

Pak-Afghan Border Fencing: Strategic Imperatives and Regional Implications

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Abstract

The Pak-Afghan border fencing has significantly impacted the lives of communities residing on both sides. While the fencing has enhanced surveillance and curtailed age-old cross-border movement, it has not entirely closed loopholes exploited for smuggling, human trafficking, illegal crossings, and terrorism. Despite a notable reduction in such activities, the fencing has introduced new challenges for borderland populations, including restricted mobility and socioeconomic disruptions. This study highlights these challenges and proposes a comprehensive way forward. Effective border management, robust surveillance systems, and bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan can transform the border into a hub for trade and constructive activities. Political leadership plays a crucial role in addressing these issues, promoting economic development, and fostering peace for local communities.

By examining the Pak-Afghan dynamics through the lens of contemporary international relations, this research provides insights into achieving stability and mutual benefits for both nations.

Keywords: Peace, Economic Development, Human Trafficking, Terrorism, Illegal Crossing, Smuggling, Splitting Blood Relatives/ Families.

Introduction

Pakistan's ongoing efforts to fence the 2,670 km Pak-Afghan border, known historically as the Durand Line, mark a significant move to enhance regional security. This multi-layered barrier, nearing completion despite economic and security challenges, features dual fences, surveillance systems, and nearly 1,000 fortified outposts. Initiated in 2017 after cross-border militant attacks, the project aims to curb illegal activities, including smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism, while managing future refugee flows. However, the fence faces criticism for its limited ability to address broader security issues and the Afghan Taliban's operations. Additionally, it intersects with unresolved political disputes, particularly Afghanistan's rejection of the British-drawn boundary and its claims over Pashtun regions in Pakistan. While proponents argue that the fencing will stabilize the border and resolve long-standing disputes, its effectiveness and broader regional implications remain contentious (Threlkeld, 2021). In the 19th century, British and Russian imperial interests clashed in Afghanistan, with Britain seeking a buffer state to prevent Russian expansion. Amid growing tensions, the British pushed for defined borders to counteract Russia's military gains. This led to the 1893 Durand Agreement, which delineated the Afghanistan-British India border. The agreement divided Pashtun tribes, creating a "buffer zone" for British security and limiting Afghan sovereignty. While praised for enhancing British defenses against Russian influence, the Durand Line faced criticism for its arbitrary division of ethnic communities and long-term political and social ramifications. Perspectives on its significance remain polarized, reflecting broader imperial dynamics.

The 1893 Durand Line Agreement, meant to define the border between British India and Afghanistan, exposed contradictions in British policy. While tribes were nominally under British protection, they neither accepted this authority nor the imposed boundary, which severed Pashtun communities and disrupted their

sociopolitical ties. The agreement, criticized as unrealistic, failed to consider the evolving political dynamics and Afghanistan's concerns over British encroachment. It fostered tribal resistance, strained Afghan authority, and created challenges in managing interdependent communities divided by the border. Though aimed at securing a strategic buffer, the line's artificiality and porous nature fueled unrest and failed to establish stability. Tribal defiance and local interconnectedness defied British attempts at strict control, rendering the frontier volatile. This imposition fostered long-standing resentment, becoming a contentious issue in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations after 1947. Afghanistan's subsequent history of conflict—spanning the Soviet invasion, US/NATO interventions, and Taliban resurgence—has deepened regional instability. These events have left Afghanistan vulnerable, with disrupted institutions and societies, and its unresolved border issues remain a source of tension in regional geopolitics.(Junaid & Zab-Un-Nisa, 2021).

The Soviet Union's 1978 intervention in Afghanistan sparked prolonged instability, with a civil war emerging after their withdrawal. The Taliban's rise to power in 1996 established a strict Islamic regime. Following the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. launched an offensive against the Taliban for sheltering Al Qaeda's leader, Osama bin Laden. This intervention strained U.S.-Pakistan relations, as the U.S. pressured Pakistan to take stronger action against the Taliban. Pakistan faced internal criticism, with its Pashtun population sympathizing with the Taliban, compounded by the presence of Taliban leaders in Pakistan and hosting around 3 million Afghan refugees (Junaid & Mustafa, 2021).

Peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, facilitated by Pakistan, repeatedly faltered over the Taliban's insistence on foreign troop withdrawal. After over a trillion dollars spent, the U.S. evacuated its forces in 2021, culminating in the Taliban's takeover on August 15th. A new challenge to regional stability has since arisen with the growing presence of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in Afghanistan's eastern provinces. While some believe the Taliban can contain ISKP, the group's attacks and broader ambitions threaten Afghanistan and neighboring countries like Pakistan. Other extremist groups, including the Turkistan Islamic Movement and the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement, have also gained strength, further complicating the post-withdrawal landscape. For Pakistan, supporting the Taliban is a strategic move to counter the rise of alternative extremist factions.

However, managing this complex conflict requires a careful approach to address the evolving threats while maintaining regional stability (Kazmi, 2016; Saghafi-Ameri, 2011).

The 2,670-kilometer security fence along the Afghan-Pakistan border aims to combat cross-border threats such as terrorism, smuggling, and illegal immigration. Despite the challenges of rugged terrain, armed group interference, economic hardships, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the project is nearing completion, reflecting Pakistan's commitment to regional stability. While proponents highlight the fence's potential to enhance security by disrupting illicit activities, critics, including local communities with cross-border ties, warn of negative socio-economic impacts. The initiative has also faced opposition from smugglers and terrorist groups. Given the complex dynamics, further research is essential to assess the fence's long-term effects on peace, trade, and regional political stability, as well as its broader implications for Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Problem Statement

The border fence between Pakistan and Afghanistan, initiated in 2017, aims to combat cross-border terrorism, smuggling, and illegal immigration. It also reinforces the Durand Line as a permanent international border, benefiting Pakistan politically. While the fence is recognized for strengthening security, its broader implications for Pak-Afghan relations and potential conflict reduction are significant. This study evaluates the impact of the border fencing initiative, contributing to both literature and policy discussions on regional security.

Research Questions

- ❖ What are the imperatives of Pak Afghan border fencing?
- ❖ What are the implications of Pak Afghan border fencing?

Research Objectives

- ❖ To assess the imperatives of Pak Afghan border fencing.
- ❖ To evaluate the implications behind the fencing.

Significance of Research

This study evaluates the Pak-Afghan border fencing, making a significant contribution to both literature and policy. It addresses three key aspects rarely discussed together: controlling smuggling, combating cross-border terrorism, and establishing the Durand Line as an international border. By highlighting the

imperatives and implications of this initiative, the study adds valuable insights to existing literature. It also offers policy recommendations to assist policymakers in developing effective response strategies. Additionally, the study proposes viable solutions to address challenges and rectify fault lines, aiming for an early resolution of the issue.

Literature Review

A literature review is a critical analysis of existing research on a particular topic. Its purpose is to assess the current state of knowledge, identify research gaps, and provide a consolidated understanding of the subject. It plays a key role in shaping research questions, hypotheses, and methodologies. The process typically begins with defining relevant terms and search criteria, followed by gathering relevant studies and materials from databases and other sources. After collecting the information, researchers critically evaluate and synthesize the findings to identify key themes, trends, and patterns, ultimately highlighting areas in need of further exploration (Ketchen Jr & Bergh, 2006).

Additionally, the literature review establishes the context and background for the research project, providing a solid foundation for the researcher to build their own arguments and insights. By critically examining existing studies, the researcher can avoid duplicating previous efforts and instead focus on exploring new or under-explored aspects of the topic. Therefore, the literature review is a crucial step in the research process, offering an overview of current knowledge in the field while identifying areas that need further investigation (Brislin, 1976).

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent challenges facing the country have profound implications for regional security, particularly along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The growing instability within Afghanistan, exacerbated by the Taliban's return to power and the country's economic decline, has increased the significance of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in regional geopolitics. Pakistan, which shares a long and porous border with Afghanistan, has been directly impacted by the increasing flow of refugees, illicit trade, and cross-border insurgent activity. The fencing of the Pak-Afghan border, which Pakistan initiated to curb illegal movement and improve border security, plays a critical role in addressing these challenges. As Afghanistan grapples with escalating internal instability and economic

hardship, the fencing becomes an essential strategic imperative for Pakistan. The border fence aims to control the movement of people and goods, prevent insurgent infiltration, and stem the flow of narcotics and other illicit activities that thrive in the porous border regions. This situation is further complicated by the fact that many Afghan migrants, desperate due to economic and security conditions, seek to cross into Pakistan. Smuggling routes, particularly in border provinces such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remain active, often exacerbated by the growing role of human traffickers who exploit the desperation of Afghan citizens. As Afghanistan's economy worsens, illegal migration has intensified, pushing more individuals to seek passage through Pakistan to neighboring countries. In this context, the border fencing is not just a physical barrier but a reflection of Pakistan's increasing need to protect its sovereignty and manage the growing challenges posed by its neighbor. Additionally, the Taliban's opposition to the fence, particularly regarding border crossings, reflects the complexity of border relations between the two countries. The Taliban's resistance to the border fence highlights the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, especially given the historical disputes surrounding the Durand Line. The fence itself, while a measure for improving security, also represents a significant geopolitical maneuver in the region, influencing Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, the Taliban, and other regional powers. In light of the broader regional security dynamics, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border fence emerges as a strategic imperative not only for Pakistan but for the region as a whole. It reflects the complex interplay of security concerns, economic pressures, and regional power struggles that shape the future of Afghanistan and its interactions with its neighbors. As such, the fence becomes an essential component in managing the cross-border flow of refugees, combating the spread of militancy, and curbing illicit trade, all while navigating the challenges that stem from the evolving political and security landscape in Afghanistan (Bukhari, et al, 2024).

This research explores the relatively underexplored topic of Pak-Afghan border fencing, focusing on its imperatives, implications, and potential impacts. While numerous books and articles have examined the Durand Line, including its tribal system, diverse communities, and the strategies of major powers, there remains a need for a more in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities tied to its pursuit of peace. This study seeks to fill that gap by highlighting the key factors driving the

border fencing initiative, its implications, and the potential consequences for the future (Zeba, 2017). Maliha Zeba's article, "Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan Since Operation Freedom Sentinel: An Overview," traces the evolution of Pakistan's diplomatic approach towards Afghanistan, noting the significant shifts brought on by the Soviet invasion. While Pakistan's policy under Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was initially active, the invasion marked a turning point, but Zeba emphasizes Pakistan's continued commitment to peace in Afghanistan. Mariam Safi's "Afghanistan's Peace Process" offers an in-depth exploration of the challenges in Afghanistan's peacebuilding efforts. She highlights the essential roles of women and civil society in achieving lasting peace, while also stressing the importance of international involvement. Safi proposes strategies to enhance the peace process's success and discusses the current security situation's regional implications. In "The Future of Peace in Afghanistan; Regional Conflicts and Global Strategies," Ajmal Jalal analyzes the influence of regional and global actors, including Iran, China, the U.S., and Pakistan, on Afghanistan's peace journey. He underscores Afghanistan's desire for economic growth and regional collaboration, advocating for Afghan neutrality amidst ongoing conflicts. Ghulam Mustafa, Rana Basam Khan, and Aamir Junaid's "India's Role in Afghan Peace Process" focuses on India's involvement in Afghanistan's peacebuilding. The article identifies India's interests in security, economic cooperation, and regional stability, with a focus on preventing Afghanistan from becoming a threat to India's security. It also outlines India's contributions to Afghanistan's reconstruction and its stance on the conflict, emphasizing its prioritization of national interests. (Jalal, 2016; Rivas & Safi, 2022; Mustafa, et al, 2020).

Ihsanullah Ghafoori and Shukria Azadmanesh, in their article "Women's Participation in the Afghan Peace Process," emphasize the crucial role of women in Afghanistan's peacebuilding efforts. Through research in Nangarhar, Balkh, Bamiyan, and Kabul, the authors examine the Afghan government's commitment to including women in decision-making, the challenges women face, and the efforts to raise national and international awareness on integrating women's voices into the peace process. Ahmed Rashid's "Pakistan on the Brink" explores the strained relationships between the military establishments of the United States, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. His work delves into the deep mistrust between Pakistan and Afghanistan,

highlighting the differing priorities of military and civilian factions in both countries. Rashid's nuanced analysis provides crucial insights into the region's political dynamics and security challenges. The literature review on economic integration between China, Pakistan, Central Asia, Afghanistan, India, and Iran highlights the potential for regional economic growth through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It emphasizes the importance of combining the resources of these states to foster collective development and enhance broader global connectivity. Maliha Zeba's "Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan since Operation Enduring Freedom Sentinel: An Overview" examines Pakistan's evolving relationship with Afghanistan, particularly its engagement under Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, involvement during the Soviet invasion, and support for the Taliban. Zeba analyzes the effects of the American war in Afghanistan on Pakistani society, the challenges Pakistan faces in fostering peace, and the role of "spoilers" in hindering the peace process. The article provides an in-depth overview of the complexities in Pakistan's foreign policy and the challenges to regional stability..(Rashid, 2009; Echavez, Bagaporo, Pilongo, & Azadmanesh, 2014; Harifal Sadig, 2021 ;Junaid & Mustafa, 2021; M. Z. Khan, 2017).

Research Gap

The existing scholarship on the Pak-Afghan border is extensive, covering a variety of sources such as books, academic journals, news articles, and reports. However, there remains a noticeable gap in research specifically addressing the motivations and implications of Pakistan's border fencing initiative. This research seeks to fill this gap by thoroughly investigating the driving forces behind the policy and exploring its potential consequences. By offering original insights into the border fencing issue, this thesis aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the subject, providing valuable knowledge for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research focuses on the effective management and reduction of illegal activities along the Pak-Afghan border, including human trafficking, terrorism, family separations, smuggling, and illegal

crossings. These issues have long been a cause of concern for local communities and state authorities. The implementation of the border fence has significantly decreased many of these challenges, particularly human trafficking, smuggling, and terrorism. However, new challenges have emerged, especially for the people living along the border, who have been separated from their families due to the fence. This research compares the situation before and after the fencing initiative to highlight the ongoing challenges and propose solutions. While the fence has curbed several illegal activities, there is a need for more effective border management to fully address these longstanding issues and ensure the long-term stability and security of the region.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the Afghan peace process and its potential for regional economic development. By focusing on non-numerical data like interviews and documents, it allows for an in-depth understanding of the perspectives and motivations of key stakeholders. Qualitative methods are well-suited for examining complex issues like peacebuilding and economic growth, providing rich insights into the challenges and opportunities involved. The flexible nature of this approach also enables the researcher to adapt as new information emerges, offering a comprehensive analysis of the topic. (Opoku, et al, 2016; Podsakoff & Dalton, 1987; Mackey & Gass, 2015).

Research Design

This study follows a descriptive research design to examine regional economic integration, using three key International Relations (IR) theories: Conflict Resolution Theory, Peace through Prosperity Theory, and Neofunctionalism Theory. Descriptive research is ideal for providing a clear and detailed understanding of complex phenomena without focusing on underlying causes. The researcher collects data through various methods such as interviews, surveys, and document analysis, which are then analyzed to create an accurate portrayal of the topic. The research design is

essential for determining the methods and techniques used to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. (Arnault, 2014; Mackey & Gass, 2015).

This study uses qualitative data analysis and relies solely on secondary data sources, including books, academic journals, research papers, government reports, think tank analyses, and credible news sources. These materials offer a comprehensive range of perspectives and insights into regional economic integration, especially from the field of International Relations. The secondary data approach allows the study to utilize pre-existing information, providing valuable insights and broad perspectives on the research topic. After collecting the data, qualitative analysis techniques, such as thematic analysis, were used to extract key themes, patterns, and relationships. This methodology ensures a thorough exploration of the topic while acknowledging the limitations of relying solely on secondary data (Raimundo, et al, 2018; Reich, 1995; Holton, 2008). This study adopts a descriptive research design and uses qualitative data analysis techniques. Data was collected through an extensive review of existing literature, including academic journals, books, and reports. The data was then rigorously analyzed to address the research questions. Theories like Conflict Resolution Theory, Peace through Prosperity Theory, and Neofunctionalism Theory provide frameworks for understanding the findings, but they are not used to directly analyze the data. Descriptive data analysis was employed to organize, categorize, and summarize the information, providing a detailed understanding of the Afghan peace process and its potential impact on regional economic development. The study analyzed various sources, such as books, research papers, and official reports, to frame the analysis in the context of these theories.

Limitations of the Study

This study recognizes two main limitations: time constraints and budgetary limitations. These factors prevented field research in Afghanistan, limiting data collection to secondary sources such as academic literature and political reports on the Taliban-U.S. peace agreement. While secondary data offers valuable insights, it has limitations regarding validity and reliability, as it reflects the perspectives of the original authors. Ideally, primary data collection through interviews would have provided a more comprehensive understanding. To address these limitations, the

researcher critically evaluated the sources for credibility and relevance and conducted a systematic and objective data analysis to minimize biases. Additionally, two other limitations are acknowledged: the limited generalizability of the findings, as they are specific to Afghanistan, and the dynamic nature of the ongoing peace process, which may affect the accuracy and timeliness of the data (Özkan & Omonkulov, 2020; Usman, 2020).

Discussion

Imperstives of Pak Afghan Border Fencing

The Durand Line, a historically disputed border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, remains a significant source of bilateral tension, as recent clashes and rising fatalities demonstrate. Despite international recognition, successive Afghan governments, including the Taliban, have rejected its legitimacy. This dispute has been compounded by increased cross-border movement, attacks, and militant activity since 2012-2013, leading Pakistan to advocate for stricter border management. However, Pakistan's initiatives to address these issues have faced consistent opposition from Afghanistan. Afghan claims of family separation due to the Durand Line, combined with accusations against Pakistan of supporting the Taliban, fostering terrorism, and infringing on Afghan sovereignty, contribute to the tension. Afghan opposition escalates whenever Pakistan attempts to address border recognition, management, or regulation. This situation highlights the urgent need for a collaborative approach to border control, aiming to transform this historical point of contention into a platform for cooperation. The next section will explore the justifications for constructing a fence along the Pak-Afghan border.

- ❖ **Human Trafficking:** Despite international efforts to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, these issues persist, particularly along the Pak-Afghan border. While border fencing has reduced trafficking, it hasn't eliminated it, as people continue to exploit familial and social connections to bypass security, with brokers charging high fees for illegal passage. These activities are linked to broader criminal networks involving arms and drug smuggling, and are exacerbated by weak governance, corruption, and inadequate anti-trafficking measures. A comprehensive approach is needed, addressing root causes like poverty and lack of opportunity, dismantling criminal networks, and protecting victims, while ensuring international cooperation to tackle these interconnected challenges.
- ❖ **Migrant Smuggling:** Migrant smuggling and human trafficking are distinct but interconnected issues. While smuggling involves the consensual illegal movement of individuals, trafficking entails exploitation through coercion or force. Migrants, initially consenting to smuggling, may become vulnerable to trafficking, particularly at the Pak-Afghan border. Understanding these differences is crucial for creating effective policies and interventions to address both issues and protect vulnerable populations. Collaborative efforts are essential to dismantle trafficking networks and safeguard individuals..
- ❖ **Terrorism/ Illegal Crossing:** Pak-Afghan relations have deteriorated significantly due to border tensions, particularly after Pakistan implemented new border control measures in June 2016, including constructing a gate at Torkham and requiring identification for Afghan nationals. These steps were met with strong opposition from Afghanistan, resulting in casualties and heightened tensions. Despite attempts at dialogue, such as invitations for discussions on border management, the issue of the Durand Line remains unresolved. The refusal of both the Afghan government and insurgent groups like the Taliban and TTP to recognize the Durand Line complicates the situation. This non-recognition, combined with militant activity along the porous border, poses a major security threat, impacting trade routes and increasing cross-border attacks. The ongoing dispute over the Durand Line and the related security challenges underscore the need for a collaborative and multifaceted approach to address the root causes of instability between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

- ❖ **Splitting Blood Relatives/ Families:** Pakistan and Afghanistan, despite shared historical, cultural, and ethnic ties, have a complex relationship marked by territorial disputes, particularly Afghanistan's claims to Pakistani land. Both countries are interdependent: Pakistan relies on Afghanistan for trade routes to Central Asia, while Afghanistan depends on Pakistan's ports for maritime access. This dynamic frames the ongoing disputes, including the controversial Durand Line border fencing, which remains contentious despite historical treaties affirming its legitimacy. As the embers of the Second World War began to fade and the British Raj prepared to relinquish its grip on South Asia in the mid-1940s, a historical fault line re-emerged, threatening to fracture the nascent peace in the region. This fault line, embodied in the contentious Durand Line, served as a stark reminder of the unresolved territorial disputes that simmered beneath the surface of seemingly amicable relations between Afghanistan and the newly formed state of Pakistan. The Durand Line, established in 1893 through an agreement between the British Empire and the Emir of Afghanistan, aimed to demarcate the border between British India and Afghanistan. However, the agreement was met with immediate and sustained opposition from the Afghan government, who vehemently contested the legitimacy of the imposed boundary. They argued that the Durand Line, drawn with scant regard for ethnic or tribal affiliations, severed Pashtun communities, effectively dividing their ancestral lands and fracturing their cultural unity. Fueled by this sense of historical injustice, the Afghan government, upon learning of the impending British withdrawal, seized the opportunity to press its claims. They implored the departing British authorities to rectify the historical wrongs and return the territories they deemed rightfully Afghan.

Their demands were multifaceted and resolute:

- ❖ **The repatriation of Afghan populations:** They vehemently argued that the Pashtun communities residing between the Durand Line and the Indus River, forcibly separated from their Afghan brethren, should be granted the right to return to their ancestral lands within Afghanistan.
- ❖ **Self-determination for the divided Pashtuns:** The Afghan government passionately advocated for the right of these Pashtun communities to exercise

their fundamental right of self-determination. They demanded that these populations be granted the freedom to choose their own destiny, be it complete independence or integration with another nation, based on their own aspirations and cultural identity.

- ❖ **Abrogation of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty:** Afghanistan views the Durand Line agreement as a colonial imposition and demands its abrogation, seeking to renegotiate territorial boundaries based on mutual respect and historical realities. This stance has caused tension with Pakistan, which sees these claims as a threat to its territorial integrity and national security. The historical grievances surrounding the Durand Line, reignited after the British withdrawal, have created an enduring dispute, complicating the relationship between the two nations and hindering potential cooperation (Quddus, 1982).

The Afghan Perspective and the Pakistani Response- Afghan Demands

As the British withdrawal from South Asia loomed on the horizon in the mid-1940s, the Afghan government, led by King Zahir Shah, seized the opportunity to revive its longstanding claims regarding the Durand Line. They vehemently contested the legitimacy of the 1893 agreement, arguing that it severed Pashtun communities and disregarded their cultural and tribal ties.

- ❖ **Repatriation and Self-Determination:** The Afghan government demanded the return of Pashtun populations residing between the Durand Line and the Indus River, asserting their right to self-determination and the freedom to choose their future, be it independence or integration with another nation.
- ❖ **Abrogation of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty:** Afghanistan advocated for the complete abrogation of the Anglo-Afghan Treaty that defined their eastern border, viewing it as an illegitimate imposition of the colonial era.

The Pakistani Counter-Arguments

Pakistan, however, vehemently rejected these claims. They argued that:

- ❖ **Successive Afghan governments had endorsed the Durand Line:** Pakistan pointed to historical agreements, including the Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1919, as evidence of Afghan acceptance of the established border. Inheritance from the British Empire: Pakistan asserted its right to inherit the Durand Line as part of its territorial boundaries upon gaining independence from the British in 1947.
- ❖ **International Law Precedent:** Pakistan invoked principles of international law, stating that treaties entered into by a predecessor state are binding upon its successor. This divergence in perspectives laid the groundwork for the ongoing Durand Line dispute, highlighting the complex historical, legal, and cultural dimensions of the issue. The unresolved claims continue to be a source of tension in العلاقات بين أفغانستان وباكستان, hindering the development of a more cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship between the two nations.

Afghanistan's Shifting Stance on Pakistan

As Pakistan pursued UN membership in 1947, Afghanistan initially voiced its disapproval. They argued that Pakistan's claimed territory included Afghan lands, and therefore, its membership was illegitimate. This stance was reflected in the statement by Husayn Aziz, the Afghan delegate at the UN, who emphasized the right of the Pashtun population to self-determination without external influence. However, this initial opposition was short-lived. By October 1947, Afghanistan withdrew its negative vote and signaled its interest in a peaceful resolution through diplomatic channels. This shift was evident in the dispatch of Najibullah Khan, the Afghan Minister of National Education, as a special envoy to Pakistan. Khan's mission aimed to establish diplomatic relations and address the Durand Line issue. He emphasized Afghanistan's lack of territorial ambitions and highlighted the deep cultural and familial ties between Afghans on both sides of the border. He argued for a solution that acknowledged these bonds and ensured the well-being of the Pashtun communities. This shift in Afghanistan's approach marked a move away from immediate confrontation and towards seeking a diplomatic resolution to the complex Durand Line dispute.

Afghanistan's Emotional Stance on the Durand Line

Najibullah Khan, the Afghan envoy to Pakistan, expressed Afghanistan's strong solidarity with the Pashtun communities on the Pakistani side of the Durand Line, advocating for their right to self-determination and a distinct cultural identity. He envisioned an autonomous state for these Pashtuns, reflecting their shared heritage with Afghanistan. Despite initial tensions over the Durand Line, both nations recognized the importance of establishing diplomatic relations. Marshal Shah Wali, Afghanistan's first ambassador to Pakistan, emphasized the cultural and religious bonds between the countries while addressing Pakistan's concerns over territorial claims. The British government declared the Durand Line an international border, further solidifying Pakistan's position. These steps facilitated dialogue, though the dispute over the Durand Line remained unresolved.

A Decade of Tension: Afghanistan and Pakistan (1950-1963)

The period between 1950 and 1963 witnessed a significant deterioration in the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This discord stemmed from several complex and interconnected factors:

- ❖ **The Enduring Durand Line Dispute:** The unresolved issue of the Durand Line, marking the border between the two nations, remained a constant source of friction. Afghanistan's claims to territories within Pakistan, particularly those inhabited by Pashtun communities, fueled tensions and mistrust.
- ❖ **Accusations of Incitement:** Pakistan accused Afghanistan of supporting and inciting Pashtun separatist movements within its borders. This perceived interference in internal affairs further strained the relationship.
- ❖ **Border Skirmishes:** The simmering tensions occasionally erupted into armed clashes along the disputed border, leading to casualties and escalating the conflict.
- ❖ **Cold War Alignments:** The Cold War context significantly influenced the relationship. Pakistan's alignment with the US-led Western bloc through pacts like CENTO and SEATO drew criticism from the Soviet Union, which supported Afghanistan. This external involvement exacerbated existing tensions.

A Turning Point:

By 1963, the severed diplomatic relations between the two countries highlighted the need for a peaceful resolution. The intervention of the Shah of Iran facilitated the restoration of diplomatic ties in May 1963, marking a turning point towards a more constructive dialogue.

The Cold War and the Durand Line:

The unresolved Durand Line dispute became a pawn in the larger Cold War chessboard, further complicating relations.

- ❖ **Soviet Support for Afghanistan:** The Soviet Union, seeking to gain influence in the region, actively supported Afghanistan's challenge to the Durand Line's validity and the Pashtunistan issue. This backing emboldened Afghanistan to adopt a more uncompromising stance towards Pakistan.
- ❖ **Military and Economic Aid:** Soviet military and economic aid bolstered Afghanistan's position, strengthening their resistance to any compromise on the Durand Line. However, as Quddus suggests, this support was primarily motivated by a desire to undermine Pakistan's Western alignment rather than genuine concern for Afghanistan's interests.

An Anomaly: Afghanistan's Neutrality in Indo-Pak Wars:

Interestingly, despite Soviet support, Afghanistan maintained neutrality during the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, demonstrating a degree of independence in its foreign policy. This neutrality is further evidenced by the absence of any conflict along Pakistan's western borders during these wars.

- ❖ **A New Chapter Begins:** The overthrow of the Daud Khan regime in 1978 and the subsequent rise of the communist Khalq government under Tarakai marked a turning point in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. This new chapter ushered in a period of significant change and further complexities in the already strained relationship between the two neighboring nations.
- ❖ **The Soviet-Afghan War and its Aftermath:** The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 marked a significant turning point in the region's history.

This period, coupled with the subsequent rise of the Taliban regime, significantly impacted the Durand Line dispute and its consequences.

Pakistan's Role and Regional Dynamics

- ❖ **Supporting the Mujahideen:** Under President Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan, with the backing of the US and other Western powers, actively supported the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet-backed Afghan government. This included training and equipping Afghan fighters primarily on Pakistani soil.
- ❖ **Wider Involvement:** Saudi Arabia and Egypt also joined the fray, further escalating the conflict. Additionally, foreign fighters from the Arab world and Middle East were recruited and channeled through Pakistan to fight in Afghanistan.

Unintended Consequences

- ❖ **Destabilization and Lawlessness:** The use of Pakistan's tribal areas as a staging ground for the war had unintended consequences. The influx of weapons and fighters fueled the proliferation of illegal activities, including the widespread availability of Kalashnikov rifles, ultimately deteriorating law and order in the region.
- ❖ **Abandoned Region:** Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the international community largely abandoned Afghanistan, leaving the region and its people to grapple with the lasting effects of the war, including the presence of numerous foreign fighters.

The Durand Line and its Challenges

- ❖ **Increased Vulnerability:** The war and its aftermath heightened the vulnerability of the Durand Line, facilitating various illegal activities, including smuggling and militant infiltration.
- ❖ **Fenced Border and its Impact:** In response to security concerns, Pakistan began fencing the border to curb illegal activities. However, this measure has led to unintended consequences, such as the separation of families and communities living on both sides of the border. Additionally, crossing the border for essential

activities like attending funerals or maintaining cultural and religious ties has become more challenging due to bureaucratic hurdles and lengthy procedures.

- ❖ **Moving Forward:** Finding a solution to the Durand Line dispute requires addressing the complex historical, political, and social factors at play. Balancing security concerns with the needs and well-being of local communities residing on both sides of the border remains a critical challenge for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Smuggling and Economic Impact

Border fencing has a larger impact both on smuggling and economy.

- ❖ **Economic Impact:** Afghanistan's economy was struggling even before the Taliban's August 2021 takeover. The reduction of US forces starting in 2011 and the decline in foreign reconstruction funding led to a shrinking economy and labor market, revealing that Afghanistan's economic gains were unsustainable and dependent on a wartime economy (Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, 2021). Between 2014 and 2016, around 500,000 people lost jobs due to the reduction in foreign assistance, and the COVID-19 pandemic worsened this situation, with an estimated 2 million people losing their jobs by May 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2016; Omid, 2020). This economic decline increased the demand for human smugglers (Hoang, 2022). The pandemic forced many Afghans abroad to return, but with limited prospects due to economic difficulties at home. As neighboring countries eased restrictions, returning migrants sought to leave again, relying on smugglers. Border closures and enhanced controls led to higher smuggling fees, with prices rising by nearly 30% for routes to Iran and Pakistan (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020). By June 2021, Afghanistan had 2.6 million refugees, the second highest number globally after Syria (UNHCR, n.d.). After the Taliban's takeover, the economic crisis worsened with widespread job losses, restrictions on women's work, and cuts in foreign aid (International Labour Organization, 2022). This, coupled with a severe drought displacing nearly 700,000 people, led to an increase in illegal migration, with smuggling activities surging. By March 2022, 5,000–6,000 Afghans were

attempting to flee the country daily, and smuggling fees increased significantly (Karimi, 2022; Ellis-Petersen et al., 2021).

- ❖ **Smuggling:** Most of Afghanistan's opiate income comes from manufacturing and international export, with the domestic market being much smaller (UNODC, 2022). Afghanistan's opiates follow routes through Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and other regions to European, Asian, and African markets. Pakistan, with its long border with Afghanistan, plays a significant role in these trafficking routes (Rocha, 2017). Afghanistan's geographic and community ties with Pakistan help mitigate its isolation, facilitating both legal and illicit activities (International Crisis Group, 2014). Pakistan is a key informal financial conduit for Afghanistan, handling currency smuggling and hawala transactions, particularly after the Taliban's victory (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2022). The border areas of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have long been poorly governed, with criminal networks crossing these regions to smuggle goods, including opiates (International Crisis Group, 2014). Organized crime networks, established during Afghanistan's wars, rely on transnational routes involving Afghanistan, Iran, India, and Pakistan, including maritime routes from Karachi (UNODC, 2015). While some poppy cultivation exists in Pakistan, Afghanistan remains the main source of opium, heroin, and other illicit drugs, with trafficking networks crossing Pakistan's borders for international markets (Rubin, 2002; Haq, 1996). Despite eradication efforts, some drug production still occurs in Pakistan, particularly heroin, and precursor chemicals are smuggled into Afghanistan (National Initiative Against Organised Crime, 2020). Smuggling is a common practice for both licit and illicit goods, especially along the Durand Line, benefiting Pakistani warlords and militants (International Crisis Group, 2014). Although the Pakistan-Afghanistan border fence has reduced illicit cross-border movement, drug traffickers continue to exert influence, pressuring the Taliban and Pakistani officials to allow smuggling to continue (Khan, 2021; Ahmad, 2021).
- ❖ **Balochistan:** Balochistan, with its extensive borders and coastline, plays a key role in Pakistan's drug trafficking routes originating from Afghanistan (Jain, 2018). The region's borders with Afghanistan, Iran, and the Arabian Sea provide numerous entry points for smuggling, especially through Chagai district, which

borders Afghanistan's drug hubs like Helmand and Nimroz (Rasmussen, 2017).

The region's remote areas, particularly the Golden Crescent, are notorious for opium production and trafficking. Militant insurgencies, including those by Baloch separatists and the Taliban, have created conditions favorable for criminal networks, with poor coordination between border security agencies and weak law enforcement exacerbating the problem (Marhoon, 2020). Policing in Balochistan is limited, with tribal militias controlling rural areas and a weak maritime security presence, allowing smuggling activities to flourish. Despite efforts by the Frontier Corps, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, and Anti-Narcotics Force, policing remains insufficient, especially along maritime routes (Jamal & Patil, 2010). Drug trafficking is intertwined with local insurgencies, as militants often provide protection for smuggling routes, allowing criminal groups to operate freely, especially near the Makran coast (Barrech, 2020; Baloch, 2017). Despite military operations, insurgent violence and alliances among armed secessionist groups have increased, with the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan potentially influencing this rise (Rana, 2022).

- ❖ **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa:** Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's border with Afghanistan spans eight districts, including six former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which lacked formal governance and rule of law until their merger with KP in 2018 (International Crisis Group, 2018b). FATA's informal governance made it a haven for criminals, militants, and smugglers, including drug traffickers. Following the US/NATO invasion of Afghanistan, the Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) took control, exploiting smuggling and drug trade revenues (International Crisis Group, 2009, 2018b). Military operations disrupted the TTP but caused collateral damage, and tighter border controls limited legitimate trade. Despite these efforts, the TTP has resurged, using the Taliban's victory as inspiration (Mir, 2022). Drug smuggling continues, with smuggling routes controlled by armed militant groups, even in areas with a border fence. Drug traffickers employ low-level "mules," truckers, and children to move narcotics across borders. Larger criminal networks leverage bribery to facilitate smuggling across national and provincial boundaries.

- ❖ **Political Instability:** Political instability refers to a situation in which a country's political system experiences frequent changes in government, disruptions in the functioning of political institutions, and a lack of stability in the policy-making process. This can be a result of underlying political, economic, and social problems and can have serious consequences for a country's development and stability. To address major challenges, implications are necessary for a viable solution/ way forward. Therefore after discussing the imperatives we come over to imperatives in detail so that an early rectification is done in this regard from both sides of the leadership by joining hands.
- ❖ **Human Trafficking:** Afghanistan is a major hub for human trafficking, with men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and prostitution, particularly within the country. While internal trafficking is more common than cross-border trafficking, Afghanistan also serves as a transit country for victims being moved between neighboring nations. Key drivers of trafficking include poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and corruption. Afghanistan has taken steps to combat trafficking, including referring victims to care facilities and enacting laws with severe penalties. However, trafficking remains widespread, with victims often trafficked for sexual servitude, forced marriages, and slavery, and some children indoctrinated to become suicide bombers. International cooperation is crucial to addressing these issues effectively.
- ❖ **Terrorism/ Illegal Crossing:** Following the success of Pakistan's Zarb-e-Azb military operation, which pushed the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) into Afghanistan, there has been an increase in TTP attacks on Pakistan from their Afghan bases, such as the APS and Bacha Khan University attacks, and more recently, in February 2017, when over 100 people were killed in a week of violence. In response, Pakistan has focused on enhancing border management to prevent cross-border militant movement, with more than 15,000 people crossing the Torkham border daily. Despite repeated requests for Afghanistan to act against TTP militants and collaborate on border control, the Afghan government has been uncooperative, instead accusing Pakistan of pushing terrorist networks into Afghanistan. Since 2017, Pakistan has implemented stricter border controls, including requiring Pakistani citizens to obtain visas to travel to Afghanistan, except for those from Landikotal. These measures have reduced violence and

eliminated many terrorist safe havens in FATA. However, relations worsened after a May 2017 incident in which Afghan forces fired on a Pakistani census team, killing 10 and injuring 47, leading to Pakistan retaliating by targeting Afghan check-posts. Despite this, Afghanistan has not supported Pakistan's border management proposals. Pakistan plans to continue with its border modernization efforts, including constructing gates and posts at key locations along the border, with over 338 border posts planned to be operational by 2019.

- ❖ **Smuggling and Economic Impact:** With the Taliban in power in Kabul, Western counter-narcotics efforts are likely to focus on transit countries, particularly Pakistan, which already receives substantial international counter-narcotics assistance (SIGAR, 2018). While interdiction is a key component, its effectiveness depends on Pakistan's willingness and ability to prosecute high-level traffickers and corrupt officials. However, Pakistan's weak criminal justice system, characterized by rare prosecutions, complicates this effort. The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), which leads Pakistan's counter-narcotics efforts, emphasizes kinetic operations and arrests, but it does little to target major trafficking organizations. As a result, major traffickers remain operational, with drug rings continuing to thrive, particularly in border regions. Donors can achieve better results by looking beyond law enforcement, especially in the tribal belt of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where democratic reforms and significant UK investment in stabilization offer potential for progress (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, n.d.). Instead of focusing solely on reducing drug quantities reaching Europe, efforts should also address the broader impact of drug trafficking on rule of law, economic development, and institutional growth in the former FATA regions. Three areas for deeper engagement include: advocating for the successful implementation of the FATA-KP merger, supporting the development of police and judicial systems in tribal areas (International Crisis Group, 2022b), and assisting victims of trafficking and drug abuse, particularly those seeking treatment for addiction (Shinwari, 2019). Such efforts would enhance public discourse on the harmful effects of drugs and support communities most affected by trafficking.
- ❖ **Splitting Blood Relatives/ Families:** After the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 and the ousting of the Taliban, militants allegedly crossed the

Durand Line to regroup and launch cross-border attacks, destabilizing the region. This caused significant social and political upheaval in the tribal areas, destroying the tribal elite, weakening political authority, and displacing families. The region, once isolated, became one of the most dangerous in the world due to the hijacking of tribal systems by foreign militants. Pakistan, supporting the US-led war on terror, proposed fencing the Durand Line in 2001 to prevent unauthorized movement and cross-border smuggling. Afghan authorities, however, opposed the idea, fearing it would legitimize the disputed border and further divide ethnic Pashtun tribes. Despite Pakistan's efforts, including partial fencing in 2007, Afghanistan remained opposed, with President Karzai arguing that it would not stop terrorism but would divide families and tribes. In early 2007, clashes occurred between Pakistani and Afghan forces over the fencing, escalating tensions. Despite international interventions, the project was halted temporarily. Pakistan later resumed fencing, claiming success in reducing cross-border activities, but Afghan security remained insufficient. Both sides struggled with effective border control, highlighting the complexities of securing the Durand Line. Pentagon officials also acknowledged the difficulty of fully securing the border, emphasizing the need for extensive resources and joint efforts from both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Findings

Due to Pak-Afghan border fencing many issues have been solved whereas on the other hand new challenges have been faced by the government as well as by the population living all along the border on both sides. Before this action was taken people there used to go from Pakistan to Afghanistan and likewise from Afghanistan to Pakistan for different reasons without any obstacles/ check. This included people having families on both sides, those who were involved in smuggling, terrorism and human trafficking etc. Moreover those issues which need to be rectified are highlighted and way forward given for government's action accordingly. Fencing has a larger impact on the lives of those who are settled with families on both sides of the border. Therefore efforts are required to go more deep in solving this issue and making the lives of the people easier. Terrorism, illegal crossing, smuggling and human trafficking etc done through this border needs a more precise surveillance system to stop, counter and monitor all types of anti-state activities.

Conclusion

The Durand Line, established in 1893 as the border between British India and Afghanistan, remains a contentious issue. Despite being internationally recognized, the border is porous, allowing Pashtun tribes to cross freely, leading to accusations of cross-border infiltration. Pakistan proposed fencing the border to curb terrorist activities, but this was opposed by Afghanistan, which views the fence as a symbol of division, particularly given the shared ethnicity, culture, and religion of the people on both sides. Afghans see it as a modern-day Berlin Wall and resist the idea, while Pakistan seeks to prevent insurgents from destabilizing its peace. The situation is complicated by political unrest in Pakistan's tribal areas and Afghanistan's own instability, where peace in the region is closely tied to Afghanistan's stability. The unresolved border issue exacerbates tensions, especially in the context of the ongoing war on terror. While there have been recent agreements for joint operations against terrorist groups, Afghanistan's reluctance to enforce strict border management and its rising violence undermine progress. Despite these challenges, both nations must recognize the shifting geopolitical landscape and cooperate to secure the border and address regional threats, such as insurgent groups exploiting unsupervised crossing points. A cooperative approach between Afghanistan and Pakistan is essential for regional stability and long-term peace.

Recommendations

- ❖ **Enhanced Border Surveillance:** After completing the fencing, the next priority should be establishing a robust surveillance system along the border to prevent illegal activities. This will help the government precisely control cross-border movement, curbing issues like cross-border terrorism, human trafficking, and other security threats.
- ❖ **Addressing Core Issues for Local Populace:** Both governments must collaborate to address the core issues affecting the local population by creating more crossing points. This will allow easier access for families on both sides of the border and reduce illegal crossings driven by personal reasons.

- ❖ **Commitment to the Peace Deal:** Both the Afghan government and the Taliban should demonstrate a strong commitment to the peace agreement. They must work together to overcome challenges during the implementation phase, showing a willingness to compromise and find mutually acceptable solutions.
- ❖ **Cooperation for Border Management:** Afghanistan and Pakistan should cooperate to develop a functional mechanism for managing their shared border, turning it into a channel for cooperation instead of confrontation. Establishing more legal and recognized entry and exit points, in addition to the existing check posts at Torkham and Chaman, will reduce tensions and regulate cross-border movement effectively.
- ❖ **Regulating Border Movement and Trade:** Border management should focus on regulating and legalizing movement, rather than preventing it. Both countries need a cooperative framework to manage the flow of individuals and goods. This includes addressing cross-border trade issues by implementing realistic trade rules and regulations, particularly to reduce smuggling and losses caused by border closures.
- ❖ **Collaborative Intelligence and Compliance:** Moving beyond blame, both nations must implement an integrated, intelligence-led approach to border security. Afghanistan, as a sovereign state, should accept its defined border to maintain sovereignty and prevent external interference.
- ❖ **Role of the International Community:** NATO and the US, through the Resolute Support Mission (RSM), should help improve border coordination and mechanisms between Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly through the Tri-Partite Commission, to establish new joint border management initiatives.
- ❖ **Pakistan's Sovereign Right to Border Defense:** Despite Afghanistan's non-recognition of the Pak-Afghan border, the Durand Line remains internationally recognized. Pakistan should continue its border initiatives within its territory without requiring formal recognition from Afghanistan, as Pakistan has the sovereign right to defend its borders.
- ❖ **Adopting a Pragmatic and Holistic Approach:** Both countries must adopt a pragmatic approach to address historical grievances and the key issues that fuel

tension. A holistic approach will help in resolving irritants and improving bilateral relations for long-term stability.

- ❖ **Promotion of Cross-Border Economic Cooperation:** Both countries should actively work towards enhancing economic cooperation through joint infrastructure projects, such as connecting roads and trade hubs. This will not only boost the economies of both nations but also create more avenues for legal trade and reduce the incentive for illegal activities.
- ❖ **Humanitarian Considerations in Border Policies:** The humanitarian impact of border policies should be prioritized. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan should ensure that their border regulations do not severely disrupt the lives of civilians, particularly those who rely on cross-border movement for their livelihood or familial ties.
- ❖ **Engagement of Local Communities:** To build trust and ensure the success of border management strategies, it is crucial to involve local communities in the decision-making process. Engaging local leaders and tribal elders on both sides of the border will help in understanding the local dynamics and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for border security and cooperation.

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