

ANALYZING PAKISTAN'S SECURITY CONCERNS AND STRATEGIC DEPTH POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan and Afghanistan are the two neighboring states and this neighboring status cannot be altered. Pakistan has vested interests in the stability and friendly regime in Afghanistan. Historically, Pakistan has been insecure from its western neighbor, and the two states' relations have been spoiled by some major irritants i.e. Durand Line dispute, Pashtunistan issue, Indian factor in Afghanistan, the sanctuaries of Baloch insurgents in Afghanistan and cross border terrorism. After 9/11, the relation between the two countries remained at odds due to increased Indian presence in Afghanistan and the sanctuaries of Pakistani terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Currently, the relationship between two countries is at lowest ebb. Pakistan has genuine security concerns emerging from Afghanistan in the form of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan and other terrorist groups attacks in the Pakistani soil. This research is a descriptive study and uses case study method to analyze Pakistan- Afghanistan relation through analysis of strategic depth theoretical framework. The analysis reveals several episodes of ebbs and flows between Pakistan and Afghanistan due to Pakistan's strategic depth idea and study also provides recommendation.

Key Words; Pakistan, Afghanistan, Taliban, Strategic Depth, India

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has stakes in an amiable and stable government in Afghanistan. Historically, Pakistan and Afghanistan ties have been ruined by various key irritants i.e. Durand Line dispute, Pashtunistan issue, Indian Factor in Afghanistan and the sanctuary of Baloch rebels in Afghanistan. The strategic culture of Pakistan is predominantly rooted on Indian hegemonic designs and her aspirations to subjugate Pakistan. Pakistan thus want a cordial Afghan administration in order to limit Indian influence on Afghan territory and to be able to exploit Afghan turf as a strategic advantage against India in the event of a crisis or conflict. Pakistan adopted the policy of strategic depth in order to install a friendly government in Kabul, normalize the western border, and prevent Indian encirclement. This approach has developed from British military tactics in Afghanistan during the great game to either establish a friendly administration in Afghanistan or take direct control of the country. This policy was employed by Pakistani military planners at different

times. In the Zia administration, this approach gained traction, and Pakistan made every effort to establish a friendly government in Kabul. During the cold war and the Afghan civil war, Pakistan tried to side with Pakistan friendly factions. Then emerged Taliban, who were considered to be close to Pakistan and the Taliban governed from 1996 to 2001 (Butt & Siddiqui, 2016). Pakistan's policy of assisting the Taliban was completely dismantled by the 9/11 incident, and the country found itself forced to choose between continuing to back the strategically significant Afghan Taliban organizations or providing overwhelming assistance to the United States. Pakistan's dream of a friendly Afghanistan was thwarted. Since 9/11 for a variety of reasons Afghanistan remained unfriendly to Pakistan and Pakistan had serious security concerns of India's stronghold in the Afghanistan. Following the events of 9/11, Pakistan had a catastrophic backlash against its prior policies in the form of internal security concerns, drone attacks, terrorism, extremism, and

military actions. Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan has undergone a tactical and strategic transition since 9/11. The overarching goal of this shift has been to find a political solution to the Afghan conflict and bring an end to the ten-year war through an inclusive conciliatory process. The strategic interest of Pakistan could be served by the Taliban's entry into Kabul's power corridors, which would inevitably reduce Indian influence in Afghanistan (Ahmad, Yousaf, & Shah, 2017). However, Pakistan's dream of friendly Taliban has been shattered, when Taliban repeatedly declined to act against TTP. Following section will discuss research questions and corresponding research objectives.

1. Research Questions

- i. What major security concerns has Pakistan been facing on its western border with Afghanistan?
- ii. How was the strategic depth policy implemented as a countering strategy to minimize security threats from Afghanistan?
- iii. What are the costs and benefits of strategic depth policy to Afghanistan?

2. Research Objectives

The purpose of this research paper is to comprehend Pakistan's security concerns in Afghanistan and to understand the context of Pakistan's strategic depth policy in Afghanistan and to assess the tools used to carry it out over various time periods. To evaluate the strategic depth policy's costs and benefits, and look at it in the larger context of Pakistan's strategic calculus in the region.

3. Research Methodology

In this qualitative study, secondary data has been the primary source of information for the researcher. The historical, descriptive, and analytical approaches are the researcher's main focus. For the literature used in this study came from secondary sources like books, research papers, and newspapers.

4. Theoretical Framework

Strategic depth in military terminology refers to an area or distance between the front line and the heart land (key cities, industrial hubs, population centers and key military installations). Strategic experts say that a country with more space between its heartland and the frontline (Forward Defended Localities) is

strategically more advantageous than one with a smaller geographical size. It is a strategically advantageous location where the attack of the aggressor can be organically absorbed (Khan K. M., 2015). There are two forms of strategic depth: the first is found inside state borders, while the second is found outside them. The ideal illustration of the first kind of strategic depth is Russia. Russia is a prime example of a country with natural strategic depth and vast spaces within its borders. Despite their best efforts, Russian foes were unable to penetrate deep into the country's heartland. Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler met with ultimate defeat because of Russia vast natural inside strategic depth. The second type of strategic depth is found outside state borders, where smaller governments have ventured to obtain strategic depth in the sea or by maintaining influence in the surrounding area, allowing a significant gap to exist between the frontline and the heartland. Pakistan and Israel are the perfect examples of inside strategic depth. Pakistan uses military methods to pursue strategic depth in Afghanistan that is controlled by the security establishment. The goal of Pakistan's strategic depth initiatives in Afghanistan is to have a friendly government in Afghanistan and have peaceful neighbor nation on the western border (Seth, 2014).

5. Major concerns to Pakistan's Security

Pakistan and Afghanistan are two adjacent countries that share common religious and ethnic ties. Since Pakistan gained its independence in 1947, relations between the two nations have been tense. Even with a 2200 km long border that is home to ethnic Pashtuns on both sides and blood ties between the tribes across the border, governmental ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan have frequently remained tense. The agreements that Afghanistan had with British-India began to deteriorate on the eve of the British withdrawal from the subcontinent. While Afghanistan claimed to have declared all agreements with British-India null and void and refused to acknowledge Pakistan as the accords' legitimate heir. Pakistan is currently the ultimate heir to the agreements agreed upon between Afghanistan and the British. The following challenges plagued relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the early years, some of which still exist today. The nature of Pakistan-Afghanistan irritants is that they mainly translate into security issues. Following is the detail of conflicts between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

5.1 Durand Line Dispute

All Afghan governments have consistently maintained that the Pashtun area that British government of United India took in 1893 as part of the Durand Line deal belongs to Afghanistan, and they have stuck to their position that Pakistan cannot legitimately inherit the deal. Pakistan rejected the allegations for political and legal reasons. All of the Afghan kings up till 1930 approved the deal with British-India. The Durand line agreement was adamantly rejected in 1949 by the Afghan parliament and the Loya Jirga, the country's grand assembly of elders, in declarations that regarded the Durand line as a fictitious boundary. Around 5,000 thousand Afghan regular and irregular fighters attempted to cross into Pakistan in 1950, but were driven back after a few short engagements. Afghanistan vigorously protested to the 1955 One Unit scheme that united the Pashtun-populated territories of West Pakistan into one unit. The One Unit idea infuriated the Afghan government and populace, and as a result, the Pakistani consulates throughout the country were encircled by enraged mobs, Pakistan flags were set ablaze, and the Pakistani embassy in Kabul was attacked. (Rizvi, 1979).

5.2 Pashtunistan Issue

Pakistan-Afghan ties severely deteriorated as a result of the Pashtunistan issue. The Durand line conflict was strongly associated with Afghan support for Pashtunistan. The term "Pashtunistan" denoted an independent nation for the Pashtun ethnic group residing in Pakistan. In order to educate the population, Afghanistan brought attention to the problem, spread awareness through the media, and established radio station "radio Pashtunistan". The Afghan government backed the Pashtunistan administration at the Tirah border and offered assistance to Haji Mirza Ali Khan. Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan reached an all-time low when they closed their borders. When Pakistan joined CENTO and SEATO in the 1950s, the Russians backed Afghanistan's claims over that country. Sardar Daoud was an ardent advocate for the cause of Pashtunistan. Pakistan had to deal with hostile Soviet activity as well as cordial ties between Afghanistan and India in the 1950s and 1960s. The U-2 plane incident further exacerbated Soviet policies toward Pakistan. Following a string of Afghani attacks in 1961, Pakistan severed diplomatic ties and closed all trade with Afghanistan.

Afghanistan remained neutral in the two Indo-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971 despite as well. Once again bringing up the subject of Pashtunistan, Sardar Muhammad Daoud's ascent to the presidency in 1973 severely damaged the fleeting amicable relations. Pro-Soviet factions in the armed forces and civil bureaucracy backed the Daoud coup. By playing the Pashtunistan card, Daoud legitimized his government, and Afghan forces mobilized to the Pakistani border in 1973–1974. Pakistan retaliated by deploying its troops to the western border and to the border areas. Multiple diplomatic initiatives between the two countries between 1976 and 1978 helped to defuse tensions, but the assassination of Sardar Muhammad Daoud in 1978 eliminated any chance of resolving difficult issues. Pakistan and Afghanistan began a critical period of bilateral and strategic ties in 1978 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent Saur Revolution (Durrani & Khan, 2002).

5.3 Indian presence in Afghanistan

Afghanistan developed friendly relations with India after having strained relationship with Pakistan. Following the British exit, Pakistan and India attempted to acquire strategic influence in Afghanistan. Af-Pak strategy has traditionally been Indian-centric and has sought to limit Indian influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan has long seen the partnership between India and Afghanistan as a security risk to its goals and national interests. Pakistan views India's engagement in Afghanistan as an encirclement of Pakistan and views India's actions as part of India's sinister plans to subjugate Pakistan. India subtly backed Afghanistan's territorial claims against Pakistan. India has several goals in Afghanistan that are focused on Pakistan: first, to support secular and nationalist governments in order to increase her influence there, second to use Afghanistan to gain access to Central Asian countries for energy needs and third to prevent Pakistan from becoming involved strategically, politically, or economically in Afghanistan and finally to neutralize the Islamist government in Afghanistan as a result of ideological affinities (Ahmad & Bhatnagar, 2007). Following some notable incidents that projected alliance dimensions in region like the U-2 plane incident, Pakistan's SEATO and CENTO accords, and the boundary agreement between Pakistan and China in 1963, a nexus between India, the Soviet Union, and Afghanistan arose. A few months prior to

the East Pakistan fiasco, India and Afghanistan signed a peace pact with the Soviet Union in 1971, demonstrating their same interests in the divided global and international arena. India and the Soviet Union enjoyed friendly relations; hence India was not bothered to voice any disapproval of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan thus faced significant security and geopolitical consequences as a result of the India-Afghanistan nexus (Khan F. , 2010).

5.4 Afghanistan's support for Baloch Insurgents

Afghanistan has occasionally assisted border region tribal insurgencies and Baloch insurgencies in the province of Baluchistan. Significant rifts in the two nations' bilateral relations were caused by Afghanistan's sponsorship of insurgencies, particularly between 1948 and 1960. Pakistan used its air force and military forces to put an end to the rebellion and regained control of the region. Once, the Afghan government and the Nawab of Dir collaborated to proclaim Dir the capital of Pashtunistan. Stationed on the Pakistani border, the regular army of 1000 soldiers and the 25000-men Afghan tribal groups were prepared to support Nawab of Dir. The Pakistan Army and the Afghan groups engaged in armed combat that resulted in fatalities for both parties. Declassified records from the US State Department claim that 1200 Afghans and 80 Pakistanis were killed in the armed conflict. After Zulfikar Ali Bhutto dismissed the provincial government of Baluchistan in 1973-7, the fourth phase of the insurgency broke out in Baluchistan. President Sardar Muhammad Daoud of Afghanistan provided safe havens for the Baloch fighters and assistance to the insurgents from Baluchistan. Bhutto withdrew backing for Baloch insurgents and stationed thousands of Pakistani troops along the Parachinar border to put pressure on Afghanistan. The terrorist organization Al-Zulfikar, led by Mir Murtaza Bhutto, was established as payback for the former prime minister's execution (Jalal, 2014). The group operated from Afghanistan for a number of years with the intention of carrying out violent actions against the Zia administration in Pakistan. For Kabul, Al-Zulfikar also took control of a passenger plane from Pakistan. As a result, throughout the early years of their diplomatic history, Pakistan and Afghanistan did not have a cordial relationship (Paracha , 2010).

5.5 Post-9/11 Cross Border Terrorism in Pakistan

It is Pakistan's long standing policy position that it would support the political groups in Afghanistan, who have soft approach on the above mentioned issues and more friendly to Pakistan. Historically, Afghanistan has been ruled by either nationalists, communists and Islamists. Pakistan always favored and sided with Islamists because of their softer stand on the issues of Pashtunistan, Durand line and cold relations India. After the end of Cold War, it was Pakistan success to brought those in power who were more friendly to Pakistan. The incident of 9/11 put in shambles Pakistan's friendly government in Afghanistan and Pakistan had to fight all the Islamists groups who were assets to Pakistan national interest in Afghanistan. 9/11 brought two major setbacks to Pakistan national interest in Afghanistan; firstly, a nationalist government came in Afghanistan which was more tilted towards India. Secondly, Pakistan became a frontline state in the war on terror against the groups who were Pakistan's protégé and thus terrorist attacks inside Pakistan became a new normal.

In reaction to Pakistan as frontline state in the war against terrorism, an ally to the United States and its military operations in the Tribal areas a militant organization emerged in Pakistan's tribal areas called Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan. Pakistan experienced economic losses, political instability, a homegrown insurgency, serve backlash, and a high rate of religious extremism and militancy that claimed thousands of lives. The domestic insurgency turned Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas into a battlefield for both military and civilian casualties. The writ of state was contested, and Sufi Muhammad and Moulana Fazl -ul- Ullah established sharia law with a self-styled controlled system in some areas including as Malakand and Swat. To exterminate domestic and international militants from the former FATA, multiple military operations, including Operation Rah e Rast (2007-2009), Operation Zalzala (2008) and Operation Mizan (2002-2006), were conducted. Operation Zarb-e-Azab (2014) was the most well-known and latest military operation to eradicate the extremist elements in the tribal district of North Waziristan. In response to these military operations, the terrorists took refuge in Afghanistan and were consistently involved in cross border terrorism. Due to the unfriendly government, Pakistan experienced a severe brunt of the cross

border terrorism (Marwat , Rehman , & Akhtar , 2023).

5.6 The United States Withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Threat of TTP

The post US withdrawal environment worsened security between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Despite Pakistan's best efforts to mediate talks between the US and the Taliban, the abrupt US withdrawal fueled views of unfair criticism and left the country feeling abandoned. Following the US withdrawal, the TTP factor, the refugee crisis, and accusations and denials have intensified the strained relationship. Kabul denies any involvement with extremists whereas Pakistan asserts that the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is getting support from the provisional Taliban government. The TTP attacks and its safe havens in Afghanistan damage their bilateral relations. Cross-border incursions in the erstwhile tribal areas have significantly increased, but terrorist violent occurrences have also increased recently, severely targeting Pakistani security personnel. The state of Pakistan is essentially at war with the militants. In addition to operating in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the TTP has expanded its reach into the unstable region of Baluchistan (Bashir , 2023).

Pakistan's security issues have gotten worse as the TTP has sanctuaries on Taliban's territory, and the Taliban government has refused to act against them. The most concerning reports include the Afghan Taliban's alleged participation with the TTP in several of the country's terrorist acts. They were clearly involved in raid on the security installation in the Zhob area of Baluchistan. It was one of the deadliest assaults in the past few years (Hussain, 2023).

The creation of TJP (Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan) as a front organization to give the banned TTP a plausible deniability, as well as the participation of other organizations like Majeed Brigade and ETIM/TIP (East Turkestan Islamic Movement/Turkestan Islamic Party) in joint operations with TTP, highlight the complex and global threat that these militant alliances pose to Pakistan from Afghanistan. In order to increase its operational reach over many regions, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement/Turkestan Islamic Party (ETIM/TIP) moved its headquarters from Badakhshan Province to Baghlan Province. These militant strategic and tactical alliance proves to be a serious security threat to Pakistan (Rana, 2024).

6. Evolution of Pakistan Strategic Depth Policy

Pakistan's policy of strategic depth originated with the British security arrangements in Afghanistan during the Great Game in the 1800s. Afghanistan serves as a backdoor to the subcontinent, where British strategists are alarmed by Russia's persistent progress. Afghanistan is seen by the British as the first line of defense for the Indian Subcontinent's core. British strategic goals in Afghanistan were to either directly dominate the country by putting in puppet rulers or indirectly rule it by installing rulers with the eventual goal of turning it into a buffer state. In order to do this, Britain fought two battles in the 19th century known as the Anglo-Afghan battles, pursued the "forward policy" and "masterly inactivity," and negotiated significant treaties with the Afghan kings, including the Durand Line agreement in 1893 and the Gandamak Treaty in 1879. Afghanistan became a buffer state between Czarist Russia and the British Empire in the Indian Subcontinent after the Durand Line agreement officially marked the borders between Afghanistan and the Subcontinent. The upcoming Afghan kings further approved the agreement in 1905, 1919, 1921, and 1930. After the border was drawn, interactions between Afghanistan and British-India continued with all normalcy. Afghanistan did not participate in World War II and only became interested in the Pashtun regions that Pakistan had inherited after the war and its division.

Pakistan was unstable on both the eastern and western fronts during the early decades of its independence. Afghanistan advocated Pashtunistan, harbored Baloch separatists, funded tribal insurgencies in Pakistan, refused to admit Pakistan as a member of the UN, and questioned the Durand Line as a genuine boundary. Pakistan's geographical integrity was seriously threatened by Afghanistan's explicit backing for the ethnic Pashtuns' succession from Pakistan. Afghanistan supported India and the USSR during the Cold War, whereas Pakistan sided with the US bloc. The already strained relations between the two countries worsened due to differences in the strategic and foreign policy considerations. Pakistani policy makers were forced to construct a friendly administration in Afghanistan in order to seek strategic depth in the country following the disastrous East Pakistan and Afghanistan aggressive postures. Along with the US axis, Pakistan financed and supported several Islamist organizations against the Soviet Union in

Afghanistan. The formation of the Taliban administration and the backing of Islamists provide Pakistan with the necessary strategic depth to counter the influence of hostile nations, particularly India, in Afghanistan. The strategic depth policy was at the forefront of Pakistani strategic planners' strategic thinking in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Fair, 2014).

6.1 Anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad and Pakistan Pursuit of Strategic Penetration into Afghanistan

Islamists in Pakistan and Afghanistan had already been in communication since the early 1970s, and Zia gave their relationship a fresh lease of life. The entire system was altered when Noor Muhammad Tarakai overthrew Sardar Muhammad Daoud in a coup in 1978, a move known as the "Saur Revolution." After the revolution, Afghanistan became a communist state. After the assassination of Noor Muhammad Tarakai a year later, Hafiz Ullah Amin assumed the presidency of Afghanistan. On December 25, 1979, the Soviet Union launched a military intervention in Afghanistan after seeing a threat to her national interests and those of her communist allies. Fears of a Soviet invasion were widespread, particularly in Muslim countries. Pakistan developed a planned approach to protect her national interests rather than accepting the Soviet invasion completely by surprise. The General Zia dictatorship gained more credibility both domestically and internationally, and Pakistan was able to confront the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan by using Islamic soldiers as a forward strategy in Afghanistan to achieve the long-desired strategic depth. Due to Pakistan's lengthy border with Afghanistan and the Soviet Union's long-standing goal to reach warm water through Afghanistan, Pakistan was strategically greatly disadvantaged by Soviet expansion into Afghanistan. In 1979, General Zia appointed Muslim nationalist and ethnic Pashtun General Abd Ur Rehman as the DG ISI. It is believed that General Abd Ur Rehman was the primary planner of the Islamist opposition group in Afghanistan. Through the Pakistani spy agency ISI, Pakistan recognized and established seven Afghan Mujahideen parties, who received supplies and weaponry from Saudi Arabia and the United States. Owing to the Soviet invasion, Pakistan was able to expand her influence in Afghanistan and considered using the friendly Islamist parties there to take power. Political scholars generally agree, according

to Safdar Sial, that Pakistan's choice to back Afghan Islamist opposition organizations during the 1970s and 1980s was tactical rather than ideological. General Zia's use of religion as a driving force was only a calculated technique to legitimize and attract troops and financial support for the war (Sial, 2013). Pakistan got a strategic success in the war and compelled Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan. In 1988 Geneva accords signed and Soviet Union were given a few months of time to withdraw her troops from Afghanistan. The success of Geneva Accords and Soviet Union troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan had a huge strategic significance for Pakistan. Now, the only hurdle was the communist government of Dr. Najib in Afghanistan, which was toppled in 1992. After the fall of Dr. Najib Government, Afghanistan plunged into a bloody civil where Islamist factions fought against each other.

6.2 The Emergence of Taliban and Pakistan's strategic Depth Policy success

The Taliban emerged as a result of Afghanistan's chaotic state and Pakistan's tacit involvement in the country. While some believe that the Taliban's rise to prominence and military triumphs was due to domestic factors, many believe that Pakistan's unwavering support was a major factor. Pakistan formally refuted the Taliban's claims of sanctuary and support. In spite of official denials, Pakistan changed course tactically in Afghanistan, substituting the Taliban for Hizb e Islami. The Taliban seized most of Afghanistan in 1994–1996 and created the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (Khan I. A., 2007). Pakistan supplied the Taliban with both manpower and logistical support during their continuous conflict with the Northern Alliance between 1996 and 2001. Numerous veteran Pakistani military personnel, including General Hamid Gul and Colonel Imam, were thought to be part of the Taliban's advisory group. Pakistan granted diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime, and as the Taliban took a strong stand against Indian, Russian, and Iranian influence in Afghanistan, the two governments had very cordial relations. Since the Taliban are graduates of the Pakistani seminaries founded by the religious leaders, they share deep ideological ties with these political and religious figures in Pakistan. The Taliban claim Moulana Sami Ul Haq Seminary, also known as Dar Ul Uloom Deoband Haqqani, in Akora, Khattak, to be their

alma mater. However, Sami Ul Haq was thereafter referred to as the Taliban's father. Between 1994 and 1999, the Taliban recruited 80,000 new members from Islamic seminaries. Pakistan gave the Taliban financial assistance totaling thirty million US dollars in 1997–1998 to help them rebuild their infrastructure. "Taliban support is legitimate and justified; they are our boys as they are securing Pakistan interest in Afghanistan," stated Naseer Ullah Babar, the interior minister of the Benazir Bhutto administration. Consequently, the Taliban were successful in gaining about 90% of Afghanistan and establishing an Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the leadership of Pashtuns. Since the Taliban had a far more moderate approach on the issues than the previous Afghan nationalist governments, Pakistan enjoyed a friendly government in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Pakistan gained the necessary strategic depth, but at the expense of becoming isolated internationally and coming under heavy fire from human rights organizations due to the Taliban's flagrant violations of human rights in Afghanistan. When Osama Bin Laden and other key members of Al Qaeda participated in assaults against US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania while the Taliban was still providing shelter for them in Afghanistan, Pakistan was strongly condemned. Even China, a cordial neighbor of Pakistan, declined to acknowledge the Taliban administration, demonstrating Pakistan's inability to persuade the international community to do so. Pakistan's stance towards Afghanistan was significantly impacted by the 9/11 incident, leading to the country's decision to join the US-led coalition fighting the global war on terror. Now Pakistan had to fought the people, which trained and funded for decades. This policy had severe setback to Pakistan (Rubin, 2002).

6.3 Analysis of Pakistan Strategic Depth Policy in Afghanistan

Pakistan's strategic depth policy in Afghanistan has its own positive and negative impacts. It was practically implemented in the 1990s, when Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996-2001. However, in the backdrop of 9/11 incident, Pakistan had to made strategic shift in its Afghan policy of supporting Taliban and Islamists. Pakistan had to change the policy in Afghanistan and join the international community in the fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. General Pervez Musharraf faced significant obstacles as a result of the policy change from the

military's senior brass and other national ideological organizations.

6.4 Gains of Pakistan Strategic Depth Policy

Pakistan strategic depth policy played a significant role in containing the threats from Afghanistan. In Pakistan's actual implementation of the aforementioned policy, there were a few unsettling issues that were mainly related to Pakistan's national security. The Durand Line status and the Pashtoonistan issue, which was linked to numerous minor and persistent problems, were the primary sources of annoyance. Pakistan's sense of unease has increased significantly as India's influence in Afghanistan grows. Initially, the two countries' attention was primarily on the eastern front, but India began to penetrate Afghanistan under the pretense of providing military and economic support in an effort to encircle Pakistan and engaged Pakistan on the western front as well. Pakistan's strategic depth policy was effective in putting Afghanistan's irredentist claims (the Durand Line) on hold and putting the Pashtunistan problem into a cold storage. Although the Durand Line border conflict and Pashtunistan's motto are related, the country's demands appear ambiguous and disorganized given its geographic focus. Due to the strategic depth policy Pakistan had produced its stakeholders in Afghanistan in the form of Taliban (Weinbaum, 2013).

From 1979 to 2001, Indian influence in Afghanistan was incredibly low. Since the Soviet Union had wanted access to Pakistan's warm water resources, the fear of Soviet Union aggrandizement was felt equally throughout Pakistan's policy-making circles. However, Pakistan, a Western bloc member, had effectively kept Soviet forces in Afghanistan, where they encountered unwavering Islamic resistance from the populace. The Soviet Union withdrew Afghanistan in accordance with the 1988 Geneva Accords, which made Pakistan's position on the western front easier. The success of Pakistan's strategic depth policy, which has been virtually implemented since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, can be attributed to the Soviet Union's exit from the country and the minimal influence of India in Afghanistan.

After Americans came to Afghanistan, they considered legitimate the Pakistan security concerns in Afghanistan especially the Indian presence. General David Patraes, the American chief of Central

Command and a veteran of the war who served in Afghanistan, stated in a 2010 interview that Pakistan needs strategic depth in Afghanistan because it faces threats on the eastern front due to strategically unfavorable terrain compared to India, its steadfast rival. He continued by saying that Pakistan's top military hierarchy has a right to pursue strategic depth in Afghanistan. Pakistan, therefore, effectively demonstrated to the Indian government, the Americans, and the Afghan government that it would not, at all, risk its national interest and that it would oppose the establishment of any hostile nation on Afghan land in order to protect its western front (Fair & Watson , 2015).

6.5 Consequences of Pakistan's Strategic Depth Policy

Pakistan's strategic depth policy has been successful, but it has also caused problems for Pakistan. Over time, the approach turned out to be a double-edged sword, and Pakistan has suffered greatly as a result. Pakistan's ethnic and sectarian balance was negatively damaged by its strategic approach to Afghanistan in the 1980s. Before 1979, there were thirty religious organizations in Pakistan, but by 2002, there were two hundred and thirty-nine. According to Amir Rana, twenty-four of the two hundred and thirty-nine organizations were Jihadi groups, and one hundred and forty-eight of them were solely focused on sectarian agendas. When the government attempted to restrict the operations of these groups, the results were incredibly detrimental. The Anti-Terrorism Act was introduced in 1997 in an attempt to stop the terrorist actions of the religious organization, however it was not very successful. A thorough national conversation about the issue of militancy and religious extremism is necessary rather than just passing punishing laws (Rehman , 2019). Pakistan's pro-Taliban policy also split the regional strategic calculus and hurt Pakistan's reputation abroad. Iran began aiding Shia armed organizations in Afghanistan after Pakistan, through its support of the Taliban, made it aware of the rise of a Sunni administration in her region. Pakistan-Iran ties suffered as a result of that stance, and both countries became embroiled in a small-scale proxy conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan was not successful enough in projecting the Taliban's image or granting them international legitimacy. China, Pakistan's all-weather friend, refused to acknowledge the Taliban government.

Strategic depth policy failed when the current Taliban government declined to act against the TTP and other terrorist groups, which are involved in terrorism and numerous Pakistan law enforcement agencies. It was Pakistan miscalculation that Taliban ascendance into power would secure Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan. The then prime minister, the key political leaders and the military establishment welcomed Taliban retake of Kabul but in matter of months the situation changed the other way around. TTP captives in Afghanistan prisons were released from prison. TTP intensify its attacks on Pakistan LEAs and Afghanistan has repeatedly declined the request of Pakistan to take actions against TTP. As of now, TTP and other terrorist groups resides in Afghanistan are the biggest security threat to Pakistan's national security. Hence, it is the failure of strategic depth policy that yesterday protégé has now turned into Frankenstein monster (Khan , Wazir , & Khan , 2019).

7. Conclusion & Recommendations

Since 1947, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have remained tense and that, despite their mutual understanding and bilateral political engagements, their basic difficulties have never been resolved. Despite the fact that both parties made diplomatic efforts, the ultimate success was not realized. Major issues such as the disagreement over the Durand Line, the Pastoonistan question, and Indian influence in Afghanistan have been a constant in policy discourse. Afghanistan lacks the military might to take on Pakistan in a conventional battle in order to settle their differences. Pakistan implemented a policy of strategic depth in order to reduce the impression of threat from Afghanistan and maintain a friendly regime there. The primary goal of this policy is to counter the influence of hostile nations in Afghanistan, particularly India, so that Pakistan has enough room to retreat strategically in the event of a conventional conflict with India. The British security arrangements in Afghanistan during the 19th and 20th centuries are the historical foundation of Pakistan's strategic depth policy. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 gave Pakistan the chance to take a more active role in the country's affairs, forge ideological allies to help resolve the country's problems, and challenge the influence of hostile nations. The strategic depth policy of Pakistan has both advantages and disadvantages overall, and its operationalization has

frequently been met with resistance at different levels inside Pakistan. Pakistan saw severe setbacks to its strategic depth policy, severe challenges to its internal security, and a year-long civil conflict. Although the policy was significant before 9/11, it was least successful after 9/11. Pakistan's strategic depth policy requires a comprehensive reevaluation of its goals and methods. Instead of taking a strictly security-oriented approach, Pakistan needs to participate in more political, diplomatic, and economic activities in Afghanistan and the surrounding region given the current geopolitical climate. It is stated here that Pakistan should expand her economic reach into the central Asian states through Afghanistan and turn her strategic depth into an economic depth. Afghanistan and the international community, in particular the United States, should acknowledge Pakistan's justifiable security concerns in the country and take proactive measures to restrain Indian activity there. Following are some recommendations.

- i. The Durand Line dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan should be settled diplomatically and politically because it has the potential to exacerbate tensions between the two countries at any time.
- ii. By managing and opening all border crossings with Afghanistan, Pakistan should work to establish economic ties with that country. Through Afghanistan, Pakistan has access to the natural resources of the states in Central Asia.
- iii. Pakistan should diversify its relations with other ethnic groups in Afghanistan to have wide spread public good will at the gross root level.
- iv. Significant action must be taken by Pakistan and Afghanistan to reduce the influence of India in their bilateral relations.

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