



## Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan

\* Uroosa Ishfaq † Kashif Ashfaq ‡ Nuzhat

- \* Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Women University, Swabi, KP, Pakistan.  
Email [uroosa.ishfaq@gmail.com](mailto:uroosa.ishfaq@gmail.com)
- † MPhil Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, National University of Modern Languages Islamabad, Pakistan.
- ‡ MPhil Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, National University of Modern Languages Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Abstract:** *Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is shaped by its quest for territorial integrity. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan remained hostile since their inception. The main factor for this rivalry was the Durand line issue which resulted in security threat from Afghanistan. The paper analyzes the bilateral conflict of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the factors responsible for their hostility. The paper also examines the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan since its independence. The findings of the study concluded that Pakistan has adopted changes in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan particularly during Soviet Afghan war. This article relies on qualitative methods of research to describe the foreign policy of Pakistan at different intervals.*

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Afghanistan, Durand Line, Foreign Policy, Soviet Afghan War

### Introduction

Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is based on the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan since the independence of Pakistan. Afghanistan was the only nation who opposed the membership of Pakistan in United Nations. It was because Afghanistan did not recognize North-West Frontier as part of Pakistan and stuck to their demand for self-determination for the ethnic Pashtun tribes across the Pak Afghan border that had the common ethnic, linguistic and kinship ties. Afghan government were continuously pushing Pashtun tribes for the greater Pashtunistan across the border which soured relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, in retaliation, Pakistan closed its frontiers with Afghanistan which harms Afghan trade (Khan & Wagner, 2013). To counter this situation Afghan government looked up to the Soviet Union, who accepted it because Pakistan was the US ally against them in cold war. Afghanistan gained generous aid from the Soviet Union for

developing projects, weapons and training for Afghan army for almost 30 years, but Afghan President Hafizullah Amin felt that Russian involvement in Afghan is becoming threat to Islamic ideology of the country as communist ideology is blooming so he tried to lessen the Soviet role in Afghanistan which irritated the USSR and Soviet forces overthrew Amin and brought its own ward to gain full control of Afghanistan in December 1979 (Tikekar, 1950).

This Soviet occupation of Afghanistan changed the region's geopolitical equation. The Soviet air and ground bases came 500 miles to the Gulf, strategically very important for the West for it was the oil lifeline. It was inevitable that this war should deeply impact upon the Pakistan which has a long porous border with Afghanistan. At that time the General Zia ulhaq government was not popular at home and outside world, in order to prolong his government and support from the West, Zia government accepted Pakistan as a

“frontline state” in the war against Soviet Union with USA and its allies. After he accepted the state of frontline state to dislodge the Soviet from Afghanistan, Zia-Ul-haq became stronger at home and abroad despite he was a military dictator. Pakistan economy was not at good shape when Zia took over the charge of country, began to improve after he took US aid package (Khan & Wagner, 2013).

Pakistan's security was highlighted after Soviet war on Afghanistan as large number of Afghan refugees migrated to Pakistan through the larger porous border and they were provided food and shelter by Pakistan through US aid. Despite US aid reached third in the list after Israel and Egypt, Afghan refugee's presence had a serious socio economic impact on Pakistan (Tikekar, 1950).

Pakistan also helped the US send military aid and training to the Mujahideen who fought against Soviet forces, which results in the large number of training centers in Pakistan. General Zia and religious parties began to undermine all secular thinking, and the people of Pakistan were told that Sharia's would be enforced in Pakistan. The free movement of afghan refugees and Mujahideen inside Pakistan and into the Afghanistan for fighting influences many youth of both Afghan refugees and Pakistan to get fighting training and they began organizing resistance movement. It is said that this was the time when religious militias, led by the people of dubious character began to proliferate in the country. These militias also participated in the Afghan resistance. Such developments brought about a change in Pakistan's society, because these warriors lived among the masses, but considered themselves above the law because they carried arms and were trained as military people. It led to the development of weapon culture among new generation who was even challenging the writ of the state. Since arms were easily available ethnic groups rapidly gained strength, dividing the people along sectarian lines which deepened sectarian strife in Pakistan (Kayathwal, 1994).

Before Afghan war Pakistani society had

hardly any heroin- addicts. But now the drug addicts are almost 6 million due to involvement of youth in extremism and lack of management of these people who were trained in Madrassah for Jihad. They become drug users because of having no education and uncertain future. The afghan refugee children were getting religious education in Madrassahs as well as training of Jihad for free while also providing food and clothes so poor children from Pakistan also went into these Madrassahs. Many schools in Pakistan became non-functioning or ghost schools. These students were taught religious extremism and militancy which provided a huge gap in Pakistan education system especially of modern education of science and technology (Lambah, 2012).

After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, US aid to Pakistan was stopped and the extremism developed through these Madrassahs was also not controlled properly which results in the creation of Taliban in 1990s, whose take over Kabul in 1992. The Taliban had strong links with the Islamist parties of Pakistan (Tikekar, 1950).

Pakistan had to look into its foreign policy after Soviet Afghan war in order to minimize the influence of India in Afghanistan and to improve its economic conditions, so Pakistan sought to open the trade routes to Central Asia through unruly Afghanistan, so they recognized Taliban government along with Saudi Arabia and UAE and close ties were established between Afghanistan and Pakistan. As Afghanistan is the neighbor country with which Pakistan has deep religious relations as well as social and cultural resemblances, so the destabilized Afghanistan is affecting Pakistan foreign policy, its economy and social attributes (Kayathwal, 1994).

### **Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan**

The relation of Pakistan and Afghanistan has always been hostile. The main reason is the Durand line, border between the Pashtun-dominated tribal areas and Afghanistan. This is traced back to 18 century when Durrani dynasty was overthrown and Pashtun empire disintegrated. The Britishers approached the region and tried to capture it but was not

succeeded as it was a tough area to govern (Omrani, 2007).

Due to the fear of Russian advancement towards Central Asia, and a possible attack from the Pashtun tribes on their settled populations, a multi-layered defence mechanism was made. On 12 November 1893, Durand line agreement was signed between the Foreign Secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand and the Amir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman. This created a cleavage amongst the pashtun population sharing common culture and heritage and demarcated the pashtun - inhabited region. This agreement enabled the Britain to become major trade hub in the region. Under the agreement both sides were convinced for non interference in one another's affair (Omrani, 2007). Thus around 40,000 square miles of territory have been lost by Afghanistan in return for grant of 60,000 pounds a year. In 1897, the boundaries were formally outlined. However, soon the protests were erupted by the various tribes. This issue continued and finally Afghanistan unilaterally withdrew from the agreement in 1949.

Since independence, Pakistan has adopted the policy of cultivating friendly ties with the Muslim world. Pakistan got independence in the name of Islam. Pakistan has taken every step to ensure cordial relations with Islamic states and to unite the Muslim states on one platform. However, in case of Afghanistan it has failed to cultivate friendly ties due to geographical location (Lambah, 2012). The issues of Durand line and Pakhtoonistan were responsible for it as Afghanistan wanted to regain its lost territory of NWFP under Durand line agreement. When it became clear to Afghanistan that Britain is going to leave the region, it demanded to get back the region. Keeping in view the relation of Pakistan and Afghanistan, it has been divided into various phases (Hughes, 2008).

The first phase covers the era since inception (1947-1963). During this period, Pakistan strived to initiate friendly ties with Afghanistan in order to protect itself from two hostile neighbors from east and northwest. However, the demand of Afghanistan for

Pakhtoonistan and its resistance of accepting the Durand line as legitimate border sowed the seeds of hostility. Afghanistan was the only state who opposed Pakistan's membership in UN. Their hostility increased in 1950 when Afghan king Zahir Shah delivered anti Pakistan speech. Their tensions reached at its peak by the assassination of Liaquat Ali Khan by an Afghan national. Afghanistan joined hands with India against Pakistan alignment with the US. It also opposes its membership of SEATO and CENTO and integration of provinces on unit scheme. Afghanistan molested Pakistan's flag and attacked its embassy in Afghanistan. This situation remained unchanged till 1963 (Omrani, 2007).

The second phase started in 1963 by detente in Pak Afghan relations. Due to the role of Iran as a mediator Pakistan and Afghanistan agreed for resuming diplomatic and commercial ties. Their relations normalized to the extent that Afghanistan supported Pakistan's stance during 1965 war. Pakistan was safe from its northwestern side and focus on east (India). When one unit scheme was made defunct, the relations of Pakistan and Afghanistan improved more. Afghanistan remained neutral during the 1971 Indo Pak war and did not take advantage from the weak position of Pakistan in that war. The third phase was shaped by Reversal of Rapprochement (1973-1978). In 1973, Sardar Daud once again came to power by Soviet support and became a threat for Pakistan's territorial integrity (Hughes, 2008). He was successful in initiating the separatist movements in Baluchistan. Their relations again worsened and both the states deployed troops on its borders. Pakistan was aware of the Afghan financial support to Baluch separatists, it started to support anti Daud forces and to overthrow its government. Daud realized that anti Pakistan policies are harming Afghanistan so he decided to normalize relations with Pakistan. The fourth phase was characterized by War of Independence against Soviet's Occupation (1979-1992). In 1979, Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and a new chapter started in Pak Afghan relations. Pakistan supported Afghanistan against USSR and played an important role in Soviet Afghan war (Lambah,

2012). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was also a threat to the territorial integrity of Pakistan. Pakistan welcomed refugees from Afghanistan and Mujahedeen were trained. Pakistan faced serious challenges by its role in Soviet Afghan war and was left alone by US to tackle the post withdrawal issues (Khan & Wagner, 2013).

### **Pakistan Foreign Policy with Neighbor Countries**

Pakistan, due to its historical, geographical and religious position, plays a complex role in international foreign policy. Bordered by China in the North, India in the East, Iran and Afghanistan in the west and North-west, and the Indian Ocean in the south, its strategic location make sure that Pakistan remains prominent on the world stage. Pakistan's relations with most of its neighbors have been subject to ups and downs. Since independence in 1947, Pakistan and India have fought several wars over territorial claims on Jammu and Kashmir. Relations with Iran were exceptionally strong in the days of the Iranian monarchy, but since the revolution, although relations have generally remained cordial, signs of strain have been noticeable on occasion. China and Pakistan have strengthened their strategic relationship over the years, finding a reliable and trusted ally in each other. Relations with Afghanistan have been strained for much of Pakistan's history, mainly due to Afghanistan's long-standing claims on the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the tribal areas. Relations worsened after the Soviet Afghan War (1979-1989) because Taliban which were supported by Pakistan both diplomatically and materially had created instability in Afghanistan (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2007).

### **Pakistan Policy toward Afghanistan**

Afghanistan has the suspicious distinction of casting the only negative vote on Pakistan's entry into United Nations in September 1947. Pak Afghan relations during the period 1947 to 1979 remained strained with 'Pashtunistan' issue being the serious source of bitterness. Sharing cultural, ethnic and religious ties, Pakistan and

Afghanistan relations have always been close, yet clashes over the Durand line and the Soviet Afghan war (Hilali, 2017).

### **Foreign Policy from 1947-1979**

Afghanistan kept increasing its political pressure on Pakistan through a campaign for an independent state of 'Pashtunistan'. Pakistan joined Baghdad Pact in early 50s whereas Afghanistan remained neutral (Tikekar, 1950). In December 1955 Soviet Prime Minister visited Afghanistan and further economic and military aid backed up the 'Pashtunistan' demand for the first time. Relations between the two Muslim neighbors were prevented from getting worse by the visits of President Iskandar Mirza of Pakistan to Kabul in 1956 and a return visit by King Zahir Shah to Karachi in 1958. However, in 1961, Afghanistan protested, against the over flights of the American U-2 spy plane which used the Badaber Air Base, near Peshawar in Pakistan. Once again diplomatic relations were broken off, the border was closed to shipment of goods to land locked Afghanistan (Qassem & Durand, 2008).

### **Pakistan Decision to Participated in Soviet Afghan War (1979-1989)**

The regional situation in 1979 was very critical in the history of Pakistan which completely changed the Pakistan foreign policy as well as its relation with neighbor countries. In the same year there occurs Islamic revolution in Iran and the Holy Mosque of Mecca in Saudi Arabia was occupied by religious fanatics. And when USSR attacked Afghanistan in the same year there were many thoughts in Pakistan about this invasion and Soviet interest in Afghanistan. Despite unwillingness in the participation of Soviet Afghan war, Pakistan had to take part due to many reasons, which we will discuss here (Kayathwal, 1994).

### **Afghanistan Negative Foreign Policy towards Pakistan**

Afghanistan was the only Muslim country who opposed Pakistan in UN. So there were many

conflicts in the mind of Afghanistan people against Pakistan, so if Pakistan did close its border for the refugees who were fleeing during war to Pakistan may spark more in their minds, therefore had to give them access to Pakistan (Hilali, 2017).

### **Durand Line Conflicts between Pakistan and Afghanistan**

Afghan government were not recognizing the Durand line which was drawn by the British government and Afghan king in 1893, they were considering most of the parts of North West Frontier Province of Pakistan as their properties which were given to Pakistan against the willingness of Afghan people. So this was the issue for Pakistan that the Afghan government in the supervision of Soviet government may not attack in that region. Therefore, Pakistan was afraid from the then superpower Soviet, which was also a threat for it in that region (Siddique, 2011).

### **Pakhtunistan Movement**

50% of the Afghan population are pakhtun people, most of them are near the Pakistan border towards east of Afghanistan, where Pakistan province of NWFP occur which now called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As Afghanistan was influencing pakhtun people of Pakistan since the independence of Pakistan against their government and there were many pakhtunistan movements took place before Soviet invasion which were against the sovereignty of Pakistan. This was also a serious threat for Pakistan that if Pakhtun tribe of Pakistan may not take part in the war for supporting their pakhtun brothers other side of the border (Kayathwal, 1994).

### **Indian Interest in Afghanistan**

Since the independence both India and Pakistan are in a war like situation especially on Kashmir conflict, which causes many wars between the two countries. India was also looking for the movements and negative propaganda against Pakistan and for that purpose they deployed many of their agents in Afghanistan. India's deep interest in Afghanistan enforced Pakistan to revise

its foreign policy and to support Afghan refugees as well as Afghan Mujahideen for the fighting against Soviet (Janjua, 2009).

### **Security Concerns**

The 2430 kilometer long porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan was main concern for the Pakistan security due to free movement of Afghan refugees to Pakistan (Bahadur, 1980). The security of Pakistan was at high risk because there was a chance of Soviet and Indian forces coming into Pakistan in the form of Afghan refugees and may be create problems for Pakistan nuclear program, so therefore Pakistan have to tight its security and have to take part in the war for their own safety and for the gaining of sympathy of Afghan people. For that they also provide training to the Afghan people and Pakistani people for the Afghan jihad which the religious leaders declare as Jihad (Siddique, 2011).

### **For Local and International Support and Gaining Power**

General Zia was Army chief who take over government which was not liking by people of Pakistan as well as abroad, so when USA invite Pakistan to play a frontline state in Afghan war against the Soviet, so for his government strength and for the international support Zia accepted this, because he was also aware of the internal situation where religious parties declare it as a Jihad, so for the internal support he also accepted to be the part of US ally in the war. Zia this decision make him popular both internally and internationally (Mahmood, 2005).

### **Weak Economy**

Zia government was going through crises, he was not accepted by the people of Pakistan and abroad therefore Pakistan economy was very weak at that time, so when US offered him to support in a war against soviet and they will be granted aid, which make Zia to think on the offer, which he accepted with desired aid because they were also supporting the training of Mujahideen and providing food and accommodation to Afghan refugees. The US aid for Pakistan was 3.52 billion \$ in 1981 for six

years and 4.02 billion \$ in 1987 for five year package which was third in volume behind Israel and Egypt (Bahadur, 1980).

### **To Support Islamic Ideology**

Soviet government was having its own agenda of bringing communism to Afghanistan for which they opposed many Islamic laws and brought laws of their own which were not accepted by the religious people of Afghanistan therefore they bring their own government. Soviet was furious over that which enforce them to invade on the Afghan government which was supporting Islamic ideology. Soviet this invasion was largely opposed by the world because it was attack on the independent state. UN passed resolution against this and Muslim countries were angry over this strike, so for supporting Islamic ideology and their Muslim brothers Pakistan become part of the US ally against Soviet in the war (Bromley, 2007).

### **Soviet Interest in Middle East Oil Resources**

There was also a hypothesis of Soviet interest in the oil resources of Middle East so that Soviet can compete with US for the run in the super power of the world, which made Pakistan to think in the participation in war against Soviet. Soviet success in the war against Afghanistan can create a way for Soviet to attack on Pakistan. As after Afghanistan, Pakistan was the next step for soviet to take forward and complete their mission. For stopping this, Pakistan has to decide to take the Soviet Afghan war is actually the war against Pakistan which will enable Soviet to go further. Therefore Pakistan becomes the frontline state in the war (Weinbaum & Harder, 2008).

### **Pakistan's Foreign Policy during Soviet Occupation**

With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan had no choice but to use all the diplomatic pressure that could be mustered to build up world opinion against the Soviet Union for violating the principles of the United Nations Charter and thus force him to leave Afghanistan. The protracted turmoil exacted a heavy toll on the Afghan people and posed a serious threat to the

regional and international security. The rise of the Taliban further emphasized the problems. The international community accused the Taliban for giving support to international terrorism including refuge to Osama Bin Laden (Weinbaum & Harder, 2008). The Pakistani policy has been coherent since General Zia decided in 1979 to provide support for the Afghan Mujahidin. This policy was based on a simple premise, to give full support to Pashtun groups, without appearing on the front line. Pakistan's support to the Taliban regime, the role of Pakistan in the War on Terror and the rising cross-border militancy has strained relations between the two countries (Bahadur, 1980).

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan is always reflected by the mistrust and hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan. This is because of the Durand line issue since independence of Pakistan. Afghanistan was the state that opposes Pakistan membership in UN. Although there are cultural ties between the two states but their mutual rivalry was the reason for Pakistan to shape its foreign policy as counter to Afghanistan. The hostile foreign policy of Afghanistan was one of the factors that compelled Pakistan to abandon NAM and adopted alignment with the west. Till 1979, Afghanistan had close ties with Soviet Union and antagonistic towards Pakistan. However, the Soviet Union invasion in Afghanistan brought drastic changes in Pakistan foreign policy as Pakistan considered it as a threat towards its own interest. Pakistan is geographically linked with Afghanistan so it became frontline state for the US to withdraw Soviet Union from Afghanistan. In this way Pakistan adopted policy of partnership with USA and stood for territorial integrity of Afghanistan. Refugees were welcomed from Afghanistan and Pakistan mujahidin fought for Afghanistan's integrity against Soviet Union. Pakistan policy of participation with USA and Afghanistan resulted in receiving huge aid from USA but also adversely affected Pakistan's own environment. Law and order situation disrupted due to involvement of youth in extremism and training of Mujahideen.

The disintegration of USSR and Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan stopped USA aid to Pakistan. Pakistan was left alone to handle the refugees and extremism issues. Pakistan was looking for improving its economic condition.

Thus, it recognized Taliban government in order to open trade routes to central Asia through Afghanistan, which has further affected Pakistan's prestige in international community.

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