

THE TWIN SECURITY PARADOX: HOW PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN REMAIN BOUND BY CONFLICT AND DEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Despite sharing wide cultural and religious similarities, the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been constantly marked by instability and tension, which heeds the call for further investigation. Despite the deep historical and geographical linkages, the two countries struggle to revitalize their security relations. This reflects the pressing need for a deeper examination of the historical grievances, external influences and the power dynamics that hamper the path of the two countries. Hence, this study explores how securities of state for both Pakistan and Afghanistan are interlinked while underlying the reasons both states have not been successful in reconciling their security issues. A qualitative methodology has been adopted to collect data. Interviews have been carried out, with the help of which thematic analysis is carried out. In total, 9 themes have been identified which directly or indirectly contribute to the Pakistan and Afghanistan state security. There are theoretical implications as well due to the critical understanding being obtained using the structural conflict theory. The study also has wide policy implications as it contributes to crucial future decisions for both the countries contributing towards future policy synergies, and a possible joint counterterrorism framework.

Keywords: State security, Pakistan state security, Afghanistan state security, conflict.

Introduction

State security is one of the most important factors affecting any country. State security of a nation is directly in line with the social, economic and political factors and it deals with the protection given to the common individual and affairs of state. Hirsch, Dijstelbloem, and de Goede (2020) elaborated the typical idea behind state security. They iterated that to bring stability; alignment of state security needs to be with nation or overall protection of state from terrorism. In terms of defense, security of a state may be evaluated through attention on important efforts to protect interest of the nation at the world platforms. Although state security is basically to protect rights

and the sovereignty of a nation, the state security of current era overshadows the impression of protecting territories against threats from outside. The growing increase in globalization has been one of the most important challenges to state security. Hence, the idea of state security has now been altered. Today state security is mostly a security of economy due to the economic based policies introduced by many countries (Hama, 2017). Additionally, they emphasized that efficient relations between nations on various problems has molded the idea of security of a state. It now includes exports, safety provided to developmental projects and infrastructure and services related to administration in and out of the nation. State

security is basically a social contract between state and its people to safeguard them against every type of internal as well as external danger. The fundamental idea of state security is concerned with the safeguarding of rights of state and territorial security. Further elaborating, state security may be understood as a vital part of the internal and foreign affairs of a state. It creates a sense of secure atmosphere among various states. Similarly, all problems faced by the state are directly or indirectly, affected and managed by the state security (Ripsman & Paul, 2010). An important factor that is also included in state security is the domestic and foreign relations and conditions of a state. If there are complexities of various factors in a state, this can easily be attributed to a weak state security. State security can also be used as an important tool that determines the relationship of people with the state policies and their influence on different aspects of the organization. Kaleem & Iqbal (2023) clarified relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan appropriately and they further asserted that both countries have more in common as compared to other nations in the world.

All these similarities include culture, religious following, languages and morality. Even in the geopolitical perspective, Pakistan and Afghanistan both play an important role because of their geographical position. It was also conveyed that the location of both Pakistan and Afghanistan strategically has served as a bitter factor in relations between both countries. Additionally, they highlighted that ever since Pakistan became independent, policy of Afghanistan towards Pakistan has been aggressive. However, Pakistan has shown tolerance both politically and militarily because of the geopolitical factors. One of the most important reasons behind the hostile behavior of Afghans is the issue of the Durand line and the concept of Pakhtoonistan. Afghanistan has supported Pakhtoonistan in the past. The important support of the other side depends upon partition of the subcontinent. Afghan support to create Pakhtoonistan has always been denied by Pakistan describing the creation of Pakistan as being based on religion rather than ethnicity. With this in view, the Durand line and the

establishment of Pakhtoonistan have been the central issues among Pak-Afghan unwanted relations.

Theoretical Background

Structural Conflict theory emphasizes the rise in ethno-religious struggles among various populations, it facilitates the researcher to research the trend of such issues and understand means for productive solutions to conflicts. An important aspect of structural conflict theory is that all the members in the society will be in a position to accustom to the forecasted given structure in the society and organization. The Structural Conflict theory holds that any alteration in the organizational structure results in various issues, it weakens the complete system consisting of various elements. Hence, applying structural conflict theory assists in comprehending the true essence of conflict between state securities of Pakistan and Afghanistan and helps in identifying the interconnection structurally.

Pakistan State Security

Shah and Khan (2023) contended that there are various ongoing security issues with Pakistan and the unpredictability in security of Pakistan can be recollected back to the times of cold war. The conflict between the US and the bloc of terrorism has had some effect on the security situation of the state overall. Under the era of the Soviet Union, Pakistan chose to follow things conventionally, helped and guided by the US to counter Soviet power emerging in the area. Constant threat by Afghanistan brought up various issues for country itself. The overpowering effect of spoilt ties between the two bitter rivals, India and Pakistan act as a major contributing cornerstone in the state security of Pakistan. Furthermore, the membership of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) has formulated a basis for Pakistan to counter multiple fronts. The unbalanced situation for Pakistan in the region is due to its bad policy of national security to keep its stand diplomatic while fighting against terror, and can be termed as the primary factor of Pakistan's unstable security situation. They elaborated that the impending challenges of national security have

ultimately caused instability in economy coupled with a gigantic loan from foreign entities. Apart from this, the state security of Pakistan relies on the interconnection among various concepts like the Islamic ideology affecting political issues and rising globalization trends. The trichotomy exercises some influence on the state security of Pakistan to maintain polarization and prevent from widening the gaps based on ethical and religious grounds. Shah and Khan (2023) also emphasized upon inconsistent Pakistan state security policies, stating that they have caused uncertainty to the nation. The general state security condition is not strong which has caused political uncertainty and economic lapses.

Afghanistan State Security

Verma (2022) believed that the soviet occupation of Afghanistan has caused various security issues in the country. Afghanistan state security has expressed serious concerns regarding the nexus of Pakistan and the entity of Taliban, formulated to diminish Soviet influence and invasion. Pakistan's involvement in matters of political stability of Afghanistan increased exponentially during the Soviet invasion. Pakistan played an important role in uplifting Afghan Taliban with United States help. The primary weapon used was religion which was at the center of the Taliban ideology. The ideology of Jihad was also embraced when formulating Taliban sections. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia became the primary influential factors in kindling the Jihad and Taliban narrative among the targeted people. State security in Afghanistan has been expressing concerns regarding Pakistan's past role in the country, which boosted Taliban influence in the region. The Islamic movement's strategy of utilizing Islamic teachings to promote Wahhabism, emphasizing the importance of Islamic education, and encouraging women to remain at home were among the few prominent aspects of Pakistan's religious policy during the Soviet invasion. Afghan state security termed the nation as the center of terrorism, iterating that the military presence and growth of insurgencies within Afghanistan are largely due to the result of Pakistan's indefinite role with the nation. It is a fact that Afghanistan's state security forces have collaborated with various foreign intelligence

agencies to launch operations against the insurgency, and foreign aid has also enabled state security forces to resist Taliban influence. The construction of training camps for training and headquarters has been neutralized by Afghan state security forces several times to counter their growing influence. Terror attacks from across the border and Pakistan's hybrid model strategy in Afghanistan have undermined the capacity of Afghanistan's state security to perform effectively and efficiently. The Afghan state security views Pakistan as a key player behind the rising terrorism in various regions of Afghanistan. The ideology of Jihadism has been backed by Pakistan's state security policy and has most of the time been presented as a challenge to the nation. Kaleem & Iqbal (2023) described Pak-Afghan relations in the right way, stating that Pakistan and Afghanistan have more similarities than any other nation in the globe, regardless of the ongoing issues. These similarities encompass religion, culture, language, and other social values. From a political standpoint, Pakistan and Afghanistan hold significant importance due to their strategic locations in Asia.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the state securities of Pakistan and Afghanistan are essentially connected and why both countries have yet failed to reconcile to their security issues. More specifically, the study investigates how the state securities of both countries are connected and the converging/diverging aspects of the national securities are also explored.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology has been used in this study. Cross-sectional research has been conducted and data has been gathered at one point in time. This is helpful in the case of the study which seeks to discover a specific relationship quickly (Kesmodel, 2018). Interviews have been taken to support the evidences in the study. As a result, participants were able to share their experiences and ideas in their own words through interviews. This open-ended approach allows participants to provide more detailed information, which cannot be obtained through other data collection methods. Conducting an interview also helps establish a personal

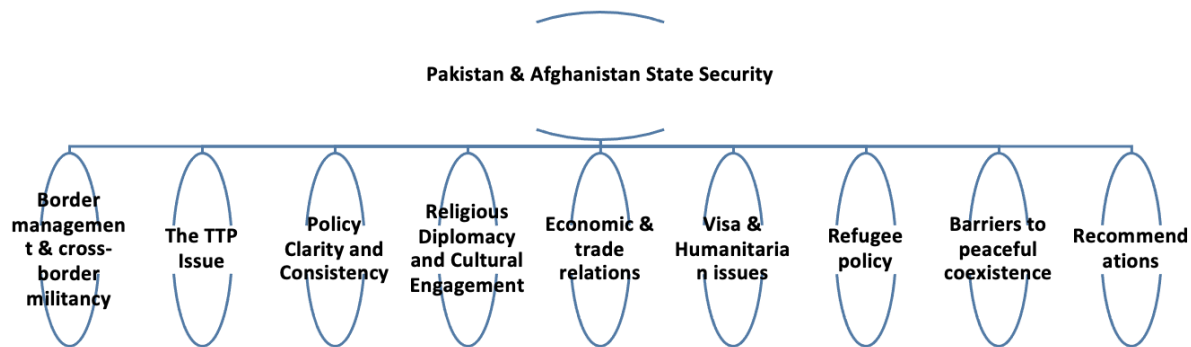
connection between the researcher and participants, enhancing trust and comfort, which can contribute to the validity of the research (Hoffman, 2007). 20 interviews have been conducted in the study. Data has been gathered by conducting interviews of a variety of participants, consisting of people from foreign office, experts, academic scholars, politicians and military analysts. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before the interview was conducted. Judgmental sampling is used in this study, where the researcher's experience or judgment is relied upon to select participants who are most relevant or suitable for the study. This method is especially useful when the research

requires involving individuals with specific characteristics, knowledge, or experience that are relevant to the research goals.

Analysis

Thematic analysis has been conducted employing NVIVO software. Through thematic analysis, the researcher will be able to determine the factors that can affect the data set by understanding the context of the data, as identified by Terry et al. (2017). All the interviews were initially transcribed, and coding was carried out afterward. Following the coding, themes and subthemes were derived. The information about the themes and subthemes is listed below.

Figure 1. Themes



Theme 1: Border Management and Cross-Border Militancy

Sub-theme 1.1: Porous Borders and Militant Movement

One of the few key issues mentioned by the respondents is the extremely porous and vast Pakistan-Afghanistan border. This largely unmonitored space enables the militants to travel freely without any hindrance because the borders are not well controlled and surveyed. The threat of insecurities on both sides has been amplified because of inadequate surveillance systems along the Durand line.

Sub-theme 1.2: Reciprocal Blame of Supporting Militants

Both nations still blame one another for helping the groups that are directly engaged in violence and instability. Afghanistan has allowed the cadres

of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to identify shelters and openly conduct their activities from the Afghan territories. Subsequently, an Afghan official asserts that Pakistan supports some Taliban groups involved in destabilizing Afghanistan's security situation past.

Sub-theme 1.3: Need for Joint Security Mechanisms

There is a pressing need for Joint Security Mechanisms through collaboration between both nations. Joint initiatives, such as coordinated petroleum efforts along the borders and effective systems for providing accurate information, should be mutually agreed upon by the participants. Incidents need to be tracked reasonably, and both parties can be held

accountable for their actions with the help of third-party intervention proposed by both states. Security and trust levels along the border can be improved through such collaborations.

Theme 2: The TTP Issue

Sub-theme 2.1: Pakistan's Security Concerns Over TTP

Regarding the relationship with Afghanistan, the most significant threat has been identified as the presence of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Respondents from Pakistan were particularly worried about deliberate attacks planned and carried out from Afghan territory. The unmonitored and unacted-upon regrouping, training, and operations within Afghanistan continuously pose a serious threat of insurgencies. This ongoing fear and uncertainty create a constant threat, making it difficult for Pakistan to ensure security along its western border.

Sub-theme 2.2: Afghanistan's Reluctance to Act Against TTP

Respondents have emphasized that the leadership of the Taliban does not want to take extreme measures against the TTP. They explained that because there exists a strong tribal connection and shared values between the two groups, hesitation is hence being experienced. Because of the connection of ideology to culture, the fight against TTP is being shunned by the Taliban, making cross-border threats difficult to manage, which, in turn, makes it harder to protect the region properly and ensure its stability.

Sub-theme 2.3: Risk of TTP Defections to ISIS

The interviewees also discussed the militant environments, being complex in nature within Afghanistan. TTP might backfire, and the Taliban can act sternly against them, according to the respondents. TTP combatants face the real possibility of being recruited into even more extremist and violent groups, such as ISIS, due to the feeling of being isolated. This places the Taliban in a difficult position because whatever action is taken against the TTP might end up strengthening other, more radical factions. The problem is made much more sensitive and perilous by this dilemma.

Theme 3: Policy Clarity and Consistency

Sub-theme 3.1: Pakistan's Unclear and Hardline Policies

Pakistan's passive policy in an effort to respond to Afghanistan is lamented by the interviewees, especially concerning the measures against shutting down the border and its controlled access, deportation of Afghan refugees, and breaking of economic ties between the states. The abrupt and stringent measures can create uncertainty and will affect the relationship between the two nations. The Afghan governments and people find it difficult to believe in Pakistan's intentions without a stable and regular policy being introduced publicly. This mistrust only makes the gap broader and hinders long-term cooperation.

Sub-theme 3.2: Afghan Internal Divisions (Kandaharis vs. Haqqanis)

Powerful segments in Afghanistan operate with different goals, leading to a more fragmented and divided system. The main factor that makes it difficult to establish stable and effective communication with Pakistan is the lack of unity, which consistently hampers policymaking. Additionally, conflicting interests take precedence over national objectives, resulting in signals that are confusing or contradictory. Trust and cooperation with neighboring countries are also further strained.

Sub-theme 3.3: Need for Transparent Bilateral Policies

Regardless of the change in Afghanistan's leadership, the attendees highlighted the need for a long-term diplomatic framework that remains open and should be maintained. With each new administration, these lasting mechanisms will help ensure that progress in bilateral relations is preserved and that more benefits are achieved over time.

Theme 4: Religious Diplomacy and Cultural Engagement

Sub-theme 4.1: Role of Religion in Afghan Society

The foundation of religion in Afghan society and its role in the country's governance are closely connected. Community interactions and diplomacy are influenced by religion. The respondents emphasized the community's deep connection to religion, the respect owed to Islamic values, and the importance of religious leaders and institutions in decision-making. Neglecting these aspects or failing to give them proper attention could lead to mistrust and resistance from the community.

Sub-theme 4.2: Potential of Religious Scholars in Diplomacy

Respondents highlighted the importance of opportunities to engage religious scholars from both nations. With a shared Islamic heritage and similar cultural norms, these scholars can act as trusted and impartial mediators, especially in tense or controversial situations. Their involvement can help bridge political divides, foster mutual understanding, and encourage friendly discussions based on common ideals.

Sub-theme 4.3: Strategic Religious Engagement for Trust-Building

Religious diplomacy must be handled tactfully, as participants emphasize, by reducing unintended support for extremist philosophies. Moderation should be promoted. Diplomacy can improve cooperation, dispel harmful myths, and support a more inclusive and fair approach to conflict resolution by tactfully managing religious language.

Theme 5: Economic and Trade Relations

Sub-theme 5.1: Trade as a Stabilizing Factor

Trade and economic cooperation were emphasized by some of the respondents as a necessary mechanism for constructing peace. This can be done through boosting the trade between the two nations, which will consequently generate common interest in strengthening stability and will result in economic gains being reaped. The concept here is that the economically interdependent nations collaborate to settle

disputes and prevent actions that severely damage economic objectives and aims, long-term peace can be promoted, and the relationships between nations can be strengthened through interdependence.

Sub-theme 5.2: Mismanagement of Trade Due to Political-Security Concerns

The respondents pointed out that there is exploitation of trade by the nations as a political tool rather than economic cooperation. To promote economic integration and improve trade relations between the two nations, the trade agenda is often manipulated and portrayed as a political agenda. This significantly undermines efforts to establish trust and prosperity.

Sub-theme 5.3: Economic Interdependence for Conflict Reduction

The economic and security concerns need to be independent of each other for long-term economic stability. This will foster consistent trade and bilateral relations can be strengthened in this manner.

Theme 6: Humanitarian and Visa Issues

Sub-theme 6.1: Corruption in Visa Process

Corruption is among the key factors that have made the process of getting visas for cross border movement worse. Respondents pointed out that travel documents can be obtained through bribery or connections, which has greatly made the legal movement less effective and has contributed significantly in hindering smooth interactions between the two countries.

Sub-theme 6.2: Healthcare Challenges at Borders

Bureaucratic hurdles are a primary factor in delaying health-related movements, especially during emergencies. Respondents note that major border crossings like Torkham lack adequate medical facilities, hindering people from accessing timely treatment.

Sub-theme 6.3: Need for Streamlined Cross-Border Movement

Respondents said that the visa process should be transparent and efficient, especially for traders, students, and patients. Additionally, establishing

electronic visa systems and opening humanitarian corridors should be encouraged to facilitate movement.

Theme 7: Refugee Policy

Sub-theme 7.1: Uncertainty of Refugee Status and Policies

Policies that are related to refugees are inadequate, with a lack of clarity. Constituency was also a common grievance. Abrupt crackdown against Afghan refugees in Pakistan is still a vital component of this factor, and refugees are facing a severe crackdown. This results in refugees facing legal uncertainty, hence they cannot feel safe and plan their future accordingly.

Sub-theme 7.2: Exploitation and Corruption in Refugee Management

Corruption in handling refugee affairs was focused upon by the respondents. Repeated demand for bribes by the authorities for the issuance of a document and guarantee of security against harassment is one of the major concerns of the Afghan refugees to date.

Theme 8: Hurdles in Peaceful Coexistence

Sub-theme 8.1: TTP as the Main Hurdle

Referring to the main obstacle, respondents identified Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as one of the primary barriers to the peace process. Their ongoing operational activities undermine trust at all levels between both nations and significantly hinder the development of positive diplomatic policies.

Sub-theme 8.2: Border Fencing and Movement Restrictions

Few responders supported the border fence for security reasons, while others criticized it for disrupting neighborhoods, damaging family bonds, and hindering legal commerce. As per a respondent: "The fence is a wall between brothers. Security is vital, but so is humanity."

Sub-theme 8.3: Economic Mismanagement as a Barrier

Political and military interests, for the most part, take precedence over economic relations. Respondents indicated towards peace initiatives,

with emphasis on the idea that the peace initiatives will always be in a state of trouble if the economic cooperation is ignored. It is also shown from history that it has never been prioritized.

Theme 9: Recommendations for Moving Forward

Sub-theme 9.1: Policy Cohesion and Long-Term Strategy

Highlighting long-term strategy, respondents emphasized that having a clear and enduring strategy is vital, and it should remain unchanged even if the government changes. These strategies should stay consistent during crises or wars. Over time, this approach would ensure stability and steady progress regardless of diplomatic relations.

Sub-theme 9.2: Diplomatic and Religious Engagement

Bridging the divides between ideology on the basis of mutual respect between both nations and religious and cultural diplomacy is recognized as the most significant tool that can be used to boost relationships between the two states.

Sub-theme 9.3: Economic Cooperation Independent of Security

This reflects that economic cooperation should be prioritized, independent of security issues and politics. Trade corridors should not be closed under any circumstances and investment agreements should be independent of other issues. This can foster and enhance economic growth and collaboration.

Discussion

The threats from Afghanistan to Pakistan are deeply rooted in its national security considerations. Chief among these are terrorism and the threat from the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which continues to operate from Afghan territory, often with support or tolerance from the Afghan Taliban (Kaleem & Iqbal, 2023). The existence of such sanctuaries across the Durand Line is a major security concern for Pakistan. Additionally, issues like weapons and drug smuggling, along with a persistent refugee exodus, contribute to internal instability, especially in border regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan (Janjua, 2009) existence. Secondly, Indian involvement with the Afghan government is very much open, and Pakistan is aware of this rising issue, making the diplomatic ties even more stringent. (Jafar & Yasmine, 2024).

Conversely, Afghanistan has long viewed Pakistan as a hegemonic power. Repeated Afghan administrations have accused Pakistan of sheltering and backing the Taliban, as well as using militant proxies to interfere in Afghan affairs (Nadiri, 2014). The legitimacy of the Durand Line remains a core dispute, as many Afghans do not recognize it as an official border. The Pashtun identity controversy, particularly with regard to cross-border tribal affiliations, makes these issues more complicated (Akbar, 2024).

From a Structural Conflict Theory lens, the research highlighted how connections between Pakistan and Afghanistan state securities were not accidental but structural in nature, rooted in shared histories and institutional weaknesses.

The Durand Line symbolizes both physical and symbolic tensions. Pakistan considers it an official border, while Afghanistan views it as a colonial relic that divided Pashtun communities. This disagreement fuels nationalist sentiments in Afghanistan and security concerns in Pakistan, perpetuating a low-level conflict and diplomatic strain (Akbar, 2024).

The cross-border activities of militant groups, like the Afghan Taliban and TTP, deepen this interdependence, as they share ideological ties and operate across borders with joint supply lines (Kaleem & Iqbal, 2023). Despite military efforts such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, complete elimination of these threats remains elusive due to the porous Afghan border (Zulfqar, 2015). Meanwhile, Afghanistan's accusations that Pakistan targets threats selectively and maintains ties with strategic forces only reinforce Kabul's suspicion of duplicity (Budihias, 2011).

The Afghan refugee community in Pakistan is another key involvement area. This has been involved with humanitarian costs as Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghans over the years and has come with political consequences as well (Khan, Hassan, & Raza, 2023). During national crises, Afghan refugees are often scapegoated, and their presence of these refugees is a point of security

concern in the country. Afghanistan has not been able to repatriate these refugees and this symbolizes humiliation and demonstrates weak state capacity.

The converging elements identified are counterterrorism, economic interdependence, and border control. While the diverging elements are Durand line legitimacy, strategic depth vs Sovereignty, and repatriation of refugees. This emphasizes that even with potential convergence, the divergences are historically and ideologically embedded. They are not technical issues to be resolved by agreeing on changing small policy aspects, but structure and identity-based cleavages necessitating deeper reconciliation processes.

Implications

The theoretical lens through which this research has been examined is Structural Conflict Theory (SCT), and provides an essential insight into the interlinkages and the long-lasting conflict relationships in the Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relationship. Applying SCT is founded on its capacity to critically examine deeply entrenched conflict patterns beyond political differences or individual events (Mack, 2014).

This study integrates postcolonial critiques into traditional International Relations (IR). It highlights how colonial borders, such as the Durand Line, transplanted governance models, and external interference contribute to insecurity in ways that Realism and Liberalism tend to overlook or minimize (Akbar, 2024). The way borders are shaped in South Asia and their ongoing symbolic significance provide a strong empirical foundation for SCT's main assertions.

The research shows that policy decisions in Afghanistan and Pakistan are mostly influenced by the regime's personality and current security conditions. Structural analysis is uncommon; instead, policymakers often favor symbolic gestures like summits and condemnations, neglecting deeper root causes.

The research has extensive policy implications since it informs and offers a way forward to the two states. The research informs policymakers on the utmost importance of having a mutual counterterrorism framework, bilateral

coordination of policy, and the urgent need for regional and international policy synergies.

Limitations and Future Research

The research comes with a few limitations. First, Measurement Problem: Structural factors like identity or historical grievance cannot be easily measured, thus empirical testing is challenging in policy situations. The second limitation is the underestimation of agency: SCT underestimates the influence of leaders and agents who can alter structures through their agency. Greater integration with agency-based theories is needed. The third limitation is of cultural specificity: SCT's blanket application might overlook regional or religious nuances. South Asian structural conflict would perhaps differ from that of a Sub-Saharan African or Latin American context.

Future research must be multi-dimensional and directed at bridging key knowledge gaps and providing actionable recommendations to policy practitioners. Future research should explore integrating Social Construction Theory (SCT) with Constructivist International Relations Theory (Hopf, 1998). This approach would help scholars understand how perceptions and narratives influence the security views of states. Additionally, research should focus on how groups like TTP and ISIS-K establish legitimacy among local populations. It's important to analyze their responses to changing geopolitical factors, such as shifts in foreign funding or battlefield setbacks. The competition and cooperation between the two countries is also now influenced due to the virtual space. The public opinion is greatly shaped by the cyber technologies and disinformation (Sulaiman, 2023). Inquiry must examine how state and non-state actors engage social media as a means of inflaming tensions or enlisting militants.

Conclusion

Without resolving underlying issues, though, any peace reform can do little more than be a symbolic act. Diplomatic discourse is insufficient. A structural change is needed in how each state views the other and how it develops its security policies. The main features of such a transformation are:

1. Removing Ideological Biases from Border Policies Matters: The Durand Line should be regarded in practice as a technical and

administrative boundary, despite its legal dispute (Akbar 2024). Bilateral acceptance of border management practices focused on building confidence and mutual discussions related to the issues can help reduce tensions.

2. Regional Security Architecture: Tensions in the region could be reduced through multilateral forums. Organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) can offer mediation roles and facilitation support (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2023).

3. Burden Sharing of Refugees: The international community, especially the UNHCR, must take action and implement reforms to address the refugee issues affecting both Pakistan and Afghanistan. A consensus plan with clear timelines and reintegration strategies should be developed. Pakistan should be encouraged to host refugees with dignity, while Afghanistan should be open to accepting them (Borthakur, 2017).

4. Ending the Strategic Use of Non-State Actors: Both countries need to commit publicly to dismantling the safe havens of militant groups (Khalid, 2018). This requires prioritizing national security over ideological and cultural ties with insurgent groups. Strategies like plausible deniability and strategic proxy policies should be replaced by transparent counter-terrorism cooperation.

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