

Indo-Pak Rivalry in Afghanistan After US Withdrawal In 2021 **Muhammad Shoaib Syed¹, Shahida Awan², Tallat Yasmin³, Ghulam Mustafa^{4*}**

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The purpose of this research is to elucidate the role of India and Pakistan in Afghanistan as both are the neighborly and rivalry states. It's likely that the Taliban will continue to run things in Afghanistan. The Taliban took over the government of the nation, however, it is still not acknowledged on a global scale or in South Asia. The Taliban's control has harmed trade and the economy since the United States withdrew in August 2021 aggravated a terrible humanitarian crisis and raised questions about human security. Afghanistan and the West are concerned about the Taliban taking control again due to al-Qaeda's safe haven and involvement in the 9/11 attacks. The fact that India and Pakistan use proxies and development assistance to engage in conflict with one another in Afghanistan has important ramifications for their long-standing rivalry over Jammu and Kashmir also known as Kashmir. They actively review and plan to counteract each other's successes in Afghanistan by anticipating each other's actions and sphere of influence. Some people might see their interaction as zero-sum play or consider it from a strategic theory perspective. The security ramifications of Afghanistan for India and Pakistan are examined in this chapter. The analysis is based on scholarly research press reports and original data from the World Bank and the UN.

1. Introduction

In 2020, the US decided to leave Afghanistan due to domestic and international conditions. The US political class was worn out by battling and conquering the Taliban because of the financial crisis, the price in human lives, the moral load on the soldier's families, and the difficult aim. In February 2019, then-US President Donald Trump declared that he would use negotiations with the Taliban to free his country from the never-ending conflict. In September 2019, the first round of negotiations with the Taliban ended in failure. However, the Trump administration reopened negotiations with the Taliban, and in February 2020, a peace agreement was signed by all sides. In the agreement, it was agreed that the US will reduce its military force size from 13,000 to 8,000, withdraw from five bases within 135 days, and finish the process by the first of May 2021. A further extension was made till September 2021. The United States had been engaged in a "endless war" when Donald Trump, who was then president, announced in 2019 that he would be ending it. The most secure face-saving strategy for the US military in Afghanistan was to accept the Taliban through peace negotiations. The peace agreement suffered its first setback in September 2019 when the relationship between US authorities and the Taliban came to light. The main cause is still unknown, but it is significant to note that negotiations resumed and that this time, a deal had been reached between the Taliban and US officials. As a result, the agreement stipulated that the US would reduce its overall force from 13000 to just 8600 (Khalid, 2022). In addition, it was decided that the US will close five bases in roughly 135 days. The agreement stipulates that until May 31, 2021, the US will withdraw all of its troops from Afghanistan. The US and the Taliban also reached several other deals. For instance, the Taliban and allied organizations agreed that neither the Taliban nor any other group will target US forces in Afghanistan. It was referred to as the US-Afghanistan Joint Declaration (Khan, 2020).

A political agreement between the Taliban and the US government was reached in this accord. The agreement stipulated that the Taliban and US authorities would maintain a lasting cease-fire until the latter's full withdrawal. On the other side of the scene, a summit for intra-Afghan conversation was also going on, with the primary goal of bringing about an internal political settlement in the nation. The Taliban and the Afghan government at the time were the target of the political agreement. The goal of talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government was to find a solution for how Afghanistan will be governed after US troops leave the country. But regrettably, no fruitful negotiations took place between the Taliban and the Afghan government, and nothing came of them. Following Christopher C. Miller's announcement in November 2020, the United States started to evacuate its troops. Around 2500 soldiers withdrew in a first wave around the middle of January 2021. After Joe Biden, a member of the Democratic Party, entered the mainstream of American politics, the situation further changed. The government of Biden favored a total withdrawal from Afghanistan. The plan for complete withdrawal was made public along with the deadline of September 11, 2021. In April 2021, President Joe Biden said, "It's to end America's longest conflict" (Akbari & True, 2022).

The researcher also requested support for the peace process and assistance for the Afghan security forces. Despite their many political inconsistencies and divergent foreign policies, Joe Biden and Donald Trump seemed to move closer to one another when it came to the departure from Afghanistan. Whereas Donald Trump argued that Afghanistan must be left in the hands of its own people, Joe Biden carried out the decisions, and in the end, Afghanistan was left in the hands of its own citizens, free from intervention from other agencies or players. Afghanistan has been removed off the agendas since Joe Biden took the presidential oath and assumed authority. Numerous political commentators have emphasized the need for Joe Biden to have handled the Afghanistan situation with some seriousness. He garnered a large portion of the criticism because of his abrupt departure from Afghanistan without a plan for the future. Even still, it was clear that the Taliban and the vast majority of Afghans preferred a full US withdrawal from the nation. However, many analysts opposed the departure from Afghanistan as the Taliban were able to completely take over city after city and province after province. Where Joe Biden made it plain that the troops' ability to hold their territory in Afghanistan will not be affected by their departure from the country. He said that if the Taliban try to conquer Kabul, they will encounter fierce resistance. In the same interview, Joe Biden came to the conclusion that with the US leaving Afghanistan, business was over. However, when the Taliban took over Kabul in the middle of August 2021, the US's true work in Afghanistan came to a stop. As a result, the Taliban issued an ultimatum warning of dire consequences if the US did not complete its pullout by August 30, 2021.

2. Research Methodology

Qualitative research method is being applied in this research in which data is gathered from secondary sources. Data has been gathered from books, articles, newspapers and various official sources like ministry of foreign affair and defence etc.

3. Review of Literature

“A Historical Analysis of Indo-Afghanistan Growing Partnership” is a research published in Journal of Social Sciences. It has been explained that Afghanistan is always remains the part of International Politics and its neighboring country like India and Pakistan are rival states and played crucial role in Afghanistan’s Politics (Mustafa, Imran, & Adnan Nawaz, 2017).

“*Complex Rivalry the Dynamics of India-Pakistan Conflict*” is an important books in this area of research by Mohan , S. While a large amount of study describes how the struggle between India and Pakistan began and progressed through time, systematic and multivariate investigations that span many IR paradigms to comprehend this rivalry are uncommon or limited. This book describes the life cycle of the India-Pakistan rivalry in four phases: start, development, maintenance, and a potential transition or termination through an analysis of fifty-seven militarized disputes that occurred between 1947 and 2021 (Mohan, 2022).

“Indo-Afghanistan Relations: Challenges for Pakistan” another piece of work written by Dr. Ghulam Mustafa, Muhammad Asif, Muhammad Arslan. The paper also

deals with the same topic. The study elaborated that India helped Afghanistan in infrastructural development, institutionalizing capacity building and many other projects. The study concluded with the suggestion that stable Afghanistan is the need of the era for Pakistan specially (Mustafa et al., 2018). “Security Implications for India and Pakistan from the Taliban Regime since the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan” is an important article in this area of research by Dalbir Ahlawat and Raymond Izarali. Since the United States has taken their army with Afghanistan. The Taliban have been in control of Afghanistan for more than a year as the new government struggles to secure UN support. Over the past year, more information has been revealed about the complex network of various armed groups in Afghanistan that originally supported the Taliban against the United States but are now operating independently. Afghanistan-related militancy is a major problem for both India and Pakistan. This article addresses the Taliban's ascent to power, their difficulties cooperating with the new administration, and the ramifications for the security of Pakistan and India in connection to Afghanistan. To promote regional peace and stability, the researcher will further examine how the US withdrawal from Afghanistan may affect regional security (Dalbir & Raymond, 2022).

“Geopolitical Dynamics of Afghanistan and Concerns of Regional and Global Actors vis a vis Pakistan” is a research work published in Pakistan Social Sciences Review in 2022. The study elaborates the importance of Afghanistan for the other world. Indian factors also elaborated in this research (Imran et al., 2022)

3.1 Recent developments in Afghanistan

On August 31, 2021, all military forces belonging to the United States and its allies were evacuated. As of September 7, 2021, the Taliban have taken complete control of Afghanistan and established an interim administration. Mullah Mohammad Hasan Akhund, who now serves as interim prime minister, has been named as the leader of the new Taliban administration in Afghanistan. The list of cabinet members has also been released; predictably, there are no women on it. Given that the Haqqani Network is listed as a terrorist organisation, giving its representative the interior ministry is a highly contentious decision. 33 individuals have been appointed by the Islamic Emirate to the new Islamic administration (Aryal & Bharti, 2021).

There are also reports that the Taliban had taken possession of Panjshir, the final surviving provincial capital, following the numerous days of warfare. Afghan women are demonstrating for their rights while the evacuation process continues. China declared on September 8, 2021 that it would urgently provide 200 million yuan (about \$30.96 million) to Afghanistan. The assistance includes the cost of food items, winter necessities, vaccinations, and medications. According to China, assistance is provided in response to actual needs. As a result, China is the first nation to formally provide assistance under the caretaker administration. Video conferencing was used for the initial meeting between acting foreign minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Mutaqi and Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. According to Wang, China continues to provide emergency humanitarian supplies and support to the Afghan people through the China-South Asian Countries Emergency Supplies Reserve. Afghanistan's participation might offer a simple

route towards Central Asia and the Western Xinjiang region. Naturally, India is concerned about these developments as all of its strategic adversaries appear ready to get closer to the Taliban. While Pakistan may be considering using Afghanistan as leverage against India, Professor Zhang Li of the Sichuan University's South Asian Studies notes that this is not necessarily the case for China" (Khan, 2023).

Pakistan, China, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan ear by nations of Afghanistan provided a Joint Statement by Foreign Ministers during this meeting via a video link. In accordance with the UN Charter, the joint statement "expressed support for Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity, as well as for non-interference in its internal affairs." It also noted that Afghanistan's future should be decided by its people. They all agreed to "recognize changes that have taken place and work together to address common challenges, strengthening cooperation and friendly relations in the neighborhood and promoting peace, security, and stability in the region, as well as fostering regional connectivity, people-to-people connections, economic integration, trade, and investment for the benefit of the entire region" (Shams & Muhammad, 2023).

India is falling behind when it comes to dealing with the Taliban in light of all the recent developments in the region and the fact that Pakistan, China, Iran, and Turkey are all actively engaged in the developing situation. In the new great game taking place in the region, China and Pakistan have both demonstrated their strategic interests in Afghanistan and have already established themselves as formidable competitors. The Taliban recently expressed interest in participating in China's massive Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) during a news conference. Similarly, the Salma Dam, which was rebuilt with India's help, was also taken over by the Taliban. Another Shahtoot Dam is being built with cooperation from India. Along with many others sent to the Afghan National Army between 2001 and 2021, a Mi-25 helicopter was also taken by Taliban fighters. This indicates that the Taliban now control all aid and support given to Afghanistan (Hussain & Shahzad, 2023).

India's investments are described as a "historical relationship with the Afghan people" by Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar. The bond with the Afghan people, he continued, "clearly remains, and that will drive our approach to Afghanistan in the days ahead. These are still early days, as I indicated. Our current priority is to ensure the safety and security of Indian citizens present. Jaishankar first stated that India is keeping track of Afghanistan's advancements. Regarding the Taliban takeover, Rajnath Singh, the defense minister of India, said that "the situation in Afghanistan emerged as challenges for India". In his own words: "The shifting dynamics in Afghanistan present us with a dilemma. These circumstances have compelled our nation to reconsider its approach. The establishment of QUAD emphasizes the fact that we are shifting our strategy (Hashimy, 2023).

3.2 Current situation of Afghanistan

According to the Afghanistan Monitoring Survey conducted by the World Bank in March 2022 up from 35% in May 2021 70% of respondents admitted they lacked the money to buy groceries and other necessities. 37% of the individuals in that sample population were unable to afford to buy food. Consumption of food both in quantity and quality drastically dropped. Around 94% of people who needed medical care in the autumn of 2021

were unable to get it. Pakistan has also provided \$1 billion in aid to Afghanistan over the years. However, the Taliban government's foreign ministry spokesman, Abdul Qahar Balkhi, said in August 2022 that Afghanistan had asked India to upgrade its diplomatic mission and in return complete construction projects such as the Shahtot Dam in Kabul. The Taliban have not yet made any statements that are hostile to India. Despite getting help from Pakistan Lisa Curtis claims that the Taliban are not the country puppets rather via deft management Pakistan is able to exert indirect control over the group (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2022).

Although employment has grown in both rural and urban areas wages have significantly decreased. It should come as no surprise that the Taliban government is keen to obtain aid for development especially given that about Afghan assets worth \$9 billion have been seized and are being held in American institutions. In order to lessen the unhappiness of the urban people the state must respond to this condition. The Taliban is also conscious of its image and does not want to appear to be appealing for assistance from the West. While the Taliban tries to give the impression that everything is under control and that it has abandoned its own territory negative reputation skepticism about the Taliban's intents and goals remains prevalent in the West (Elias, 2022). Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K) both have stated goals for South Asia (Ahmadzai, 2022). Except for the time the Taliban were in power from 1996 to 2001 India and Afghanistan have been friendly relations. In addition to providing humanitarian aid for the civilian population Under the Taliban India has been reassessing its level of relations with Afghanistan rule since August 2021. India is nevertheless conscious of the fact that Kashmir experienced a marked increase in terrorist attacks during the first Taliban regime. The majority of Afghans view India as a friendly nation and the Taliban itself doesn't seem to have any animosity towards New Delhi. During the past few decades India has given Afghanistan \$3 billion in aid to help with areas like electricity production, roads, health care, agriculture, and education (Roy, 2021). The US and Taliban were able to negotiate thanks in large part to Pakistan. This ultimately resulted in the February 2020 Peace Agreement being signed. Pakistan has backed the Taliban and organizations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and others since the Taliban's foundation others who fought alongside the Taliban and were developed by Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The Afghan Taliban sponsor one of the factions, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) however TTP works against Pakistani interests and is still active. Pakistan usually blames Indian intelligence is accused of aiding in the preparation and carrying out of violent activities against Pakistan from Afghan territory and of using TTP as its proxies (Verma, 2022). The Haqqani Network a part of the Taliban is one of the organizations Pakistan supports that is thought to be detrimental to India interests in that region. Afghanistan is made up of complex structures of state actors and networks.

3.3 Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and impact on Indo-Pak

The Taliban's resumption of control as Afghanistan's de facto government alarmed India. The Taliban's return suggested that India had lost the game and Pakistan was ready to benefit from the regime change in Kabul because India's strategy towards Afghanistan

has historically been perceived as a zero-sum dynamic against Pakistan in which loss for one party entails gain for the other. Pakistan's security and foreign policy departments were jubilant as India battled to evacuate its diplomatic post and citizens from Afghanistan. Islamabad's reaction to the Taliban seizing power contrasted sharply with the despair experienced in western cities. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan encapsulated his country's joy when he claimed that their triumph proved that Afghans had emancipated themselves from servitude. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan was once more on display when Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed visited Kabul in anticipation of the installation of the interim administration there to meet with top Taliban officials. As might be expected India was astounded to read of these occurrences in Afghanistan. If only New Delhi had established avenues of communication with the Taliban instead of the country's limited Afghan approach. In August 2021, India will not have experienced a sense of strategic loss. The UN Security Council, presided over by India, voted a resolution designating the Taliban as a state actor as the US prepared to complete the withdrawal of its soldiers from Kabul (Roy, 2021).

By voting against the resolution, New Delhi would have had less chance to win over the Taliban. A difficult step for Afghanistan which had previously profited considerably from Western financial support was highlighted by the sudden withdrawal of international forces and the subsequent closure of western embassies in Kabul. Lack of western assistance caused the Afghan economy to collapse, and one of the main problems the Taliban leadership was dealing with was a food scarcity. India wasted little time in starting to provide food aid to Afghanistan, keeping with its long-standing civilian-centric strategy. India announced that it would give Afghanistan 50,000 MT of wheat. India and the World Food Programme (WFP) agreed to work together to plan the distribution of wheat in Afghanistan. Three Indian wheat shipments totaling roughly 6500 MT have already left the country. The WFP whose headquarters are in Rome applauded New Delhi for its generous donation of wheat to aid the country's citizens, who are experiencing serious food shortages (Haider, 2022).

India's food aid not only serviced a humanitarian need, but it also gave New Delhi a pretense to begin formal talks with the Taliban authority. The Taliban and other Afghans expressed gratitude to India for providing them with wheat. As payment and a gesture of goodwill, the Taliban promised to keep the Indian embassy in Kabul safe. With the opening of India's embassy, the Taliban's quest to be seen as the legitimate government in Afghanistan would gain ground. The Taliban gain more legitimacy the more nations that back them. India has chosen to continue giving Afghanistan financial support, despite the fact that it has not yet fully restored its embassies and consulates there. As of February 1, 2022, New Delhi's fiscal budget for 2022 to 2023 included Rs.200 cores, or almost US\$ 27 million, for aid to Afghanistan.

The money would be used to support ongoing projects in Afghanistan that are being supported by India as well as for the good of the Afghan people. Afghanistan's ambassador to India Farid Mamundzay, hailed India's financial support. Despite being under the Taliban's authority Mamundzay complimented India for continuing to financially support

Afghanistan adding that this demonstrates that India is not giving up (Hindustan Times, 2022). India continues to provide food, medicine, and financial assistance to Afghanistan. This may help India keep the respect it has earned in Afghanistan over the past 20 years though. The strategic stance for New Delhi in Afghanistan must be developed in addition to these aid-driven initiatives an excellent place to start in this direction would be Afghanistan's deteriorating relations with Pakistan. Pakistani airstrikes carried out on April 16, 2022 in the eastern Afghan provinces of Khost and Kunar resulted in the deaths of at least 47 civilians including women and children. In return Pakistan received a warning from the Taliban to abstain from such attacks inside of Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan condemns in the harshest terms the bombardment and attack that have occurred from the Pakistani side on Afghan soil according to a statement made by Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahidin after the attacks. This is awful and it's making Pakistan and Afghanistan more hostile. We are making every effort to prevent future occurrences and asking that our sovereignty be respected (Aljazeera, 2022). On the other hand, Pakistan defended the airstrikes by claiming that the terrorist organization Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was the intended target. Recent tensions between Islamabad and Kabul are thought to be the result of the Taliban's reluctance to take action against the TTP, a close organizational and ideological ally (Siddique, 2022).

A delegation from India led by J.P. Singh Joint Secretary of the Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran division of the Ministry of External Affairs met with senior Taliban leadership during the first week of June 2022. The delegation main topics of discussion were trade related concerns and India humanitarian aid programmer. The crew also visited development initiatives with Indian funding. India was once more requested by the Taliban to reestablish diplomatic ties and provide consular support in Afghanistan. Following the conversation Pakistan reaffirmed that Islamabad still sees India as meddling in Afghanistan (Hussain, 2022). Despite Pakistan's assertions Kabul and Islamabad's relationship has deteriorated. Given that Afghanistan still struggles to solve the issue of a lack of medicines, food and healthcare facilities India can assist more strongly and lay the foundation for a renewed strategic footing under the Taliban leadership. India would never gain anything concrete by staying away from Afghanistan and the Taliban. Only by forging a meaningful alliance with the Taliban would India be able to capitalize on their animosity towards Pakistan and swing the balance in its favor.

3.4 Indo-Pak rivalry and the other actors in Afghanistan

Afghanistan changing condition has long lasting effects on its neighbors. Afghan are in disorder due to the unreliable peace and security, which leads to their exodus. There are 2.5 million displaced Afghans in Pakistan and Iran. The improvement of economic linkages and regional growth are both significantly hampered by this circumstance. The only hope for a connection between South Asia and Central Asia is a peaceful Afghanistan (Heine & Ghosh, 2011). The Iranian government, which has long-term goals in Afghanistan, shares the 572-mile border with that country with Afghanistan. The Shia presence in Afghanistan, drug trafficking, issues with trade and borders, the Islamic State, and water shortages are other major concerns for Iran. In addition to the about 950,000

Afghans who are recognized as refugees Iran maintains three camps for Afghan refugees in Sistan Razavi Khorasan and South Khorasan where there are at least 2 million unregistered refugees. In light of the current situation Iran has reduced its diplomatic representation at its embassies in Kabul Jalalabad, Mazar-i-Sharif and Kandahar. Iran has in the past helped to facilitate negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Following the fall of Ghani's government and the Panjshir valley Iranian officials are concerned about Pakistani diplomacy in Afghanistan. Iran is optimistic for regional peace and stability following the recently installed Taliban government. The world was somewhat surprised by how the Russians responded to the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan. The Russian government responded favorably to the termination of its major rival's protracted military campout. The American pullout was referred to as the revenge of history by Russian authorities who continue to be vocal opponents of this military solution in Afghanistan. According to many analysts neither superpower Soviet Union nor America was able to impose its will on Afghanistan (Yunker, 2021).

Afghanistan's changing condition has long-lasting effects on its neighbors. Afghans are in According to Russian authorities America abrupt pullout might necessitate a fundamental shift in its foreign strategy. The US can now conduct focused operations against terrorists but will no longer support nation-building and regime change to foster democracy. Against China, America still has a strategic depth in Afghanistan. The United States maintains significant interests in this region therefore this departure does not constitute a complete evacuation. Afghanistan can perform a better check and balance function for South Asia. Afghanistan can provide South Asia with a better system of checks and balances. The Russian authorities have been in communication with the Taliban and they have shown a willingness to work together (Sullivan, 2021). Russian Ambassador Zhirov commended the Taliban warriors for their efficiency in protecting the safety of the Russian Embassy in Afghanistan. Strong bilateral ties between the Taliban and Central Asian nations developed in the 1990s. The weak dishonest and disjointed Ghani administration in Kabul had no appeal to the Central Asian nations. Because a country in civil conflict would present significant security and economic concerns to Central Asia. The Islamist phenomenon is the major threat that dominates the leadership's thoughts in Central Asia. Afghanistan has evolved into a center for terrorist and criminal organizations following its recent plunge into instability (Lieven, 2021).

Afghanistan cannot have trade connection or economic transit without a powerful government. The Taliban's keen interest in the powerful centralized authority is encouraging. The Taliban government, which was just constituted, faces a formidable problem in getting rid of the terrorist danger and network in Afghanistan. One of Afghanistan's neighbors China ceased to maintain diplomatic ties after the civil war broke out in 1993. After that, the Chinese government cut all ties with the Taliban on a diplomatic level. China's foreign minister, Wang Yi, sent his best wishes for Afghanistan's safe return and, more crucially, for the country's continued stability in the wake of the Taliban assault. China feels that Afghanistan is not benefiting from the ongoing volatility and humanitarian calamity (Qian, 2011). Beijing is working with the international community to prevent Afghanistan from becoming the center of terrorism and extremism. The Afghan

government would experience peace and stability following the American exit according to the Chinese government. Chinese communists are extremely pragmatic and unconcerned about the new government. They are confident that the newly elected government will be able to protect corporate interests in Afghanistan and significantly advance the country. Beijing had mixed feelings on the American pullout and kept Chinese diplomacy hazy. In July 2021 a high-level delegation from the Taliban was received in China. According to persistent reports in the international media that Beijing had engaged in diplomatic relations with them throughout the years. The two primary subjects of discussion at this conference were the Chinese assurance for the accommodation with the Taliban and the Taliban government's vow not to block China economic interests in Afghanistan. Beijing was convinced by the Taliban that their territory would never be used against it or any other nation. Beijing applauded this act of goodwill, which dispelled any uncertainty about China commitment to economic growth in the foreseeable future. Given the possibility of Indo-Pak conflict and the fall of the pro-Indian Ghani government the ascent of the Taliban in Afghanistan is seen in India as a severe setback to Indian interests there. The Taliban takeover was viewed by many Indian observers as a win for Pakistan's Afghan policy (Kotokey & Borthakur, 2021).

India, which pushed for an immediate cessation of all forms of violence in Afghanistan, served as the chair of the UN Security Council special session. The Indian government debated reaching a suitable settlement with the Taliban before the American pullout. However, the Indian government is prepared to carry out this task even as it fosters support for Ghani's anti-Taliban government (Hanif & Shaheen, 2021). The fall of Ghani's administration had an impact on India, and now the future of its relations with Afghanistan depends on how the Taliban would treat Pakistan. India is extremely concerned about the Taliban's connections to Pakistani extremist groups. Using emergency visas, India evacuated all of its diplomatic personnel from Afghanistan, including Hindus and Sikhs in particular. Additionally India has extended an invitation to the Afghans to reside there until they are processed for any other settlement. The National Security Committee meeting on August 16 was presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan who reiterated the necessity of an all-inclusive political solution to the Afghan issue that has the support of all Afghan ethnic groups. This declaration praised all parties for preventing violence in Afghanistan (Sanaullah, 2021). After Kabul fell, the Taliban declared a coalition of all parties would form their government, which would guarantee human rights and forbid the use of Afghan territory against any nation. Even though Pakistan has removed its diplomats from Afghanistan it has not yet acknowledged the Taliban's rule. The Pakistani officials appear to be taking their time and are carefully assessing the situation. In Pakistan, there is a sense of triumph that its policy of hedging and supporting the Taliban has paid off. Despite the right-wing in Pakistan portrayed the Taliban takeover as a victory for the pan-Islamist movement over the United States, Prime Minister Khan remarked that the Afghan people refused to accept the Western imposition on their nation. As India and Pakistan wage proxy wars to resolve the Kashmir dispute Afghanistan has evolved into a sophisticated playground for the Taliban. Although the two nations do not share a border directly Afghanistan is very significant geographically for India. Shah and Hussain make a similar

case for Pakistan pointing out that Islamabad would gain from an at-peace Afghanistan. They emphasize the potential advantages of the two countries working together economically to reinforce this viewpoint, a topic for which there is a dearth of academic material (Shah & Hussain, 2022).

It would be important to keep in mind that only the Taliban signed the peace pact with the US and other non-state entities if Allen's judgment is accurate. John Allen highlighted the complexity of the relationships in his work in this way while serving as the commander of the American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The local tribal leadership is too frequently misconstrued as being made up of independent warlords and dispersed or isolated cells. It is incorrect that the Taliban can maintain stability indefinitely (Ahmadzai, 2022). More specifically the U.S. talks for the peace deal did not involve either the Afghan government at the time. It is left to the Taliban to determine if these groups could endanger the United States its allies or their own interests. It is not helpful that the Taliban and al-Qaeda have maintained their affiliation since the beginning of the war on terror. Currently, it appears that the Taliban has only minimal operational, financial, and capability to subjugate the other groupings. The Taliban then worked with the Afghan military to undertake a military assault against the Islamic State in response to pressure from American forces damaging the IS-K and causing defections among its cadres. The Taliban are still up against a threat from the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K). The attack on the Kabul airport on August 26, 2021, which killed 200 people (most of them Afghans), put the IS-K threat in Afghanistan in perspective. If so this sets an even higher standard for complexity. As highlighted by Pakistani security expert Muhammad Amir Rana, Al Qaeda IS and TTP were only the means by which the Taliban enabled the US withdrawal. In addition when explaining the Taliban's ties to al-Qaeda Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid said Nowhere in the agreement has it been specified that we have or do not have ties with anyone. It has been decided that no threat should come from Afghan territory towards the United States and its allies the subject of relations with other organizations were not taken into consideration. In fact a UN assessment from 2021 observed that relationships. Because of similar issues and ideological affinity ties between the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the Haqqani Network. Which has been the major channel for the Taliban's involvement that al-Qaeda are still strong (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2022)

This is a result of their decentralized organizational structure at the local level, as well as their members' and leaders' divided loyalties, kinship links, intermarried relationships, and ideological affinities. The dissolution of other groups and occasionally the conviction that they share an enemy aid in the development of new ones. For instance the Taliban collaborated with the IS-K to assault the Kabul government and American interests in the northern region where it had a tenuous footing before to signing the agreement with the U.S. According to the Special Report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, in August 2017, anti-government groups attacked the village of Mirza Olang from a number of angles. Afghan Local Police and pro-government militia were engaged in conflict with Taliban and self-declared Daesh (Islamic State) forces. The attack was carried out by local Taliban and Daesh/Islamic State members, assisted by regional Taliban from nearby provinces. In order to prevent Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the chief Taliban

negotiator, from speaking with the Hamid Karzai administration in 2010, Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan would have been weakened had there been an agreement between the Taliban and the Karzai administration (Giustozzi, 2017). Additionally it seems to encourage the IS-K so that it has routes to maintain its hegemony. He stated at the time that none other than Sirajuddin Haqqani a Taliban commander is reporting to and giving orders to all ISKP forces operating in Nangarhar and the Kabul area. Being able to maintain what some of its military officers refer to as strategic depth in Afghanistan is Pakistan main concern. This interest shows that Pakistan still controls Afghanistan affairs and maintains the Afghan state weakness or availability to it. Whether Pakistan, which supports the Taliban, is also worried that the Taliban's total control of Afghanistan will reduce Pakistan's influence and put pressure on the Afghan government to resolve the Durand Line conflict in favor of the latter is up for debate. New Delhi is viewed as a potential threat by Islamabad to destabilize its border regions particularly in Baluchistan along the Afghan border. The cadres'/mujahideen's erratic allegiance and their exchange of operational information with other organizations increase the complication (Ahmadzai, 2022).

3.5 The Al-Qaeda Challenge

Members of a number of significant militant groups, including HuJI and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, joined AQIS after its formation in September 2014. These organizations were first created by the ISI to advance its objectives in Kashmir. Al-Qaeda has not taken part in any big assaults in India, with the exception of its collaboration with LeT in the Mumbai bombings in 2008, which occurred later when interests converged (Riedel, 2013). It seems to have only one purpose, announcements. For instance, the atrocities committed by the Indian government against the Kashmiris drew a lot of attention when it revealed its first comprehensive strategy plan in June 2017. The Indian Security Forces (ISF) were made a target by the militants as a result (Joscelyn, 2017). It proclaimed the founding of Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGH) a month later. A highlighting exposing the ISF's excesses was issued by AQIS in December 2017. The ISF however removed the group's commander Zakir Musa in the middle of 2019 and his replacement Hameed Lelhari in October of that same year. Thus while carrying out AQIS's plan in Kashmir there was a leadership gap created by that. Because of this incident, the ISF declared Kashmir's AGH to be extinct. In reality, when the Taliban signed the Peace Agreement with the United States in February 2020, a well-known AGH ideologue named Hafiz Mustafa Abdul Kareem became actively involved in recruiting new recruits in Kashmir. The ISF carried out significant operations in Kashmir to neutralize the various terrorist organizations based on intelligence-led inputs. In addition Kashmir was split into two union territories and the unique status granted to it under Article 370 was abolished by the Indian government. In response to the removal of Article 370 in Kashmir it persuaded local organizations to join its jihadi cause. Al-Naba, a weekly journal of IS, ran an editorial encouraging violence against Hindus residing in Arab Gulf states (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2020).

Contrary to what the ISF asserted, in March 2020, AQIS changed the title of its periodical from Nawai Afghan Jihad to Nawai-Ghazwa-ul-Hind to emphasize that after defeating American forces in Afghanistan, its attention will turn to the liberation of

Kashmir (Taneja & Siyech, 2021). This behavior, in addition to Kashmiris' syncretic culture and animosity towards foreign militants spearheading jihad, appears to have prevented the AQIS from gaining local support. The massive ISF deployments, their vigilance over cross-border movements with Pakistan, and their determination to carry out airstrikes on terrorist launching pads and training facilities have all played key roles in blocking AQIS operations in Kashmir. However the al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri made mention of Kashmir in a video message aired the week before the 20th anniversary of 9/11 (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2022). India has had time to adjust its strategy since Al-Zawahiri's death in July 2022 because it is unknown who will succeed him and how he will view India in terms of foreign policy.

3.6 The IS-K Challenge

Long before the IS-K was founded in 2015, India was on the Islamic State's (IS) agenda. In June 2014, the IS publication Dabiq's 13th issue made the following claim. It won't be long before the group runs Kashmir. Ansar-ut-Tawheed (AuT) and the Indian Mujahideen (IM) have pledged allegiance to the IS-K. Shafi Armar the IS-K's key leader, and other top commanders were assassinated in 2016 just as the organization was beginning to organize its activities in Kashmir. To make up for the defeat the IS said in May 2019 that Wilayah Hind would be established in India (Mullins, 2020). The Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir (ISJK) made some success by attacking ISF bases and denigrating local militant organizations that did not adhere to the IS-K concept of characterizing the Kashmir war as a religious conflict (Siyech, 2018). By May 2019, however, the ISF had eliminated the ISJK's cadres and its commander, Ishfaq Ahmed Sofi. Disputed between Muslims and Hindus in Ayodhya, India, the al-Babri Mosque was shown in a journal article from August 2020 by a militant carrying an IS banner. But the Kashmiris lack of support and the ISF vigilance have so far stopped the IS-K from taking root in India so India still views it as a danger. Despite being defeated on Indian soil the IS-K still emphasizes the Kashmir problem in its propaganda materials. For instance, the IS-K subsidiary Al-Qitaal Media Centre highlighted a violent protest in New Delhi as communal in its journal Sawt-al-Hind during President Donald Trump's visit to India in February 2020 (Iyer & Mirchandani, 2020). In other words, the ISF prevented the Wilayah Hind members from establishing themselves in Kashmir by stopping them there. In retaliation, the IS-K struck Indian sites in Afghanistan, most notably a Sikh temple in Kabul, where 25 people perished in an attack in March 2020 and two more perished in a second strike in June 2022 (Mobasher & Nezaami, 2023).

3.7 The Challenge of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)

The TTP was founded by Pashtun militants near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in December 2007 in response to Pakistan's military campaign against al-Qaeda terrorists in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA). Since then, TTP has engaged in combat alongside Pakistan's armed forces and has become a danger to Pakistan's sovereignty. TTP continued to attack Pakistan's government while continuing to support the Taliban in Afghanistan. In response to TTP attacks on high-value targets, the Pakistani military launched two large operations, Operation Zarbe- Azb in 2014 and Operation Radd-ul-

Fasaad in 2017. Ten terrorist groups that fight the Pakistani government have united with the TTP since July 2020. This includes three al-Qaeda affiliates in Pakistan and four significant subgroups that split from the TTP in 2014. Several TTP terrorists were killed or forced to cross the border into Afghanistan as a result of these offensives. Several TTP members joined IS-K as their new allies. Others, including TTP commander Noor Wali Mehsud, have publicly reiterated their oath of allegiance to Maulvi Hibatullah Akhundzada, the Taliban's leader, and claimed that the TTP is a Pakistani branch of the Taliban (Mir, 2022).

TTP, which has bases in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, increased its attacks against Pakistan's security forces after learning of the US plan to withdraw from Afghanistan. After the Taliban took control in August 2021 and unlocked the prison gates, releasing many of its commanders and cadres, TTP was reinforced. By using Sirajuddin Haqqani, a Taliban ally, as well as simultaneously offering an olive branch for a political settlement specifically that the government would grant the TTP a broad amnesty in exchange for their surrender, disarmament, and recognition of the state's authority Pakistan has attempted to put pressure on the TTP (Ali, 2013). However, the government refused to agree to the release of more than 100 TTP officials and cadres from Pakistani prisons during the 20-day truce declaration by the TTP Shure in North Waziristan in December 2021 out of concern for retaliation. TTP responded by abandoning the cease-fire pact. Since then, the TTP has intensified its high-value operations against Pakistani military. The killing of TTP cofounder and senior leader Omar Khalid Khorasani in a claimed ISI-perpetrated roadside explosion in eastern Afghanistan in August 2022, when a truce between the TTP and the army was in existence, may also lead to vengeance against Pakistan. Additionally, the Taliban has expressed its extreme disapproval of the killing of al-Zawahiri by a drone attack in Kabul. Mullah Yaqoob the Taliban's acting defense minister attributed this to Pakistan. Our evidence indicates that they (US drones) are using Pakistani airspace to invade Afghanistan from Pakistan (Ahmadzai, 2022). This has harmed ties between the Taliban and Pakistan and reduced confidence. This situation has led to a turning point for Pakistan. The Taliban still backs the TTP but they do not want to risk losing the backing of their government in Afghanistan. Pakistan is also unable to provide the Taliban regime with adequate financial assistance or international legitimacy. Pakistan appears to have little power as a result, but it also refuses to cede Afghan land out of concern that India may interfere and harm Pakistan's interests.

3.8 Border Dispute

In 2018, Pakistan started building a fence along the disputed Durand Line in preparation for the exit of American troops from Afghanistan and the anticipated influx of migrants and militants. At the time, this action was rebuked by the Ashraf Ghani administration. After observing the fence's installation, the Taliban members started to rip down the barrier opening fire on Pakistani forces and killing multiple soldiers. The Pakistani military reacted strongly saying that the border fence between Pakistan and Afghanistan will remain in place and that soldier's blood was utilized in its construction. The Taliban defense ministry then-spokesman Enayatullah Khwarizmi described Pakistan's

fence construction as unlawful. He forewarned Pakistan that it had no right to split Pashtuns who resided on both sides of the border. In addition, Pakistan started air operations against TTP hideouts in eastern Afghanistan in April 2022 which resulted in the deaths of numerous civilians. Pakistan took this action to halt the TTP growing attacks from Afghan territory. The Taliban vehemently denounced Pakistan for undermining its sovereignty rather than curbing TTP activities. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid referred to the massacre of civilians as cruelty and foresaw that Pakistan actions will increase tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Ahmadzai, 2022). As a result of this, Pakistan's influence has decreased and the idea that some people supported the TTP attacks on the Pakistani government has grown.

4. Conclusion

Pakistan finds the growing friendship between India and Afghanistan intolerable and views it as a danger to its survival. Indian involvement in Afghanistan is increasing as a result of economic rivalry in the region, particularly with China. India wants to establish a network of trade throughout Asia, and they are able to do so by designating Chabahar port in Iran for Afghanistan so that goods can be transported from Iran to Central Asia via Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pakistan accuses both Afghanistan and India of restricting their ability to conduct business in the area. The harmful impact of competition between India and Pakistan is becoming more widely acknowledged. States that are engaged in conflict act differently, with each point of contention fusing into the larger rivalry relationship. Influence in Afghanistan is a part of India's strategic plan to continue to dominate Pakistan in South Asia. While Pakistan seeks influence in Afghanistan largely as a means of opposing, undermining, and frustrating Indian objectives. The ongoing bloodshed and instability in Afghanistan are clear results of these rivalries between India and Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan are both concerned about the water crisis. As they did under the terms of the water pact between Afghanistan and Iran, Afghanistan has not yet used the rivers that flow into Pakistan to supply its needs for irrigation and energy. To resolve its energy dilemma and utilize the water for irrigation, Afghanistan must come to an agreement with both countries and sign the relevant documents. Last but not least, Afghanistan is burdened by the competition between these two governments, as each nation competes with the other to strengthen its military and economic at the expense of Afghanistan.

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