



RESEARCH PAPER

Examining the Impacts of 2021-Reemergence of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan over the Security and Strategic Dynamics of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The withdrawal of the armed forces of United States (U.S.) from Afghanistan on 30th August 2021, marked the end of the twenty-year war started under the pretext of War on Terror in 2001. The post-U.S.-withdrawal reemergence of Taliban regime in Afghanistan has redefined Pakistan's counterterrorism experiences and foreign policy inclinations since it caused the resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, relabeled by the state of Pakistan as Fitna al Khawarij) and the consequent eruption in anti-state activities has jolted the peace and security situation in Pakistan particularly in the bordering provinces of Afghanistan i.e. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan wherein the attacks on state installations and security personnel have become a new normal. The severity of the matter can be sensed by noting that nearly five hundred terrorist attacks have been recorded in KP alone until August 2025 whereas the internal displacement in Bajaur district of KP has already started in order to provide the security forces an opportunity to restore normalcy in the region. The matter becomes more complex owing to the fact that 1640 miles long Durand Line is very hard to be fully covered for preventing cross-border movement of the Khawarijs. In this background, the present study, while applying a qualitative and exploratory research design, analyzes the post-2021 security and strategic dynamics in and around Pakistan especially with regard to the revival of terrorism, cross-border instabilities, and policy realignments of the regional and global powers. It concludes that, for Pakistan, an effective border management system along with an all-inclusive socio-economic development policy is necessary to bring peace and stability in its areas contiguous to Afghanistan otherwise the shallow military successes lacking proper strategic depth would prove fruitless.

Keywords: Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations, TTP, *Fitna Al- Khawarij*, Counterterrorism Policy

Introduction

Since the times of the cold war and until the events of 9/11, the foreign policy of Pakistan has been changed numerous times. Pakistan allied to the U.S. during the cold war and it served as a frontline state against the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, despite the performance of its due role as a responsible member of the international community of states, Pakistan frequently remained in a weaker position to ensure the achievement of its long-term strategic interests and objectives (Gul, 2024; Bibi & Muzaffar, 2023). It might be noted that the global political orientations have been fluctuating quickly in the recent years. The world has switched from the period of being the unipolar led by the United States to an era of being the multipolar with China emerging as a major global power whereas most countries are struggling to adapt to this new global order. In the case of Pakistan, it implies reconsidering foreign policy and the network of alliances (Salman, et al., 2024). Pakistan remains a close ally of the U.S. in the war on terror since 9/11, although the alliance was problematic and full of mistrust but it is obvious that the withdrawal of the U.S. in Afghanistan in 2021 has ensured that the situation in the region is even more delicate and

this is more so to Pakistan since the Taliban have returned to the power and this means that Pakistan is now confronted with new security and political challenges relating to the cross-border terrorism threat (Gul, 2024).

Examining these strategic re-alignments is necessary to see how Pakistan can engage with the major powers such as the U.S and China and address regional challenges as well as safeguard its national interest in the emerging futuristic landscape within the world.

Literature Review

Popalzay (2024) uses the Regional Security Complex Theory to explain why security and diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been decayed since the Taliban takeover. He discusses the attacks launched by the TTP in Pakistan and diplomatic failures which make the region less secure. The study although details the theory, nevertheless, it fails to look at how Pakistan's security agencies have responded—or not responded—to the regional strategic changes.

Khan, et al. (2025b) outline Afghanistan's importance in the geopolitics of South Asia, especially concerning Pakistan, India and Iran. They explain that because of continual instability in Afghanistan, drugs travel more freely over borders, different terrorist attacks are more common and large numbers of refugees are created. The writers admit that violence in Afghanistan attracts central focus from Pakistan but they analyzed the allied issues in abstract terms and fail to explain how responses to these dangers are being handled by Pakistan.

While applying content analysis, Khan et al. (2024) identify that the Taliban's ascent has worsened both humanitarian and political problems in Afghanistan. While focusing exclusively on Afghanistan, the book examines options for Taliban leadership to address the problems of disharmony among people and the absence of law and order from Afghan society (Muzaffar, et. Al., 2019).

Ullah et al. (2025) investigate why Pakistan and China are gaining influence in Afghanistan after the US drew back. They believe that both Pakistan and China have a common goal: Pakistan wishes to block the TTP and maintain peace at home, while China wants to guard its BRI and control Uyghur extremism.

The Decline of U.S. Hegemony and Its Impacts

During the past decades, the United States occupied the dominant position in the global politics in many respects. The post-cold war era can be termed as a unipolar era in real sense since the U.S. had the key influence over the worldwide international relations. Yet, this supremacy is currently wearing-off. Global dynamics is changing with new global powers such as China and Russia as well as regional powers, such as India, have increasingly been active in the global politics. This transition of a U.S-led world into a multipolar world is transforming the manner in which nations are taking their foreign policy decisions. One of the countries that are directly affected from this shift in global political order is Pakistan. Previously, Pakistan depended upon the ties with the U.S in terms of military and economic support. However, at the moment, when the U.S. is struggling to reclaim its role of world leader, the pressure has been mounting on Pakistan to reconsider its foreign policy and seek new collaborators. Pakistan now has a second option to cooperate the fellow Asian country China in the form of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Abbasi, 2023).

Pakistan is not in a position in which it can continue to rely only on the United States in this new multipolar world. It should rather use the balancing strategy i.e. preserving the existing alliances with old powers, such as the U.S., and developing strong strategic

relationships with new powers, such as China and Russia. Such a change will also require from Pakistan to improve its local security and development strategy (Shah, et. al., 2020a). In fact, Pakistan has, over the years, been greatly reliant on the United States in terms of economic, military and diplomatic assistance. Although this aid generated certain advantages, it restricted freedom of Pakistani foreign policy makers to independently make their own decisions. With the U.S. relief becoming erratic and the level of military coordination declining, Pakistan is experiencing a significant change in the nature of its strategic outlook and behavior. The U.S. aid was usually conditional and this influenced the policy decisions of Pakistan particularly in spheres like counterterrorism, regional security and human rights. These factors diminished the policy independence of Pakistan, as it had to acquiesce to the interests of the US, despite its conflict with national interests of Pakistan. The studies show that diplomacy differences and conditionality of aid made a significant negative effect on foreign policy liberalism of Pakistan (Gul et al., 2025).

The decline in the relationship between Pakistan and the United States has become enlarged in recent years whereby scholars have gone a step further to label the relationship as strategic drift. (Gul, 2024). Such a deteriorating alliance is characterized by frequent diplomatic conflicts, misperceptions, as well as the variable U.S. interests in the area. Growing closeness between the United States and India is one of the principal causes of this shift. Contrary to Pakistan, India had never been a Cold War ally of the U.S., but in the course of time, there has been the formation of a robust strategic and economic partnership between Delhi and Washington, primarily with respect to containing Chinese ascendancy in the Asian continent (Zaidi & Nirmal, 2022). Included in this developing U.S. India alliance is the cooperation on defense, transfer of technology and interests on the Indo-Pacific, etc., which have all marginalized Pakistan in important regional dealings. The U.S. currently considers India as a focal point in South Asia, a matter that has taken Pakistan even closer to China (Gul, 2024). This shift has altered the regional balance of power so that there is a new triangle of forces in which Pakistan becomes closer to Beijing and India becomes more attached to Washington.

To Pakistan, the U.S.-India alliance will pose a strategic dilemma and Pakistan will have to re-evaluate its foreign policy decisions and find new and more trusted allies elsewhere that can help it in defending its national interests.

Pakistan-China Strategic Convergence

The strategic partnership between China and Pakistan is growing in strength and scope with mutual interests in terms of security, economic growth and stability of the region. Even the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan and the change in balance of power in south Asia did not adversely affect this relationship which has become more strong and significant than ever before. The two countries regard each other as trustworthy partners in an evolving world in which conventional alliances are being put to trial. The CPEC is one of the most important pillars of this partnership between the two countries which connects Pakistan with the BRI of China. China started CPEC aiming at establishing alternative overland routes of energy and trade, as well as fostering development of Pakistan (Rahim, et. al., 2018). On the one hand, CPEC is an infrastructure project that matters to the Islamabad and, on the other hand, it is long-term economic opportunity and strategic stability keeping in view the regional challenges, especially those caused by U.S. congruency with India (Ali, 2022; Hussain, 2021). Besides, the two nations are worried about regional instability in context of Afghanistan. The main concerns of Pakistan were resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP, now known as Fitna Al Khawarij)) and transnational terrorism whereas China was concerned with another spillover of Uyghur militant activity into the Chinese territory. Mutual interest in this regard has brought closer collaboration between both sides on matters affecting Afghanistan (Ullah, et al., 2025). In addition to economy and security, the spread of Chinese influence in the Middle East is affecting the foreign policy of Pakistan. Earlier, the religious affiliation and historical support

characterized the relationship that Pakistan had with countries in the Gulf. Nonetheless, this is changing. As China enhanced its economic influence in the Gulf, Pakistan is becoming more strategic and realist in its approach in national interests as opposed to religious orientations. This shift indicated the fact that the presence of China is informally transforming the foreign policy of Pakistan in regional matters (Shah, et al., 2025).

Overall, Pakistan-China relations are no longer symbolic friendship rather those are the deep-seated convergence in terms of shared interests and complementary objectives. The collaboration between the two countries presents both of them with a position of leverage, a sense of regionalism, and a shield against pressure or influence of the traditional allies led by the West. The CPEC is a signature program of the Chinese BRI and, now, it has become the face of Pakistan-China strategic relationship. It is not only a great infrastructure and development project but also a great geopolitical and geo-economic pivot in South Asia. Under CPEC, the two countries hope to redefine regional connectivity, improve energy security, balance strategic powers of Indian and American competitors (Ali, 2022). In the case of China, CPEC offers a safe land shipping corridor linking its Xinjiang western province to Arabian Sea through the Gwadar port of Pakistan. This lessens the reliance of China on the vulnerable Malacca Strait and helps it in its aim of an integrated economy in the region (Hussain, 2021). It also assists in extending the political and economic influence of Beijing in the South and Central Asia to support its wider purpose of BRI.

In the case of Pakistan, CPEC is considered an ambitious initiative that will enhance the energy infrastructure, transport system and industrial belts. Other than its economic benefits, it also gives Pakistan some strategic significance as it roots Pakistan in the Chinese regional designs. This cooperation has raised the diplomatic significance of Pakistan and has enabled it to play a greater and independent role in relation to regional matters especially with reduced U.S. patronage (Ali, 2022; Shah, et. al., 2020). Besides, some scholars observe that CPEC is also beneficial to the security interests of Pakistan. The development policies undertaken under the umbrella of CPEC, which are aimed at linking regional peace and economic development, will stabilize the restive parts of the country including Balochistan province and the areas surrounding Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which always remained susceptible to insurgency and foreign influence (Hussain, 2021). In a nutshell, the intensification of the CPEC-BRI relationship indicates the strategic alignment between Pakistan and China, in which the economic collaboration has become directly associated with the regional security and the shifting of global political order. It signals the change of the traditional Western-aligned policies of Pakistan in favor of adopting a more east-oriented multipolar approach.

The security-related situation changed radically in the region after the withdrawal of the U.S. military forces from Afghanistan in 2021. The implications of this transition are also of grave concern to both Pakistan and China, especially in terms of terrorism, border instability, and the future of the connectivity that exist in the region. Such common worries forced them to strengthen their mutual strategic collaboration in the post-US-withdrawal situation in Afghanistan in particular (Ullah, et al., 2025). In Pakistan, TTP and other militant groups operating from and taking refuge in Afghanistan are posing the biggest threat, therefore, Pakistan also believes that consequences of the insecurity in Afghanistan impacted the peace in its tribal regions as well, which proved a major blow to its internal security and destabilizing the large-scale development projects in the country particularly the CPEC. Another tension in Pakistan is its concern about weapons, refugees and social influence of the extremists. However, China, in turn, mostly fears that the separatist among Uyghurs will find some support from militant groups active in Afghanistan. Beijing wants to avoid the occurrence of any threat to or within its western region, Xinjiang, and fears infiltration of extremists into the Chinese territory. Simultaneously, the stability of the region is one of the priorities of China since the country seeks to reach Central Asian markets and resources via the BRI expansion across Afghanistan (Ullah et al., 2025). These common

interests have increased cooperation between Pakistan and China and the two nations improved diplomacy to deal with Taliban government and promote stability and inclusiveness of political scenario in Afghanistan. They are also considering how Afghanistan can be linked with current CPEC routes and that can be a different thing as Afghanistan will emerge as a viable investment partner into trade and energy route in the region. Consequently, the post-US-withdrawal Afghanistan has also paved the way to another arena of Pakistan-China convergence-whereby greater security, counterterrorism, and connectivity are directly associated. Such collaboration is not only supposed to stabilize Afghanistan but contribute to the overall geopolitical and economic interests which both China and Pakistan have in the region.

Moreover, Pakistan had a long tradition that its foreign policy towards Middle East was led by religious solidarity and a common Islamic identity. A high degree of cultural and ideological affiliation to such countries as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirate (UAE) or Iran predetermined the Pakistani diplomatic and political appetite in the region during the past decades. This could be seen through its contribution to the active membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as its engagements and agreements with Gulf monarchies regarding various regional issues. In the recent past, however, a significant change is observed. It can now be seen that the conduct of Pakistan diplomacy in the Middle East is driven by realism as opposed to religious imperative. This change is highly motivated by the increasing economic and political standing of China in the area and its bonding to Pakistan and major Gulf states. Economic interests and connecting with the region have come to play a greater role in Pakistan's foreign policy considerations with the coming of projects like the BRI and CPEC (Shah, et al., 2025).

Pakistan has changed its foreign policy choices under the soft coercion wielded by China. As an illustration, it has played an equitable role in the Yemen crisis, watched its relationship with Iran closely, and has not been ready to hardline on intra-Gulf tensions. There has been a shift from symbolic religious unity to protection of economic relations, energy security as well as regional stability interests that fits the strategic preferences of China in the Gulf and West Asia. Shah et al. observe that such a change is a part of the wider trend in the diplomacy of Pakistan whose foreign policy decisions are increasingly based on geopolitical reasoning and long-range economic strategies instead of on ideological or religious affinity and loyalties. This reorientation is also a milestone towards the renewed interests of Pakistan to interact with the Middle East, as well as it denotes the expanding influence of China over the external affairs of Pakistan (Shah et al., 2025).

Managing the U.S.-China Rivalry: Pakistan's Hedging Strategy

While living in an era of changing global power balances, Pakistan has to simultaneously deal with two great powers, the United States and China whose conflict had been growing in the recent past. The two countries are distinctly significant to Pakistan as well; the U.S. has aided Pakistan both militarily and economically whereas China has long-term strategic, political, and economic partnership with Pakistan. Pakistan has followed a policy of hedging, which means making an attempt to maintain a balance in the relationship with both powers, though not fully committed to any one individually (Ali, et. al, 2024). It is one of the methods by which Pakistan can safeguard its national interests in an unreliable and competitive international environment. On the one hand, Pakistan responds to the U.S. with regard to military relations, countering terrorism and recognition of diplomacy; conversely, it has substantially strengthened its relationship with China in the field of infrastructure development, energy, trade and regional security (Ali, et al., 2024; Muzaffar, et. Al., 2020; Sadia, 2024).

The U.S.-China rivalry has gained particular strength in spheres including technology, trade and regional dominance. Sadia claims that this geo-political and geo-economic conflict poses both challenges and opportunities to Pakistan. The pressure by the

United States might question such closer relations between Pakistan and China, but also, this provided Pakistan finding a way to take advantage of both relations through not taking hard positions and being flexible. As an illustration, Pakistan has participated in regional efforts that are led by China and it has also joined the U.S-sponsored counterterrorism mechanisms (Sadia, 2024). This balancing approach however is not without its problems. Pakistan can be put to a tough spot from the U.S. and the Western countries which remained wary of China and its deepening role in South Asia. Moreover, strategic dependency because of aid conditionality by U.S. and economic reliance on China, are the causes of concerns of strategic autonomy. Nonetheless, the hedging strategy fits the realistic definition of foreign policy adaptations, as the realists argue that it is a strategy that tries to balance and stay in place amidst the world powers and at the same time retain sovereignty, economic sustainability, and regional prominence (Ali, et al., 2024). Concisely, the hedging policy by Pakistan enables it to keep out of over-reliance on a particular block.

The increasing technological and trade war between the United States and China has directly influenced the strategic planning of Pakistan. With these two world powers struggling to dominate in regards to activities in such fields as artificial intelligence, cyber security, 5G technology, and trade, nations such as Pakistan are gradually being driven to reconsider their foreign and economic policies in order to stay out of their firing line. Such competition has made the situation difficult for Pakistan which relies on both America and China for different spheres of its development. Pakistan has not been able to balance its relationship with either of the states because the U.S. and China conflict in trade and limitations regarding high-tech cooperation have complicated the situation. The Western countries including US often criticized Pakistan for its excessive dependence over Chinese cooperation and funding. The interaction and collaboration of Pakistan with Chinese technology firms in infrastructure and digital development under the umbrella of CPEC is criticized and questioned by Western States fearing backsliding privacy of information as well as cyber security threats. The technological gap also affects the procurement of military equipment, the digital policy, and educational exchange programs in Pakistan. Getting too close to one side can constrain technology, funding and international partnerships available through the other. This has compelled Islamabad to be cautious, in that it tries to diversify its economic and diplomatic activities reducing its dependence on any one power, and prefer not to take rigid positions in the tech war that holds huge sums and stakes. Moreover, the trade war has brought economic burden to Pakistan which has influenced its capacity for the establishment of global market, trade flows, and investments on an international level. With both the superpowers pursuing for their own economic and technological interests, Pakistan needs to make informed choices on each aspect of foreign investment, digital infrastructure, and multilateral affiliations without seeming too dependent on one party or neglecting the either side (Sadia, 2024).

To conclude, the competition between the United States and China in the spheres of trade and technology has put Pakistan in a hard compromising position. The U.S. continues to be the key player in the financial institutions, military-related collaboration as well as worldwide relations whereas China has been an imperative strategic and economic partner for Pakistan. The potential of Pakistan to overcome such a complicated rivalry using clever hedging and diversified activities will determine its future identity and standing within the regional as well as global order.

Afghanistan Factor in Realignment of the Foreign Policy of Pakistan

Afghanistan plays a dominant role in the shaping of Pakistan foreign policy because both the counties have strong historical ties as well as ethnic and security connections. Nevertheless, with the withdrawal of the U.S. in 2021 and the Taliban returning to power in Afghanistan, the impact that the country had on the foreign policy formulation process in Pakistan become even more complicated and pressing. The situation after the withdrawal has entailed significant changes in regional alignment, security considerations and the

diplomatic approach of Pakistan (Popalzay, 2024; Khan, et al., 2025b; Muzaffar, et. Al., 2021). The revival of Taliban rule poses significant and urgent implications to border and internal security of Pakistan. Although initially it seemed that by reintroducing Taliban as ruling elite Pakistan would have a more compliant neighbor but, in reality, the situation is much more complicated and problematic (Popalzay, 2024).

The revival of TTP and other militant organizations operating from Afghanistan territory is one of the greatest concerns of Pakistan. The one of the burning issues associated with the Taliban regime is the resurgence of the anti-state activities and murderous operations of the TTP within Pakistan, specifically in the peripherals of the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan which have common border with Afghanistan. Although there was an early optimism that the new Taliban regime would patrol against such cross-border operations, Islamabad has been rattled by recent attacks and equivocation exhibited by the Kabul regime when it comes to intelligence-based offensive operations against the terrorists (Popalzay, 2024). Such events have prompted Pakistan to reconsider its earlier expectations of having a friendly Taliban regime and change its policies regarding cross-border relations and counter terrorism efforts. Though the existing government in Afghanistan continuously denied the presence and access of TTP to Afghan soil, yet the policy makers in Pakistan generally believe that the TTP has been operating freely from the other side of the border to strike against Pakistani security agencies and general citizens (Shah, 2025). This has given birth to a fresh pool of violence endangering, at the same time, the internal security of Pakistan.

The Durand line is an old bone of contention with Afghanistan which did not acknowledge it as a formal boundary while Pakistan took it as a done and dusted issue. This contradiction of views has caused border conflicts at intervals, interrupted trade between one country and the other, and posed a challenge to the management of refugees in Pakistan (Khan, et al., 2025a). This unresolved issue of border still plays a vital role in defining Pakistan's security calculations and deployment strategies. In addition, the instability in Afghanistan has regional spillover consequences; such as more refugee inflows, drugs trafficking, and the spread of transnational terrorism. All these reasons not only are the direct threats to the internal stability of Pakistan but they also jeopardize such strategic projects of Pakistan as CPEC which require regional peace and connectivity (Shah, 2025).

Another diplomatic problem Pakistan is experiencing is the issue of international recognition of Taliban regime. Officially, Pakistan has never recognized the legality of Taliban regime in spite of having informal connections with them because of international pressure and the fact that they have not been acting upon/implementing the international standards of human rights. It puts Pakistan in a tricky situation because of its security concerns related to the legitimacy of the Taliban Government and the concern of not being isolated globally (Hasar, 2024; Elsayed, 2024).

The Afghanistan factor continues to be an acute element of foreign policy reshaping for Pakistan. The policy makers in Islamabad are forced to mitigate increased direct and indirect security threats, precarious relationships, and instability in the region as they attempt to collaborate with world and regional powers in order to make sure that with Afghanistan, there will no longer emerge a long-term source of regional conflict.

As mentioned above, the factor that has actually tarnished relations between Islamabad and Kabul is the failure or refusal of Taliban regime to take any noticeable measures against anti-Pakistan militants (Popalzay, 2024). The two countries have warred against each other at the edge due to armed conflicts and fencing destruction along Durand Line. These tendencies left Pakistan with no choice but to deploy more military and rethink the way it will engage with the Taliban government. Moreover, with the re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, other extremist elements in the region have gained confidence and resulted in a spillover effect which has contributed towards radicalization and

neutralization of efforts by Pakistan to counter terrorism. These unsteady state of affairs across the border along with the confusing stance of the Taliban with regard to militant groups have created new potential security threats for Pakistan, which, in turn, are adversely impacting its internal governance and regional diplomacy (Shah, 2025). To summarize, regaining the control of government by Taliban did not bring in the expected peace and stability in Pakistan. Rather, it caused security backlash, predominately in the form of upsurge in cross-border terrorism, compromised border control and mounting internal unrest, rendering Afghanistan a re-defined center of foreign and security policy option for Pakistan.

Viewed from another perspective, the installation of Taliban regime of 2021 has created major diplomatic problems to the Pakistani government and other regional players as well which are commonly confronting with the issue of how to approach the Taliban dominated Afghanistan without their recognition on the international level. As a consequence of this lack of recognition and acknowledgment of the said regime, states are facing with a set of options of either pursuing a more pragmatic policy or conforming to international standards of diplomacy (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021a). Hasar observes that since the incumbent Taliban regime has constantly been denying to ensure human rights, women rights and safeguarding the interests of ethnic minorities, therefore, majority of the countries interacting with Afghanistan in one sphere or the other, are reluctant to officially recognize their rule and establish formal diplomatic relation with them. All these conditions have not yet been met and thus Taliban exists in political limbo now being the de facto government of Afghanistan without any legal recognition and legitimacy. In the case of Pakistan, it results some kind of uncertainty about formal diplomacy, cross-border cooperation and establishment of regional forums (Hasar, 2024).

Elsayed, quite significantly points out that the political orientation and worldview of the Taliban regime and their value system which includes religious ideology and opposition to liberal values of the West have been the reasons behind their shaky international status. Although Pakistan has informal relations with the Taliban, complete recognition would leave Islamabad as an outcast in main Western and multilateral communities and organizations. Meanwhile, their refusal to acknowledge the Taliban regime limits the power of Pakistan's civil-military political elite to affect the socio-political happenings and processes being undertaken in Kabul and ensure their collaboration in the problematic and troublesome areas, such as terrorism, refugees' settlement/repatriation and the border management (Elsayed, 2024). Pakistan finds it hard to balance this diplomacy. On the one hand, it must guarantee its security as well as economic prosperity by engaging Afghanistan. On the other hand, it cannot afford international censure because it was condoning the cooperation from a regime against international norms. The expansion plans of CPEC envisaged by Pakistan via Afghanistan are also challenged by the fact that these plans and their probable investors and other international organizations will be wary of cooperating with what is an unrecognized regime in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the unrecognition of the Taliban constitutes one of the central problems for the Pakistan's foreign policy. It reduces options on the diplomatic front, hurts regionalism and puts Islamabad on a precarious path, between expediency and ideology in dealing with Kabul. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, besides militancy, the problem of the settlement and accommodation of Afghan refugees is a great headache for Pakistan. The addition of another chunk of Afghan refugees to Pakistan due to the takeover of the Taliban initially placed further burden on its already over-stressed/squeezed resources particularly in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan but after the surge in the violent activities of TTP, the Government of Pakistan decided to repatriate these refugees and sending them back to Afghanistan in large numbers. A number of such refugees while entering Pakistan use illegal crossings and it is not very easy to track it down, instead of all that it ends up being more likely that they can be infiltrated by extremists or even criminals themselves

(Khan, et al., 2025b). The government of Pakistan now coming hard at these illegal crossers and the military forces are not sparing any person found involved in illegal movement across the border. In addition, the unregulated Pakistan-Afghanistan border has aggravated the situation. The frequent border attacks, the Taliban resistance to fencing, smuggling rings have all caused an increased insecurity. This should be concerning as it will undermine the completion of strategic ventures such as CPEC, which can only be executed in a secure regional setting (Ali, 2025). Accordingly, it might be safely observed that the instable political and security environment in Afghanistan coupled with the fact that country is being used as a safe haven by regional militant groups are factors that still drives competition and regional imbalances. To Pakistan, the cross-border issues not only pose security threats but bring direct consequences for the country including its economic development, international relations and image.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion reveals that there are five significant challenges faced by the security establishment of Pakistan namely, (1) the revival of TTP (Khawarijs) and proliferation of cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan to Pakistan; (2) the shallow military successes in KP and Balochistan without ensuring strategic political depth; (3) ineffective nature of the national action plan because of institutional clutter; (4) diplomatic apathy towards the Afghan Taliban and minimal regional clout; and (5) marginalization of the non-traditional security concerns like the safety of refugees, and their social integration. In sum, the increased cross-border violent activities of the Khawarijs is directly associated with the reemergence of Taliban regime in Afghanistan which form the main agenda in the foreign policy re-alignment in Pakistan whereas the interlinking threats require a holistic approach to the region; an effective border management and counterterrorism cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan including humanitarian assistance should be the main aspects for that approach. Also, the current foreign policy of Pakistan is reactionary and tactically conditional to the global alignment of powers in the region particularly the U.S. and India and is asymmetrically dependent on China as well.

It goes without saying that neglecting those regions from KP and Balochistan, which share border with Afghanistan, over the past several decades has provided feasible environment therein to recruitment of the anti-state militants and prospering of criminal economies. Without improving the inadequate healthcare system, redesigning the educational structure, and addressing the problem of an increased xenophobia, which are contributing to the further marginalization of such communities and increasing mistrust over the state and its apparatus installed in those regions, the military solution alone would not be sufficient to ensure peace and improve security situation. A Special Border Communities Development Policy needs to be formulated by the Government of Pakistan focusing on socio-economic development of territories bordering with Afghanistan while improving the level of public infrastructure, regularizing and legitimizing cross-border trade, and ensuring identity protection and legal registration to local citizens. These steps would reduce the sense of marginalization among the relevant masses which consequently would improve security and stability of the region in particular and the country in general.

The above proposals also illustrate the fact that counterterrorism and border governance in Pakistan need an effective paradigm shift - that is, it is important to move away from fragmented, militarized, crisis-centric responses to coordinated, preventive, and rights-based decisions. The study also indicates that national security threats faced by Pakistan revolve not only around the issue of militant violence but are also entrenched in institutional weaknesses, ideological vacuums and multinational risks hence the suggested reforms would aim to promote regional cooperation and local participation as well as bringing in legal reforms and technology-based governance. To summarize, the sustainable peace and stability of Pakistan along its most turbulent frontier can only be achieved by overcoming the gaps between the hard and the soft sides of security policy.

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