

## PAKISTAN'S EFFORTS FOR PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN: US AS A FACTOR

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### Abstract

This study examines Pakistan's multifaceted efforts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, a region marked by protracted conflict and complex geopolitics. Through a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy initiatives, diplomatic endeavors, economic investments, and security cooperation with the US, this research sheds light on the intricacies of Pakistan's role in shaping Afghan peace processes. The study investigates the dynamics of the Pakistan-US relationship, highlighting areas of convergence and divergence in their interests, particularly regarding Afghanistan. By exploring the complexities of regional politics, this research provides valuable insights into the challenges of promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. The findings offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between Pakistan's national interests, regional dynamics, and the US-Pakistan relationship, contributing to a deeper understanding of the Afghan peace process. This study's conclusions have implications for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to promote peace and stability in the region. The study is done by using the qualitative content analysis technique and concludes that achieving peace in Afghanistan and securing its borders is a critical imperative for Pakistan, and Pakistan has undertaken substantial initiatives to foster peace in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

Stability in Afghanistan was significant for regional security, and Pakistan, as most impacted neighbor of Afghanistan, had vested interest in peace prevailing across border. Elongated conflict in Afghanistan had far-reaching magnitudes and significances for Pakistan, accentuating need for peaceful resolution of Afghan conflict. Furthermore, diligence of war in Afghanistan not only destabilized region but also affected the world. It highlighted urgent need for joint efforts for achieving enduring peace and stability in the region (Mustafa, Yaseen, & Junaid, 2020). The Afghan people bore the brunt of prolonged foreign occupation, internal conflict, terrorism, ethnic tensions, and economic hardship, making it imperative to establish lasting peace and stability in the region. Given the intricate ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan, peace in one country was crucial for stability in the other, as unrest in Afghanistan had far-reaching consequences for Pakistan's demographics and security. Therefore, a comprehensive and inclusive peace initiative was essential, one that ensured the establishment of a representative and

constitutional government, thereby providing the Afghan people with a sense of security, justice, and satisfaction (Ullah, Shahzad, & Haroon, 2023). As a pivotal neighbor of Afghanistan, Pakistan was strategically positioned to play a crucial role in brokering peace. Both Afghanistan and the US looked to Pakistan to leverage its reported connections with the Taliban leadership, with the aim of facilitating meaningful negotiations on Afghanistan's future (Pandey, 2019).

Dialogue always considered as the most effective mean of ending disputes same in the case of the Afghan war. Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating the Taliban's participation in peace negotiations, which ultimately led to the signing of a landmark peace agreement between the United States and the Taliban on February 29, 2020 (Gul, 2020). Pakistan's contributions to the Afghan peace process were multifaceted, drawing on its diplomatic prowess, historical ties, and strategic regional position (Kousar, Magsi, & Charan, 2023). A stable Afghanistan would facilitate the expansion of transit trade through Central Asia, leveraging initiatives like the China-Pakistan

Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These projects offer vast potential for economic cooperation between Beijing, Islamabad, Kabul, and the Central Asian republics, but their success hinges on sustained peace in Afghanistan (Kumar, 2019).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Giustozzi (2021) was a landmark study providing unparalleled insights into the Taliban's military strategy, resilience, and evolution. Based on extensive fieldwork and over 400 interviews, the book offered detailed and nuanced account of the Taliban's growth. Praised for its meticulous documentation and unique sourcing, the book was treasure trove of information on the Afghan Taliban. Experts hailed it as a significant contribution to understanding the Afghan conflict, noting Giustozzi's narrative skill, analytical authority, and expertise on the Taliban. The book grasped the complexities of the Afghan war and provided standard reference on the subject, offering a rich understanding of the Taliban's evolution and resilience over two decades. Giustozzi's work is widely regarded as authoritative and insightful (Giustozzi, 2021).

Naqvi (2015) explored significant development in Afghan situation and its implication for Pakistan's security. Furthermore, Pak-Afghan relationship in post-2014 was shaped by US troop withdrawal and transition from Hamid Karzai to Ashraf Ghani as President. The US withdrawal impacted Pakistan's security situation, with Afghan forces taking on greater responsibility. Hamid Karzai's presidency was marked by accusations of Pakistan supporting militant activities and strong ties with India, which affected relations. Ashraf Ghani's presidency brought different approach, potentially altering trajectory of relationship (Naqvi, 2015).

Rashid, A. (2009) provided an in-depth analysis of the complex dynamics in Central Asia, focusing on Afghanistan. It explored the internal divisions within Afghan society and the influential role of Pakistan's military in shaping foreign policy, particularly its relations with the Taliban. It highlighted Pakistan's historically cordial relations with the Taliban, driven by strategic interests, and notes that many Taliban leaders were educated in Pakistani madrassas. It argued that Pakistan's army dominates foreign policy decision-making, often sidelining the civilian government,

contributing to complexities in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. The book also examined the involvement of neighboring states in Afghanistan, highlighting competing interests and agendas (Rashid A. , 2009).

Jalalzai (2019) provided in-depth analysis of internal clefs within Taliban and profound impact of external factors on crumbly Afghan landscape. This book shed light on complex web of interests among neighboring countries, including Pakistan's historical ties with Taliban, India's strategic alliance with Northern Alliance, and Iran's close relationships with Hazara community and key Northern Alliance leaders. Jalalzai examined intersecting regional and global interests, arguing that meaningful dialogue was most viable solution to end protracted conflict. (Jlalzai, 2019).

#### **PAKISTAN'S EFFORTS FOR PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN**

Security of Pakistan was deeply entwined with peace in Afghanistan due to their geographical proximity and historical connections. There are three key factors that contributed to security interdependency for both the countries. Firstly; landlocked status of Afghanistan that necessitated reliance on Pakistan for trade and transit, governed by

Afghan Transit Trade Agreement 1965.

However, this arrangement had been exploited for smuggling and illicit activities, compromising Pakistan's security. Secondly; 2,500 km border between two countries was porous and challenging to manage, with multiple official-crossing points, including Torkham and Spin Boldak, as well as over 700 lesser-known entrances and exits. This complexity had facilitated the movement of terrorists, smugglers, and other illicit actors. Thirdly; Durand Line, which demarcated the border, bisected tribal areas and had led to the granting of easement privileges to tribesmen, allowing them to cross the border relatively freely. Unfortunately, this arrangement had also been exploited by criminals. In response to the 2014 Peshawar Army Public School attack, Pakistan had launched a 20-point National Action Plan to combat terrorism. Although border fencing was not initially part of the plan, it was later considered as a measure to prevent terrorist infiltration and enhance national security (Kousar, Magsi, & Charan, 2023).

Pakistan's interests were linked to Afghanistan's peace and stability. Pakistan promoted peace-building efforts, urging the

Afghan government and US to remain vigilant against spoilers. This aimed to reduce terrorism and militancy risks, promote economic cooperation, and enhance regional stability, ultimately benefiting Pakistan's national interests and regional security (Mustafa, Yaseen, & Junaid, 2020). The peace initiative in Afghanistan was complex, with various stakeholders having different interests. Despite Pakistan's efforts to facilitate talks, spoilers sought to sabotage the initiative for their own gain. The international community recognized Pakistan's constructive role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. However, the Afghan government, led by Ashraf Ghani, harbored concerns about Pakistan's involvement, fearing the peace agreement would empower the Taliban. The Afghan government employed delaying tactics, hindering the peace process and creating uncertainty. The complex relationships between stakeholders further complicated the process, making a fair and equitable agreement challenging to achieve (Jamal, 2020).

Pakistan played a pivotal role in the Afghan peace process due to its strategic location

and historical ties with Afghanistan. The country's geographical proximity, shared border, and ethnic connections made it an indispensable partner. It was perceived that military establishment of Pakistan had long-standing connection with Taliban, positioning it uniquely to facilitate negotiations. International community recognized Pakistan's influence over Taliban and relied on its diplomatic efforts to facilitate peaceful resolution. Afghan conflict proved complex, with military solution failing to yield decisive victories and mounting humanitarian costs. Peace process became primary avenue for achieving stability and security. Pakistan consistently demonstrated its commitment to supporting peace initiatives, working closely with international community to facilitate negotiations. With its strategic location and historical ties, Pakistan was well-positioned to play key role in peace process, and its diplomatic efforts were critical in bringing parties to negotiating table (Ahmad, Yousaf, & Shah, 2017).

Pakistan constantly supported the direct talks with Taliban, highlighting need for incentives to encourage their return to

negotiating table. By pushing for pragmatic and realistic approach, Pakistan aimed to facilitate meaningful dialogue that would lead to stable and peaceful Afghanistan. This approach underscored Pakistan's commitment to finding peaceful solution to conflict, recognizing that negotiated settlement was most viable path forward. Through its efforts, Pakistan sought to bring Taliban to negotiation-table and foster an environment advantageous to constructive dialogues that ultimately contributing to more stable region. Pakistan's role in promoting peace dialogues highlighted its dedication for the regional peace and stability (Mustafa, Yaseen, & Junaid, 2020). Pakistan's long-standing diplomatic and strategic ties with the Taliban leadership have been widely recognized. Islamabad's significant influence over the Taliban positions it to play a pivotal role in facilitating peace negotiations. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Pakistan's religious parties have historically maintained strong connections with Taliban leaders, dating back to the Soviet-Afghan War when Pakistan provided substantial financial, military, and logistical support. Many

Taliban insurgents originate from Pashtun-majority areas in Pakistan and have received education from madrassas within the country. Pakistan's support for the Taliban has been driven by strategic interests, including countering Indian influence in Afghanistan, securing its Kashmir interests, and advancing its regional ambitions (Waldman, 2010).

General Kayani, Pakistan's former army chief, acknowledged Pakistan's ability to facilitate Afghan reconciliation. His statement highlighted Pakistan's significant influence over the Afghan Taliban, forged through historical ties and geographical proximity. Pakistan was well-positioned to leverage this influence to create a conducive environment for peace talks, encouraging the Taliban to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Afghan government (Perlez, 2010). Pakistan's military and civilian leadership acknowledged the country's influence over the Taliban, reinforcing the international community's perception. Pakistan maintained strong ties with the Taliban, while India had close connections with the Northern Alliance. This dynamic was widely recognized, shaping the regional politics.

Differing perspectives within the Pakistan Army on Taliban ties reflected internal divisions. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) later revealed that its operational links with the Taliban were dismantled following the 9/11 attacks, marking a significant shift in their relationship (Jalal, 2019).

Pakistan's concerted efforts towards peace could have fostered enduring stability in Afghanistan, leveraging its considerable influence over key militant groups like the Taliban, Haqqani network, and Hizb-e-Islami. In 2010, Afghanistan's High Peace Council, comprising 70 members, was established to drive the reconciliation process. A delegation from the council visited Islamabad in January 2011, seeking Pakistan's support for peace talks. However, the process was severely set back by the assassination of former President Burhanuddin Rabbani in September 2011, which led to a marked deterioration in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations (Giustozzi A. , 2021). In early 2012, Pakistan initiated a diplomatic outreach to key Afghan leaders, including former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum, and Ahmad Zia Massoud, brother of the late Ahmad Shah

Massoud. These leaders, who had been part of the Northern Alliance that fought against the Soviet occupation, were approached by Pakistan in a bid to improve bilateral relations with Afghanistan. This engagement had a positive impact, helping to ease the previously strained ties between the two nations (Fai, 2014).

In 2013, Afghan President Hamid Karzai acknowledged Pakistan's key role in facilitating a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict. He requested Pakistan's assistance in mediating talks between the Afghan government and Taliban fighters. Moreover, President Karzai suggested a joint effort with Pakistan to address the mutual threat of extremism in the region (Giustozzi A. , 2021). In response to President Karzai's appeal, Pakistan released several senior Taliban prisoners from its custody, aiming to facilitate peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Although the United States had expressed reservations about this move, it was perceived as a constructive step towards peace. The Afghan government, meanwhile, had appreciated Pakistan's gesture and thanked them for

releasing the Taliban leaders (Grossman, 2018).

A US drone strike on May 21, 2016, killed Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor near the Pakistan-Iran border, sparking a controversy. While President Barack Obama hailed it as a victory, citing Mansoor's role in killing American soldiers and Afghan civilians, Pakistan disputed this narrative, highlighting Mansoor's involvement in peace talks and his advocacy for peace in Afghanistan. The strike was seen as a setback to Pakistan's peace efforts, and the appointment of hardliner Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada as the new Taliban chief further complicated the situation (Khalil, 2016). Following the announcement of Mullah Muhammad Omar's death, the second round of talks stalled as Mullah Akhtar Mansoor pledged to persist in fighting against foreign forces and the Afghan government. This stance exacerbated the Taliban's internal divisions and commitment to violence, posing a significant hurdle for Mansoor to overcome, despite Pakistan's facilitation efforts (Mustafa, Yaseen, & Junaid, 2020).

A US drone strike on May 21, 2016, killed Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansoor near the Pakistan-Iran border, undermining Pakistan's peace efforts. While President Obama celebrated the operation as a victory, citing Mansoor's alleged role in attacks on Americans and Afghans, Pakistan disputed this, highlighting Mansoor's role in the Murree peace talks and his advocacy for peace. The strike complicated the peace process, and Mansoor's replacement, hardliner Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, further challenged Pakistan's initiatives to revive Taliban peace talks. The situation underscored the complexities of the Afghan conflict and the difficulties in achieving peace (Ali & Sultan, 2023). Pakistan, Russia, and China met on December 26, 2016, to discuss Afghan peace. They had agreed to offer the Taliban sanctions-free movement to encourage dialogue. The meeting, which had taken place without Afghan government and Taliban representation, aimed to incentivize Taliban participation in peace talks (Gul, 2020).

Pakistan played a pivotal role in promoting peace in Afghanistan, but American authorities persistently pressured it to "do



more". President Trump followed his predecessors in criticizing Pakistan, alleging that despite billions in aid, it had done little to assist the US, and accusing it of supporting terrorism and playing a double game (Giustozzi A. , 2021) . Pakistan responded strongly to Trump's allegations, convening a National Security Committee meeting. It expressed deep disappointment, asserting that it had taken significant steps to counter terrorism and that there were no terrorist camps on its soil (Jamal, 2020). US authorities repeatedly accused Pakistan of harboring terrorists, with President Obama urging it to "do more." The Afghan government expressed concerns about US pressure on Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups. The US acknowledged Pakistan's strategic importance, particularly its ties with the Taliban (Nawab, Muzaffar, & Yaseen, 2021).

In June 2018, the US sought Pakistan's assistance in facilitating indirect peace talks with the Taliban, underscoring the complexities of the Afghan conflict. US Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo engaged with Pakistani civilian and military leaders to enlist support for the

Afghan peace process. Pakistan had consistently endeavored to promote peace in Afghanistan, recognizing that a stable neighbor was essential for its own security. US officials emphasized that Pakistan's efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table would have significantly contributed to its internal security. This collaboration highlighted the crucial role Pakistan played in the Afghan peace process, given its historical ties with the Taliban. The US acknowledged Pakistan's strategic importance in the region and its potential to influence the Taliban. By working together, both countries aimed to reduce violence and pave the way for a sustainable peace in Afghanistan (Gul, 2020).

The Trump administration's 2018 policy shift, initiating direct talks with the Taliban, marked a significant departure from the US' previous Afghan-led peace process approach. The change in policy hinged on Pakistan's collaboration, that was considered essential for attaining peace in Afghanistan due to its influential regional role. Pakistan endorsed its assurance for peace in Afghanistan by diplomatic determinations. Pakistani ambassador to US met with US Secretary of

Defense, assuring him of Pakistan's support for peace talks with Taliban. Ambassador highlighted Pakistan's ongoing efforts to facilitate peace in Afghanistan, emphasizing that this support would continue, underscoring Pakistan's pivotal role in regional peace initiatives (Karamat, Muzaffar, & Shah, 2020).

Pak-US diplomatic row intensified as President Trump alleged Pakistani military of supporting terrorist organizations. Prime Minister Khan strongly rebutted, questioned the logic for blaming Pakistan for US failure in Afghanistan despite deploying over 100,000 NATO troops, 250,000 Afghan soldiers, and spending over one trillion dollar. Pakistan's Army Chief also denied allegations and highlighted Pakistan's significant contribution to promoting peace and bearing brunt of war's human and economic costs. He urged US to reflect on its strategies before blaming Pakistan. The exchange highlights deep-seated tensions between the two countries over the Afghan conflict, with Pakistan maintaining it's a victim of terrorism and the US expressing frustration over perceived lack of cooperation. The diplomatic spat

underscores the complexities of finding a peaceful resolution, with both countries having differing perspectives and priorities. Tensions persist, and a solution remains elusive (Zahra, Shah, & Badeeb, 2023).

US President Donald Trump wrote to Pakistani Prime Minister in December 2018, seeking Pakistan's assistance in resolving the Afghan conflict. The letter marked a shift in Trump's policy, who had previously been critical of Pakistan's alleged support for terrorist organizations. Trump acknowledged Pakistan's crucial role in facilitating a US withdrawal from Afghanistan. In response, Pakistani Prime Minister directed the Foreign Ministry to engage with the US, affirming Pakistan's commitment to promoting peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan had consistently made efforts to facilitate a peaceful resolution. The exchange highlighted the complexities of US-Pakistan relations, particularly regarding Afghanistan. Pakistan's Information Minister confirmed the letter's authenticity, while the US embassy remained silent. This development underscored the challenges of finding a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict, with both countries sharing a common goal

but having differing perspectives (Ahmed, 2022).

The international community recognized Pakistan's efforts to promote peace in Afghanistan. US Special Representative for Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad frequently visited Pakistan to brief officials on the Taliban peace talks in Doha, seeking Islamabad's assistance. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Military Chief, and Prime Minister consistently assured Khalilzad of their support for the peace process. Pakistan had long backed Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace initiatives and remained committed to promoting stability in Afghanistan. This stance was reflected in Pakistan's facilitation of crucial breakthroughs, including the US-Taliban peace agreement and intra-Afghan negotiations. Pakistan's commitment to Afghan peace stemmed from its desire for a peaceful, stable, united, and prosperous Afghanistan (Mustafa, Yaseen, & Junaid, 2020).

President Trump recognized Pakistan's efforts for peace talks and helping US to resolve the Afghan issue. In September 2019, President Trump unexpectedly declared the US-Taliban peace talks "dead," citing

unacceptable American casualties in Afghanistan. This abrupt cancellation surprised Pakistan, which had been actively supporting US efforts in the peace process. Pakistan's facilitation had been acknowledged by both the US and the Taliban on various occasions. Despite the setback, Pakistan urged the US to revive the talks, emphasizing that a negotiated settlement would benefit all parties involved, including the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Pakistan's stance is driven by its desire for peace and stability in the region, given the immense human and economic costs it has borne due to the conflict. In December 2019, the US and Taliban resumed talks, a step towards Afghan peace. Pakistan welcomed the development, reaffirming its support for peace initiatives, and advocated for a negotiated settlement to promote regional stability and prosperity (Jamal, 2020).

Pakistan reaffirmed its commitment to Afghan peace in 2020, emphasizing the importance of a negotiated settlement. US representatives consistently acknowledged Pakistan's significant role in the Afghan peace process. American diplomats, including Ms. Wells and Special

Representative Zalmay Khalilzad, praised Pakistan's efforts, with Khalilzad visiting Pakistan in early 2020 to discuss the peace process with top leaders. The country facilitated significant breakthroughs, including the US-Taliban Peace Agreement signed on February 29, 2020 and intra-Afghan negotiations that commenced on September 12, 2020 (Mustafa, Yaseen, & Junaid, 2020). Pakistan's efforts aimed to bring warring parties together, promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan. This stance aligns with Pakistan's longstanding policy to support Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace initiatives, reflecting its desire for a peaceful, stable, united, and prosperous Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to work with regional partners, including China and Russia, to ensure stability and peace in the war-torn country.

Pakistan played a key role in the Afghan peace process, driven by its strategic interests in regional stability, security, and economic growth. Pakistan's geographical proximity to Afghanistan made peace and stability in region priority. Pakistan facilitated dialogue between Taliban and US, hosting several rounds of talks and providing platform for negotiations.

Pakistan's efforts were acknowledged by both US and Taliban, with American diplomats and special representatives expressing gratitude for Pakistan's role. Pakistan supported Intra-Afghan Talks, hoping for lasting peace in Afghanistan after decades of conflict. Country played constructive role in facilitating dialogue between Afghan government and Taliban, prioritizing peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Despite challenges, Pakistan remained committed to Afghan peace process, seeing opportunities for regional cooperation and economic growth. Pakistan's role in Afghan peace process was multifaceted, driven by its strategic interests in regional stability and economic growth.

## CONCLUSION

Pakistan played significant role in Afghan peace process and supported the US stabilization efforts in the region. After 9/11 attacks, Pakistan moved from the country under suspicion to key player for US military action in Afghanistan and also played crucial role for peace building after two decades of instability in the region. A good example of this was US-Taliban peace deal signed in Doha in 2020 for which Pakistan helped to conclude with its established connections with Afghan

Taliban. Pakistan hosted several rounds of talks, allowed Taliban delegates safe and secured passage and used its good relationships with others to promote talks among Afghan factions. By making these efforts, albeit facing criticism, Pakistan tries to ensure that Afghanistan does not become a safe haven for groups opposing Pakistan like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

With time, the US had a hard time developing a clear approach to Afghanistan and there were times such as Trump's decision to suspend military aid, when diplomatic relations became strained. In spite of facing problems, Pakistan continued to play a major role due to its location and political power. As per research, Pakistan's strong influence over certain members of the Taliban allowed it to negotiate with the US which had to respect this change in the military situation. Besides, the level of ties between the US and Pakistan and its effect on the Afghan conflict during and after the withdrawal have also been discussed. Afghanistan's geostrategic importance remained, even though the United States concluded its long military presence there in August 2021. There were pros and cons for Pakistan as a result of the American

withdrawal. On the positive side, it gave Pakistan an opportunity to maintain regional stability and realize its goal of an economically stable region. On the other hand, the quick rise of the Taliban and the issues that followed made people worried that Afghanistan would again become a home for terrorists.

The decision to withdraw put the United States on a path of reducing major military actions, but did not mean it was completely leaving the region. Going into the future, US priorities related to counterterrorism, regional stability and competition with China will keep influencing its ties with Pakistan. In the absence of close military working in Afghanistan, United States and Pakistan will have to rethink their relationship and start focusing on other projects, for instance, progress in economic matters, climate action and better coordination regionally. Pakistan's domestic stability, its views on militancy and how it deals with China and Russia will also play a big part in shaping future ties between the US and Pakistan.

Moreover, Afghanistan will face major consequences because of these events. If ties between Pakistan and the United States become confusing or limited to practical

transactions, Afghanistan could start getting ignored on the global stage, leaving the gap filled by dangerous groups and its rival countries. If both nations work together and concentrate on supporting reconstruction of the government and assisting the people, it will be much easier to maintain peace in Afghanistan.

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