



## **Paper Title: Harnessing Pakistan's Priorities to Encourage Constructive Engagement with Afghanistan**

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## **Harnessing Pakistan's Priorities to Encourage Constructive Engagement with Afghanistan**

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Afghanistan and Pakistan share a long history of political contestation—including on the Durand Line issue—which has evolved along with (and due to) the trajectory of their foreign policies toward each other in the recent decades. Indeed, there has been some forward movement in the recent years, such as in the form of the establishment of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), and attempts by Afghanistan to acknowledge that Pakistan is one of the important players in bringing security and peace in Afghanistan. However, as Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, stated, the relationship between the two countries remains in a state of “undeclared war” by Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

Given this context in the backdrop of the U.S.-Taliban talks towards a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan, this paper attempts to address the following questions: What does Pakistan gain from providing sanctuaries to terrorists? How can Afghanistan balance its relations with Pakistan and India to encourage Pakistan's cooperation towards security and peace in Afghanistan? What options can Afghanistan consider to bring Pakistan on board to resolve security issues in the country?

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2. “Undeclared war between Afghanistan, Pakistan must end: Ashraf Ghani.” *Economic Times*, November 15, 2018. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/undeclared-war-between-afghanistan-pakistan-must-end-ashraf-ghani/articleshow/66630756.cms>

## **Pakistan's Support/Sanctuary to the Taliban and other Terrorist Groups**

Regional peace and stability in Afghanistan's neighborhood depend largely on a stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan. For years, Pakistan has provided the Taliban and the Haqqani Network with sanctuary, military and intelligence aid, resulting in the deaths of thousands of Afghan civilians, security personnel, and foreign forces based in Afghanistan. The history of insurgencies demonstrates that external sanctuaries play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of insurgent groups. With external sanctuaries, a group can plot, recruit, proselytize, contact supporters around the world, raise funds, resupply, and-perhaps most importantly-enjoy respite from counter-insurgency efforts.<sup>3</sup> In the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. intervention in 2001 killed dozens of Taliban leaders, but many of them fled to Pakistan seeking safe havens. The Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and many other terrorist groups enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan, sponsored by the government of Pakistan and its intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

According to the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Pakistan provides sanctuary and support to the Taliban, including for high-level Taliban leaders like incumbent Taliban Chief, Haibatullah Akhunzada, his deputies, Sirajuddin Haqqani and Mullah Yaqoob, as well as for a range of senior leaders like Abdul Qayyum Zakir, Ahmadullah Nanai, Abdul Latif Mansur, and Noor Mohammad Saqib.<sup>4</sup> They reside in Pakistan and on a daily basis, coordinate the insurgency against the Afghan government whom they consider illegitimate and corrupt. These groups benefit Pakistan by sustaining instability in Afghanistan, and facilitate Islamabad's pursuit of its national security interest in Afghanistan and the region.

3. Byman, Daniel. "Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism" (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 53-78.

4. Jones, Seth G., "The Insurgents Sanctuary in Pakistan." Center for Strategic and International Studies, September, 2018. [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180911\\_Insurgent\\_Sanctuary\\_0.pdf?Di93wTOJ\\_ZpqMO38OTutzRXqaub.4.Dw](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180911_Insurgent_Sanctuary_0.pdf?Di93wTOJ_ZpqMO38OTutzRXqaub.4.Dw)

## **The Relevance of a Stable, Secure Afghanistan for Pakistan**

Although Islamabad has rejected all allegations of supporting terrorist groups, there is credible evidence to the contrary, which the Afghan government has provided to the international community.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, U.S. President, Donald Trump's, administration reduced its security and military aid to Pakistan as a warning, and has added Pakistan to an intergovernmental watchlist for terrorism financing.<sup>6</sup> There is little doubt that Pakistan is supporting and financing terrorism. This essay argues that Pakistan has nothing to lose from a stable, sovereign and prosperous Afghanistan. On the contrary, a secure neighbor could offer good opportunities for cooperation in the areas of trade, transit, energy supply and cross-border water management-all of which are in Pakistan's interest.

A secure Afghanistan will offer better opportunities for trade, transit and energy cooperation with Pakistan, contrary to the notion that cooperation between Afghanistan and India poses a national security risk to Pakistan. Since the collapse of Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the Indian government has assisted Afghanistan in developmental projects. When Pakistan sought to regularly close the transit route for Afghan goods to India, Afghanistan sought alternative routes for trade and India helped in the process. As a result, in 2018, Afghanistan, India and Iran signed a trilateral agreement pertaining to the Chabahar Port project in Iran, which opened a new transit and transport corridor in the region. India's economic development projects in Afghanistan have caused apprehension among Pakistan's policymakers and some of the country's economists. They perceive economic development and initiative projects in Afghanistan as being potentially harmful to Pakistan's economy and trade markets in the region if Afghan goods and products reach regional and international markets by bypassing Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> However, the Chabahar Port project, for instance, demonstrates that regional cooperation will continue even if Pakistan refuses to become part of it, and Pakistan may be losing an

5. Tellis, Ashley J. "Reconciling with Taliban." Carnegie Endowment for international Peace, 2009. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/reconciling\\_with\\_taliban.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/reconciling_with_taliban.pdf)

6. Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia." White House, August 21, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/>

7. Sahar Khan. "Double Game: Why Pakistan Supports Militants and Resists U.S. Pressure to Stop." CATO Institute, September 20, 2018. <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa849.pdf>

opportunity for improving its economic strength by refusing to partake in it.

Moreover, Pakistan fears that a stable Afghanistan will have the opportunity to develop its capacities in different sectors including infrastructure-especially of dam construction on transboundary rivers that Pakistan and Afghanistan share, such as the Kabul River. However, it is more logical to consider that a peaceful and secure Afghanistan will have the opportunity to enter into a more formal and binding agreements with regard to transboundary river watersharing with Pakistan, resulting in a more consistent and predictable flow of water into Pakistan. Such a development will secure agricultural growth and Pakistan's economic well-being.

### **The Significance of Afghanistan's Balanced Relations with Pakistan and India**

Afghanistan's foreign policy is anchored and focused on economic cooperation and regional integration to maximize its interests. The government of Pakistan, however, is concerned about Afghanistan's cooperative diplomatic relations with India. They perceive Afghanistan's positive relations with India as a national security threat for Pakistan given their contentious relations with New Delhi because of the Kashmir issue, among others. Given Pakistan's geostrategic location between Afghanistan and India, cooperative relations between Afghanistan and India is viewed by Pakistan as being detrimental to its interest.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it is necessary for Afghanistan to try to strike a balanced foreign policy with Pakistan to persuade Islamabad to pursue constructive security cooperation with Afghanistan.

From a realistic point of view, Afghanistan is a weak state with considerable domestic economic and security problems. Therefore, a balanced foreign policy towards India and Pakistan will serves Afghanistan's economic and security interests more optimally rather than favoring closer ties with either of the two. It is therefore important to acknowledge that the country's security is closely linked to its foreign policy with India and Pakistan as well as other states.

For Afghanistan to strike a balance in its foreign policy in the region, Kabul should balance its economic and diplomatic relations with both India and Pakistan. In so doing, it is important to understand that in addition to perceptions on the India

8. Noorzai, Najibullah. "Afghanistan, Between India and Pakistan." *The Diplomat*, August 19, 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/afghanistan-between-india-and-pakistan/>

angle, various perceptions exist among Pakistani military leaders, policymakers, and diplomats with regard to bilateral relations with Afghanistan, such as on the Durand Line and the Pashtunistan issues. These perceptions need to be addressed, and for that, there is a need for a joint platform involving all the three countries. Therefore, it would be useful if Afghanistan initiates a trilateral dialogue aimed at facilitating cooperation and counter-terrorism by both India and Pakistan.

### **Possible Platforms for Security Cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan**

There are several bilateral and multilateral initiatives and platforms in place that can facilitate security cooperation between the two countries. Some of these initiatives and platforms have been used to some extent, while some others have not been harnessed adequately yet. However, there is a potential for security cooperation in all of these initiatives and platforms, including the APAPPS, the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

During a bilateral meeting in Kabul in September 2017, Afghanistan and Pakistan agreed to develop an action plan to improve border security.<sup>9</sup> This initial meeting was followed by several other meetings which ultimately culminated in the establishment of the APAPPS.<sup>10</sup> In April 2018, the two countries agreed on seven key principles for the action plan, three of which focused on security and peace cooperation, including on Pakistan's commitment towards supporting an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process, as well as the two countries' commitment to undertake effective action against fugitives and irreconcilable elements posing security threats to either of the two countries.<sup>11</sup> In mid-May 2018, the joint action plan was finalized between the two countries, which included the seven principles.<sup>12</sup> Although progress on the APAPPS' implementation slowed

9. Siddiqui, Naveed. "Pakistani, Afghan officials agree to form 'action plan' for improved border security: ISPR." *Dawn*, September 14, 2017. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1357650>

10. "Afghanistan Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity." *Who is who in Afghanistan*, June 26, 2018. [http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com\\_afghanbios&id=3967&task=view&total=4028&start=152&Itemid=2](http://www.afghan-bios.info/index.php?option=com_afghanbios&id=3967&task=view&total=4028&start=152&Itemid=2)

11. "Ghani, Abbasi agree to 7 key principles for Action Plan." *Tolo News*, April 9, 2017. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/7-principles-agreed-afghanistan-pakistan-action-plan>

12. "Afghanistan-Pakistan Finalize Joint Action Plan for Peace." *Tolo News*, May 15, 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-pakistan-finalize-joint-action-plan-peace>

down after that and it is unclear as to what it has achieved since then, it provides a framework for the two countries to engage towards cooperation aimed at security and peace in Afghanistan.

In addition to the abovementioned bilateral framework for security cooperation, there are several multilateral platforms in place that focus on cooperation for security and peace. The most prominent one is the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation, which is an Afghan initiative in which Pakistan has been a participant and has co-signed a declaration that calls for cooperation in areas of security, peace and counter terrorism.<sup>13</sup> This provides another platform for Afghanistan to use build on the consensus among the participating countries to convince Pakistan to rectify its prevailing policies. Moreover, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process is another initiative in which Pakistan is a participating country, and its pillars of activities include political consultations and confidence building measures towards building regional consensus on achieving shared goals.<sup>14</sup> This also provides a useful opportunity and possibilities for Afghanistan to harness in this regard.

Another multilateral platform with potential in this regard is the SCO, in which too Pakistan is a full member and Afghanistan is an observer member.<sup>15</sup> Strengthening mutual trust and good neighborliness, and undertaking joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region are among the SCO's main goals. Finally, SAARC provides a framework for cooperation between the two countries since both are its members and security cooperation falls in the domain of cooperation under SAARC framework.

All these bilateral and multilateral platforms and frameworks possess the potential for securing cooperation for security and peace in Afghanistan. Politicians in Afghanistan can tap into this wide range of options and their potential for the purpose of building regional

13. "The Kabul Process for Peace & Security Cooperation in Afghanistan Declaration." The U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan, March 01, 2018. <https://af.usembassy.gov/kabul-process-peace-security-cooperation-afghanistan-declaration/>

14. Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, official website. Accessed July 13, 2019. <http://hoa.gov.af/293/pillars>

15. "About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation." Official website of SCO, September 01, 2017. [http://eng.sectsco.org/about\\_sco/](http://eng.sectsco.org/about_sco/)

consensus towards such cooperation. Although there are limitations and difficulties, the potential of these platforms do also exist and can be harnessed.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan is one of the most relevant countries when it comes to security and peace in Afghanistan, due to a multitude of factors including its support of terrorism, and its disputes with Afghanistan over the Durand Line, among others. However, these are not among the major reasons driving much of Pakistan's Afghanistan policies since its creation and especially since the 1978 coup in Afghanistan and subsequent wars. Pakistan's policies stem from its concerns regarding India's influence in Afghanistan, and its concerns about water sharing of transboundary rivers that Afghanistan and Pakistan share.

While Pakistan has relied on proxies such as the Taliban to further its interests over the past years, there is much that Pakistan stands to gain from a secure and peaceful Afghanistan rather than from an insecure and unstable one. Therefore, it is beneficial for both if Pakistan and Afghanistan move towards cooperation for security and peace in Afghanistan. To that end, there exist feasible and effective platforms and frameworks. Such platforms include the APAPPS, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, the Kabul Process, the SCO and the SAARC. Although there are limitations and difficulties in tapping into these possibilities to ensure security and peace related cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the frameworks do offer harnessable potential.

## **Policy Recommendations**

- The Taliban has been fueled and sponsored by Pakistan's government over the course of decades. Although the administration in Pakistan has been one of the most important players in Afghanistan's peace talks with Taliban, it is believed by Kabul that Pakistan is mostly promoting their own set of goals and strategies by using Taliban as leverage. Therefore, if Pakistan succeeds in bringing and convincing the Taliban to negotiate with Kabul towards peace, it will deliver Pakistan with major benefits in the region and improve the country's reputation in the region and around the world.

- The volume of trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been declining in the recent years. Recent reports have indicated that Pakistan's trade sector is facing challenges due to insufficient cooperation between the two countries. To overcome Pakistan's closure of its transit routes for Afghanistan's goods meant for export to India, Afghan and Indian businesses switched over to use Iran's Chabahar port. According to recent reports, the Afghan government has shifted the transit of over 70% of its trade through Iran, India and China. Thus, rebuilding a warm and amicable relationship with Afghanistan could benefit Pakistan's trade and economy.