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AN ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS: FROM PEACE PROCESS TO TALIBAN TAKEOVER (2021)

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
<p>Super Powers, Taliban, War-torn, Geopolitical, Peaceful, China, Pakistan</p>	<p>Afghanistan as a focal state for super powers remained a war-torn territory since 19th century. Its geopolitical importance can't be ignored as country connects South Asia to Central Asia. Afghanistan as a neighbouring state of Pakistan is also very significant for India. Peaceful/violence circumstances in Afghanistan have immense effect on Pakistan. Pakistan had to pay high cost of the war against terror in the Afghanistan. Despite extending of full cooperation to USA, Pakistan was identified as an untrustworthy state, as US blamed Pakistan that all the terrorists operating in Pakistan are the state sponsored terrorists. On the other hand, Pakistan as the US ally cannot be trustworthy for Taliban. During peace process, paradoxically US accepted Pakistan as a vital mediator between the Taliban and US. Pakistan remained US ally, whenever US needed. On other hand, Pakistan may have to pay heavy cost after US withdrawal. After Taliban take over, Pakistan has started to deliver humanitarian aid to Afghanistan & provided shelter to Afghan refugees. China, the emerging power of the world, has taken initiatives to enhance with Afghanistan. Once again it is China which needed Pakistan for successfully attaining its aim. Pakistan eminence in South Asian region cannot be neglected. Regional peace and stability are vital for Pakistan's own viability and prosperity.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Historically, Afghanistan is recognized as important country of South Asia both in geostrategic & geopolitical perspective. This landlocked state connects with other & geopolitically important states like Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan & China. Afghanistan provides connectivity link from West Asia and South Asia to Central Asia. South Asia and West Asia are thickly populated regions and energy demand is growing in these regions & as such connection

with Central Asia can be beneficial to meet this demand. In this connection, the Afghanistan has also direct access to Chahbahar port of Iran, it can unlock Afghanistan from landlocked status (Shirazi, 2021). Likewise, Afghanistan shares boundaries with some of the major states, which are connected to Caspian Sea, the most important energy source of the world after Persian Gulf and Siberian sea. Due to the poor transportation system, Afghanistan has to depend on littoral states for importing and exporting products. Wakhan corridor is located in Pamir mountainous range North-East of Afghanistan and in the North China, the emerging economy of the world. China intends to build a direct highway towards the Afghanistan through Wakhan corridor. This mountainous corridor will be beneficial for China to enhance its trade towards Central Asia and increase its commerce from Wakhan corridor to Gwadar port, which will also be beneficial for Pakistan.

Wakhan corridor provides an alternative route for Afghanistan and China, and it makes them less dependent on Pakistan. This geopolitically & historically significant territory of Afghanistan has remained zone of conflict due to rivalry of super powers (Saikal, 2014). Pakistan became frontline state twice during the war in Afghanistan. In both times Pakistan remained the ally of USA, first time USA provided the economic and military aid to Afghanistan and as it was fully involved in this Afghan- USSR war to protect its own interests. Pakistan had to provide strong bases to USA for supporting Afghanistan. Pakistan was actively involved in war for providing assistance to Afghanistan. After the incident of 9/11, Pakistan had to take a drastic turn in the foreign policy and cease all relations with Afghanistan. Once again Pakistan had to provide her territory to US, but difference was, now Pakistani territory was used against the neighboring state. There was a situation of mistrust for Pakistan from both the sides. USA blamed Pakistan, that Pakistan is providing safe haven to Taliban; on other side, Taliban also hostile to Pakistan, due to her cooperation with the USA against Afghanistan. Elizabeth Threlkeld & Grace Easterly have printed out: "Pakistan likewise shaped external involvement in its decision to ally with the United States yet maintain links to Taliban fighters as a hedging strategy" (Threlkeld, Easterly, 2021).

A huge number of Afghan citizens entered in Pakistan during Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. The Afghan inhabitants came here as refugees but their presence in Pakistan for almost four decades shows the historical Pakistan Afghanistan relations (Ghufran, 2006). Both the countries had great similarity regarding the culture and religion. Most of famous Muslim invaders like Sultan Mahmood Ghazanvid Shahab ud Din Ghauri came in South Asia through Afghanistan. A great mystic Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh was also belonged to Afghanistan who came and settled in Lahore and preached Islam. On other hand, in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country who opposed Pakistan in United Nations for her membership. During the different phases after the establishment of Pakistan both countries remained unable to keep cordial relations between themselves. China and Russia are seeking their own interest in the post-NATO Afghanistan and attempting to reduce USA impact in South Asian region. After US involvement in Afghanistan, Russia and China started to support Afghanistan from all directions. Iran a strategic partner of Russia, took part in increasing intricacy against USA. Iran, Russia & China were assaulting for enhancing their regional clout in South Asia. For this drive they supported Taliban (Gilchrist, 2019).

With the initiating of "New Great Game", Afghanistan served wide-ranging interests for super powers and regional actors. Afghanistan was also important for India, emerging Asian power. During Hamid Karzai's tenure both Afghanistan and India had protected and promoted their

multi-dimensional interests (Singh, 2013). Indian influence in Afghanistan was a direct threat for Pakistan. Pakistan had the serious concerns over the India- Afghanistan defense agreement. President Ashraf Ghani claimed that Afghanistan had launched undeclared war with Pakistan and country would continue her involvement in proxy war for regional rivals India & Pakistan (Shafiq, 2016). Due to president Karzai's pro-Indian policy, Pakistan- Afghanistan relations remained strained and the blame game continued against the Pakistan (Hanauer, Chalk, 2012). Afghanistan has remained unstable state and this situation has been dangerous for Pakistan's security. Pakistan played the vital role for bringing Taliban to table of negotiations with USA in Doha 2020. In these circumstances, in spite of all the efforts of Pakistan, Pakistan Afghanistan relations could not improve, as USA backed government in Afghanistan. After USA withdrawal from Afghanistan, ultimately India had to cope with the difficult circumstances. Mark Gilchrist stated on August 12, 2019 "The return of great power geopolitics has transformed Afghanistan's strategic circumstances, affecting both its future as well as the long-term interests of the United States.

These conditions reinforce enduring importance of Pakistan to America's strategic flexibility, particularly in an era of renewed great power competition" (Gilchrist, ND). Pakistan had been facing a lot of problems but after the takeover of Taliban, the nature of Pakistan's responsibility changed. Now Pakistani government requires influential Afghanistan government to judge the issues of the human rights sincerely. The most important issue is regarding the girls' education. Islamabad should insist Afghan Taliban to take action against TTP and to control cross-border terrorists' activities to demonstrate regional cooperation. Government of Pakistan also should open up to Afghani students for higher studies and encourage public contacts (Waheed, 2022). The terrorist attacked in mosque of Peshawar in January 2023 and same day 2 higher-ranking commanders of TTP, Sarbakaf Mohmand and Umar Mukarram Khurasani accepted charge of attack; however, later on one of official spokesmen of TTP Muhammad Khurasani disowned the same attack. In response to the attack Pakistan took dead bodies of hundreds of police force persons in a single blast. Interim foreign minister of Taliban Mr. Emir Khan Muttaqi angrily responded to claim of Pakistani officials' that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan had planned to more attacks from land of Afghanistan. After that Muttaqi declared that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan is internal problem of Islamabad and fundamentally he realized Pakistan to not blame Kabul for internal issues of Pakistan but sort them out by the government of Pakistan (Sayed, Hamming, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Taliban were badly defeated by US armed forces after incident of nine eleven and geo-strategic change was appeared in the region at high stage. Although Pakistan has longest border with Afghan territory; however, Islamabad has to bear the pain of India-Afghan friendship in region (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2007). The governments of Pakistan have been facing the issue for a long time in respect of border but the situation was comfortable for Pakistan when Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, the month of August (Kaura, 2022). In the month of September 2021, IISS expressed an opinion on its website under the title "Pakistan's relations with the US after the fall of Kabul" that the United States withdraws her forces from the Afghanistan after a long period of 20 years. It was the result of the victory of Taliban in the long time war against US armed forces. It has changed and reshaped Central and South Asian strategic positions. After the incident of 11 September 2001, the Pakistan has been supporting USA and NATO forces at Afghanistan in the reign of General Pervaiz Musharaf but Pakistan reviewed her policy after

Musharaf era and thus Pakistan wanted to support Taliban against the NATO forces. After the Taliban take over in 2021 the US Pakistan relations were also suspended to some extent (IISS, 2021). When Taliban takeover in August 2021, Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Imran Khan who is measured as pro-Taliban leader welcomed Afghan Taliban with enthusiasm along with other top leaders of Pakistan. In fact government of PTI had opinion that they will be able to maintain cordial relations with Taliban at a glance and government of Pakistan will promote the security interests.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan was known as anti-America as he said that return of Taliban had broken the “Chains of Slavery”. The highly ranked military officers of the Pakistan army including Faiz Hameed (Lieutenant General) who was the head of ISI directorate visited Kabul to see new establishment. He requested Afghan authorities to control Pakistani Taliban. Most important issue is regarding girls’ education. Islamabad should insist Afghan Taliban to take action against TTP & to control cross-border terrorists’ activities to prove regional cooperation. Afghan government of Taliban promised to negotiate with leadership of TTP. In October 2021, Imran Khan told that military of Pakistan was holding the negotiation with Pakistani Taliban in Kabul (Ahmed, 2023). Before military success of Taliban in 2021, Pakistan had been supporting to group of Taliban for many years and provided them many type of resources. It was openly declared by Imran Khan that it was due to supports of governments of Pakistan that Taliban succeeded to takeover. Once again Pakistan had to provide her territory to US, but difference was, now Pakistani territory was used against neighboring state. Meanwhile, Imran Khan had to leave office of Prime Minister and sent to jail while the other politicians of Pakistan could not maintain good relations with Kabul and imaginations of Pakistan-Afghanistan cordial relations proved false during 2022-2023. Since takeover of Taliban had to face increase terrorist attacks on her land including destructive attack at police mosque in Peshawar in 2023 and in response of attack Pakistan had to face more than 300 casualties of innocent people (Haidary & Haidary, 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The title of the research article is An Analysis of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: From Peace Process to Taliban Takeover (2021). It is exploratory type of research in which the authors has focused to analyze Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. The available literature has been reviewed & discussed.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Role of Pakistan in Doha Negotiations

The US invited Pakistan to play her role as a mediator for rapprochement between Washington and Taliban. The super power believes that it is Pakistan that has guts to bring the Taliban to the table of negotiations. US and its allies had given up the hope for military solution of Afghan conflict. The peace process was the only hope. Pakistan always supported peace initiatives and also demanded incentives to induce Taliban back towards peace process. Pakistan endorsed the attainable road maps led both rivals towards peaceful solution. As Ghulam Mustafa pointed in February 2021, “Pakistan’s military commander General Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani pronounced the openly that Pakistan has such ability to create suitable environment for Afghan reconciliation” (Mustafa, Yaseen & Junaid, 2021). Pakistan’s efforts would be successful if USA fulfills her promise to reduce foreign troops including NATO and US forces from Afghanistan. The Kabul

government & Taliban were not ready to share power in parliament with each other. President Donald Trump initiated a “new Afghan Strategy” by involving Pakistan to play a key role in the game. US also tried to push Taliban insurgent group for negotiations over military pressure. This was challenge for Zalmay Khalilzad (US special envoy and chief negotiator of the Afghan peace process) to persuade insurgents to come to table of negotiations with Kabul government. US president Donald Trump asked PM Pakistan Imran Khan to serve as a mediator in peace process.

Pakistan’s regional reputation also improved due to her successful efforts to take Taliban for dialogue process including all internal and external Afghan stakeholders (Idrees, Rehman, 2019). In March 2020, Pakistan was also represented in signing ceremony of the agreement, stipulating that USA would reduce her forces to the level of 5000 to troops within four and half months, and all remaining forces would leave the war-torn country within fourteen months. Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan also acclaimed this step for peace process. He tweeted: “We welcome the Doha Accord signed between US and the Taliban. This is the start of a peace and reconciliation process to end decades of war and suffering of Afghan people”. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Quershi also praised these talks for peace. He said: “It is a significant step forward by US and Taliban in advancing ultimate aim of peace reconciliation in Afghanistan” (Sajjad, 2020). Pakistan’s role and hope for attaining peace in South Asia aligns her with the interests of international community. All previous efforts for stabilizing this war-torn state have remained in vain. Pakistan supported the previous Taliban government in 1990s.

Now Pakistan’s participation in the peace process was beneficial for the state. By the backing of negotiating table with the other regional powers, Pakistan’s relations with other states would improve. For improving relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan had a hope for friendly ties with Kabul government. During the Afghanistan peace process, Pakistan was an important actor but remained neutral. Pakistan acknowledged the new government of Ashraf Ghani and showed her interest to work closely with them in future. India had always good ties with elected Afghan government but in the peace negotiations India did not have any active role although, she had her own interests in stabilizing Afghanistan. Afghan territory could be easily used by India for unleashing terror in Pakistan (Noushad, 2020). The dire need and importance of Pakistan for USA, was acknowledged by the head of US Central Command (CENTCOM), Gen McKenzie, “Their support has been very vital in directing the Taliban to come to negotiations and their continued support is going to be very important as we go to this difficult period of deciding is Taliban actually serious about this and they are going to live up to their commitments” (Dawn, 2020).

Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade & Investment Forum

A two days seminar hosted by National Assembly of Pakistan in October 2020 for enhancing mutual trade and business. Around 140 proposals were put forward to promote trade. It was recommended that Pakistani government would allow all Afghan citizens, who want to launch their business by issuing five years business and residence visa. Business visa would grant legal rights to Afghani business men, such as having a driving license, opening bank accounts and property ownership. Tax policies for both countries would be revised and new tax policies would be introduced. Regular periodical meetings of “Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority (APTTCA)” would be held with participation of stake holders. It was

also suggested that Pakistani goods would have access to move up to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan borders. Also Afghan exportable goods its exports would have access to Wahga and Karachi port. It was also suggested that branches of “chamber of commerce” would be set up at Torkham- Chaman borders for facilitating chamber to chamber relations. It was proposed to issue road pass for uninterrupted transportation of goods transport. Time limit for Pakistan would be increased for crossing Afghanistan and unloading on Tajikistan border. Clearness time for Afghanistan’s cargo would be minimized to one day (Butt, 2020). The authority also suggested that trade facilitation should be better over streamlined payment system. State Bank of Pakistan was advised to ease opening of bank accounts Afghani businessmen and exporters (Khan, 2020).

Pakistan- Afghanistan Relations after Taliban Takeover

After the withdrawal of the US’ force, 20 years later, the super power realized that there is no military solution of Afghanistan problem. Pakistan had been facing serious consequences and had to pay heavy cost for unstable situation in the Afghanistan since 9/11. Now Pakistan could not afford any violent circumstances in war-torn state. Peace in Afghanistan is much vital for Pakistan as it is important for Afghanistan. Maleeha Lodhi, the former Ambassador of Pakistan to US, said in an interview, "I can tell you that Pakistan has most to gain in peace and stability in Afghanistan and it also has the greatest of fear of Afghanistan descending into more fighting and civil war" (The Express Tribune, 2021). With withdrawal of US troops, President Ashraf Ghani did not receive any support from the USA, and the situation of a civil war had already developed in Afghanistan. Pakistan showed its interests for good relations with neighbouring state ‘no matter who is in power’. However Pakistan wanted to strengthen economic ties and enhance mutual trade with Afghanistan, but it was very difficult for Pakistan to recognize Taliban government due to reservations of major world powers. Pakistan had more concerns than any other state and there was a need to realize as how to deal with new regime across the border.

Pakistan’s DG ISI (now retired) Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed visited to Kabul, it was first ever visit of any Pakistani official after 15th August 2021. He assured new Afghan leadership that Pakistani government and high officials are working for peace and stability in Afghanistan and he declared “Don’t worry everything will be okay.” He met top leadership of Afghanistan, to discuss the current scenario and arrangement and mechanism for safe passage for foreign nationals. But, no official details are available nor any other objective is disclosed (Yousuf, 2021). His picture with a cup of tea along with Taliban was highly appreciated by the Pakistani citizens at that time. Pakistan high officials intended to accept the Afghan Taliban as a “new reality”. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi declared that there is no other option to accept new government of the neighbour state. The Islamabad also wants to provide assistance for reorganizing forces of the new government of Afghanistan. Earlier Islamabad has showed its interest to sign security pacts and bilateral agreements of the intelligence agencies of both countries, with US backed government in Kabul but Pakistan could not attain desired objectives due to the trust deficit amid two states. Now there is need to sign fresh agreements with the new Afghan government hoping for the positive response from the other side (Yousuf, 2021).

After Taliban take over, there is a dire need for Afghanistan to win the trust of its neighbouring states. Pakistan continued the diplomatic relations with the neighbour state and all other states

having carrying on their diplomatic relations to Afghanistan, are on same page, want peaceful situation and wish for avoiding any domestic & international conflict. For increasing revenues of Afghanistan, Pakistan enhanced trade with border state. Pakistan reduced tax from 17% to 0% on the exports of fruits from Afghanistan while giving more relaxation on the export duties. Pakistan has also trying to unfreeze Afghan's accounts, which were frozen by the USA after Taliban takeover. Pakistan also delivered humanitarian assistance to Afghans, over Torkham border. Habibullah Khan Chairman Pak-Afghan Cooperation Forum (PACF) handed over the goods container to Taliban leader Maulvi Mubariz Afghani, "Speaking on occasion, Habibullah Khan said that the goodwill gesture from Pakistan was made at a time when the war-stricken & impoverished people of Afghanistan needed such assistance the most" (Dawn, 2021). In this regard, according to a media report PACF 13 more trucks carrying the humanitarian assistance, consisting of 16 tons of sugar, 140 tons of flour and 18 tons of rice, were sent to Afghanistan through Torkham border. A day earlier PACF sent four trucks carrying 70 tons of humanitarian aid, sent through Ghulam Khan Border (Geo TV., 2021). The Turkey also sent aid to Kabul via Pakistan.

Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

Once again Pakistan had to provide shelter to Afghan refugees. Soon after Taliban's take-over, Pakistan closed its borders with Afghanistan officially. However, Pakistan could not control the influx of Afghan immigrants due to porous borders and close cultural & linguistic ties between the two people. Pakistan launched several flights to evacuate foreigners, despite of the official reluctance a max onset of Afghan refugees from borders, is not in control. Since Taliban took over, 6000 to 20,000 Afghans are 'crossing Baluchistan border' moving in to Pakistan on daily basis. Unexpectedly, west offered Pakistan aid for rehabilitation of Afghan nationals. According to report UK has plan to set up offshore center in Pakistan for asylum immigrants (Azad, 2021). UNHCR is interested for relocation of refugees in Pakistan. "UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi visited Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan to survey situation & hold talks with Pakistani officials about situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan's support of the ongoing aid operations" (UNHCR, 2021). Now there is need for Pakistani government to rethink on matter as Pakistan economy is already deteriorating and Pakistan's exports unable to match with increasing level of imports.

US Steps against Pakistan & Encounter Taliban

According to United States, Taliban have failed to fulfill their commitments which were made in peace agreement. Taliban needs to reduce violence in Afghanistan but US have to held substantive negotiations with Afghan government. That's why US senate introduced bill, titled "Afghanistan Counterterrorism, Oversight, and Accountability Act", for imposing sanctions against Taliban supporters including Pakistan. But this is not the only reason for initiating the bill. Bill that was launched by 22 lawmakers from Republican Party, required "the imposition of sanctions with respect to Taliban and persons assisting Taliban in Afghanistan, and for other purposes."The proposal also suggested reviewing or suspending the assistance and imposing sanctions on those foreign governments who are supporting Taliban. The significant portion of the bill is has mentioned imposing punitive measures for Taliban and their supporters. The bill claims that, "Secretary of State, in consultation with appropriate congressional committees, shall conduct a comprehensive review of all forms of United States foreign assistance provided to or over government of any country, any organization providing any form of material support to Taliban."

Pakistan has been signaled out in the bill “(1) an assessment of support by state and non- state actors, including the Government of Pakistan, for Taliban between 2001 and 2020, including the provision of sanctuary space, financial support, intelligence support, logistics and medical support, training, equipping, and tactical, operational, or strategic direction; (2) an assessment of support by state and non- state actors, including the Government of Pakistan, for the 2021 offensive of the Taliban that toppled the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan... (3) an assessment of support by state and non-state actors, including the Government of Pakistan, for the September 2021 offensive of the Taliban against the Panjshir Valley and the Afghan resistance” (News International, 2021). Pakistan Federal Minister for Human Rights showed her reaction against the bill, “So again Pakistan will be made to pay heavy price for being an ally of US in its "War on Terror" as a bill is introduced in US Senate in aftermath of the US's chaotic Afghan withdrawal followed by collapse of ANA and Ashraf Ghani's flight to UAE” (Ahmad, 2021). The bill is under process right now. After passing the bill, a period of 180 days, is given for submitting report of entities supporting Taliban. Pakistan-US relations depend on doctrine of necessity.

Whenever, US needed Pakistan, it develops strong relations with Pakistan and the need over then sanctions are imposed on Pakistan. Similarly, during the latest visit of US Secretary of the State Wendy Sherman to South Asia, she claimed that now US don't want to build up broad-based relations with Pakistan, any more. She also blamed that Pakistan has narrowed down to contain terrorism in the country and in the region. Pakistan wanted to persuade US Secretary of the State for broad-based dialogue on multi-dimensional purposes of mutual interests of the two states. But, US did not pay any attention on the host country desired agreement. Wendy Sherman's explicated that Pakistan's leadership should clear the wool from the eyes that US would build up massive relationship with Pakistan. Although, the US appreciated Pakistan's role for bringing Taliban on negotiations table. Now US appetite for “Do More” could not fulfill by Pakistan any more (Sheedi, 2021). If sanctions are imposed on Pakistan, its economy which is already in bad shape, will suffer precipitously. Pakistan currency at Rs 170, to US Dollar lost much of its value, inflation has increased 8.66%, trades deficit has raised by 120% in the first quarter of fiscal year 2021-22. Donors are already under the US influence. Therefore, economic crisis in Pakistan will be similar to the one it faced following the atomic nuclear explosion in 1998.

UK Needed to Pakistan for Afghanistan Stability

British 'Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab' came to Pakistan on 1st September 2021, for two days visit and expressed his hope for the Pakistan's assistance to Afghanistan for the formation of administration. Before his visit to Pakistan, he visited to Qatar to discuss, how regional powers can resolve Afghanistan problem. During his meeting, Prime Minister Imran Khan, Foreign Minister and COAS, he discussed the issue of providing safe passage for those who are leaving Afghanistan, war against terrorism, humanitarian crises and regional solidity. He also visited Torkham border to personally observe conditions there. In a joint press briefing with Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Dominic Raab said, “The basis for UK-Pakistan relationship is very strong - and the UK has the desire to take it to the next level. We also have a very clear and shared interest in the future of Afghanistan. We will judge Taliban by their actions, not their words” (Government of Pakistan, 2021). UK also announced aid for Afghanistan worth 286 million Pounds and additional 30 million Pounds for the Afghanistan's neighbouring states, including Pakistan. 'Dr Christian Turner CMG, UK High Commissioner to Pakistan' stated: “The Foreign

Secretary's visit to Pakistan today underlines just how vital UK-Pakistan relationship is. We are committed to working closely together to help the people of Afghanistan and promote stability in the region" (Luqiu, 2017). Now the question is, why the great power of Europe is taking the interest in the war-torn Afghanistan. Great Britain attacked Afghanistan in 19th century, but could not occupy it. Is UK using another strategy to subjugate Afghanistan? Because foreign policy of every country depends on its national interest then what will be the national interest of United Kingdom for supporting the Afghanistan through a vast means? The other Foreign Ministers of Western states like Germany, Italy and Netherlands, also visited to Pakistan. The aim of their visits was the evacuation of their nationals. Britain also showed the same interest, but this was the only aim of the United Kingdom or there any other purpose which can't be disclose?

China Needed Pakistan's Collaboration for Afghanistan

China is keen to renew its interests for strategic collaboration with the regional states specially Afghanistan. Pakistan can be best ally for China for attractive China-Afghanistan collaboration. During US the regime of backed government in Afghanistan, India was an obstacle for China to strengthen her dominance in region. "In China's quest for regional dominance, Afghanistan's relationship with India presents many challenges to China's grand plan. As a result, there is increased interest on part of China in Afghanistan to overpower India's regional dominance" (Luqiu, 2017). Thus, when, regional states were envisaging reconciliation between the Taliban and the Kabul government, China began to develop its relations with the Taliban. China expects that Pakistan will give preference to China as a regional player. China's relations with India have been deteriorating since Galwan crisis. India does not share any border with Afghanistan, that's why Pakistan is the only state in South Asia, which can collaborate for promoting China's interests in Afghanistan. Pakistan has continued its role as a facilitator for China to consolidate its Belt and Road Initiative and also for exploiting the mineral resources of Afghanistan. The Sino-Afghan border has a rugged landscape, so this inhospitable border is not suitable for the trade.

Therefore China can use Pakistani territory as an alternative route as some analyst has pointed out, "For Beijing, no country is as relevant and willing to promote its interests in the region as Pakistan" (Kaura, 2021). Smooth and peaceful Pakistan – Afghanistan relations will be the best conduit for BRI as it can facilitate China connectivity to Turkey and Iran. Yusufzai has opinion that in start of year 2018 little development was seen in relations amid Kabul and Islamabad. Pakistan started an action plan regarding Pakistan-Afghan transit and Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan. There were only two meetings between working groups' one in Kabul and the other in Islamabad and some mutual issues were discussed. The author is of opinion about Pakistan that Islamabad had the function of like a trouble-shooter because of having mature association with Afghan Taliban and a negotiation took placed in Doha on 12 September 2020. There was a little progressed developed between two powers but Islamabad is unable to make the one sided developments. The author has discussed negative role of India between Kabul and Islamabad. We can change the friends but not neighbours so Pakistan & Afghanistan should develop their relations amid them as they share their culture, history, languages, races & religion (Yusufzai, 2021).

On 7th May 2023, Mr. Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Afghan Foreign Minister had a meeting with Mr. Asim Munir the chief of Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi and discussed the situation. It was

time when Taliban were going to celebrate their second ceremony of control over Afghanistan. Muttaqi expressed his views that Taliban have friendly attitude towards Pakistan as the both countries had longtime ally between themselves. But, Pakistan was not happy with Taliban as there were numerous attacked from Afghanistan on tribal areas of Pakistan (Hussain, 2023). Pakistan had misunderstanding towards Taliban was a great mistake of Pakistani politicians. Pakistan had to face stressed relations with Afghanistan Taliban which have left Pakistan “amid rock and hard place”. Moreover, unwillingness of Taliban to cooperate with Islamabad against Pakistani Taliban made the Pakistani politician hopeless towards the Taliban’s attitude (Khan, 2023).

Results of Study

China needed Pakistan for spreading its belt and road initiative. Pakistan is ready to cooperate with China. It will increase Pakistan’s reputation and reduce Indian influence in the region. Although, Pakistan has been an ally of US in war against terror but at the same time, it must be acknowledged that the state of Pakistan suffered a lot in previous two decades. Taliban regime can be favorable government for Pakistan because despite of cooperating with USA. Moreover Ahmed says that Taliban were succeeded to taking over their country Afghanistan in response to withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in August 2021. Taliban got total control on their beloved country and founded their own government. Although it was considered that Pakistan favors Taliban and had frequent supported at many stages but after taking over of Taliban on Afghanistan attacks were increased on Pakistan from territories of Afghanistan. The security of Pakistan affected due to increasing terrorism in country (Ahmed, 2022). US backed Govt in the Afghanistan never tried to give the preference to Pakistan on its enemy state, India. Moreover, after ending US- Afghanistan war, secure & peaceful environment in Pakistan was still remain in distance.

In this regard, the elimination of Imran Khan Government on 10 April 2022 from Pakistan also affected the Pakistan-Afghan relations obviously as he had keen interest to develop cordial relations with Afghanistan. On 5 October 2023 Ayaz Gul writes that the Pakistan banned the smuggling of almost 200 items at Pak-Afghan border and implemented a tax of ten percent on the goods that were sent to Afghanistan. This decision was not good for Taliban government and they requested to Pakistan to revise the policy of impose of tax. The Taliban government requested one side to reverse the tax policy and the other side the threatened Pakistan that if Pakistan fails to revise the tax policy the bilateral relations between Kabul and Islamabad will be suffered badly (Gul, 2023). Pakistan has long traditional relations with Afghanistan with a number of ups and downs; however, after the caretaker government under the premiership of Kakar; Islamabad has focused its attention to millions of Afghan refugees who have been living in Pakistan for almost four decades. Although he is an interim prime minister of the country but he tried to solve issue of Afghan refugees which was faced by the state for a long time (Mir, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The geopolitical importance of Afghanistan can’t be ignored. Country has remained a source of attraction and a war theatre for super powers since 19th century. First the Great Britain tried to conquer it, then USSR tried in 20th century and finally USA launched war against terror in 21st century, but no country subjugate Afghanistan. Now another emerging power of the world, China is also showing its interest in South Asian region but its strategy is different as compared

to previous contenders. Position of Pakistan has emerged after withdrawal of US forces. While, when US forces invaded Afghanistan, it provided foreign aid removed sanctions from Pakistan. But Pakistan had to pay high costs. Pakistan had been abusing for two decades. But, America could not sideline Pakistan or ignore whenever, it needed Pakistan for its integral interests. The reality cannot be ignored that according to rules of US foreign policy, “no permanent friends or enemies, only interests.” During tenure of US-backed govt in Afghanistan, India developed amicable relations with Afghanistan. She could use Afghan territory against Pakistan. Through the peace process for the Afghanistan problem, India was totally ignored by the international community.

Pakistan as a neighbour of Afghanistan performed an active role for the peaceful solution of the problem. Pakistan as a mediator was successful to take the Taliban to the table of negotiations. Pakistan wants to maintain cordial relations with neighbour state no matter who is in power. Considerations about Taliban regime that it would be beneficial for Pakistan, because Ashraf Ghani’s regime was not too much favorable for Islamabad as it is compared to India, proved wrong because on the one side India started to develop good ties with Afghanistan and on other side, terrorist activities could not be contain in Pakistan. Yet, Pakistan did not accept Afghan Taliban government, officially soon after Taliban take over, but accepted Taliban “New Reality” Pakistan accepted Taliban as a “New Reality”. In spite of serious paucity of economic resources, Pakistan is cooperating with Taliban government. It should be kept it in mind that friends can be changed but not the neighbours. So having good terms with neighbour states is a proof that Pakistan wants amicable relations with Afghanistan. Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade & Investment Forum is initiative for enhancing trade between two countries and gives access to neighbouring states of each other. But reservations related to security & economic progress of Pakistan cannot be ignored. Pakistan granted privileges to Afghan nationals for boosting their business in the country.

It will reduce the chances of business for Pakistanis themselves and problem of unemployment will remain unresolved. The Afghani products which are exported through Pakistani territory, has not any deeply clearness process due to shortage in time limitation. So state doesn’t know, any illegal products like weapons or drugs are exporting from Pakistani territory, or even it is sending to Pakistan its own self. Moreover, caretaker government of Pakistan has decided to take an action against the Afghan refugees staying in the country without any documentation (Bhatti, 2023). The government has taken a strong action using police force and the purpose of this action was to settle the Afghan refugees to their own country as the Taliban have taken over control to their country Afghanistan. United States of America had left the country and Taliban have secured sovereignty. In this situation it is responsibility of Afghan Government to settle their inhabitants as well. Security risks for Pakistan are increasing due to undocumented Afghan refugees crossing borders without any clearness. Thus, they may be taking drug and Kalashnikov culture with themselves as they did in 1980s. Pakistan is already importing wheat and other food items now the large influx of Afghan immigrants will be the extra burden on the Pakistan’s economy.

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