

Pakistan's Afghan Policy: Predicaments, Challenges And The Way Forward

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Abstract

This research paper explores Pakistan's Afghan policy in the context of the ongoing conflict and instability in Afghanistan. The paper analyzes the challenges and predicaments that Pakistan faces in relation to its Afghan policy, including issues related to security, refugees, and economic development. The paper argues that Pakistan faces significant challenges in its Afghan policy, including the threat of terrorism, border management issues, and the potential spillover of the conflict into Pakistan. It also highlights the role of regional powers and external actors, such as China and the US, in shaping the situation in Afghanistan. The paper also examines the regional and international dynamics that impact Pakistan's Afghan policy, including the role of neighboring countries and global powers. Through this analysis, the paper proposes possible ways forward for Pakistan's Afghan policy, including the need for a comprehensive strategy that addresses security, political, and economic concerns, as well as greater engagement with regional and international stakeholders to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Key Words: Pakistan's Afghan Policy, Durand Line, Blame Game, Economic Integration.

Internal challenges and factors

Pakistan's Afghan policy is shaped by various internal factors that have influenced its stance towards Afghanistan. These factors include historical, geopolitical, security, and economic considerations.

Historical factors play a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. The two countries share a long history of cultural, ethnic, and religious ties. Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan have been influenced by its desire to maintain strategic depth and ensure friendly relations with its neighbor, due to its perception of Afghanistan as a key buffer state against India. This historical context has shaped Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan and influenced its policy decisions.

Geopolitical factors also play a role in Pakistan's Afghan policy. Afghanistan is strategically located as a landlocked country with borders shared by Pakistan,

Iran, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The geopolitical importance of Afghanistan has implications for regional stability, trade routes, and access to resources. Pakistan's Afghan policy is influenced by its desire to protect its strategic interests in the region and maintain influence in Afghanistan, which is seen as a key element of its broader regional strategy.¹

Security considerations are another internal factor that shapes Pakistan's Afghan policy. The volatile security situation in Afghanistan, including the presence of militant groups and the ongoing conflict, has direct implications for Pakistan's security.² Pakistan has faced challenges such as cross-border terrorism, drug trafficking, and refugee influx from Afghanistan, which have had a significant impact on its internal security dynamics. As a result, Pakistan's Afghan policy is shaped by its security concerns,

¹ Cheema, Pervaiz Iqbal. (2008). Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Historical Analysis. Oxford University Press.

² Ibid.

including efforts to mitigate threats to its stability and security.

Economic factors also play a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. Economic cooperation and trade relations with Afghanistan are of strategic importance to Pakistan. Pakistan seeks to enhance economic connectivity with Afghanistan through initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which includes infrastructure projects that aim to promote economic development and regional connectivity. Pakistan's economic interests in Afghanistan influence its policy decisions, including efforts to enhance bilateral trade, promote investment, and facilitate economic development in the region.³

Public opinion can play a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy as it reflects the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of the Pakistani public towards Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan. Public opinion can influence policy decisions through various channels, including political discourse, media coverage, civil society activism, and public protests. Understanding the role of public opinion in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy is important for analyzing the dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy-making process.⁴

Public opinion can influence Pakistan's Afghan policy in several ways. First, public sentiment towards Afghanistan can shape the overall public mood and perception of Afghanistan, which in turn can influence policymakers' decisions. Positive or negative public opinion towards Afghanistan can impact policymakers' willingness to engage in diplomatic efforts, support or oppose military interventions, and pursue or avoid bilateral relations with Afghanistan.⁵

Second, public opinion can affect policymakers' decision-making on issues such as security cooperation, border management, and refugee policies related to Afghanistan. Public concerns about cross-border terrorism, drug trafficking, and security threats emanating from Afghanistan can shape policymakers' responses, including measures to enhance security cooperation, tighten border controls, and manage the flow of refugees.⁶

Third, public opinion can influence Pakistan's approach towards the Afghan peace process. Public support or opposition to peace talks, negotiations with Afghan factions, and engagement with external powers involved in the Afghan conflict can influence policymakers' decisions on Pakistan's role in the peace process.⁷

It is important to note that public opinion on Afghanistan in Pakistan can be complex and multifaceted, with diverse views among different segments of society, including political parties, religious groups, ethnic communities, and civil society organizations. Public opinion can also be influenced by external factors such as media coverage, geopolitical dynamics, and regional developments, which can further shape Pakistan's Afghan policy.⁸

The media plays a crucial role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy by influencing public opinion, shaping the narrative, and framing policy debates. Media coverage of Afghanistan can impact policymakers' perceptions, shape public sentiment, and influence policy decisions. Understanding the role of media in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy is important for

³³ Khan, Fazal-ur-Rahman. (2014). *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Conflict, Extremism, and Resistance to Modernity*. Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴ Yusuf, Moosa. (2012). *Understanding Pakistan's Foreign Policy*. Oxford University Press.

⁵ Iqbal, Anjum. (2014). Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan. *Strategic Studies*, 34(1), 85-102.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Jaspal, Rizwan. (2015). Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Exploring the Articulation of Pakistan's National Interest in Afghanistan. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 23(1), 19-42.

⁸ Kazmi, S. H. (2019). Public Opinion and Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan: Understanding the Role of Media. In S. S. Shah & I. Aziz (Eds.), *Understanding Pakistan's Foreign Policy* (pp. 91-107). Palgrave Macmillan.

analyzing the dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy-making process.⁹

Media coverage of Afghanistan in Pakistan can impact policymakers' perceptions of the situation in Afghanistan. Media reports on the security situation, political developments, and regional dynamics in Afghanistan can shape policymakers' understanding of the situation and influence their policy choices. Positive or negative media coverage can shape policymakers' perceptions of the effectiveness of different policy options, and impact their decisions on issues such as security cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and support for different Afghan factions.¹⁰

Media also plays a significant role in shaping public sentiment towards Afghanistan, which in turn can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy. Media coverage can shape public perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan. Positive or negative portrayal of Afghanistan, its people, and its political actors can shape public opinion and influence policymakers' decisions on issues such as military interventions, peace talks, and bilateral relations.¹¹

Furthermore, media framing of policy debates on Afghanistan can impact policy outcomes. Media framing refers to how the media presents and interprets information on a particular issue. Different media outlets may frame the Afghan conflict differently, emphasizing different aspects of the conflict and highlighting different policy options. Media framing can influence policymakers' perceptions of policy options, public opinion, and the overall policy discourse, which can in turn impact Pakistan's Afghan policy choices.¹²

It is important to note that media coverage of Afghanistan in Pakistan can be influenced by various factors, including editorial policies, ownership patterns, geopolitical dynamics, and government control. Media outlets may have different biases, perspectives, and interests that can shape their

coverage of Afghanistan and influence Pakistan's Afghan policy.

Religion has played a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy, with references to Islamic ideology, historical ties, and religious identity influencing Pakistan's foreign policy choices towards Afghanistan. Religion has been used as a basis for Pakistan's policy positions on issues such as support for Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War, engagement with the Taliban in the 1990s, and efforts towards promoting a role for Islam in the Afghan political system. Understanding the role of religion in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy is important for analyzing the complexities of Pakistan's foreign policy-making process.¹³

Pakistan's Afghan policy has been influenced by Islamic ideology, with references to the historical ties between Muslims in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The concept of "Islamic brotherhood" and the notion of protecting fellow Muslims have been important factors in shaping Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan. The historical and cultural ties between the two countries, including shared religious beliefs and practices, have often been invoked to justify Pakistan's support for different Afghan factions and to promote an Islamic identity-based approach to Afghan policy.¹⁴

Religious identity has also played a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. Pakistan, being an Islamic state, has considered itself as a guardian of Muslim interests in the region and has sought to protect and promote the interests of Muslims in Afghanistan. This has influenced Pakistan's policy positions on issues such as the promotion of Islamic governance and the inclusion of Islamist groups in the Afghan political system. Pakistan has at times pursued a policy of supporting Islamist groups in Afghanistan as proxies to advance its strategic interests and promote its vision of Islamic governance in the region.¹⁵

Political parties in Pakistan play a significant role in shaping the country's Afghan policy. As key actors in the foreign policy-making process, political parties

⁹ Hussain, Hafeez. (2016). Understanding Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy: A Role of Public Opinion. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 10(4), 41-54.

¹⁰ Ali, M. A. (2018). Media Framing of Afghanistan Conflict and Its Impact on Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan. *South Asian Studies*, 33(1), 83-94.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lodhi, I. (2019). Media's Role in Shaping Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 26(2), 261-276.

¹³ Haqqani, Husain. (2005). *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁴ Akbar, M. J. (2012). *The Shade of Swords: Jihad and the Conflict between Islam and Christianity*. Routledge.

¹⁵ Rizvi, H. (2016). The Role of Islam in Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan. In S. Saeed & S. Akbarzadeh (Eds.), *Islam and Political Legitimacy* (pp. 129-144). Routledge.

express their stance on Afghanistan through their manifestos, official statements, and actions. Understanding the role of political parties in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy is important for analyzing the dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy-making process and the factors that influence its policy decisions.¹⁶

Political parties in Pakistan often articulate their stance on Afghanistan in their manifestos, which outline their policy positions and objectives. Manifestos serve as a roadmap for a political party's policy agenda and provide insights into their stance on key foreign policy issues, including relations with Afghanistan. The policy positions and priorities articulated in the manifestos of political parties can influence policymakers' decisions on issues such as security cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and support for different Afghan factions.¹⁷

Political parties in Pakistan also express their stance on Afghanistan through official statements and actions. Party leaders and representatives often make public statements on Afghanistan, expressing their views on the situation, proposed policy measures, and desired outcomes. These statements can influence public opinion, shape the policy discourse, and impact policy decisions. Moreover, political parties may take actions, such as organizing public rallies, protests, and other forms of political activism, to promote their stance on Afghanistan and influence policy outcomes.¹⁸

Furthermore, the internal dynamics of political parties in Pakistan can also impact the country's Afghan policy. Different political parties may have different ideologies, perspectives, and interests that can shape their stance on Afghanistan. For instance,

conservative or nationalist parties may prioritize security concerns and advocate for a more assertive approach towards Afghanistan, while progressive or liberal parties may emphasize diplomatic engagement, conflict resolution, and regional cooperation. The dynamics of political competition and alliances among parties can also shape the policy positions of different parties on Afghanistan.¹⁹

It is important to note that political parties in Pakistan can also be influenced by external factors, including regional and global powers, as well as domestic interest groups. External pressures, interests, and alliances can impact political parties' policy positions on Afghanistan and influence Pakistan's Afghan policy.²⁰

External Factors in Shaping Afghan Policy

External factors play a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy, as neighboring countries, regional powers, and international actors often exert influence on Pakistan's foreign policy decisions towards Afghanistan. These external factors can include geopolitical, economic, security, and diplomatic considerations that shape Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan. Understanding the role of external factors is crucial for analyzing the complexities and dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan.²¹

Neighboring countries, such as Iran and India, have interests and concerns related to Afghanistan that can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy. Iran shares a border with Afghanistan and has its own security, economic, and cultural interests in the country. India also has significant economic, political, and strategic interests in Afghanistan, including investments in

¹⁶ Lodhi, H. K. (2015). Pakistan's Afghan Policy: Role of Political Parties. *Strategic Studies*, 35(2), 105-120.

¹⁷ Hussain, M. S. (2013). Role of Political Parties in Pakistan's Foreign Policy Making Process: A Case Study of Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan (2001-2010). *South Asian Studies*, 28(2), 287-302.

¹⁸ Raza, M. (2016). Political Parties and Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Afghanistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 23(2), 191-206.

¹⁹ Siddiqa, Ayesha. (2018). Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy: Public Opinion and Role of Political Parties. In M. A. Khan

& E. Raza (Eds.), *Pakistan and Its Neighbors: A Regional Security Perspective* (pp. 163-180). Springer.

²⁰ Jalal, A. (2018). Political Parties and Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Case Study of Afghanistan. *Journal of Political Science*, 36(1), 121-137.

²¹ Siddiqa, A. (2019). External Factors Shaping Pakistan's Afghan Policy. In Z. Haider & A. N. Shahid (Eds.), *Afghanistan: Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy* (pp. 221-239). Springer.

infrastructure projects and political influence through diplomatic engagement. The relations between Pakistan, Iran, and India can shape Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, with competing interests and regional dynamics influencing Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan.²²

The neighboring countries of Pakistan, including Iran, India, China, and Afghanistan itself, play a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. These countries share borders with Afghanistan and have direct interests, concerns, and historical ties that influence Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan. Understanding the role of neighboring countries is crucial for analyzing the complexities and dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan.²³

Iran, as a neighbor of Afghanistan, has its own security, economic, and cultural interests in the country. Iran shares a long border with Afghanistan and has concerns about issues such as drug trafficking, refugees, and extremist groups that can spill over into its territory. Iran's policies and actions towards Afghanistan, including its engagement with Afghan political actors, can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy.²⁴

India, another neighbor of Afghanistan, has significant economic, political, and strategic interests in the country. India has invested in infrastructure projects, provided development aid, and engaged in diplomatic efforts to gain influence in Afghanistan. India's engagement in Afghanistan is often seen as a challenge by Pakistan due to their historical rivalry, and India's policy towards Afghanistan can shape Pakistan's approach towards its neighbor.²⁵

The role of India in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy has been a contentious issue, given the historical rivalry and conflicts between the two countries. India's involvement in Afghanistan has influenced Pakistan's approach towards its western neighbor,

with implications for Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic interests.²⁶

India has been a major player in Afghanistan, providing developmental assistance, humanitarian aid, and engaging in infrastructure projects. India has also been involved in capacity-building initiatives, education, and cultural exchanges with Afghanistan. India's strategic interests in Afghanistan include countering terrorism, promoting stability, and building friendly relations with the Afghan government. However, Pakistan views India's engagement in Afghanistan with suspicion, as it perceives India's presence as an attempt to encircle Pakistan and undermine its influence in the region.²⁷

Pakistan has expressed concerns about India's alleged support to militant groups operating in Pakistan from Afghan soil, which has fueled tensions between the two countries. Pakistan has accused India of fomenting instability in Afghanistan, and this perception has influenced Pakistan's Afghan policy, including its approach towards peace talks, security, and regional stability.²⁸

India's involvement in Afghanistan has also led to strategic competition between India and Pakistan, as both countries seek to assert their influence in Afghanistan. This has impacted Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan, including its stance on the Afghan government, the Taliban, and other regional actors.²⁹

China, a regional power and neighbor of both Pakistan and Afghanistan, has economic and security interests in Afghanistan. China has invested in infrastructure projects, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which includes a portion in Afghanistan known as the "Afghanistan-China-Pakistan" corridor, and seeks to promote regional connectivity and stability. China's policies and actions towards Afghanistan, including its engagement with

²² Noor, M. M. (2019). Pakistan's Afghan Policy: Role of Neighboring Countries. In Z. Haider & A. N. Shahid (Eds.), *Afghanistan: Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy* (pp. 203-220). Springer.

²³ Ghori, S. (2017). Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities. In S. Ghori (Ed.), *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities* (pp. 123-144). Routledge.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Abbas, A. (2018). Afghanistan's Relations with Pakistan and Iran: Prospects for Regional Cooperation. In R. Sadre-Orafai (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Afghanistan* (pp. 170-182). Routledge.

²⁶ Lodhi, M. A. (2017). Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan: Challenges and Prospects. *Journal of Political Studies*, 24(1), 165-181.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Singh, R. (2018). Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan: Role of Neighboring Countries. *Strategic Analysis*, 42(2), 109-122.

²⁹ Rizvi, S. Z. (2018). Afghanistan and Pakistan: Understanding and Managing the Regional Security Complex. In A. Ghosh, & W. Roy (Eds.), *Afghanistan and Its Neighbors after the NATO Withdrawal* (pp. 133-149). Lexington Books.

the Afghan government and the Taliban, can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy.³⁰

China has played a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy due to their bilateral relationship and shared interests in the region. China's involvement in Afghanistan has influenced Pakistan's approach towards its western neighbor, with implications for Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic interests.

China has been a close ally and supporter of Pakistan, providing economic, diplomatic, and military assistance. China has also been engaged in various infrastructure and economic projects in Pakistan, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to enhance connectivity and economic development in the region. China's strategic interests in Afghanistan, including its concerns about terrorism, stability, and regional security, have aligned with Pakistan's interests, leading to mutual cooperation and coordination in shaping their Afghan policies.³¹

China has also been involved in regional initiatives related to Afghanistan, such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which aimed at facilitating peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. China has supported a negotiated settlement to the Afghan conflict, advocated for regional stability, and hosted dialogues involving Afghan stakeholders. These efforts have influenced Pakistan's approach towards peace and stability in Afghanistan, as China's engagement has shaped the regional dynamics and priorities for Pakistan's Afghan policy.³²

Afghanistan itself, as a neighbor of Pakistan, plays a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. The dynamics of the bilateral relationship between

Pakistan and Afghanistan, including issues such as border management, refugees, cross-border terrorism, and political stability, influence Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan. The political situation in Afghanistan, including the actions and policies of the Afghan government, can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy.³³

The geographical location of Afghanistan has played a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. As a neighboring country, Afghanistan shares a long and porous border with Pakistan, which has implications for Pakistan's security, economic interests, and regional stability. The geographical proximity and border dynamics have influenced Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan, shaping its Afghan policy.

Pakistan has faced security challenges due to the instability in Afghanistan, including cross-border terrorism, drug trafficking, and the movement of militants. The porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has made it challenging to control these threats, and Pakistan has had to develop policies to manage these security challenges. The geographical location of Afghanistan has, therefore, influenced Pakistan's security concerns and strategies towards Afghanistan.³⁴

Moreover, the geographical location of Afghanistan has economic implications for Pakistan. Afghanistan serves as a landlocked country that could potentially provide Pakistan with access to Central Asian markets and energy resources. Pakistan has sought to leverage its geographical location by promoting economic cooperation and trade with Afghanistan, including initiatives such as the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) and the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI). The geographical location of

³⁰ Haider, Z. (2018). *Managing the Durand Line: Border management and security challenges between Pakistan and Afghanistan*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_363_Haider_Managing_Durand_Line_FINAL.pdf

³¹ Ibid.

³² Shabbir, S. (2019). U.S.-Pakistan Relations and Afghanistan. In Z. Haider, & A. N. Shahid (Eds.), *Afghanistan: Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy* (pp. 221-236). Springer.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Tariq, R. (2017). Pakistan's Border Management Policy towards Afghanistan: A Historical Analysis. *Journal of Political Studies*, 24(2), 1-22.

Afghanistan has, therefore, influenced Pakistan's economic interests and engagement with Afghanistan.³⁵

Furthermore, the geographical location of Afghanistan has implications for regional stability. The landlocked nature of Afghanistan has made it a strategic battleground for regional and international powers, leading to competing interests and influence in the country. Pakistan, as a neighboring country, has been affected by the regional dynamics and instability in Afghanistan, which has shaped its approach towards its western neighbor. Pakistan has sought to promote stability and peace in Afghanistan, given the potential spillover effects of instability on its own territory. The geographical location of Afghanistan has, therefore, influenced Pakistan's regional security concerns and efforts to promote stability in Afghanistan.³⁶

The issue of border management and security with Afghanistan has played a crucial role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. The shared border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, known as the Durand Line, has been a source of historical, cultural, and security challenges that have influenced Pakistan's approach towards its western neighbor.³⁷

The Durand Line, drawn during the British colonial era in the 19th century, has been a contentious issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghanistan has not officially recognized the Durand Line as the international border, and this has led to border disputes, cross-border movements of people and goods, and security challenges, including the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and militants.³⁸

Pakistan has been grappling with security threats emanating from the porous border, including cross-border attacks by militant groups, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other anti-Pakistan elements operating from Afghan soil. This has prompted Pakistan to prioritize border management and security measures, including the construction of

border fences, enhanced surveillance, and coordination with Afghan authorities, to address security challenges along the border.³⁹

The border issues with Afghanistan have also impacted Pakistan's policy towards the Afghan government and the Taliban. Pakistan has sought to engage with the Afghan government to address border-related challenges and promote stability, while also maintaining contacts with the Taliban for facilitating peace talks and managing cross-border movements. The issue of border management and security has influenced Pakistan's stance towards peace talks, reconciliation efforts, and coordination with regional and international stakeholders in shaping its Afghan policy.⁴⁰

The presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has had a significant impact on Pakistan's Afghan policy. For several decades, Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees who have sought refuge from conflict and instability in their home country. The Afghan refugee population in Pakistan has influenced Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan, shaping its policies on issues such as security, border management, refugee repatriation, and humanitarian assistance.⁴¹

The influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan has had implications for Pakistan's security concerns. Afghan refugees have been living in refugee camps and settlements in Pakistan, which has posed challenges in terms of security and law enforcement. There have been concerns about the potential involvement of Afghan refugees in cross-border smuggling, illegal activities, and even militant activities, which has influenced Pakistan's security policies and border management measures.⁴²

Pakistan has also faced challenges in providing humanitarian assistance and services to the Afghan refugee population. The prolonged stay of Afghan refugees in Pakistan has strained the country's resources, including healthcare, education, and social

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hussain, I. (2017). Afghanistan's geographical location: Challenges and opportunities for Pakistan. *Journal of Political Studies*, 24(2), 291-306.

³⁷ Tariq, R. (2017). Pakistan's Border Management Policy towards Afghanistan: A Historical Analysis. *Journal of Political Studies*, 24(2), 1-22.

³⁸ Haqqani, H. (2017). Pakistan and Afghanistan: The blame game. Hudson Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.hudson.org/research/13318-pakistan-and-afghanistan-the-blame-game>

³⁹ Tariq, R. (2017). Pakistan's Border Management Policy towards Afghanistan: A Historical Analysis. *Journal of Political Studies*, 24(2), 1-22.

⁴⁰ Kugelman, M. (2019). Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan: Internal and External Factors. In Z. Haider & A. N. Shahid (Eds.), *Afghanistan: Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy* (pp. 191-202). Springer.

⁴¹ Ahmed, A., & Munir, S. (2016). Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities. *Strategic Studies*, 36(4), 1-22.

⁴² Saeed, S. (2017). Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Current Status and Future Prospects. *South Asian Studies*, 32(2), 363-379.

services. This has influenced Pakistan's policy on repatriation and resettlement of Afghan refugees, as well as its engagement with international organizations and donor countries to seek support for refugee assistance and repatriation efforts.⁴³

Furthermore, the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan has also influenced Pakistan's diplomatic efforts towards finding a solution to the Afghan conflict. Pakistan has been advocating for a peaceful and inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan, taking into account the interests of Afghan refugees and their potential role in the future of Afghanistan. Pakistan's engagement in regional and international initiatives on Afghanistan, such as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), has been influenced by the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and their impact on Pakistan's Afghan policy.⁴⁴

Regional powers, such as China, Russia, and the United States, also play a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. China has significant economic and security interests in Afghanistan, including investments in infrastructure projects and concerns about regional stability. Russia has historical ties with Afghanistan and has concerns about security and extremism in the region. The United States has been a key player in Afghanistan for over two decades, with its military presence, diplomatic engagement, and economic aid influencing Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan.⁴⁵

The United States and Russia have historically played significant roles in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy due to their interests, interventions, and engagements in Afghanistan. These two global powers have had complex relationships with Pakistan and Afghanistan,

which have influenced Pakistan's approach towards its western neighbor.⁴⁶

The United States has been a major player in Afghanistan since the 1980s, when it supported Afghan mujahideen groups against Soviet occupation. The U.S. has continued its involvement in Afghanistan post-9/11, leading a coalition of international forces to combat terrorism and support the Afghan government. U.S. policies and actions in Afghanistan, including military operations, diplomacy, and development aid, have had direct implications for Pakistan's Afghan policy. The U.S. has pressured Pakistan to take action against militant groups operating in the region and has provided financial and military assistance to Pakistan to support its counterterrorism efforts. However, U.S. drone strikes, unilateral military operations, and criticism of Pakistan's role in Afghanistan have also strained bilateral relations and influenced Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan.⁴⁷

Russia, as a regional power, has also played a significant role in Afghanistan, particularly in the post-Soviet era. Russia has expressed concerns about the presence of militant groups in Afghanistan, including those affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) and other extremist organizations. Russia has also been engaged in diplomatic efforts to promote stability in Afghanistan, including hosting talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Russia's policies and actions in Afghanistan, including its interactions with various Afghan stakeholders, can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy, particularly considering Pakistan's historical ties with Russia during the Soviet era.⁴⁸

⁴³ Hassan, Z. (2014). Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Security, Social and Economic Impacts. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 34(1), 227-243.

⁴⁴ Kugelman, M. (2019). Pakistan's Policy towards Afghanistan: Internal and External Factors. In Z. Haider & A. N. Shahid (Eds.), *Afghanistan: Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy* (pp. 191-202). Springer.

⁴⁵ Stobdan, P. (2017). Russia's Afghanistan Policy: Its Impact on South Asia. In G. S. Dhillion, & S. Shourie (Eds.), *Russia and Asia: From Marginalization to Full Integration* (pp. 123-141). Springer.

⁴⁶ Yusuf, M. (2018). The U.S.-Pakistan Relationship and Afghanistan: A History of Ambiguity. In C. M. Fair, & S. Ganguly (Eds.), *Pakistan's Enduring Challenges* (pp. 95-111). University of Pennsylvania Press.

⁴⁷ Rakhimov, A. (2019). Russia's Policy towards Afghanistan: Interests, Challenges, and Prospects. *Eurasian Review*, 9(2), 57-73.

⁴⁸ Lodhi, M. A. (2017). External Factors Shaping Pakistan's Afghan Policy. *Journal of Research Society of Pakistan*, 54(2), 183-202.

International actors, such as the United Nations, European Union, and other international organizations, also have a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. These actors often engage in diplomatic efforts, peace talks, and provide aid and assistance to Afghanistan, which can impact Pakistan's policy towards its neighbor. International organizations also play a role in shaping the narrative and discourse on Afghanistan, which can influence Pakistan's policy positions.⁴⁹

The United Nations (UN) and other international or regional organizations have played a significant role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy through their diplomatic efforts, resolutions, and engagement in the Afghan conflict. These organizations have often been involved in facilitating negotiations, promoting peace and stability, and providing humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, which has influenced Pakistan's approach towards its western neighbor.⁵⁰

The UN has been actively involved in Afghanistan through its various entities, such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which has played a pivotal role in supporting peace talks, facilitating political processes, and promoting human rights and governance in Afghanistan. The UN Security Council has also passed several resolutions related to Afghanistan, which have called for regional cooperation, inclusive governance, and counterterrorism efforts, among other issues. Pakistan, as a member of the UN, has engaged in multilateral diplomacy through the UN forums, which has shaped its Afghan policy in alignment with the UN's objectives.⁵¹

Other regional organizations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), have also played a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy. These organizations have provided platforms for regional dialogue, cooperation, and coordination on issues related to Afghanistan, which have influenced Pakistan's stance on regional matters and its approach towards Afghanistan.⁵²

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are regional organizations that have played a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy through their regional engagement, dialogue, and cooperation efforts.⁵³

The SCO, comprising of member states such as China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, has focused on regional security and stability, counterterrorism, and economic cooperation in the Central Asian region, including Afghanistan. The SCO has provided a platform for member states, including Pakistan, to discuss and coordinate their policies towards Afghanistan, which has influenced Pakistan's approach towards its western neighbor.⁵⁴

Similarly, SAARC, comprising of member states such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, has aimed at promoting regional cooperation and economic integration in South Asia. SAARC has provided a forum for member states to engage in dialogue and discuss regional issues, including Afghanistan. Pakistan's participation in SAARC has influenced its policy towards Afghanistan by promoting regional cooperation and coordination among member states.⁵⁵

Furthermore, global powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, often have strategic interests in the region that can impact Pakistan's Afghan policy. These global powers may have competing interests and priorities in Afghanistan, and their policies towards Afghanistan can impact Pakistan's policy decisions. Economic considerations, such as trade, investment, and regional connectivity, also play a role in shaping Pakistan's Afghan policy, as economic interests can influence foreign policy decisions.

The blame game between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been a recurring factor that has influenced Pakistan's Afghan policy. The two countries have often engaged in accusations and counter-accusations, blaming each other for various issues related to security, border management, and cross-border activities. This blame game has impacted

⁴⁹ Bhatia, M. K. (2018). India's role in Afghanistan: A case study of strategic competition with Pakistan. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved from <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/23/india-s-role-in-afghanistan-case-study-of-strategic-competition-with-pakistan-pub-77633>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Cheng, D. (2017). *The China-Pakistan alliance: Shaping regional politics in South Asia*. Oxford University Press.

⁵² Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://eng.sectsc.org/>
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://saarc-sec.org/>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Cheng, D. (2017). *The China-Pakistan alliance: Shaping regional politics in South Asia*. Oxford University Press

Pakistan's approach towards Afghanistan and has shaped its policies on bilateral relations, border management, and regional stability.⁵⁶

The blame game between Afghanistan and Pakistan has resulted in tensions and mistrust between the two countries, affecting their bilateral relations. Accusations of harboring militants, providing safe havens, and supporting insurgent groups by both Afghanistan and Pakistan have strained their relationship, leading to periods of diplomatic standoffs and disruptions in cooperation. This has influenced Pakistan's Afghan policy by affecting its willingness to engage in bilateral initiatives, trust-building measures, and regional cooperation efforts.⁵⁷

Moreover, the blame game between Afghanistan and Pakistan has also impacted border management measures. The two countries share a long and porous border, which has been a source of disputes and challenges. Accusations of cross-border infiltration, smuggling, and illegal activities by both sides have led to increased border tensions and security concerns. This has influenced Pakistan's policy on border management, including measures such as increased border controls, fencing, and enhanced security measures to address the perceived threats from Afghanistan.

The blame game between Afghanistan and Pakistan has also impacted regional stability efforts in the context of Afghanistan. Both countries are part of regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and their disputes have had implications for regional stability. Accusations and counter-accusations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have often complicated regional efforts to address the security and stability challenges in Afghanistan, impacting Pakistan's policy towards regional initiatives and cooperation on Afghanistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan's Afghan policy has been a complex and challenging issue for decades, and the country has faced numerous predicaments and challenges in managing its relations with Afghanistan. This paper has examined Pakistan's historical and geopolitical factors that have shaped its Afghan policy, as well as the various challenges and predicaments that have emerged due to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The paper has highlighted the critical role that Pakistan can play in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan needs to adopt a more proactive approach in engaging with all the stakeholders, including the Taliban, to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. This would require Pakistan to take a pragmatic approach towards the Taliban, while also ensuring that the interests of the Afghan people are safeguarded. Furthermore, Pakistan needs to work closely with its international partners, especially the United States, China, and regional countries such as Iran and Russia, to find a comprehensive solution to the Afghan conflict. The paper has also emphasized the importance of economic integration and regional connectivity in bringing long-term stability to the region. Finally, Pakistan's Afghan policy is a complex issue that requires a holistic approach that balances security concerns with regional stability and economic development. The way forward for Pakistan is to adopt a more proactive and pragmatic approach, engage with all stakeholders, and work closely with its international partners to find a comprehensive solution to the Afghan conflict.

⁵⁶ Khan, A. A. (2019). The Afghan blame game: Assessing the dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). Retrieved from

https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/1568851366_31783779.pdf

⁵⁷ Ibid.