

## Pakistan's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan: Post NATO Drawdown

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### Abstract

*Pak-Afghan relations went sour in current time due to the rising negative perception and trust deficit between the two countries. The Afghan authorities held Pakistan responsible for the security deterioration of their country irrespective of the fact that Pakistan has persistently been paying 'heavy price' for the Afghan peace and offered huge sacrifices for the stability and security of Afghanistan. Currently the relations between the two countries is estranged if not totally broken, however, a peaceful, prosper and friendly Afghanistan is Pakistan's strategic priority and a matter of national interest. This paper aims at exploring and analyzing the strategic interests of Pakistan, its role and involvement in Afghanistan for the realization of its national interests. This research mainly focuses on Pakistan's previous role and present position in the light of its vital interests. The study also seeks to evaluate the required conditions for the revival of bilateral relationship and bringing peace and security in the region.*

**Keywords:** Strategic interests, border Security, Indian Presence in Afghanistan, trust deficit

### Introduction

A sovereign, stable, and independent Afghanistan capable of sustaining its own statehood is in the best interests of the whole region in general and of Pakistan in particular. Afghanistan is at war since three decades and has remained a victim of foreign invasions, civil wars, and competing interests of super powers, regional actors, and national warring heads. A troubled Afghanistan has always created problems for Pakistan's security, affected its vital national interests, and deteriorated the country's image at international level. In fact, it is Pakistan's great attachment to the ideology of Islam that has driven its foreign policy towards Muslim unity and solidarity. Therefore intimate and amiable relations with the Islamic world, especially with the neighboring Islamic countries remained a cornerstone of Pakistan foreign policy. A safe, secure and friendly

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Afghanistan has always remained in Pakistan's interests. Pakistan wants close bilateral relations with Afghanistan in order to secure and enhance its interests.

Pakistan's role remained instrumental in Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan until now. During the Soviet-Afghan war, Pakistan played a key role in supporting the Afghan *Mujahidin* against the Soviet and with the active support of the US, ISI helped in vivifying the Afghan Taliban against Soviet during 1980s. This allowed Pakistan to avoid the establishment of a pro-Indian regime in Kabul, to resist the Soviet pressure and to exert influence over the Pashtun-dominated areas in Afghanistan (Siddique, 2011). Pakistan's role was also crucial in reconciliation among *Mujahidin* groups, in the rise of Taliban and in supporting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In the eve of 9/11, Pakistan shifted its policy from pro-Taliban to pro-US and actively supported the US efforts against the Al-Qaeda and Taliban. Pakistan not only played a frontline state role in the US led war against Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan but also remained active in capturing Al-Qaeda members inside the country and dealing with the internal insurgency, which grew in strength after Pakistan's alliance with the US.

Pakistan wants peaceful resolution of the decade long Afghan war because due to the conjoined nature of border between the two countries and the transformative effects of Afghan war on the peace and security of Pakistan. Since 2001, Pakistan has played an active role in defeating, dismantling, and eliminating terrorism and extremism and has suffered huge losses in human, economic, and political terms. Although, Pakistan has lost more in the war in Afghanistan but it will gain most from a permanent peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan will gain more benefits from the end of Afghan war than any other regional or international actor will. This conviction is the base of Pakistan's commitment of providing unequivocal support to the Afghan peace and stability.

Pakistan is actively supporting an Afghan led and Afghan owned peace and reconciliation process and has offered its help in efforts aiming at reconciling the insurgents in order to bring peace and stability not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan and in the South Asian region. However, the regime in Kabul is hostile towards Pakistan, accuses it, and

holds it responsible for the Afghan trouble at large. This constitutes another important factor for Pakistan's involvement and participation in the peace process in Afghanistan. Although for years, Pakistan has followed intrusive policies in Afghanistan but since the US invasion of Afghanistan it has gradually moderated its approach towards Afghanistan. Now Pakistan wants to achieve an inclusive process of reconciliation in Afghanistan, which includes the Taliban as pivotal negotiating parties that would lead to an arrangement of power sharing in Afghanistan (Yusuf, 2013).

Pakistan's President Mamnoon Hussain while addressing High Education Commission expressed the confidence that both Pakistan and Afghanistan share close religious, historic and cultural ties and will work together for the resolution of regional problems. He said that Pakistan want to involve in the process of Afghan development and prosperity and insisted that the Afghan authorities should reject the forces that try to create misperception mistrust between the two countries (Hussain, 2017). The Afghan civil war and internal crisis will further deteriorate the security situation in Pakistan. Recently Pakistan has three main interests in Afghanistan. First, Pakistan wants a friendly government in Kabul that will give Pakistan the potential to achieve the strategic depth (Rubin & Siddique, 2006). Secondly, Pakistan wants the prevention of pro-Indian regime in Kabul, because friendly Indian government in Afghanistan will allow encirclement of Pakistan by its enemies (Lieven, 2002). Finally, controversies over the Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan are a source of concern for Pakistan which Pakistan wants to resolve or keep it silent through a friendly government in Kabul. These interests will give Pakistan upper hand in resolving the conflicts among the Afghan warring heads and in its dealing with India. Pakistan will strive for maximum gain in any Afghan peace settlement and will try to reduce Indian role in Afghanistan and close Indian consulates in Qandahar and Jalalabad, to play active role in negotiating peace between Taliban and Afghan government and to make the international community recognize Pakistan's role as pivotal among other neighbors (Shafqat & Haque, 2011).

### **Conceptual Analysis of Strategic Depth**

Ahmet Davutoglu, a Turkish academician in his book ‘Strategic Depth’, developed the concept of strategic depth about Turkey. According to him, the geographic location and tremendous history of Turkey situate it to possess strategic depth. Turkey is a central power therefore its role should not be limited to regional context. It should aspire to play a key role in other regions as well that could provide it strategic significance in the world (Grigoriadis, 2010). Further he argues that Turkey’s policy should be a proactive commensurate to its geographic and historic depth and should capitalize on its potential soft power for achieving this aim. The Turkey’s policy should be based on its cultural and historic links, regional economic cooperation and conflict resolution in order to block the invasion of great powers, to increase its influence in all the regions to which it belong, and to claim a strategic role in the world (*Ibid*).

Most countries of the world followed the policy of strategic depth in order to ensure their national interests and increase their influence. Pakistan initiated the strategic depth policy after the debacle of East Pakistan in December 1971. The basic aim of Pakistan’s strategic depth is to ensure its national interests in the regional context. The US and the Afghan government accused Pakistan’s Intelligence Agency of using the Haqqani network and other insurgent groups in Afghanistan in order to gain strategic depth that is to have a Pashtun dominated friendly regime in Afghanistan as an insurance policy in its rivalry with India (Qazi, 2011). Pakistan does not want to exclude India entirely from Afghanistan rather it wants to confine Indian presence to the development projects only and to avoid the Afghan context to be used by India against Pakistan (Yusuf et al, 2011). In fact, Pakistan wants to prevent the establishment of an antagonist regime in Afghanistan and wants to play key role not only in the discussions about resolving the conflict and bringing peace and stability, but also to curtail Indian growing influence in the country.

Pakistan wants to advance its policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan, but it does not mean that Pakistan wants to control Afghanistan. Ejaz Haider, a military journalist of

Pakistan argued that the concept of “strategic depth is better used to describe achieving security through improving relationships with the governments of neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India” (Haider, 2011). According to Gen Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, Pakistan’s policy of strategic depth regarding Afghanistan aims at establishing “peaceful, friendly, and stable relationship with Afghanistan” (Dawn, 2013). Pakistan and Afghanistan are the Islamic republic states and share common values, traditions, culture and civilization. Both countries are the neighboring countries and destined to enjoy good friendly and brotherly relations.

Pakistan’s policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan is based on the aim to promote peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and to establish with it friendly and brotherly relations by using ethnic, cultural, historical, linguistic and religious links, by promoting mutual economic cooperation and through the positive and constructive use of its ties with Haqqani, Taliban and other insurgent groups. The effective use of this policy of strategic depth will benefit both countries equally. Pakistan will be benefited from a stable friendly regime in Kabul as it will improve Pakistan’s security, ensure a secure western border and will get rid of its fear of being encirclement on two fronts. Afghanistan will avail permanent peace and stability, economic prosperity and human safety. Therefore, the aim of Pakistan’s policy of strategic depth is not to control Afghanistan or to interfere in their internal affairs but to ensure regional peace, stability, and prosperity.

### **Pakistan’s Interests and Strategic Priorities in Afghanistan**

Pakistan came into being on the basis of Islamic ideology and ordained to represent Islamic solidarity among Muslim Ummah. Cordial relation with the Muslim world remained a principal feature of Pakistan’s foreign policy since its establishment (Durani & Khan, n.a). In case of Afghanistan, Pakistan is eager to establish close friendly ties with it but it is deplorable fact of history that since its creation Afghanistan has maintained an antagonistic attitude towards Pakistan. Afghanistan was the only country that opposed Pakistan’s entrance into the United Nation organization. Moreover when

Pakistan was struggling for its survival Afghanistan joined hand with India in order to further increase Pakistan's insecurity (*Ibid*).

In the eve of Soviet military action against Afghanistan in December 1979, Pakistan drastically changed its Afghan policy and became actively involved in Afghanistan. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan frightened Pakistan as the Soviet forces were close to Khyber Pass, which had remained a gateway for the invasion of the region throughout the history. Pakistan's strategic calculation of the move created anxiety among Zia's top military brand. At the time of invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet, Iran was passing through Islamic revolution and the revolutionists had overthrown the Shah's Government in Iran. Pakistan was also facing crisis because of Baluchistan insurgency. Nonetheless, the advocates of the warm-water theory predicted that Pakistan would be the terminal stop of the Soviet aggression, which created fear in Pakistan (Shahed, 2008).

George Crile (2003) argue that Pakistan entered into the Soviet-Afghan war because at that time it had initiated its nuclear program and was building an 'Islamic bomb' therefore it needed the US 'indifference if not compliance'. Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haq agreed to work with the US against Soviet in exchange for economic and military aid and for keeping the nuclear issue in cold storage (Crile, 2003). The US also wanted the containment of the communist expansion because it perceived the Soviet military aggression as a geo-strategic threat to Pakistan's security and to US interests in the Persian Gulf. The most important motivating factor for the US involvement in Soviet-Afghan war was the ideological struggle between the US and Soviet Union during Cold War era. Therefore, the US and western countries wanted to contain the Soviet communist expansionism. Moreover, the US had lost the Vietnam War and it wanted to take revenge for the defeat of Vietnam War from Soviet Union. According to one of the US official, US wanted to "[give] the U.S.S.R. its Vietnam War" ( Blum & Gibbs, 2000). Therefore, some shared threat perceptions and mutual necessities brought both Pakistan and the US closer towards each other in the Afghan game.

Pakistan allowed its territory to be used against the communist expansion by the US. Pakistan also became a key route for supply of equipment, arms, and ammunition to the Afghan *Mujahidin*. During the Soviet-Afghan war, Pakistan assumed the role of a frontline state, emerged as a key player in the Afghan war against the Soviet and become a principle channel for assisting the Afghan *Mujahidin* (Hilali, 2002) Pakistan's role was also instrumental in drawing the world attention to the cause of Afghan *Mujahidin*. Pakistan accommodated some 3.2 million Afghan refugees, provided them aid and facilities and allowed their unrestricted movement throughout the country (Weinbaum, 1991). In the words of Weinbaum,

“Without Pakistan, there could have been no effective Afghan resistance movement and little prospect for its success against the Soviets. The sanctuary of Pakistan allowed the mujahidin (holy warriors) to organize military operations, and the Islamabad government became a conduit for multinational arms deliveries to those fighting in Afghanistan” (*Ibid*).

The refugee groups were offered shelter and ways and means by Pakistan to continue their struggle against the Soviet. Pakistani-based refugees were organized as an alliance known as ‘The Peshawar-Based Seven or Peshawar Seven’. This alliance was composed of the influential refugee groups based in Pakistan and represented all factions of the Afghan society. It included feudal class, religious leaders, and ex-bureaucrats, members of People Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), nationalist groups, and members of the Afghan army. Pakistani authorities choose this alliance to work as a political nucleus of resistance. The alliance was controlled by ISI and was actively used for the prosecution of the Afghan war (Marwat, 2011)

The motivating factors behind Pakistan's active support to the Afghan *Mujahidin* against the Soviet were the domestic and geostrategic imperatives that led Pakistan to pursue many objectives during the Soviet-Afghan war. These objectives included the removal of Soviet Union from Afghanistan because Pakistan was concerned that the Soviet would support separatist elements in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Secondly, Pakistan needed economic and military aid and assistance from the US and international

community. Thirdly, Pakistan wanted to gain international support for the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq and to prolong his reign. Fourthly, Pakistan wanted to project the country's image as the defender of Islam against communism. Fifthly, Pakistan wanted to establish a friendly government in Kabul and to get Afghanistan's recognition of the Durand Line as an international border (Weinbaum, 1991). At the end of the Soviet-Afghan war, Pakistan's ISI was praised internationally for its abilities and capabilities for making Afghanistan a bleeding wound for Soviet and break dawning a superpower Soviet Union.

The war in Afghanistan did not end and the Afghan peace and stability remained a distant dream even after the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The *Mujahidin* groups who earned a prestigious position among the Afghan masses and who were better equipped with weapons that were provided to them during the course of war become actively involved in mutual fighting. The most motivating factor for Afghan *Jihad* was the Islamic philosophy, but later on, this religious indoctrination led to the rise of fundamentalism and extremism (Fuller, 1991). Pakistan not only played its role in the Soviet-Afghan war but also assumed a leading role in negotiation leading to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The Soviet-backed government of Najibullah ended with the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. The UN Secretary General put forward his five-point plan for peace in Afghanistan in May 1991, which was designed to prepare the groundwork for negotiating a political settlement of the Afghan conflict, holding an election, and ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Pakistan supported the UN plan although there were some internal disagreements within Pakistan over the issue and within the *Mujahidin* factions as well but Pakistan continued to support the UN plan regarding the resolution of the Afghan conflict and at last, Pakistan succeeded in its efforts towards establishing a political government in Kabul (Marwat, 2011). Pakistan successfully brought the *Mujahidin* to negotiating table and got signed the Peshawar Accord on April 24, 1992. Under the Peshawar Accord, *Mujahidin* government was established in a fragmented Afghanistan (*Ibid*).



However, the Peshawar Accord could not bring an end to the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan's efforts for the peace and reconciliation processes failed to achieve the desired results. Therefore, Pakistani authorities for the resolution of the Afghan conflict and ensuring the Afghan stability made another attempt and along with the collaboration of Saudi Arabia and Iran, successfully brought the Afghan *Mujahidin* to the negotiating table. As a result, the Islamabad Accord, a plan for power sharing among *Mujahidin* was signed on March 7, 1993 (*Ibid*). The Islamabad Accord also failed to bring stability in the war-torn Afghanistan and the chaos and turmoil continued until 1996 when Taliban established Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan.

During the 1990s, Pakistan's Afghan policy remained the same as it was in the 1980s but the focus was now on India. Pakistan's Afghan policy during the Soviet-Afghan war was led by Pakistan's ISI. The success of *jihad* against Soviet Union encouraged the ISI to expand the experiment against India (Sial, 2013). Pakistan extended active support to the Taliban regime in Kabul. By supporting the Taliban, Pakistan's political and military leadership wanted to further the policy of strategic depth –that is to have a Pashtun-dominated, friendly government in Afghanistan, to deny India's political and military influence in the country and to suppress the Pashtunistan issue. Accordingly, the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto provided full logistical, political, and military support to the Taliban regime (Qazi, 2011).

Before the US attack on Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, Pakistan did its best to avoid the war and resolve the issue through negotiations. For this purpose, Pakistan helped in mediating between the US and the Taliban regime and arranged a meeting between the CIA head in Islamabad Robert Grenier and the Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad (Tenet, 2007). In September 2001, Grenier held a secret meeting with Mullah Akhtar Osmani, the Taliban leader after Mullah Omar. The meeting took place in Quetta in a five-star hotel (*Ibid*). Mullah Akhtar was told about the US intention regarding the invasion of Afghanistan and was warned to do something to avoid the invasion. Grenier offered a deal with the Taliban and said that the US forces would secretly snatch Osama

and assured him that “it doesn’t get any simpler. You just give us what we need to do it. Step aside; the man disappears. You could claim complete ignorance” (Bergen, 2012). In response to the offer, Mullah Akhtar said that he would discuss the matter with Mullah Omar. Then in a second meeting between the two that was held on October 2, 2001, in Quetta Grenier presented another plan before Mullah Akhtar but the talks ended in failure (*Ibid*).

On September 17, 2001, Pakistan’s Lt. Gen. Mahmood Ahmad with a delegation of six persons visited Afghanistan. In the meeting between Mahmood and Mullah Omar that was held in Kandahar, Mahmood tried to persuade Mullah Omar to handover Osama to the US and avoid war but such effort did not bear any fruit and the Taliban remained stuck to their stand. On September 28 of the same year, Mahmood Ahmed again visited Afghanistan with ten religious leaders and met with the Taliban leaders. In a meeting, Mahmood tried to convince Omar to extradite Osama bin Laden to the US otherwise face the US attacks. This time too Mullah Omar refused to do so (Matt and Paul, n.d.).

### **Pakistan’s U-Turn in Afghan Policy**

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed the security scenario of the whole world in general and of South Asia in particular. Pakistan was between the ‘devil and the deep sea’ as there was no choice for Pakistan but to join the international coalition against terrorism. The US Deputy of State Richard Armitage in a meeting with Pakistan’s ISI director Mahmood Ahmed held in Washington on September 12, 2001, gave an ultimatum to Pakistan to extend complete support to the US against Al-Qaeda and Taliban “or be prepared to live in the Stone Age” (Matt and Paul, n.d.). Moreover, at that time, Pakistan was internationally isolated because of military rule and the nuclear issue. Moreover, the fluctuating economy, political instability, social disorder, and institutional incapacity were the daunting tasks before the military regime of Musharraf (Cohen, 2004). Therefore, Pakistan under the US pressure and due to daunting needs of the country brought a strategic shift in its Afghan Policy and extended full support to the US in its war against Al-Qaeda and Taliban. Pakistan provided its air bases, intelligence and

supply routes to the US (Musharraf, 2006). Moreover, the regime of President Musharraf lacked legitimacy both within the country and at international front, so the active involvement in the US war on terror provided an opportunity to President Musharraf to legitimize his rule, stay for long on the top of the country's political setup and to gain international support. Thus, the successful coercive diplomacy of the US, the need for safeguarding vital interests in Afghanistan, the future terms of relations with Afghanistan and the domestic needs were the instrumental factors in shaping Pakistan's policies towards Afghanistan.

The US military attacks expelled the Taliban from power and within few weeks, the US occupied the whole country. After the collapse of the Taliban regime, UN arranged a meeting of selected tribal chief in Bonn, Germany in order to establish an interim government in Afghanistan. At the Bonn conference on December 2001, the Kabul government was established under Hamid Karzai. Pakistan extended full political, economic, and moral support to the new government of president Karzai (Durani & Khan, 2009). The Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited Pakistan in February 2002, which was the beginning of renewed bilateral relations and a normalcy between the two countries. The government of Karzai faces many problems regarding rebuilding and establishing peace and stability. Pakistan is actively assisting the Afghan government in its task of rehabilitation and reconstruction and ensuring peace in the country. Pakistan has provided aid for rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan and has deployed a huge number of forces along the Pak-Afghan border for countering the threats of terrorism and ensuring Afghan peace and stability (Mazhar & Goraya, 2009). Pakistan has provided economic aid and extended its help and support in various projects aimed at rebuilding the war-torn country.

### **Pakistan's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan**

Pakistan wants a secured and peaceful neighborhood in order to promote the goal of economic growth and social prosperity in the region. The chaotic situation in Afghanistan has deeply influenced the security and stability of the region. Pakistan is taking a keen

interest in Afghan peace and has offered its sincere efforts for promoting peace. Pakistan and Afghanistan bind together in historical, ethnic, and cultural ties. Following are the core interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan.

The growing Indian influence in Afghanistan is the foremost concern of Pakistan because India is its traditional rival and a perceived enemy from the very beginning (Narayanan, 2010, 3-4). It is confirmed by the US Director of National Intelligence in February 2010 that militant groups are considered by Pakistan as an important part of its strategy to counter India's economic and military advantages in Afghanistan (Blair, 2010). There are strong beliefs on the part of Pakistan that Indian presence in Afghanistan is not confined to development and reconstruction in Afghanistan and the actual motive behind Indian presence in Afghanistan is to create instability inside Pakistan (Sial, 2013). India's huge investment in the Afghan reconstruction increases its influence and soft image among the Afghan people. Moreover, its consulates near Pakistan's western border, its involvement in Baluchistan and FATA disturbance, and its growing strategic space in Afghanistan affect Pakistan's interest. Thus, Pakistan is struggling for minimizing Indian influence. Pakistan's ISI believes that the Islamic militant such as Taliban will prove useful in maintaining regional strength and strategic depth in Afghanistan against India and the use of these strategic proxies will be helpful to ward off the perceived Indian threats (Waldman, 2010). In the words of Rubin and Siddique "Pakistan sought to support a client regime in Afghanistan that was supposed to provide a space for the retreat and recuperation of the Pakistani military in case of a confrontation with India"(Rubin & Siddique, 2006).

A friendly and secure western border has always been remaining Pakistan's utmost desire. Pakistan wants a friendly government in Afghanistan that will secure Pakistan's western border (Sial, 2011). Since independence, the ultimate objective of Pakistan foreign policy was to establish friendly relations with Afghanistan and to prevent the possibility of any re-approachment between Afghanistan and India (Budihas, 2011). However, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan with the help of the US

supported the Afghan *Mujahidin* (Taliban) against the Soviet forces and consequently the Soviet withdrew its forces from Afghanistan. When the Afghan *Mujahidin* established a pure Islamic government in Kabul in 1996, Pakistan was among those who immediately recognized the Taliban government in Afghanistan. This was the first time in history that there was Pakistan's friendly government in Kabul.

Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan include a stable pro-Pakistani government in Kabul in order to secure its national interests. Moreover, Pakistan attaches great importance to the Islamic ideology and therefore wants to establish friendly relations with Islamic countries. Furthermore, due to an existential threat from India, Pakistan's foreign policy from the very beginning remained friendly toward all countries of the world, especially with the Muslim world and with the neighboring countries. Pakistan wants good friendly relations with Afghanistan in order to escape from being sandwiched from both east and west (Durani & Khan, 2009).

Afghanistan needs to use Pakistan's overland routes because it is a landlocked country and depends upon Pakistan for its access to the international markets. It needs Pakistan overland route to reach the Karachi seaport and the Arabian Sea to conduct its trade with India and other countries of the world. Pakistan also needs Afghanistan to expand trade with Central Asian countries via Afghanistan. According to Rahimullah Yousafzai,

“Pakistan continues to be the largest trading partner of Afghanistan and is a third largest export market for Pakistani goods after US and China. Due to the proximity with Afghanistan and familiarity of its products used by the Afghans, Pakistan enjoys an edge over countries competing for the Afghan market” (Yusufzai, 2011).

Economic development and stability of both countries need availing the economic opportunities and close collaboration in trade and economic on urgent basis. Pakistan's constructive economic role can ensure durable peace in the region and as an energy corridor; Pakistan will promote peace, stability, and interdependence among regional countries, which will also help to exploit its industrial potentials (Durani & Khan, 2009).

Peace in Afghanistan will also bring peace inside Pakistan because the Afghan war has a direct impact on Pakistan. Peace in Afghanistan will also provide an opportunity to Pakistan to deal effectively with home insurgency, which is threatening the security of Pakistan. The Afghan situation has always affected Pakistan, and peace, stability and security in both countries is essential for the peace of the whole region (*Ibid*).

### **Pak-Afghan Controversial Issues**

Pak-Afghan relations remained strained for the last six decades due to Durand line, *Pashtunistan* issue, interference in one another internal affairs and Indian factor. These issues have kept both countries distant from each other and fueled mutual distrust and antipathy.

Durand Line, a 2,400-kilometer international border has remained a cause of strain relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Afghan people and governments doubt the legality of the Durand line because of misunderstanding of facts and non-availability of proper information (Durani & Khan, 2009). Afghanistan does not accept the legal status of Durand line, argue that it is a colonial legacy, and artificially divide the Pashtuns on both sides of the border and want the unification of Pashtun tribes. The Kabul administration want the Pashtun areas to join Afghanistan or create their own independent country with the name of Pashtunistan but the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan are not to be included in it (Aziz, 2007). Durand Line is a porous border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and there are cross-border activities and movement on daily basis. The strong ties between Pashtun, living on both sides of the border has diluted the territorial division and Durand agreement.

The Pashtunistan issue also constitutes a major hurdle in resolving the Afghan conflict because the unresolved problem of Pashtunistan has remained an important factor in Pakistan's strategic calculation. Thus in order to suppress the Pashtunistan issue, Islamabad supports the domination of Afghanistan by the Muslims radicals. Pakistan's reluctance to a broad base settlement of the Afghan conflict and its favor for the Taliban or radical Muslims in Afghanistan is due to the controversy over Pashtunistan (Tomsen,

n.d.). According to Waldman, one of the causes of Pakistan's support to the insurgency in Afghanistan is Pakistan's aspiration for influence in the Pashtun areas near Pakistani border, its desire to subdue the Pashtunistan issue and to suppress the claims of the Afghans over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA (Waldman, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan attaches great importance to its relations with Afghanistan. In post-9/11 scenario, there is an urgent need for cordial relations between the two countries in order to meet the challenges that they face due to the war and instability. Pakistan is an important neighboring country and has great influence for maintaining peace in Afghanistan. Close bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan will provide an opportunity to both the countries to deal effectively with the insurgencies and ensuring security. It will also enhance trust and confidences among the people of both countries that will further strengthen economic cooperation and regional stability. Despite Pakistan's sufferings due to Afghan war Afghanistan's attitude become more and more antagonistic. Presently there is lack of sincere efforts on the part of both countries to revive the relations and overcome the trust deficit. Reestablishing trust and confidence will be possible only when both countries respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity and sincerely work for peace and security.

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