

A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan Relations with Afghan Taliban and with the Previous Afghan Government (2014 - 2021): Security Dilemma Perspectives

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Abstract



This study analyzed the intricate relationships between Pakistan and the Taliban (the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan); examining its historical background and Islamabad's strategic dimensions and security concerns. Pakistan's recognition of the Taliban during their first regime in 1996 was a culmination of close ties forged during the Soviet-Afghan conflict that had led to the establishment of a foundation of mutual trust between Pakistan and the Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan). The disputed Durand Line issue and counterbalancing India have shaped Pakistan's perspective, making the Taliban a valued ally compared to the previous Afghan government (2014 - 21) in Afghanistan. Notably, the study indicates a shift in dynamics with the Taliban's second (2.0) regime, revealing a complex relationship where some members show less commitment to Islamabad. This study used a comparative qualitative analysis to collect data from relevant literature, including interviews. The analysis employed the lenses of Security Dilemma and Neorealism theories to unravel Pakistan's motivations. Despite expectations, the recent return of the Taliban to power has not ensured an ideal scenario for Pakistan, as its security situation has worsened than before. In essence, Pakistan's dual approach toward a stable government and support for the Taliban reflected a nuanced strategy wherein Pakistan sought a stable Afghanistan while simultaneously supporting the Taliban's extremist views to safeguard its strategic interests and influence regional dynamics. The study contributed to a deeper understanding of this intricate interplay between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban in the context of historical legacies, strategic calculations, and regional power dynamics.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Taliban, Relations, Security, Strategic Interests

Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of South Asia, particularly the connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan, has been complicated and multidimensional, shaped by historical, cultural, and strategic considerations. The era from 2014 to 2021 is particularly notable because of the changing dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which saw a transition from the former Afghan government to the rebirth of the Taliban.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have strong historical relationships based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities. However, their relationship has been fraught with difficulties and mutual suspicion, especially since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan played a critical role in aiding Afghan mujahideen fighters during the Soviet-Afghan War, a policy that has had long-term consequences for regional security and politics (Rashid 2000). Pakistan has a long history of supporting and providing safe havens to the Afghan Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan), which has hurt the political situation and stability of Afghanistan (Rubin, 2002a). Since 1990, Pakistan has provided various military and financial support to the Taliban which played an important role in the Taliban's first and second rise to power. In 1996, Pakistan was one of the three countries that hastily recognized the government of the Taliban (First regime) (Holland, 2021a).

Between 2014, when Ashraf Ghani succeeded Hamid Karzai as president, and 2021 when the Taliban took control of Kabul, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations had a succession of ups and downs. The

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Afghan government frequently accused Pakistan of sheltering and supporting Taliban fighters, which Pakistan repeatedly denied. Despite these claims, both governments endeavored to engage in discussion and collaboration, particularly through the Quadilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which included the US and China (Khan, 2016).

Pakistan's ties with the Afghan Taliban have been the subject of international investigation. The Taliban, who have ethnic and ideological ties with some elements in Pakistan, are thought to have gotten asylum and support from Pakistani authorities (Fair, 2014). This link grew increasingly visible as the Taliban gained headway against the Afghan government, eventually taking control of Kabul in August 2021 (BBC, 2021). Pakistan's strategic calculus has frequently been regarded as preferring a friendly administration in Kabul to defend its western frontiers and counter Indian dominance in Afghanistan (Riedel, 2014).

The concept of the security dilemma, in which a state's actions to strengthen its security produce insecurity in other states, is especially pertinent when examining Pakistan's relations with both the Afghan government and the Taliban. Pakistan's assistance for the Taliban can be interpreted as an effort to maintain a favorable rule in Kabul, which it sees as critical to its security. In contrast, the Afghan government's alignment with India and charges against Pakistan contributed to Islamabad's insecurity and subsequent policies (Bajoria, 2009). Understanding these dynamics necessitates a careful examination of the historical and geopolitical imperatives that have driven Pakistan's policy toward Afghanistan.

The topic, "A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan Relations with Afghan Taliban and with the Previous Government of Afghanistan (2014 - 2021): Security Dilemma Perspectives" is a comparative study that delved into the evolving dynamics of Pakistan's engagements for ensuring their security in the country with the Afghan Taliban, especially in contrast to its previous engagements with the Afghan government during Dr. Ashraf Ghani's era (2014 - 2021), the study examined the dynamics where Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban appears notably stronger compare to the previous Afghan government. By examining historical relationships focusing on Security Dilemma theory and as well as following perspectives of neorealism (structural realism), strategic ambitions, and cooperation between Pakistan and the Taliban, the study sought to unravel the underlying aspects of this relationship. It emphasized that the partnership between Pakistan and the Taliban remains strong as long as it aligns with their mutual interests.

Meanwhile Investigating the recent fall of the Afghan government and the Taliban's return to power in 2021, this study very core aims to understand “Why Pakistan sees its Strategic interests more aligned under the rule of the Taliban compared to other republic governments.

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into three categories: The historical background of the relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan, Pakistan's Strategic interests in Afghanistan, and the comparison between the Taliban and Afghan previous government. The last part describes the structure and position against Pakistan and this structure and position making Pakistan choose the Taliban. It is notable to write that this sub-comparison will help in understanding “why Pakistan is eager to deal in strong relation with Taliban compared to the previous government of Afghanistan (Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani 2014 -2021).



Long-standing (Historical Background:

The Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) & Pakistan have had an ongoing relationship since the 1990s, when Pakistan was one of the few nations to recognize the Taliban's first rule in Afghanistan (Holland, 2021). When the Taliban were in power, Pakistan provided them with financial and military backing, which was crucial in enabling them to take control of most of the regions of Afghanistan (Lyall et al., 2013a).

Pakistan's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan:

Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan are motivated by a mix of security concerns, economic goals, and regional geopolitical forces. First, Pakistan sees a stable and friendly Afghanistan as critical to its national security. The porous 2,670-kilometer Durand Line has historically served as a conduit for terrorists and militants. Pakistan seeks to prevent the establishment of hostile entities in Afghanistan that may encourage separatist activities within its borders, particularly the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Pakistan is worried about the possibility of instability along its border with Afghanistan and the possibility of terrorist strikes by organizations such as the Tehreek TTP (Taliban in Pakistan) (Sial, 2021). Furthermore, Islamabad is concerned with Indian involvement in Afghanistan, which it views as an encirclement plan. Pakistan feels the necessity of preventing India from using Afghanistan as a base of influence in the area (Holland, 2021). Pakistan aims to counterbalance this by sponsoring factions in Afghanistan that share its objectives.

Second, Afghanistan is essential to Pakistan's goals for regional connectivity and economic integration. Afghanistan is envisioned as a crucial transit route for energy supplies and trade between Central Asia and South Asia under projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Stability in Afghanistan is therefore required for these programs to succeed. Additionally, Pakistan is interested in gaining access to Afghanistan's undeveloped mineral wealth, which might give major economic benefits (Aziz et al., 2021). Apart from the significant financial advantages in addition, Pakistan has several other strategic interests in Afghanistan. Therefore, Pakistan sees the Taliban as a key partner in ensuring stability and security in Afghanistan.

Finally, Afghanistan's strategic location at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East makes it a key participant in regional geopolitics. Pakistan wants to make sure that any government in Kabul is not just friendly but also consistent with its larger regional goals. This entails using historical ties with parties such as the Taliban to keep power (Rais, 2019). The withdrawal of US forces, followed by the Taliban takeover, has created a new dynamic that Pakistan is determined to handle cautiously, managing its relationships with both the Taliban and international players to avoid diplomatic isolation while protecting its strategic interests (Ali, 2023).

Comparing the Taliban and Previous Afghan Government:

The governing structures, philosophies, and methods of approaching foreign affairs of the Taliban with the previous Afghan government, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, are very different (Bell, 2015). The former Afghan government, led by President Ashraf Ghani, was founded on a republican framework outlined in a constitution. It featured democratic institutions like an elected president, a bicameral legislature, and an independent judiciary (Singh, 2023). This government stressed a centralized state, complete with a structured bureaucracy and different ministries in charge of governing. In contrast, upon their conquest in 2021, the Taliban restored their version of the Islamic Emirate. This is a theocratic framework, with the Emir, Hibatullah Akhundzada, exercising supreme authority (Baczko, 2023). The Taliban's government model is more decentralized, with policies implemented through regional commanders and local councils (shuras). Their governance strategy stresses religious leaders and traditional tribal structures over official state institutions (Sani, 2023).

The previous Afghan administration supported democratic governance, human rights, and international collaboration (19 June 2023, Human Rights – UN news). It aspired to create a pluralistic society that respects women's rights and minority protections while adhering to international standards and conventions. In contrast, the Taliban are motivated by a rigid interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia). Their concept is centered on establishing a society ruled by their interpretation of Islamic principles, which frequently includes restrictions on women's rights, freedom of expression, and personal liberty (Afser et al. 2008) Many parts of modern democratic governance are rejected by the Taliban, who believe they are incompatible with their religious and cultural traditions. Therefore, if there is such a broad divide between a nation's two sides (the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban and the former Afghan

government), it follows that each side will have distinct interests and political relationships with other nations as well as with their neighbors (Raipeha, 2013a).

Lastly, the previous Afghan administration sought widespread international engagement and support, particularly from Western countries and organizations such as the United Nations. It pursued measures to secure international funding, develop regional cooperation, and integrate Afghanistan into the global economy (Koç & Şeker, 2023). This strategy was distinguished by efforts to strike a balance in ties with major powers and adjacent countries. On the other hand, the Taliban's foreign policy is increasingly isolated and cautious. Initially, they sought worldwide recognition and legitimacy by vowing to combat terrorism and uphold specific human rights principles (Suhrke & Schmeidl, 2023). However, their governance methods have frequently contradicted these commitments, resulting in tense relations with other countries. The Taliban has prioritized partnerships with a few significant regional actors like Pakistan, China, and Qatar, who have been more ready to engage with them on practical grounds (Khan & Khan, 2024).

Previous Research and Papers on the Topic:

According to (Rubin, 2002b) article titled "Who Is Responsible for the Taliban" Pakistan has a root and ideological relationship. Meanwhile, Holland wrote in his article that Pakistan keeps a strong relationship with the Taliban to gain advantages and it's all based on strategic goals.

Under the title of "Karachi Becoming a Taliban Safe Haven" (Ali Imtiaz, 2010) wrote in his short article that the majority of Taliban members were trained in Pakistan and Pakistan has intentionally worked on their mindset and at all this country is like a safe haven for Taliban. Pakistan uses the Taliban as a pressure in the region and takes credit for it in various ways on the international stage. Economic, strategic, shared long disputed border, Pakistan's disputed relations with India, Pakistan's complex position on the stability of Afghanistan, and Pakistan's religious and ideological relations with the Taliban have made Pakistan eager to keep the Taliban with themselves and use them for different peruses (Judah, 2002).

Other studies (Cordesman, 2021), (Afsar et al., 2008), (Blair et al., 2013), (Judah, 2002), (Raipeha, 2013a), (Omrani, 2009), (Ali Imtiaz, 2010), (Rubin, 2002b), (Lyll et al., 2013a), (Holland, 2021b) deeply talked about the strong and different kind of relationship between Taliban and Pakistan, Pakistan strategic interests, Historical and long stand relations, Pakistan as a safe haven for militant groups, Pakistan as hired killer and related this.

On the empirical grounds, there is a lack of evidence on "Why Pakistan calculates that they can reach their goals and interests in Afghanistan more likely under Taliban rule compared to other (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), particularly in Ashraf Ghani era 2014 - 2021" or similar issues.

Research Question:

This study aims to investigate the underlying reasons why Pakistan's strategic interests align more favorably with the Taliban than with the former Afghan government under Dr. Ashraf Ghani. Providing complete knowledge of Pakistan's foreign policy priorities in Afghanistan by analyzing the historical context, political dynamics, and regional security concerns. The research question is as follow:

Why do Pakistan's strategic interests align more favorably with the Taliban compared to the previous government of Afghanistan (Dr. Ashraf Ghani Era, 2014 2021)?

Problem Statement:

Though there are plenty of literature works on the historical and long-standing relationship between Pakistan and the Afghan-Taliban, the observed strengthening of its strategic alignment with the Taliban, particularly when compared with the previous Afghan government, presents a significant problem in need of exploration. Additionally, how can a country seek stability in the instability of another country? One question creates another one and it can be said that whether the Taliban means the instability of Afghanistan that Pakistan wants.

Therefore, this problem statement highlighted the need to unravel the intricacies of Pakistan's decision-making processes, emphasizing historical relationships, the Security Dilemma theory, neorealism perspectives, and the mutual cooperation dynamics with the Afghan Taliban. The observed strength of the Pakistan-Taliban partnership, in contrast to the previous Afghan government, prompts a deeper inquiry into the factors influencing this strategic alignment, paving the way for a comprehensive comparative analysis. Addressing this problem was essential in order to understand how Pakistan finds it easy to achieve its strategic goals under the rule of the Taliban and sees its

security proven in their presence and further that is really acceptable for the Taliban what Pakistan charted.

Research Objectives:

- Examine the historical relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban, focusing on the origins and development of their alliance.
- Identify and analyze the specific strategic advantages that Pakistan perceives in maintaining strong relations with the Taliban, comparing them to the previous Afghan government.
- Evaluate the security concerns that Pakistan believes are better addressed through its relationship with the Taliban, contrasting them with its previous dealings with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. And also, Pakistan claims that there are similar threats from Afghanistan.
- Evaluate the factors that make Pakistan believe its strategic goals are more achievable under the rule of the Taliban than with the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. And also explores that weather the Taliban particularly their second regime of (2.0) are still as committed to Pakistan's interests as Pakistan expected or whether they (the Taliban) have changed.

Hypotheses:

Pakistan calculates that they can reach their strategic goals in Afghanistan more easily under the Taliban rule compared to the Republic government of Afghanistan. The analysis and concept in this assumption is that Pakistan has maintained different types of relations with different governments of Afghanistan. Therefore, on the basis that Pakistan has strategic goals in Afghanistan and they have always maintained good and close relations with the Taliban compared to other governments, so they have always maintained this rhythm of relations based on their calculation.

Research Methodology:

Research Design:

This study's research approach was a comparative analytic, qualitative, and argumentative library research including interviews with journalists and experts that examined and compared the connection between Pakistan and the Taliban during their first (1996) and second regimes (2021) to the previous Afghan government (2014-2021) focusing on security dilemma theory and along this following neorealism (structural realism) theoretical framework under the sub-themes to this framework. This methodology enabled a systematic comparison of crucial elements such as diplomatic encounters, strategic interests, and policy approaches, providing insights into the differences and similarities between the two eras.

Data Collection Methods:

A numeral of data collection strategies was employed particularly library research and interviews with 10 participants to acquire relevant data for the study. The study involved international relations journalists and experts to better understand the phenomenon of this research study. On the other hand, the library research mainly focused on finding relevant sources and scholarly discussion on the issue posed in this study. Interviews are conducted with journalists from different news organizations, some of whom could come from Pakistan, Afghanistan, or the Taliban side, in order to acquire firsthand accounts & perspectives.

Data Analysis Techniques:

The information acquired from the literature and participants were analyzed comparatively and qualitatively. This required meticulous analysis of the data to identify themes, patterns, and correlations, as well as drawing valuable deductions and conclusions. The study's goal was to provide a complete knowledge of the characteristics influencing Pakistan's commitment to keeping close connections with the Taliban in contrast to Afghanistan's previous government via a qualitative study.

Ethical Considerations:

Participants in interviews or surveys were asked for informed consent, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality. The research followed ethical guidelines for data collection, storage, and dissemination. In addition, correct source recognition and references were used to protect intellectual property rights and prevent plagiarism. Concerns regarding ethics also included doing the study in a fair, impartial, and courteous way, reflecting multiple viewpoints, and being transparent in reporting the results. The study minimized any possible damage while prioritizing the ethical ideals of honesty, respect, and fairness.

Theoretical Framework:

According to topic and existence phenomena this study employed Security Dilemma as its theoretical framework and also followed Neorealism which hypothesizes that in an anarchic international system, states are primarily concerned with their survival and security. In this scenario, Pakistan's attempt to influence Afghanistan's internal and external affairs aligned with the concept of states engaging in self-help mechanisms to secure their interests.

In the big picture, the author analyzed the study through the perspectives of the Security Dilemma, for a quick light on security dilemma theory, it explains how countries might end up in conflict even if they don't want to harm each other. It happens when countries feel uncertain about each other's intentions and military capabilities. To protect themselves, they build up their military or form alliances, but these actions can be seen as threats by other countries. This confusion can lead to a cycle of fear and distrust, causing more rivalry and aggression (Schweller, 1996). Randall Schweller argues that some countries aren't satisfied with their current security and might use force to achieve their goals. However, Schweller believes that the security dilemma theory doesn't fully explain the behavior of these pragmatic states and overlooks the influence of domestic politics, ideology, and nationalism on a country's actions.

As this study's main focus was on conducting a comparative analysis of Pakistan's relations with the Afghan Taliban compared to the previous Afghan government during Dr. Ashraf Ghani's era, (2014 – 2021). We have the following subtheme regarding this theoretical framework:

Security Dilemma and Pakistan's Actions: The Security Dilemma theory was used to examine how Pakistan, in its pursuit of ensuring its own security, has historically engaged with the Afghan Taliban. The theory suggests that states, when uncertain about each other's intentions and abilities, may take actions to boost their security.

Evolution of Corporations: In this study, the Security Dilemma theory helped to explain the dynamics of Pakistan's engagement with the Afghan Taliban. As the Security Dilemma often involves states adjusting their strategies based on perceived threats, this analysis can explore how the partnership between Pakistan and the Taliban has evolved in response to changing security undercurrents in the area.

Strategic Interests and Policies: As this study focus was "Why Pakistan perceives its strategic interests additional aligned under the rule of the Taliban compared to other republic regimes" resonates with the Security Dilemma theory. The theory posited that states may align themselves with actors perceived to enhance their security.

Theoretical puzzle:

In the theoretical framework of IR (international relations), the experiential dynamics of Pakistan's relations with the Afghan-Taliban and its contrast with the previous Afghan government (Dr. Ashraf Ghani Era, 2014-2021) gave a puzzling phenomenon. Whereas traditional realist perspectives, as like the Security Dilemma theory, anticipate states aligning with actors that enhance their security, the apparent strengthening of Pakistan's ties with the Taliban raises theoretical queries. How does the Security Dilemma theory, highlighting states' security-driven actions, align with the observed strategic alignment of Pakistan with the Taliban, particularly when it comes to compare with the previous Afghan government?

So, the above-mentioned theoretical puzzle underlines the need for an in-depth examination of the conceptual underpinnings of the Security Dilemma theory in the context of evolving geopolitical relations. It challenges existing theoretical predictions, suggesting that additional factors, beyond immediate security concerns, might be influencing state behavior. Unraveling this puzzle requires a nuanced examination of the interplay between security considerations, regional politics, and state decision-making, contributing to the broader discourse on international relations (IR) theory.

Discussion and Findings

An overview of Pakistan's historical relations with Afghan Taliban:

According to our assumption and claim Pakistan has had a strong relationship with the Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) from the very beginning and it is based on mutual interests and for Pakistan it means strategic goals. So, in this regard, we can cite that in 1996, Pakistan was one of the first and one of the three countries that recognized and supported the first regime of the Taliban as the new government of Afghanistan. Pakistan's support included diplomatic recognition as mentioned, military assistance before the insurgency of the Taliban and after, financial aid, and intelligence

collaboration (Holland, 2021a).

We found that Islamabad (Pakistan) had old ties with some elements of the Taliban dating back to the Soviet-Afghan Conflict in the year 1980s. So, during that conflict, Islamabad, along with the United States and other allies, supported the Afghan Mujahideen, and some of these Mujahideen later became significant and very important figures in the Taliban (Iqbal Yousafzai, 1996). This history formed a level of understanding and trust between Islamabad and the Afghan Taliban.

Additionally, Islamabad's relations with the Taliban during their first rule were influenced by several features. One main and key consideration was Pakistan's strategic goals and security concerns. Afghanistan was seen as a crucial neighbor for Pakistan, and supporting the Taliban allowed Pakistan to have influence over the Afghan government and maintain security along its western border named the disputed Durand Line. According to Rajiv Dogra Durand Line is "A Line Across the Pathan (Pakhtoon Tribe) Heart" and this Line is still claimed by Afghanistan and Afghanistan not recognize this line as the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Dogra, 2017).

Another issue was the historical rivalry between India and Pakistan. Afghanistan's shared border Durand line and proximity to Pakistan added a strategic dimension to this historical rivalry (Raiphea, 2013b). Supporting the Taliban was seen as a way to prevent the emergence of a government friendly to India on Pakistan's western border and to establish a more favorable and promising balance of power in the region, particularly in South Asia.

Lastly in this part of the study, but very important, Ideological considerations also played a crucial role. The Afghan-Taliban conservative interpretation of Islam resonated with some groups in Pakistan and Pakistani madrassas, aligning with Pakistan's religious identity. This made it easy for Pakistan to support the Taliban government.

Taliban New Regime 2.0 and Old Friend Pakistan:

From the very first day when Pakistan started support of the Taliban, Pakistan was eager for the harvest. Pakistan wanted the Taliban to come to power and collect their harvest. In the recent political change in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control over Afghanistan in 2021, in Pakistan some ulama of madrassas and Islamist groups celebrated their rise to power and they were happy to see the Taliban again in power. It was not only ulama and Islamists who celebrated the Taliban rise for the second time, but the ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence) leadership members of Pakistan went to Kabul on an unannounced visit (Siddique, 2021). The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban during their second rule has been a focus of attention and different perceptions and questions raised. Islamabad eager to maintain strong ties with the Taliban, offering support like refugee camps, resources, and even offered human resources. This support is believed to have played a role in the Taliban's return to power, giving Pakistan influence over Afghanistan's political landscape and sureness for Pakistan's security concerns.

However, Islamabad wants a government in Afghanistan that is more friendly and committed to Pakistan. Islamabad prefers one that is not influenced by India and for that Pakistan thinks the Taliban regime particularly the Taliban 2.0 regime is the best option. But overall, it seems that after the Taliban's second regime (2.0) Pakistan's security situation became more severe and their good relations were not as good as Pakistan expected (*Taliban's Ties with Pakistan Fraying amid Mounting Security Concerns | News | Al Jazeera*, 2023).

Why Taliban are Favorable ally for Pakistan compared to The Previous Afghan Government?

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Previous Afghan government 2014 – 2021), had very different approach, ways of governing, freedom of expression, moderation and the way they interacted with other countries. However, the Taliban are known for extremism, radical and extreme in their religious views, aiming to create an Islamic state in Afghanistan based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law where no access to women's education, freedom of speech, and modernity. On the other hand, the previous Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was a democratic government that valued human rights and equality (UN news, June 19, 2023). According to political experts, this unambiguous contrast in ideologies and governance very means that neighboring and foreign countries particularly Pakistan will have distinct relationships and interests with each side. "After the Taliban's collapse in 2001, Pakistan officially joined with the US-led anti-terror coalition and supported the formation of a new democratic government in Afghanistan, but this is very funny that when the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed in 2021 and Taliban came to power Pakistan was happy for their second regime 2.0 and Pakistan made significant changes to its relations with Afghanistan (P8, 2023)."

“Pakistan is interested in the good friendship of a government in Afghanistan that prevents the modernization of Afghanistan, but if a democratic and stable government is established in Afghanistan, then they are disappointed (P7, 2024).”

“Islamabad's relationship with the previous Afghan government led by Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani (2014-21) was challenging and was felt friendly even though there were some political and economic connections between Afghanistan and Pakistan (P1, 2024).”

And based on the participant's views, this means that Pakistan drives a two-face policy toward Afghanistan. And Pakistan doing this because, in the framework of the Security Dilemma and Neorealism theory, Islamabad's foreign policy choices regarding Afghanistan can be analyzed through the lens of international relations theories. Neorealism, also known as structural realism, suggests that states' behavior is influenced by the circulation of power in the international system. Based on Neorealism, states should focus on power dynamics and act in their best interest for survival.

The Security Dilemma concept and neorealism are reflected in the assessment of Pakistan's role as a middle power. While Neorealism usually emphasizes the influence of great powers, the text acknowledges that middle powers, like Pakistan, can have a role in shaping international dynamics. This aligns with the Security Dilemma, as states in the international system may seek alliances or actions to improve their security in response to perceived pressures.

Pakistan is concerned about its own Security

Islamabad's support for the Taliban during their first regime was driven by a range of geopolitical objectives and concerns. And Pakistan (Islamabad) still following those concerns in the Taliban's second regime. The very important that Pakistan and Afghanistan share a long, disputed border which is called Durand line and still it is not recognized by any Afghan government as a border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan believes that Taliban rule in Afghanistan will enhance Pakistan's stability and security. Meanwhile, Pakistan's calculation is that under the rule of the Taliban Afghanistan will not reach stability, this is because a stable Afghanistan will be able to ask about the Durand line from Pakistan. In this regard, the Taliban's control in Afghanistan was seen as a way to concept a more likely and friendly government on Pakistan's western border, reducing the potential of cross-border violence and fostering regional peace (Khan, A. 2017).

However, since the Taliban reached power in the year 2021, Pakistan's security situation has worsened, with bombs and deadly attacks on security organizations. Islamabad seems to have fallen into its own trap.

“The fact is that a stable Afghanistan and government will never make Pakistan happy. Pakistan will experience as much fear as Afghanistan becoming stable. Obviously, neither the Taliban nor any other Afghan government has formally recognized the Durand Line with Pakistan, and this territory will eventually be reclaimed from Pakistan when Afghanistan reaches its peak stability P5, 2024.)”

“Pakistan cannot tolerate a strong government and army in Afghanistan because their national interests and identity will be in danger (P1, 2024)”

The counterbalancing game: Pakistan-India

India and Pakistan both try to influence the region and they know each other as a historical enemy. India is also involved in Afghanistan and their try is to prevent this territory Afghanistan from becoming a base for terrorist groups supported by Pakistan. The main goal is to stop these terrorists from launching attacks in India or targeting Indian interests in Afghanistan which is a security dilemma in the region. This determination was strengthened after the Mumbai attacks in 2008, which India suspected were carried out by the Pakistani-backed Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) terrorist group (Tariq, 2015).

In addition to this, both countries Pakistan and India eager to have relaxed access to the rich natural resources, including oil, in Central Asia. India, with its strong-growing economy, anticipates importing more than 80% of its fuel by 2030. To protect energy resources, there's a proposed gas pipeline called TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) covering a distance of 1,000 miles. The pipeline is estimated to cost \$7.6 billion and would carry 33 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas annually. This project is expected to bring economic benefits, including \$1.4 billion in transit fees for Afghanistan. Both India and Pakistan would receive a significant portion of the gas, helping to meet their energy needs. The accomplishment of this project relies on helping security in the region. In this regard influence in the region for both country India and Pakistan is important (Tariq, 2015).

From the above library output regarding the counterbalancing of Pakistan-India, we can have an overall them that Pakistan supports the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan one main reason for its competition with India. Pakistan is not happy if India gains too much influence in Afghanistan. And supporting the Taliban is a strategic move to counteract Indian dominance in the region. So, the previous Afghan government had friendly relations with India, which Pakistan saw as a threat, as it considers India its rival (Tariq, 2015).

Pakistan is resisting Indian Influence in Afghanistan overall, Islamabad is distrustful of any actions by India in Afghanistan, viewing them as undermining its position in the region. By this Pakistan aims to block Indian interests whenever possible, particularly in Afghanistan (Dogra, 2017). The Durand Line which is a disputed share line between Afghanistan and Pakistan, is not recognized by Afghanistan and Pakistan try is to agree any of Afghan government to recognize it. Pakistan supports the Taliban to discourage Afghan claims on parts of Pakistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan's objective is to control northern trade routes to undermine India's economic ties with Afghanistan. This is very crucial for Pakistan's energy wants, particularly in the face of an energy crisis where Pakistan experiencing a severe situation (Dogra, 2017).

For all these objectives Pakistan supports groups like the Taliban, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) to counter Indian interests in Afghanistan. However, these strategies sometimes backfire, leading to internal issues in Pakistan (Lyall et al., 2013b).

“Pakistan and India see each other as enemies. And every country wants to have many and good friends in the region, so Pakistan wants to continue such a government in Afghanistan, which will never be a friend of India but will be a good hand for Pakistan (P7, 2024).”

Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) - Pakistan relations Depends:

One key result that we have found is, that Pakistan-Taliban relations depend on mutual interests Particularly it seems in the second regime of Taliban in Afghanistan and Taliban seems aggressive toward Pakistan and not looking as committed to Pakistan as they were in their first regime. Taliban members were educated in Pakistan and supported by the country in the past even Pakistan provided them with safe houses within Pakistan's territory. However, recent events such as the improvement in TTP attacks, severe and bad security situations, and economic and political crises in the country suggest a shift in this dynamic.

“After the Taliban seized power in 2021 August 15, terrorist attacks in Pakistan increased, and there were clashes along the Afghan-Pakistani disputed border. Initially, it was expected that Pakistan would have a significant role in the Taliban's governance, but the current government doesn't entirely align with Pakistan's expectations (P7, 2024).”

“We can say that some Taliban members remain loyal to Pakistan, but it seems that Pakistan's control or influence over the Taliban has reduced or changed in form. However, Pakistan and the Taliban still have some basis of relations, but it's incorrect to claim that Pakistan established the Taliban or say all Taliban are the agents of Pakistan. The Taliban is an independent Afghan group with its own government, though they maintains close ties with Pakistan due to various agreements and historic motives (P4 Zaheen, 2024).”

Conclusion

In concluding remarks, the relationship between Islamabad (Pakistan) and the Afghan-Taliban (Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) is extremely rooted in strategic, historical, and security concerns by Pakistan and religious factors The Taliban have some ideological similarities particularly in religious side with some Islamic and religious parties and groups in Pakistan. If we are talking about the historical ties, it dating back to the 1990s and the Soviet-Afghan conflict, have established a level of trust and understanding between the Taliban and Pakistan. Here in short, we claim that Pakistan's support for the Taliban is driven by a mix of strategic and security considerations.

The core strategic interests of Pakistan in supporting the Taliban are evident in its concerns about the Durand Line, a long-disputed border with Afghanistan, Pakistan itself security concerns, and the India-Pakistan counterbalancing game. For these examining we buy Security Dilemma and Neorealism perspectives. These perspectives explain how countries might end up in conflict even if they don't want to harm each other. It happens when countries feel uncertain about each other's intentions and military capabilities. To protect themselves, they build up their military or form alliances, but these actions can be seen as threats by other countries. This confusion can lead to a cycle of fear and distrust, causing more rivalry and aggression (Schweller, 1996).

Analyzing Pakistan's foreign policy through the Security Dilemma and Neorealism provides insights into its motivations. The Security Dilemma theory suggests that states seek alliances for security in response to perceived threats and tensions. Neorealism emphasizes power dynamics, and as a middle power, Pakistan strategically aligns itself with the Taliban for survival and influence.

However, Pakistan is eager for a better security situation and strong influence on the Taliban, and in the region, the recent return of the Taliban to power in 2021 August has not necessarily translated into an ideal scenario for Islamabad. The security situation in Pakistan has worsened, and expectations of complete control over the Taliban may not have materialized. According to most participants of this study, there are indications of a shift in dynamics, with some Taliban members showing less commitment to Pakistan in comparison to the first regime of the Taliban in 1996.

Additionally, the regional power play between India and Pakistan adds another layer to this complexity. Pakistan's support for the Taliban serves as a countermeasure against Indian influence in Afghanistan. The historical enmity between India and Pakistan fuels this rivalry, making Afghanistan a battlefield for strategic dominance as it was for superpower countries (USA and Russia).

At all, Pakistan's relations and policy toward Afghanistan is, Pakistan's dual approach, favoring a stable government in Afghanistan while simultaneously supporting the Taliban's extremist views, reflects a nuanced strategy and needs more deeper investigation. However, according to our findings, this two-faced policy aims to secure Pakistan's interests, prevent modernization, stability, and a strong government of Afghanistan, and maintain influence over the region.

In its core, the interplay between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban is a multifaceted narrative encompassing historical legacies, strategic calculations, and regional power dynamics. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Previous Afghan government 2014 – 2021), had very different approach, ways of governing, freedom of expression, moderation and the way they interacted with other countries. However, the Taliban are known for extremism, radical and extreme in their religious views, aiming to create an Islamic state in Afghanistan based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law where no access to women's education, freedom of speech, and modernity. According to political experts, this unambiguous contrast in ideologies and governance very means that neighboring and foreign countries particularly Pakistan will have distinct relationships and interests with each side. Pakistan is more likely to have a strong relationship with the Taliban seems to prevent the modernization of Afghanistan in comparison to the republic government or a democratic system.

Recommendations:

- **Promote top-level Political Dialogues:** To eliminate prejudiced political rivalry that has developed over time and create friendly relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, it would be helpful to start biannual meetings. These summits should involve the heads of the two countries to iron out contentious issues and come up with a common mechanism of solving conflicts. Thus, these dialogues can be defined as the processes that are based on the recognition of historical conflicts and striving for the elaboration of the terms which can be considered as acceptable for both parties thus opening the way for long term political reconciliation and cooperation.
- **Enhance Public Diplomacy Efforts:** In the context of the Afghan and Pakistani populations, public diplomacy should be enhanced as one of the main priorities. In this regard, the people-to-people diplomacy programs can be effectively initiated to encourage people to people contact through cultural exchange, sports, education exchange, civil society engagement and other forms of interaction. Also, media cooperation should be promoted to foster constructive stories as a way of combating the hatred and distrustful propaganda. Such steps can be used in building a better understanding society between the citizens of the two countries.
- **Institutionalize Peace-building Mechanisms:** In this case, to ensure that lasting peace and reconciliation are achieved, there is need to entrench the peace building processes. This can be done through co-established joint peace-building committees comprising governmental and non-governmental organizations from both countries and community leaders. These committees can at one time or another be tasked with the responsibility of working on reconciliation at different levels. Conflict mediation training shall also be extended to the main stakeholders to ensure that they conduct peaceful meetings that will enhance the solution to the arising conflicts.

- Promote Economic Integration: It is crucial to increase the economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan to create a win-win situation and decrease rivalry. Investing in infrastructure projects like the TAPI pipeline, and projects under the CPEC can enhance economic entwinement and have positive effect on political stability. This will lead to the enhancement of trade agreements as well as economic cooperation which will deepen economic interdependence thereby promoting economic welfare in the two countries and also improving the bilateral relations.

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