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# Evolution of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and its identity

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**Abstract:** This article describes the history and evolution of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, analysis of political processes and development trends. Also, it is focused on the analysis of the future perspective of the relations based on the foreign political activities of the two countries, the problems in their mutual relations, the priority directions of cooperation and the happening events.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, interstate relations, state independence, state borders, national interest, the idea of Pashtunistan, the Pashtun National Assembly, the collapse of the USSR, NATO, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Taliban government.

**Introduction:** Currently, the development trend of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is complex and unstable. It should be noted that most of the problems that have arisen historically in the formation of relations between the two states and that continue to negatively affect interstate relations to this day are directly related to the mutual border and border regions of these states.

Although relations between the two countries were established with the independence of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947, historically formed problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to have a negative impact on the development of interstate relations.

At the heart of the problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan lie historical factors and conditions that arose during the colonial period. The most important of these was the division of Afghan (Pashtun) territory into two parts, one belonging to Kabul (the Kingdom of Afghanistan) and the other to British India. The formation of Pakistan, which included the eastern Pashtun lands, led to problems in relations.

In the study of relations between the two countries, based on the analysis of historical and political

processes, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were conditionally divided into seven main stages. They are as follows:

**The first phase** covers the 1940s and 1950s. During this period, in the early years of independence, which was achieved with the partition of British India, conflicts erupted between the Pakistani and Afghan governments in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (the former North-West Frontier Province). The Afghan government, refusing to recognize Islamabad's sovereignty over these territories, demanded that the Pashtuns living in Pakistan be granted the right to self-determination and the creation of an independent state.

Since the Free Tribes Territory, where Afghan tribes lived, had been incorporated into the newly formed Pakistan, Afghanistan appealed to Pakistani officials for a negotiated settlement. However, Pakistan ignored Afghanistan's appeal and remained hostile towards Afghanistan. As early as 1947, a number of Afghan tribes launched an uprising against the new Pakistani government. In July 1949, the Afghan parliament discussed the issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan and expressed its support for the Afghan tribes within Pakistan [1]. The Afghan parliament also declared that it would not recognize the Durand Line as a border between the two states.

In August 1949, a meeting of the leaders of the Afghan tribes living in Pakistan was held and the establishment of an independent state of "Pashtunistan" was declared. The Pashtun National Assembly was elected and its flag was approved. In 1950, Pakistan threatened to launch an armed attack on Afghanistan. The Afghan government's request for help from the United States to resolve this conflict also yielded no results.

**The second phase** covers the years 1950-1970. During these years, Pakistan largely overcame its initial difficulties and significantly strengthened its economic and military capabilities. Its main focus was on its regional neighbor and rival India, which was taking advantage of its ties with Afghanistan.

On September 30, 1950, Pakistani officials accused Afghan forces of invading areas near the Baghra Pass. The Afghan government denied this, saying that they were tribesmen who supported "Pashtunistan". The then Afghan king Zahir Shah had expressed his friendly attitude towards Pakistan in 1952. However, he had emphasized that the issue of "Pashtunistan" could not be ignored. The Pakistan-US military agreement signed in 1954 had a negative impact on Afghanistan and India. This led to the policy of bringing Afghanistan closer to the Soviet Union [2].

The Afghan government recognized the unification of

the West Pakistani provinces, and on March 30, 1955, Afghan protesters attacked the Pakistani embassy and consulates in Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad. Pakistan responded by closing its border and imposing economic pressure. Diplomatic relations were restored in September of that year. In an effort to resolve the Pashtun issue and restore ties, Iskander Mirza's visit to Kabul in 1956, and King Zahir Shah's visit to Pakistan in 1958, restored transit opportunities on the Afghan trade route. One of Pakistan's main goals was to appease the Afghan Pashtuns and restore Afghan transit trade. [3] Field commander Muhammad Ayub Khan met with the then Afghan Foreign Minister Sardar Naeem to try to resolve the issue peacefully. However, the failure of the Ayub-Naeem talks in 1960 further worsened relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Following Daoud's ouster, diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were established in May 1963, mediated by the Shah of Iran. Relations improved with the visits of Pakistani President Ayub Khan to Kabul in 1964-1966. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, there was a tendency for Afghan-Pakistani relations to warm up [4].

**The third stage** covers the first quarter of 1970. In the early 1970s, Afghanistan experienced a deep crisis in the state system, and as a result of the events of 1971, Pakistan lost its eastern province and became an independent state of Bangladesh. Afghanistan became an intermediate geopolitical space between the Arab states, Iran, Pakistan, and the USSR. Since the mid-1970s, the role of the Islamic factor in regional politics has increased, which led to Pakistan's increasing influence in the Islamic world and the use of Islamists as a force against Kabul in its relations with Afghanistan. Afghanistan tried to promote separatism, which covered the western (Baluchistan) and northwestern (Pashtun) provinces of Pakistan, but, based on the demands of Iran and the United States, agreed to negotiate with Pakistan [5].

**The fourth stage** covers the period from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. This period is considered the period of the most acute confrontation between the two neighboring states. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, which came to power in Kabul, pursued a policy that was ideologically the opposite of that of Islamabad.

With the mediation of Iran and Turkey, there were some signs of easing in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In June 1976, Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto paid an official visit to Kabul. During the negotiations, it was agreed to resolve the existing problems in the future. In August 1976, Muhammad Dawood paid an official visit to Pakistan. During the

meeting, the parties stated that they would adhere to the issues agreed upon in Kabul. In June 1977, Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Afghanistan again, and Muhammad Dawood visited Pakistan in March 1978 [6]. Following the increase in state visits by officials from both countries, a trend of improvement can be seen in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, relations between the two countries changed dramatically. This led to the United States and Saudi Arabia supporting the Afghan insurgency. Pakistan became a major supplier of American weapons, and Saudi Arabia provided financial assistance to ethnic groups fighting against the Soviet Union. Islamabad's war with the Afghan government in Kabul and the formation of Islamic mujahideen on Pakistani soil were successful after the collapse of the USSR.

**The fifth stage** in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations covers the decade from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. By this time, official Islamabad began to make serious efforts to gain leadership in the region through Kabul, and sought to use any favorable conditions for this. In the early 1990s, the civil war in Afghanistan for Pakistan destroyed all the positive aspects of its geopolitical situation. Pakistan used all its opportunities as a bulwark against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan by Western countries. That is, the fact that the Pakistani army was supplied with economic and modern military equipment and supported it under the pretext of supporting the Afghan Mujahideen became an important factor in Pakistan's development. Also, the fact that the distribution of military and material assistance to the Mujahideen and millions of Afghan refugees was under the control of Islamabad became a major source of income for Pakistan. Due to its status as a strategic ally of the United States during the war in Afghanistan, Pakistan equalized its position and military power in the region with its arch-enemy India [7].

In late 1996, the Taliban established the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and established close ties with neighboring Pakistan. However, relations began to deteriorate after the Taliban refused to support the Durand Agreement, despite diplomatic pressure from Islamabad. When the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was overthrown and a new Afghan government was formed, President Hamid Karzai began to repeat the Taliban's previous statement and did not recognize this border. Islamabad resolved the border issue along the Durand Line in a way that was acceptable to it and ultimately prevented the idea of an independent Pashtunistan from being realized [7].

**The sixth stage** began with the elimination of the

Taliban in Afghanistan and covers the period up to the 2014 presidential elections in Afghanistan. Pakistan's influence on the neighboring country weakened significantly during this period. The main influence at this stage was exercised by the United States and its NATO allies. As a result of the emergence of local Taliban militants on its territory, Pakistan found itself in a crisis situation and lost its ability to exert direct political influence on Afghanistan. It began to indirectly influence the political environment in Afghanistan by providing shelter and assistance to the Afghan Taliban and their allies. After 2001, Pakistan's importance became extremely important from a strategic logistical point of view in the context of the deployment of international coalition forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan's role as a transit area for goods imported into Afghanistan was important.

The celebration of "Pashtunistan Day" as a national holiday on August 31, 2003 made the Afghanistan-Pakistan border a primary factor in the relations between the two sides. This year, armed clashes took place between the security forces of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the border areas. The situation even reached the point of searching the Pakistani embassy in Kabul [8].

It was during this period that we could observe the development and rapprochement of interstate relations. In particular, as a result of the relations between the two states, the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighborliness was signed in 2002, the Agreement on Transit Traffic between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2005, the Agreement on the Establishment of a Trilateral Joint Working Group on Strengthening Mutual Confidence between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2007, and the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

**The seventh stage** of interstate relations covers the period from 2014 to 2021, when the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was overthrown and the Islamic State of Afghanistan was declared by the Taliban.

After Ashraf Ghani was elected as president of Afghanistan in 2014, bilateral relations improved. In particular, Ashraf Ghani made his first foreign trip as Afghan president to China, and during the trip, he asked Beijing to mediate in the reconciliation process with Pakistan. As a result, several meetings were held between the foreign ministers of China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan on the normalization of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the talks, the normalization of bilateral relations, political, economic, defense, intelligence, and refugee issues were

discussed.

Also, at this stage, the number of official state visits of the heads of state has increased, normalization of bilateral relations, peace and reconciliation, fight against terrorism, return of Afghan refugees, border problem, bilateral trade and further development of regional relations were the main focus of negotiations during the meetings.

The "Afghanistan-Pakistan Peace and Reconciliation Action Plan [9]," signed during the visit of former Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Abbas to Kabul on April 6, 2018, included norms such as both countries taking effective measures against elements that threaten national security, refraining from using their territories against third countries, groups, networks, individuals, and state elements, and committing to combat them, not violating each other's airspace usage rules, and avoiding public accusations of each other.

Another of Islamabad's efforts at this stage is to organize negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban movement.

Following the decision of the US and its allies to completely withdraw their military forces from Afghanistan without any conditions, the Taliban movement succeeded in capturing Kabul on August 15, 2021, as a result of several months of fighting and clashes.

Experts say that with the overthrow of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the proclamation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, relations between the two countries will continue in a new format.

Based on this, the positive conduct of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan is an objective necessity for ensuring and maintaining security not only in the Middle East, but also in South and Central Asia. From this point of view, it is of the utmost importance to study the events taking place in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which are neighbors of the Central Asian countries, and to analyze their future prospects.

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