



RESEARCH PAPER**Conflicting behavior between US and Afghanistan and Its
Implications on Tribal Areas of Pakistan****Hassan Ali**

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ABSTRACT

The US-Afghan relationship, marked by decades of conflict and strategic alliances, has considerably effected Pakistan, mainly its tribal areas. This paper employs Realist Theory to analysis the geopolitical dynamics between the United States, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, focusing the socio-economic and security challenges posed by Pakistan's tribal areas. The study delves into key players of the US-Afghan conflict, such as strategic goals and power struggles, and scrutinizes the spillover effects, containing militant actions, refugee influx, and economic instability in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Pakistan's realist approach, shaped by military operations such as Zarb-i-Azb, FATA's union in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and strategic involvement with Afghanistan's Taliban-led government, reveals its struggles to regulate sovereignty and regional stability. Qualitative methodology is used also have secondary sources utilized for data collection, providing a detailed understanding of the interconnectedness of local, regional, and global dynamics encompasses these complicated triangular relations. The study underlines the importance of multilateral cooperation, economic resilience through initiatives like CPEC, and governance reforms in combating long-lasting challenges. This study suggests to address the interrelated security, economic, and governance issues in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the surrounding area by taking a regional strategy. Show a consistent dedication to and involvement in advancing regional security and stability. Put an emphasis on sustainable and inclusive development to raise quality of life, alleviate poverty, and advance stability in the region. To confront common security challenges, regional stakeholders should strengthen their counterterrorism collaboration.

KEYWORDS

Afghanistan, Pakistan, Security, Talban, Tribal Areas

Introduction

The relationship between the United States (US) and Afghanistan stands as one of the most intricate and transformative geopolitical fluctuating aspects of the modern era. This relationship, marked by conflict, shifting alliances, and conflicting interests, has been formed by a series of historical and current developments. From the Cold War controversy against the Soviet Union to the post-9/11 "War on Terror," and the ultimate with drawl of US armies in 2021, the boundary between these two nations has intensely complicated not only Afghanistan but also its bordering states (Ashraf, Arshad, & Kiran, 2023). At the heart of this energetic lies Pakistan, a country whose landscape, historical ties proximity, and thoughtful implication have positioned it at the juncture of this complicate triangular association. The impacts of the US-Afghan conflict have resonated deeply across Pakistan, with its tribal areas experiencing the most severe impacts, ranging from security encounters to socio-economic volatility. Understanding the conflicting behavior between the US and Afghanistan is, hence, important to studying its adverse impacts on Pakistan,

mainly its ancestral belt, which has faced the impact of decades of provincial unrest (Shakirullah, Nawab, Nyborg, & Elahi, 2020).

Literature Review

The US's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has been a foundational basis of its wider global approach, marked by significant shifts based on emerging security and strategic importance. During the Cold War, the US forged an alliance with Afghan Mujahideen to counter Soviet influence in the region, providing extensive military and financial aiding. However, the aftermath of the Soviet removal set aside Afghanistan in a power vacuum, leading to civil strife and the resultantly rise of the Taliban in the 1990s. The 9/11 incidents envisioned a turning moment, leading to the US-led assault of Afghanistan in the behest of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 (Samuel, 2022). This struggle aimed to dismantle the Taliban regime, eliminate terrorist systems like Al-Qaeda, and create a democratic structure in Afghanistan. Over the next two periods, the US invested profoundly in military actions and nation-building efforts overall, but systematic corruption, a lack of suitable strategy, and a resilient Taliban insurgency challenged these objectives. The US's subsequent departure in 2021 puts a deliberate recalibration, with Washington converged its attention to internal priorities and emerging global concerns such as China's rise and Russia's aggressiveness, leaving behind Afghanistan to navigate its ambiguous future.

On the other side, Afghanistan's foreign policy for the US has been marked by its internal unstable form of structure and the wider regional perspective. During the US military occurrence, consecutive Afghan governments deeply relied on American aid, security promises, and diplomatic support to regulate their administrative structure. However, this dependence also promoted anger among factions of the Afghan population, who viewed protracted foreign involvement as an infringement on their sovereignty. The Taliban's recovery and finally takeover of Kabul in August 2021 dramatically changed Afghanistan's attitude toward the US. While the Taliban openly condemned the US for its long-standing interventionist strategies, the group also wanted to involve diplomatically with Washington to get recognition and financial backing in the post-withdrawal era (Li, 2022). Afghanistan's current foreign policy remains a weakened balancing act, as it efforts to secure international legality, navigate tightened relations with the US, and forgo support from regional powers like China, Russia, and Pakistan to rebuild its fragile status (Parveen, Aman, & Aman, 2023).

The fighting activities between the US and Afghanistan have had intense and multilayered effects on Pakistan, mainly in its tribal regions. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), now combined with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have attained a structure as a strategic buffer zone but have also suffered the costs of cross-border violence, refugee inflows, and economic troubles. The US-led military actions in Afghanistan placed militant groups like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban into Pakistan's tribal belt, shifting the region into a hotspot for insurgent actions and counter-terrorism maneuvers. The influx of thousands of Afghan refugees additionally stressed Pakistan's resources and social fabric, exacerbating tensions in the tribal areas (Marwat, Rehman, & Akhtar, 2023). Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan and the US has revealed the necessity to balance its strategic interests. While Pakistan has been an important supporter of the US in its "War on Terror," it has also upheld ties with Afghan factions, involving the Taliban, to protect its interests in the region. This dual approach has drained international disapproval, with allegations of Pakistan hiding militant groups, even as it assisted peace talks, such as the US-Taliban talks in Doha. The US withdrawal and the Taliban's return to control have

increased security tensions for Pakistan, with cross-border insurgences and the revival of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) posing significant threats (Imran & Khan, 2024).

The implications of the US-Afghan engagements for Pakistan's tribal regions are both instant and long-term. In the short term, Pakistan faces amplified security risks, economic challenges, and the straining of dealing refugee flows. The tribal areas, long ignored in terms of development and governance, have become a forefront for militant groups misusing the region's vulnerabilities (Zeb & Ahmed, 2019). In the long term, these contests underline the need for Pakistan to recalibrate its foreign policy toward both Afghanistan and the US. Pakistan must occupy with Afghanistan's Taliban-led government to ensure regional stability while sustaining strategic links with the US for economic and military backing. The emerging dynamics of the US-Afghan relationship present Pakistan with both trials and opportunities to redefine its part in the region and address the socio-economic requirements of its tribal areas (Zeb & Ahmed, 2019).

In a nutshell, the conflicting activities between the US and Afghanistan last to have far-reaching implications for regional and global stability. For Pakistan, mostly its tribal areas, the costs of this conflict are extremely deep-seated, impacting security, governance, and socio-economic conditions. The present scenario, with the Taliban measuring to consolidate power in Afghanistan, the US recalibrating its global tactic, and Pakistan dealing with the spillover belongings, underline the interconnectedness of these countries. Addressing these tensions requires a multilayered approach containing regional cooperation, robust governance reforms, and maintained international engagement. Pakistan's ability to navigate this intricate triangular affiliation will not only shape its own future but also lead its position to the broader peace and stability in South Asia.

Material and Methods

The research would have been carried out the descriptive and analytical approaches to proceed and draw the conclusion. For this purpose, qualitative method has been used. All the data given in this study would be collected from books, journals, official reports of the organizations, experts available on internet for instance, secondary methods for the research were consulted and analyzed the recommendations. To gain a more conflicting behavior between US and Afghanistan and Its Implications on Tribal Areas of Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

This framework employs the Realist Theory of International Relations to analyze the conflicting behavior between the United States (US) and Afghanistan and its influences on Pakistan, specifically in its tribal areas. Imbedded in the works of Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, and John Mearsheimer, realism emphasizes power dynamics, state-centric behavior, and the priority of national security in an anarchic international system. This theory offers a robust framework to analyze the triangular relationship between the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, marked by shifting alliances and conflicting interests.

The US-Afghanistan relationship determines key principles of realism. The US's foreign policy, particularly post-9/11, was shaped by strategic imperatives to demolish terrorist networks and form regional dominance. Operation Enduring Freedom (2001) and subsequent nation-building struggles meant to eliminate the Taliban and Al-Qaeda while stimulating democratic governance. However, these attempts were challenged by systemic corruption as well as a resilient Taliban insurgency. The US withdrawal in 2021 characterized a shift in main concern, lining up with Mearsheimer's Offensive Realism,

which offers that states pursue power pursuit but recalibrate when costs overshadow advantages. This withdrawal also shows realism's central idea that state actions are guided by national interest, highlighting wider challenges like the rise of China and Russia overextended involvement in Afghanistan (Yawar, 2024).

Afghanistan's foreign policy toward the US further clarifies realism. Consecutive Afghan governments dependent on the American aid and security assurances, reflecting the realist significance on survival in a competitive system. Though, the Taliban's return to authority in 2021 raises the point of Waltz's Defensive Realism, which advocates that states, or in this case parties, urge to consolidate power to ensure survival rather than dominance. The Taliban's involvement with regional powers like Pakistan, China, and Russia determines a strategic balancing act to secure legitimacy and support in a segmented international system (Yawar, 2024).

Pakistan's position in this dynamic region demonstrates the application of realism in a regional setting. Sharing a porous boundary with Afghanistan, Pakistan has facing momentous spillover effects such as cross-border skirmishes, refugee influxes, and socio-economic volatility in its domestic zones. The previous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), currently part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, have borne the brunt of these trials, serving as a battleground for militant groups and multiple counter-terrorism operations. Pakistan's foreign policy, shaped by balancing relationships with the US and maintaining bonds with Afghan various factions like the Taliban, reveals realism's view of a security dilemma – where one state's struggles to increase security unintentionally threaten others, exasperating instability (Iqbal, 2023).

The tribal areas in Pakistan further faces the refugee problem, as US-led military activities in Afghanistan pushed militant groups like the Taliban into this regional area, enhancing insurgent actions. Pakistan's involvement in counter-terrorism operations, while aimed at maintaining stability in the region, frequently emerged cycles of violence along with displacement. This aligns with Morgenthau's classical realism, which argues the unintentional concerns of power struggles in an anarchic system. Furthermore, the influx of Afghan's refugees stressed Pakistan's resources, plus another layer of trouble to an already volatile area. (Javed, Shafiq, & Azhar, 2022).

Realism's sub-theories increase the perception of this triangular relationship. Offensive Realism illuminates the US's initial engagement as a bid to sustain global domination. Defensive Realism explains Pakistan's strategy of balancing the relationships with the US and Taliban to protect its regional interests without increasing the conflict. The theoretical framework highlights how the quest of national interests by the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan has shaped cascading challenges and issues, specifically in Pakistan's tribal areas (Hussain, 2022).

By employing realism, this research contextualizes the interplay of power, survival and security in shaping the engagements of the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. The analysis deals with a comprehensive description of the current conflicts as well as their impacts, including the interconnectedness of local, regional, and global dynamics.

Discussion Model

Key Drivers of US-Afghanistan Conflict

The US-Afghanistan conflict has been marked by a multifaceted interplay of strategic interests, power struggles, and refugee tensions. These factors have included the

dynamics between the United States, Afghanistan, and other regional players, contributing to a lengthy and complicate conflict. The United States wanted to establish a democratic form of governance in Afghanistan, an aim that collided with the Taliban's resistance and their dream for the country. The Taliban, evolving as an important power in the region, rejected the US-backed Afghan government, resulting into a continued conflict over governance models. The US's struggles to foster democracy were exposed with confrontation not only from the Taliban but also from regional powers like Pakistan and China, who had their own important strategic interests in Afghanistan. These nations were more concentrated on regulating influence and challenging each other's existence in the region, rather than focusing on the US's democratic agenda (Ganguly, 2022).

The Taliban's emergence as a regional power broker has been a critical point in the conflict. Their capability to establish power within Afghanistan, despite global actions to isolate them, has been a noteworthy challenge for the US and its partners. The Taliban's gaining of power over Afghan territory empower them to exert influence and contest the US's strategic aims. This power tussle was further intricate by the participation of regional players like Pakistan, which wanted to use the Taliban to encounter Indian influence, and China, which desired to secure its financial and strategic goals in the region (Parveen, Aman, & Aman, 2023).

Security tensions have been a pivotal driver of the US-Afghanistan conflict. The US's principal focal point was to abolish terrorist networks, mainly al-Qaeda, which found shelter in Taliban-controlled zones. However, Afghanistan's incompetent governance and complex regional connections made this task puzzling. The Taliban's backing for terrorist groups like al-Qaeda put forward a direct threat to US security interests, bolstering military interventions and diplomatic efforts to limit their influence. Meanwhile, regional powers like Pakistan and China had their own security issues, emphasizing on counterterrorism and maintaining regional stability, which sometimes move away from US intentions (Matevosyan, 2024).

Spillover Effects on Pakistan's Tribal Areas

The incorporation of militant groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda into Pakistan's tribal areas has been a major source of regional instability, primarily following the U.S. assault on Afghanistan in 2001. These groups have subjugated the socio-political vacuum in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), leading to an enlarged militancy and insurgency. The TTP, motivated by Al-Qaeda's philosophy, appeared as a well-known militant group in this region, leading to the security problems faced by Pakistan. The existence of these groups has not only threatened local stability but also exposed larger security concerns for Pakistan and its neighboring states (Mason, 2008).

The conflict in Afghanistan has led to an important influx of Afghan migrants into Pakistan, employing a noteworthy stress on the country's resources and socio-economic infrastructure. This refugee crisis has resulted in demographic changes and amplified security issues within Pakistan. The existence of a large refugee populace has challenged Pakistan's domestic security environment and shifted its policy towards Afghanistan. The socio-economic problems of accommodating refugees has more worsened existing concerns in the tribal areas, affecting local societies and governance system (Borthakur, 2017).

The rise of aggression and the influx of settlers have compounded the financial and governance questions in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Historically marginalized, FATA has experienced significant political and socio-economic negligence,

which has driven aggression and insurgency in the region. The absence of progress and effective governance has suspended efforts to incorporate FATA into Pakistan's greater socio-economic framework. The merging of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2018 was a critical step toward concentrating these challenges, seeking to bring peace and stability to the area by refining governance and development. Though, the region still necessitates widespread reforms to entirely overcome its past marginalization and attain sustainable development. (Ifejika, 2023).

Realist Explanations for Pakistan's Role

Pakistan's dual performance in the region is a classic example of a security problem, where its activities to secure its own goals unintentionally question its security. On one hand, Pakistan has been a strong ally in the US-led war on terror, providing crucial support to abrogate the Afghan Taliban and detain Al Qaeda insurgents. On the other side, Pakistan has maintained support for Afghan groups like the Taliban as part of its approach to formulate "strategic depth" in Afghanistan, which was initially perceived as a victory when the Taliban recaptured power in Kabul in 2021. However, this dual role has flopped, as it has led to amplified hostility between Afghanistan and Pakistan, with concerns such as the Durand Line quarrel and violent border clashes reemerging. The existence of militant groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) further complexes the security landscape, posing dangers to both Pakistan and Afghanistan (Machitidze, 2023).

Pakistan's realist perspective to balancing its relations with the US and Afghanistan is channelized by its strategic survival requirements. Historically, Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has been shaped by its security uncertainties regarding India. The existence of Indian influence in Afghanistan has been an important factor in Pakistan's strategic calculations, resulting in it to maintain a robust alliance with the US while concurrently restraining India's role in Afghanistan. This balancing role is further intricated by the complicated trilateral relationship between the US, Pakistan, and the Taliban, where Pakistan has had to navigate its role as a US ally while also engaging with the Taliban. The "New Balance of Threat Theory" suggests that Pakistan's actions are a response to perceived threats from both India and Afghanistan, demanding a delicate balance to maintain its strategic ambitions (Hussain, 2020).

The risks faced by Pakistan in upholding control over its tribal areas highlight the effect on its sovereignty. The lack of state control in these regions has been an important factor in the disaster of counterterrorism struggles, as the tribal areas have repeatedly served as safe havens for militancy groups. The military's supremacy in foreign policy implementation, coupled with an institutional preference for using Islamic militant groups to acquire strategic objectives, has more complicated Pakistan's capability to assert control over these areas. The unresolved issue of the Durand Line and the divided nature of Pashtun society on both sides of the border have also harmfully impacted Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan, failing Islamabad's influence over Kabul. Despite these issues, Pakistan continues to sight its past Afghan allies as crucial to preserving its location in Afghanistan, hoping to persuade the Taliban to embrace the changed global certainties.

US-Afghan Conflict Repercussions on Pakistan's Tribal Dynamics

The US-Afghan conflict meaningfully changed the power dynamics in the tribal areas of Pakistan, mainly the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The invasion of the US in Afghanistan in 2001 resulted in the disintegration of community and political systems in these regions, creating a power vacuum that was quickly subjugated by militant

groups. These groups, containing the Taliban and al-Qaida, capitalized on the instability and the region's geographical and cultural dealings to Afghanistan to maximize their influence and recruit localized sections, leading to massive violence and devastation of institutions like military installations, mosques, and universities. The historical tribal traditions and the socio-political milieu of FATA were deeply impacted, as the area became a hotbed for uprising and terrorism, driven by religious extremism and national conflicts (Zeb & Ahmed, 2019).

In response to the growing challenges from militant groups, Pakistan performed several military operations in the tribal areas, inspired by a realist approach to perform its role for state security. These operations intended to undo the networks of militant groups and reestablish order in the region. The Pakistan Army's efforts were considerable, involving important military involvements in both the FATA and Frontier Regions. These actions were not only a response to the immediate threat imposed by these groups but also a strategic shift to maintain the sovereignty and stability of the state existing in the regional chaos. The military's activities were driven by the demand to counteract the risks of extremist groups and to rescue further destabilization spreading in the region, which was critical for regulating national security (Marwat, Rehman, & Akhtar, 2023).

The conflict and subsequent military operations have had deeply long-term implications for Pakistan's internal sovereignty and its active role in regional power dynamics. The persistent instability in the tribal areas has challenged Pakistan's capability to exert control and regulate sovereignty over these regions. The continuous insurgency and the presence of militant groups have demanded continuous military involvement, which has exploited resources and impacted the socio-political fabric of the country. Moreover, the conflict has influenced Pakistan's regional relations, predominantly with Afghanistan and the United States, as it navigates the complicated geopolitical landscape experienced by historical and cultural ties. The strategic standing of the tribal areas, coupled with the dangers posed by militancy, underscores the demand for a nuanced approach to peace building and conflict resolution to ensure long-lasting stability and security in the region (Mason, 2008).

Pakistan's Realist Strategy for Addressing Tribal Challenges

Pakistan's stance to addressing existing tribal challenges, mainly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has been marked by a realist perspective emphasizing on state sovereignty and counter-terrorism. This stance incorporates military operations to dismantle militant networks and strategic attempts to assimilate tribal areas into the national framework to maximize state direct control. Pakistan has performed significant military operations to demolish militant networks in the tribal areas. Operations like Zarbi-Azb have been pivotal in abolishing infrastructure used by radical groups, including IED factories and training zones accommodating for suicide bombers. These activities have also open detention avenues and grasped foreign exchange, underlines the extensive reach of militant networks in the region. The success of these operations underscores the strategic importance of safeguarding the tribal belt to protect national sovereignty and stability (Khattak, Sargana, & Hussain, 2018).

The tribal belt, chiefly FATA, has been a strategic focal point due to its role as a fort for numerous militant groups, including the Haqqani's Network and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. The region's geographical and social ties with Afghanistan have made it a crucial area for counter-terrorism struggles, as instability here directly affect the security of neighboring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the wider region (Khan Zeb, *Structural Violence and Terrorism in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan*, 2019). An important

step in consolidating sovereignty has been the merging of FATA into the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This integration aims to carry the tribal areas under the same legal and administrative framework as the rest of Pakistan, thus enhancing state control and mitigating the region's use as a base for insurgency. This integration process comprises comprehensive legal and economic reforms to guarantee that FATA is on an equal standard with other provinces, attempting to address long-standing issues of marginalization and absence of political representation (Shad & Ahmed, 2018).

The pragmatic approach stresses state consolidation and regional integrity. By incorporating FATA, Pakistan struggles to eliminate the colonial-era governance structure that had kept the region isolated and weak to militancy. This integration is seen as a vital step to establish a durable line of defense against terrorism and to defend the authority of the state. The merger is also expected to enable nation-building by providing security, dignity, and democratic participation to the tribal societies, aligning with wider national goals (Begum, 2018). Notwithstanding these efforts, challenges continue to occur in fully integrating FATA. The area's political realities and socio-economics, characterized by economic marginalization and limited political liberty, continue to fuel instability. Addressing these root causes is critical for attaining long-term peace and stability. Reconstruction and development programs, along with de-radicalization initiatives and education, are essential to rebuild the capability of the local population and integrate them into the national mainstream (Zeb & Ahmed, 2019). The integration procedures also face issues from traditional mechanisms and cultural distinctions, particularly including the Pashtunwali code and the role of Jirgas. These old-fashioned structures have historically performed a role in conflict resolution but are now being confronted by changing socio-political dynamics and movements such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement. Replacing these traditional norms with modern governance structures is essential for successful integration and conflict resolution in the region (Yousaf & FurrakhZad, 2020).

Engagement with the Taliban-Led Government

The relationship between Afghanistan and its neighborhood countries, such as Turkey and Pakistan, is profoundly rooted in social and historical ties. Turkey, for example, has maintained a long-lasting relationship with Afghanistan, highlighting communal Islamic culture and historical connections. Despite uncertainties, Turkey has attempted to mediate in the Afghan conflict and foster links with the Taliban-led government, emphasizing on financial and educational collaboration. Similarly, Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan is experienced by historical issues like the disputed Durand Line, which continues to be a source of tension. The rise of the Taliban has further complicated these relationships too much, necessitating a careful regulation between social ties and political realities (Machitidze, 2023). Countries like China and Pakistan have pragmatic motivations for involving with the Taliban-led government, primarily to control insurgency spillovers and safeguard regional stability. China's approach includes cautious cooperation with the Taliban on economic dealings while emphasizing more on counterterrorism efforts. This strategy is part of China's wider geopolitical aims, including the Belt and Road Initiative, which focus to enhance regional connectivity and economic growth. Pakistan, on the other hand, seeks to halt hostile elements from using Afghan territory and to gain acceptance of the Durand Line as an international border. Both countries have cooperated under their strategic partnership to enhance mutual interests and contribute to the peace-building process in Afghanistan (Ali, 2020).

Maintaining border controls is a crucial measure to prevent the penetration of militant groups across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The persistent concern of terrorism and religious extremism necessitates coordinated action to eradicate such

groups. Despite attempts to manage the border, it remains a main area of tension, with extremist groups like ISIS aggressively targeting Afghanistan. The participation of international organizations, such as the UN, is recommended to enhance watchdogging efforts and provide a neutral platform for solving border disputes (Malysheva, 2022).

Diplomatic initiatives are needed to align security interests with Afghanistan and stabilize cross-border matters. Countries like Turkey and Iran have strengthened their political efforts to create special relations with the Taliban, focusing to increase their geopolitical influence in the region. Turkey's pragmatic approach includes leveraging its NATO impact to mediate between the alliance and the Taliban administration, while Iran aims to balance fears of cross-border violence with chances for increased diplomatic leverage and security association. These diplomatic struggles are central for fostering regional stability and preventing a negative consequence in Afghanistan (Guzhev, 2024).

Continued Security Cooperation

The partnership between Pakistan and the United States based on strategic interests has been marked by a complicated interplay of military, geopolitical, and economic factors. This relationship has evolved significantly since the occasion of September 11, 2001, with both nations navigating issues and opportunities in their bilateral cooperation. Pakistan's geostrategic location has been pivotal in obtaining U.S. military and financial support. Following the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan became a key player in the U.S.-led International War on Terror, giving crucial support in counterterrorism struggles and stabilizing operations in Afghanistan. This collaboration was active in Pakistan being labelled a major non-NATO ally, which enabled significant military aid and support from the U.S. (Ganguly & Paul Kapur, 2023). The collaboration between the U.S. and Pakistan in counter-terrorism has been driven by realist considerations, aiming at shared security goals. In spite of challenges, such as accusations of Pakistan's selective counterterrorism struggles and U.S. concerns over sovereignty uncertainties, the relationship has seen periods of genuine collaboration. Recent improvements, such as the U.S. sustainment package for Pakistani F-16 fighter planes, indicate a possible revival of substantial counterterrorism assistance (D'Souza, 2006). The U.S. has stated concerns over Pakistan's relations with Afghan parties like the Taliban, which have historically strained the two-sided relationship. The U.S. removal from Afghanistan and the resurgence of terrorist groups have additionally complicated this dynamic. However, there is a recognition of the need for renewed trust and political engagement to tackle these rising security threats (Khan, Naseem, Kamran, Khan, & Zaman, 2024). Pakistan experiences the challenge of lining-up with U.S. interests while safeguarding its national sovereignty. This balance is crucial, especially in light of U.S. drone strikes and other activities perceived as invading on Pakistan's sovereignty. The evolving geopolitical landscape, containing Pakistan's association with China and regional dynamics absorbing India, further challenging this balance (Jan, Shah, & Khan, 2023).

Regional Cooperation and Economic Resilience for Stability

The U.S. has long been worried about Pakistan's links with Afghan factions such as the Taliban, which have historically stressed their bilateral relationship. The withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan and the resurgence of extremist groups have further intricate this dynamic. Though, there is a recognition of the necessity for renewed trust and political engagement to focus on these emerging security issues. Pakistan experiences the sensitive task of bring into line with U.S. interests while protecting its national sovereignty. This balance is predominantly puzzling in light of U.S. drone strikes and other actions observed as overstepping in Pakistan's sovereignty. The involvement of India again escalated the

worries in the region regarding the equilibrium. By observing this complex landscape entails strategic partnerships and a careful diplomacy. (Li, et al., 2021).

Regional collaboration is vital for changing tribal areas and mitigating insurgency drivers. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) exemplifies how developed infrastructure and revenue generation can uplift economies, even under challenging conditions like the COVID-19 pandemic. CPEC's role in increasing monetary stability highlights the significance of honest leadership and valuable development in building resilience. In Ukraine, strategic investment in critical infrastructure is necessary for financial security, particularly in the face of military threats and financial instability. Public-private partnerships and international assistance are crucial for advancing infrastructure and safeguarding long-term economic growth. These examples demonstrate the realist emphasis on boosting financial resilience to reinforce state power, emphasizing the need for strategic investments and global collaboration (D. Zatonatskiy, 2024). Hence, multilateral involvement with regional powers and strategic economic development are key to attaining regional stability. By fostering collaboration and investing in infrastructure, regions can reduce dependence on external powers and address internal trials, ultimately enhancing their financial resilience and state control.

Conclusion

The US-Afghan clash has intensely restyled the geopolitical and socio-economic landscape of South Asia, with Pakistan's tribal areas rising as a critical focus on instability and resilience. The interaction of strategic interests, refugee's tensions, and power struggles between the United States and Afghanistan has formed a complex dynamic that has directly impacted Pakistan's internal and external policies. Pakistan's tribal areas, including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), have borne the brunt of cross-border attacks, socio-economic instabilities, and governance complexities. The integration of FATA into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a key step toward consolidating state power, but the region remains to face insurgency, historical marginalization and economic stagnation.

Pakistan's response, embedded in a realist viewpoint, reveals a pragmatic approach to focus on these challenges while maintaining its relations with Afghanistan and the United States. Military operations such as Zarb-i-Azb have been served as an instrumental in demolishing militant networks, yet the persistence of extremist groups underscores the necessity for long-term plans. Engagement with the Taliban-led government, diplomatic initiatives and enhanced border surveillance with key actors like China and Russia prove Pakistan's commitment to regional stability and strategic survival. Multilateral collaboration, as seen in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), underlines the potential of financial growth in mitigating insurgency drivers and promoting resilience.

The growing intricacies of Pakistan's association with the US and Afghanistan highlight the delicate balance required to uphold national sovereignty while navigating complicated international relationships. The nonstop security collaboration with the US, in spite of challenges, and strategic partnerships with regional powers, remains critical for Pakistan's role in fostering peace and stability. Focusing on internal challenges in tribal areas, such as socio-economic reforms, transformation of governance, and de-radicalization, is vital for incorporating these regions into the national framework and warranting lasting stability.

In conclusion, the US-Afghan conflict has left a stubborn mark on Pakistan's domestic delicacies and wider geopolitical role. By leveraging pragmatic approaches,

fostering regional cooperation, and contributing in sustainable growth, Pakistan can eradicate the long-term consequences of this conflict and place itself as a stabilizing player in the region. Cooperative efforts, strategic foresight, and a nuanced approach are important for guaranteeing the safety and prosperity of Pakistan and its tribal areas within an unstable global landscape.

Recommendations

- In order to stop terrorist activity across borders and trafficking, border protection measures such as security operations, oversight, and gathering surveillance information should be strengthened.
- To ease tensions and advance regional stability, cultivate improved ties with Afghanistan through economic, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic engagement. In order to combat unemployment and advance stability, development projects in tribal communities should be accelerated with an emphasis on infrastructure, medical care, educational opportunities, and financial empowerment.
- Increase collaboration between Afghanistan and the United States on counterterrorism initiatives, including intelligence exchange and coordinated actions to target shared adversaries.
- Encourage and aid the Afghan-led peace process by offering financial, diplomatic, and technological assistance as required.

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