctrine." The doctrine's central axis revolves around the Indian efforts to isolate Pakistan at all the regional and international fronts. In this regard, India has been using a set of warfare – financial, diplomatic, information, and covert warfare – against Pakistan to discredit it among Afghans. Thus, the recent surge in the trajectory of terrorism in Pakistan suggests that India has been employing a blend of both the strategic frameworks given by Chanakya Kautilya and Ajit Doval to achieve its goals vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

Currently, there is substantive evidence to prove India's financial support to its proxies for using TTP against Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> By investing in the Afghan people, India is trying to enhance its influence in Afghanistan and exploit its resources. This is obvious from the donation of 50,000 metric tons of wheat to Afghanistan by the Indian government, via Iran, as a way to show its generosity to Afghan people.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, by constructing the Zaranj-Delaram highway,<sup>24</sup> India is strategically trying to divert Afghanistan's transit trade from Pakistan to Iranian routes. Not only this but the Indian announcement of investing in the Shahid Beheshti terminal of the Chabahar port is also motivated by New Delhi's aspiration to undermine the importance of Pakistan's ports against the Iranian port of Chabahar. However, the feasibility of such a strategic goal of India remains obscure, as Afghan trade through Chabahar is 25-40

percent more expensive than via Pakistan's Karachi port.

Despite pledging millions of dollars for the Chabahar port, India itself has been unable to use the port for its trade with Afghanistan. When a cargo is dispatched, using a multi-modal transportation route, from the Indian port of Kandla in Gujarat, it covers a distance of nearly 3,100 km<sup>25</sup> in fifteen to twenty days to reach Kabul via Chabahar and through Zaranj crossing. During this time, the perishable products are left with no shelf-life; subsequently, the spoilable products of India cannot compete with those of China or Central Asia. This is the reason that the private trade sector of India does not use this route. However, in the case of air transportation, the Indian government subsidizes two-thirds cost for its private sector in its trade with Afghanistan. This shows India's readiness to achieve its strategic goals in Afghanistan vis-à-vis Pakistan by using a soft power approach.

### **Recommendations**

In line with the discussed challenges faced by the Pakistan and Afghanistan relationship, the following set of recommendations is proposed.

#### ***Border Management and TTP***

In their relationship, both Pakistan and Afghanistan should recognize and respect each other's territorial sovereignty. In this regard, instead of adopting a strategy that violates the territorial integrity of Afghanistan, there are innovative ways to take out TTP sanctuaries inside Afghanistan. In the past, Pakistan's security institutions have utilized different political links to dilute such groups. Therefore, in the case of TTP, similar options can be utilized, including the offices of the Afghan Taliban, who should be acknowledged for their certain goodwill efforts.<sup>26</sup> If the Afghan Taliban are encountering financial

<sup>21</sup> Bhushan Mate, "Kautilya (Chanakya) in India's foreign policy," Times of India, June 23, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/spark/kautilya-chanakya-in-indias-foreign-policy-34133/>.

<sup>22</sup> Iftikhar A. Khan, "India funding TTP through Afghan proxies, says envoy," Dawn, March 17, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1821995>.

<sup>23</sup> "India's generous wheat contribution supports nearly five million Afghans in dire need of assistance," WFP, December 22, 2023, <https://www.wfp.org/news/indias-generous-wheat-contribution-supports-nearly-five-million-afghans-dire-need-assistance>.

<sup>24</sup> V.K. Sashikumar, "Indian built Zaranj-Delaram highway under Taliban control," Canary Trap, March 26, 2012, <https://canarytrap.in/security-and-intel/indian-built-zaranj-delaram-highway-under-taliban-control/>.

<sup>25</sup> Distance from India's Kandla port to Iran's Chabahar port is 650 nautical miles or 1,200 km. Distance from Chabahar port to Zaranj border crossing with Afghanistan is 900 km. Distance from Zaranj to Kabul is 960 km. Thus, the total distance for an Indian product to reach Kabul via Chabahar will cover a distance of approximately 3,100 km. Whereas, a product from Pakistan's Karachi port covers only a distance of 810 km to reach the Chaman border crossing with Afghanistan.

<sup>26</sup> "Pakistan Taliban extends ceasefire in talks brokered by Kabul," Al Jazeera, May 19, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/19/pakistan-taliban-extends-ceasefire-in-talks-brokered-by-kabul>.

constraints while managing TTP, then Pakistan and international counter-terrorism stakeholders can provide financial support to the Afghan authorities or work with them to deal with the menace of terrorism.

Similarly, by ensuring the implementation of the rule of law, it becomes easier to stay proactive. In this regard, the intelligence support of a local police officer is more credible due to his knowledge of the area under his jurisdiction. To utilize the sources of such an officer, people in his area of responsibility should support him, which is only possible when his area will have political representation through an elected representative. Similarly, people who are subject experts in their respective fields should be taken on board while devising a strategy on terrorism in general or TTP in particular. In addition to this, Pakistan should avoid repeating the mistakes of the past by devising a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy by taking different stakeholders into confidence.

### ***Management of Refugees***

Though a considerable number of undocumented Afghans have been repatriated to Afghanistan, a huge number of documented ones are living in Pakistan. Since their stay in the country, these Afghans have been enjoying the same state facilities and benefits provided to ordinary Pakistanis. This has made most of these Afghans become part of the country's social fabric. Therefore, instead of sending them back, relevant authorities may consider offering citizenship to deserving Afghans as per the 1951 Pakistan Citizenship Act. This way, the Afghans would become part of the national tax base and subsequently legally be integrated into Pakistani society.

### ***Improve Trade Relations***

In a bid to materialize the potential of trade relations, both countries need to work together. In this context, efforts should be made to conduct joint anti-smuggling raids. The relevant departments should be tasked with the identification of the entities that are behind the smuggling operations. In line with this, the material capacity of customs and other relevant authorities should be enhanced. The purpose of such arrangements should be aimed at practicing strict vigilance, not only on borders but also in towns. Similarly, there should be constant raids in markets in a bid to discourage illegally smuggled products. Subsequently, instead of regularization of such seized products, these should be destroyed so that deterrence is created.

Subsequently, if Pakistan wants to introduce and implement the option of a one-document regime, then it will have to make administrative preparations. Such an arrangement requires the opening up of consulates in Torkham and Spin Boldak. Similarly, the consulate in Kandahar needs to have more staff to clear the load on a daily basis. However, until such an arrangement is finalized, it should be ensured that trade between the two countries continues without interruption.

### ***Do Not Raise the Issue of Status of Pakistan-Afghanistan Border***

Pakistan should avoid initiating any discussion on the international status of the Durand Line during talks with the Afghan Taliban. The Durand Line is an internationally recognized border, which needs not be made controversial. Thus, instead of diverting its resources and time, Pakistan should discuss other issues of bilateral relations with Afghanistan to increase mutual stakes. However, any comments on the status of the border should come from those familiar with the historical, social, and ethnic dynamics of the border areas.

### ***Think Strategically***

In a bid to keep Indian influence in check in Afghanistan, the Pakistan needs to think strategically vis-à-vis Afghanistan. One way of doing this can be to re-imagine Afghanistan. In Pakistan, either Afghanistan is too romanticized or people have a negatively stereotypical image. In the recent shifting regional dynamics, it is better for Islamabad to look towards Central Asia, where there are no territorial disputes or regional hegemony at play. In this regard, Afghanistan is the key for Pakistan, which would also substantiate the goals of its national security policy that is based upon the premise of a shift towards geo-economics. In line with this thinking, the Pakistan-India hyphenation, which is inimical, should be replaced with a Pakistan-Central Asia hyphenation, which offers prospects for cooperation and mutual benefits.

### ***Careful Narrative***

The media, academic, and policy sectors in Pakistan should highlight the positive aspects of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship more often. Currently, there is no Pakistani media person in Afghanistan who can do real-time reporting about Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, thus limiting the scope of reporting to security and news about terrorism. Therefore, to normalize relations, Pakistan should add more positivity vis-à-vis its discourse towards Afghanistan.

In this regard, the stakeholder communities, including think tanks, media houses, and the general population, should focus on generating a narrative about Afghanistan that can contribute positively to the bilateral relations. However, due care must be taken that Afghans should not perceive this as a weakness of Pakistan or the country's policy of appeasement.

### **Policymaking Process**

Across the world, the process of policymaking involves a multitude of actors and is not the discretion of only one ministry. Usually, it is the nature of the issue that decides the involvement of actors in the policymaking process. Therefore, no single individual/institution can make any country's foreign policy in isolation. However, the responsibility for policy results is put on the individual/institution, which executes the implementation. Subsequently, no policy is expected to give fully desired results owing to institutional, human resource, or other such limitations.

In Pakistan, the formulation of Afghan policy involves suggestions of all the relevant stakeholders; and, it is the responsibility of the parliament to bring all such actors on a single platform. However, if the policy is not being implemented in true letter and spirit, then there is a problem of institutional limitations. Such limitations can lead to the lack of rule of law, thus posing hurdles in an effective process of policy implementation.

It is important to emphasize that a policy does not fail entirely; rather, changing circumstances, events, and ambitious goals can make it complex and difficult to navigate. In such a situation, if the core interests are not being achieved, then the policymakers try to materialize the peripheral interests and keep the spoilers at bay. In light of these assertions, success of Pakistan's Afghan policy can also be subject to institutional resources and regional or international developments, which induce the country to navigate effectively.

Prepared by:

**Muhammad Waleed**

Junior Research Officer

Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad

For queries:

**Syed Nadeem Farhat**

Research Fellow/Editor

Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad

[nadeem@ips.net.pk](mailto:nadeem@ips.net.pk) | [www.ips.org.pk](http://www.ips.org.pk)