

THE IMPACT OF AFGHANISTAN GEO-POLITICAL LOCATION ON ITS RELATION WITH PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand the impact on Afghanistan geopolitical position in relations with Pakistan. The study explore how a country's geopolitical location effects its relation with the neighbors and region. Qualitative research method was used for research methodology. Besides using primary data 20 interviews were conducted online with political analyst, diplomats and university professors. In the result we understand that several ups and downs happen in Pak Afghan relations. Some of these ops and downs was based on Afghanistan geopolitical location. India influence in Afghanistan for its national interests, the issue of Durand line which is denied by Afghan governors in the course of history as formal border, the issue of Pashtunistan arise by the people living across Durand lead which lead to nationalist movement and treating Pakistan security, security issues in border areas, refugees cases are the most influential subject effect Pak- Afghan relation in the course of history.

Keywords: Geography, foreign policy, opportunities, challenges, neighborhood

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan's geopolitical location in Central Asia, bordered in the east and west and south west by Pakistan, in the west by Iran, in the north with China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, has made it a focal point of geopolitical, economic, and security dynamics in the region. This study aims to explore how Afghanistan's geopolitical position influences its relationships with Pakistan (Iqra, 2020).

Geopolitical location has a significant role in countries domestic and foreign policies and in establishing its relations with other countries. From one hand Afghanistan is a landlocked country and have no access to the free waters. It make it impossible for Afghanistan to benefit all the advantages that countries with access to water have (Martín, 2011 apr). This limitations enforced Afghanistan to be reliant on neighboring countries for fulfilling desires that the society have in economic, political and social wellbeing. The nearest way for accessing

Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean is passing Pakistan and Iran. This way always trouble the inter-state relations among these three countries. From the other hand the countries located in the north of Afghanistan is facing the same issue. These countries need Afghanistan for accessing free water. Mentioning these show that the geopolitical location is an important part while shaping domestic and foreign policies (Sakandari, 2020).

Afghanistan, due to its strategic location between the South Asia, and Central Asia, has always faced difficulties in its relations with the colonial powers and, in particular, with its neighboring countries. The reason for this is that certain strategic points within Afghanistan's geographical location have turned out to be problematic for the country, such as natural resources, geographical location, and favorable geographical shape, etc. Moreover, neighboring countries exploit Afghanistan's geographical

position to achieve their own interests (Yar, 2018). Furthermore, the challenges related to Afghanistan's geographical location, which rarely become points of discussion and conflict in relations with neighboring countries, include factors such as Afghanistan's landlocked status, mountainous terrain, border disputes with neighboring countries, the issue of migration, drug trading, terrorism, security challenges stemming from Afghanistan, fears regarding the rise of Islamist groups, and so on (Rahimi, 2016). In a research published in 2010 by the international review of the Red Cross it is mentioned that Afghanistan has been the victory of its history and geography. The soviet invasion make it a battle ground in the era of cold war and then the collapse of the soviet union turned the country to a house of competition between regional and international actors. Every actor competed with others to have an access to the face of Hindokash (Maley, 2010). In one the other research published in 2022 it is written that due to the strategic location Afghanistan have it become an aria of attraction to the regional and other super powers. The researcher mentioned that due to Afghanistan environmental condition consist of billions cub of water, natural resources and as across road for economic growth and social development mad this country to be in the front line of the strategies of regional and international countries (Amiri, 2022).

In one of the other research published in 2022, the researcher focuses on the importance of geography on a country relations with others. He emphasize that geography can bring more opportunities for a country in the field of politics, social and economic. The researcher says that for some countries its geographical location has advantages and for some other countries it has disadvantages (Shahi, 2022).

From the establishing of Pakistan in 1947, the relations with Afghanistan has gone to several apps and downs. The issue of Durand line, Pashtunistan, influence of India in Afghanistan, the issue of Kashmir and several other concerns; made this relationship problematic during 1947-2025. Despite the share interest that these two neighbor countries have, unfortunately the ties has not friendly during the last thirty years. These two countries not only has common history and culture but need each other to develop in several aspects (Razvi, 1979).

In a research it is mentioned that the first thing made this relation problematic is the idea of Pashtunistan right on the establishing of Pakistan

in 1947 (Hasan, 1976). This idea come from the people living across Durand line. They shared language, religion, cultures and so on.

Based on the information mentioned above the impact of geopolitical location cannot be ignored in country's relation with Pakistan. It has its own impact; either this impact has a positive role or negative is a subject which this article will discuss. So, this research examine that how Afghanistan geopolitical location impact on relations with Pakistan. It also proposed to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by Afghanistan due to its geographical location with relations with Pakistan.

Research methodology

A descriptive research method is used to identify and obtain the research objectives. Primary data is collected through in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted with Political analyst (from Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan), Former diplomats and university professors. However the primary data is collected through study of the existed literature in shape of books, articles, case studies and reports.

Research objectives

This research aims to describe the opportunities and challenges faced by Afghanistan due to its geographical location and its impact on Pak-Afghan relations. It also explore the importance of a country's geographical location for shaping the domestic and foreign policy.

Literature review

In this part of the study we collect the data similar to the topic of the research. Unfortunately the research on the same name and topic has not been conducted yet; but the similar topics are explored and the researchers have given a significant attention to the topics like geo-politics of Afghanistan, geo-economic of Afghanistan, strategic location of the country, county's relations with the neighbors and so on. Here we mention some of the similar research and its results conducted in different years and locations. In a study (Geopolitics of landlocked states in South Asia: a comparative analysis of Afghanistan and Nepal) conducted in July 2020 in Australia, it is mentioned that due to geographical location of south Asian landlocked countries (Bhutan, Afghanistan and Nepal) they depend on their neighbors to have trade relations with the outside world. The researcher argue that landlocked ness is a major political impediment

faced by the landlocked countries in their coastal relationship with neighbors. In the conclusion the researcher mentioned that due to this major weakness Pakistan and India continue to have control on the domestic and foreign policy of their neighbors (Stuti Bhatnagar & Zahid Shahab Ahmed, 2020).

In a research conducted in 2020 in Nangarhar Afghanistan (Geopolitical Influence of Afghanistan's Neighbors on the Country's Domestic and Foreign Policies), it is stated that the unique geographical location of Afghanistan make it a strategic bridge for central Asia, south Asia and Middle east. This geographical location made Afghanistan as a focal point for regional and global actors. This geographical location faces Afghanistan for the intervention of the regional and international actors in its domestic and foreign policy. The research finding indicate that due to Afghanistan location the neighbors influenced the domestic and foreign policy. It resulted economic and trade collaboration with china and Pakistan which resulted infrastructural development of Afghanistan (Noorani Wafa, Fayaz Gul Mazloum Yar, 2020).

In a study conducted in December 2023 named (Geo-Strategic Significance of Afghanistan: An Analysis of Indo-Pakistan Rivalry from 2014-2021), it is mentioned that due to Afghanistan strategic location it is been an era of competition for its neighbor Pakistan and south Asian country India. They mentioned that both these countries cannot tolerate each other's existence in Afghanistan. Pakistan always want to have a control over Afghanistan Mountains for their military purpose and also to defend themselves in time of war against India. They implemented and persuade the strategic depth policy over the years. India also want to marginalize Pakistan from Afghanistan. The rivalry between these two countries impact on Afghanistan domestic and foreign policy. And bring difficulties in Pak-Afghan relation from the very beginning 1947 (Zabiullah Khamosh and Matiullah Aryanpor, 2023).

The issue of Durand line

The Durand line agreement was signed by the Afghan ruler Amir Abdurrahman Khan and the British Indian envoy Henry Mortimer Durand on 12 November 1893. Basically it was the move of Britain to secure their western border from Russian intervention. Since the agreement of Durand line, the Afghan rulers and people regarded this line an unequal treaty imposed by a

powerful state on a weak neighbour. Fraser Tylor regarded this line in his own words 'a concert symbol of compromise, the manifestation of a policy, which was not carried to its logical conclusion'. This line scarified the ethnological requirements for political aims (Mukesh Kamar Kayathwal, 1994). This line established without any respect of ethnic, religious, historical and language affinities. The Durand line pass 11 out of 34 provinces of Afghanistan which is touched with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. In addition to Torkham, Ghulam Khan and Spin Boldak there are hundreds of routes for people to cross the Durand line. 10000 to 30000 people including legal migrant, trader, member of different national and international organizations crossing Torkham and Ghulam Khan Borders per day. Except this, hundreds of the people illegally crossing these routes per day (Nelofar Ikram, Zahid anwar, 2018).

The Durand line plays a major role in Afghan-Pak relations. From the very first time of Pakistan establishment this line was not accepted by the Afghans living across the line. Afghanistan refused the establishment of Pakistan in the UN as new state. Mentioned that until the people of North West Frontier province (NWFP) has given the full freedom in selecting either want to be an independent state (Pashtunistan), determine for themselves to be with Afghanistan or Pakistan, they will not accept the existence of a new state named Pakistan (Kayathwal, 2016). Pakistan always using this line as a key factor while imposing their interest in Afghanistan by forceful economic blocked and stop trade on Khyber Pass and Karachi. At the time of Sardar Dawood Khan this imposition reached the military intervention between the two countries. At that time fearing of the positive relation between Afghanistan and USSR encourage the UK and USA to put series effort and control the two state relations but it didn't work in that era of time (Kayathwal, 2016). The relations between these two countries have been effected by the issue of Durand line in the course of history.

We told by an interviewee that the Durand line is a strategic and very important point for both the countries. If Afghanistan accept this as a formal border it will harm it from different perspective. It will accept the formal separation of Pashtun tribe across the line, will give Pakistan an open hand to intervene in Afghanistan by imposing several limitations in term of economic, trade and so on because it is the only easy way for

Afghanistan to access the free water (sea). From the other hand Afghanistan pressurize Pakistan while imposing these imposition by using the status of the people living across this line. Whenever Pakistan want to impose sanction Afghanistan use the Durand line issue to control the pressure.

The Durand line impact Afghan-Pak relations for the following reasons:

Durand line is barrier for Afghanistan to have an access to the sea. So the official statement of Afghanistan governments in the course of history and also all afghan people denied this line as formal border between these two countries. It impact bilateral relations when this issue arise. (told by an interviewee)

Implementing the border policies in the case of Durand line prevent people to people relations as we know that this line has separated a nation. There are too many families living in both side of the border. When these people stand to have open relationship with their family member in the other side of the line; they are denied. These policies make hostilities in the Afghan-Pak relations.

The problem of security is on the other hand impact this bilateral relations. According to media reports many of insurgency groups living across the line. These groups damage the security in both sides. So both of the countries blame each other for hosting and promoting these groups and assert that they could take action on the other side of the country which impact the relation. As for the very immediate example. Pakistan bombard Paktia province of Afghanistan claiming that groups which are danger for the security of the country living in Paktia province in they have the right to target them (Yawar, 2024). As Afghanistan government refused this declaration but still this action have trouble the Afghan-Pak relation.

Drug trafficking in the border areas effects bilateral relations negatively. Both countries have faced too many issue regarding this illegal action. The issue of smuggling is toughest issue that deny implementing rules and regulations, make security concerns for both the countries and increases the crime rate in both sides. This trafficking make difficulties in each country in regards of fight against drug using (crime, 2015). The issue of drug trafficking effects border security and had a negative impact on Afghan-Pak relations.

For trade and economic perspective this line also impact bilateral relations. As we witnessed too

many sanctions these countries imposing on each other. Pakistan can access to central Asia and Middle East trough crossing Durand line and also Afghanistan can access to free water crossing this line in different parts. (Told by an interviewee)

The issue of Pashtunistan

The issue of Pashtunistan is also a matter of tension between these two neighbors. Afghanistan wanted Pashtunistan as independent state believing that it will benefit them to have open access to the sea. Among the reasons for demanding Pashtunistan is a desire for having an outlet for the sea (Hasan, 2013). But logically these Afghan rulers and people is just care about the unity of a nation living in this strategic area. Supporting the desire for Pashtunistan can strongly validate their claim of Durand line as an imposed line separated a nation. They believe that Pakistan is not the inheritor of British heritage in the region.

The slogan by some of Afghan living across the Durand line for making an independent state of Pashtunistan is not acting by Pakistan. Because they will lose some their important territory. As the parts that being separated by the British based on Durand line agreement have more value for Pakistan from different perspectives. This area is not only connecting Pakistan to central Asia trough Afghanistan but internally is a full of natural resources. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the third-largest provincial economy in Pakistan. The province contributes 10% of Pakistan's GDP and 20% in mining output. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa outshines in mines and minerals industry by outshining in producing record breaking income. The province holds widespread opportunities in mines sector for the investors. It is obvious by the significant enhancement realized in mines and minerals sections by an income increase of over 150 per cent over a period of two years. The contribution of the province in mining output is extraordinary. The amount of electricity produce in FATA goes back to Punjab first and the people of the FATA always faced discrimination based on the usage of these opportunities. The issue that harmed and effect the Afghan – Pak relation is the dissatisfaction of Pashtuns living across the border particularly in the Pakistan side. This satisfaction sometimes forced Pakistan to take action against those who do not accept the government policies. Pakistan blame Afghanistan

of supporting the declaration of Pashtunistan (Harrison, 2008).

The emergence of Pashtunistan issue after the establishment of Pakistan is one of the causes which develop Pashtun nationalism in the region. This issue also alerted the other national group to have an independent state (Bezhan, 2014). The main reason which answer the question that why the issue of Pashtunistan effect Afghan-Pak relation is the supporting actions of Afghanistan governor to arise Pashtun nationalism in the region which harm Pakistan internally and will effect it security condition as well.

The issue of India

Historically India and Pakistan are two countries having different issues with each other's. Afghanistan is scarified for this competition from a long time. The rivalry between Pakistan and India has shaped too many events in central and south Asia. Both the countries fear from each other for making security concerns on the borders. From the 2001 both the countries has tried to have more influence in Afghanistan as the government of Afghanistan tried to balance the relation with these two countries. The objective of India are to have easy access to central Asia, prevent anti-Indian terrorism, weaken Pakistan, large hand of investment, to deny Pakistan notion of strategic depth use against India. (Muhammad Tariq and Manzoor Ahmad, 2015) In the last few years India has taken too many strategies to have influence in Afghanistan for instance establishing diplomatic existence, keep the northern cad in pocket, help in political reconciliation, military assistance and assistance in development of the country which have gain more attention and resulted very close relation with Afghanistan. Pakistan has also too many objectives in Afghanistan as it wants to resist with Indian influence, Maintain strategic depth, deny the claim of Pashtunistan and access to central Asia. For reaching these objectives Pakistan has applied too many strategies for instance role in Afghanistan reconciliation process, provide aid and trade to Afghanistan, to ensure access to central Asia and trade and persuade USA to safeguard Pakistan interests (Muhammad Tariq and Manzoor Ahmad, 2015). Based on the information provided above, we can get to the conclusion that each of the country cannot tolerate the existence of each other in the region particularly in Afghanistan. If we see the last two decade Afghanistan had very tight relations with India which lead to several

difficulties with Pakistan. Pakistan has also the fear that in case of India – Pakistan war the influence of India in Afghanistan will harm them and Afghanistan will use this opportunity in favor of their too many claims like Pashtunistan. Finally we could conclude that Pak-Indo rivalry complicated and impacted Pak Afghan relation negatively.

The issue of refugees

The internal war in Afghanistan effects the life of thousands of Afghan people, which lead it to the status of refugees in neighbor countries. In the late 1970 and 180 it was the largest refugee crises which the UNHCR face with in the world (Schöch, 2008). After the internal war the country has remained unstable and a large number of people went to the neighbor countries as keeping in mind the people who first went out was not return yet. The largest amount of these people were in Pakistan. Pakistan has used too many opportunities through these refugees, gain too many project and budget from international organization. But still Pakistan claims that these refugees impact negatively on their security as well as economic and political arena. These refugee has joined several insurgency groups which are dangerous for Pakistan. From the political perspective these refugees are involved in the declaration of nationalism in the country which lead to insecurity and against state actions. Furthermore these refugees groups effect the country economically. So the status of these refugees group has been used by Pakistan against Afghanistan as a pressure point. In the declarations of rejecting and forcibly make them out of Pakistan which is against the international roles effect Pak Afghan relations (Martín, 2011 apr).

Opportunities for Afghanistan as a strategic point

The geopolitical location of Afghanistan can offer opportunities for this country in relations with neighbor countries and particularly Pakistan. We mentioned some of these opportunities here.

Afghanistan as a Bridge of Energy

Internationally competition over energy has reached a stage which one of the energy specialist call it (Energy world order). Energy as a source of national power can assist countries to military data. Central Asia have very large amount of gas and oil, which is a reason for USA,

China and Russia competition over this region. Afghanistan is a bridge of energy between central and south Asia. The project of TOPI, IPI and CASA1000 which can send energy from central to south Asia depend on the situation in Afghanistan. Security issues in Afghanistan impact the implementation of these huge project. So using this strategic point for Afghanistan give it a positive role in this region (Parviz, 2013).

Existence of natural resource

Existence of natural resources has played a significant role as a great variable in Afghanistan economic and political arena. In a geological survey it is mention that Afghanistan has over than a trillion values menials, lithium, copper and so many other. It has the potential of processing lithium for the demand of the world. On the other hand it has sufficient amount of water. Which has the capability of making Hydro energy. Afghanistan can use all these opportunities in making positive relations with neighbor countries particularly Pakistan which is in a huge need of energy (Parviz, 2013).

Afghanistan as bridge if connection between central and south Asia trade Challenges for Afghanistan as a strategic point Land lock ness of Afghanistan

In this dynamic world free seas are the significant ways for country's trade and income. For trade Afghanistan need other countries to have access to the world market particularly Pakistan and Iran. This obligation has a negation impact on Afghanistan foreign policy (Sikandry and Sajjad ali, 2020) . It has a number of effect on trade which we mention here. High customs duty, delay in arrival of the goods, political pressures, Business losses and Mental pressure are the result which came from being a landlocked country.

Border issues with neighbors

Border issues with neighbors particularly Iran and Pakistan has harm the relation between these two countries. For example disagreement on water management with Iran or the issue of Durand line with Pakistan. Issues about water with the central Asian republics. All these reason are used by the neighbor countries as a policy of stress over Afghanistan and has a negative impact on Pak-Afghan relations (Sardar Mohammad and Abass Arifi, 2020).

Security issues

According to history Afghanistan faces too many issues in term of security in history. The neighbors has fear of threat from Afghanistan. For instance the cross on relations between the USSR and Dawood Khan was the fear of USSR over the northern areas of Afghanistan (M.A, 2011). For the now the neighbor countries claims the fear from several point of Afghanistan. To some extent these are just the declaration publishing by these countries but it has its impact on maintaining bad relation among countries. As we witness too many ups and downs between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Conclusion

As the first aim of this article was to understand the importance of Afghanistan geopolitical location, we get to the result though studying the existence literature about Afghanistan geopolitical location that country is a pool of connection between central and south Asia and Middle East. Along with the very large impact on the development in the region it can be traced as bridge of Energy transaction from central Asia to south Asia. For the second objective we get to the result that the impact of geopolitical location cannot be ignored in country's relation with Pakistan. It has its own impact; either this impact has a positive role or negative is a subject which this article will discuss. So, this research examine that how Afghanistan geopolitical location impact on relations with Pakistan. It also proposed to understand the opportunities and challenges faced by Afghanistan due to its geographical location with relations with Pakistan. There are too many issues the effect Pak- Afghan relations like the issue of Durand line, the issue of Afghan refugees, the issue of border security, the issue of Pashtunistan and the Indian influence which lead some time to a very strange relations between these two neighbor countries.

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