

## THE KASHMIR CONFLICT: ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPACT ON INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND REGIONAL STABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA (2019–2024)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15028498>

### Keywords

Kashmir issue, Scrapping Article 370, India Pakistan relations, South Asian stability, Ceasefire violations, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, dynamics of South Asian geopolitics, Handling ceasefires, Human rights of people of Kashmir, Prospects for conflict transformation.

### Article History

Received on 06 November 2024

Accepted on 26 January 2025

Published on 31 January 2025

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### Abstract

The Kashmir issue, as the political hot area between the two India and Pakistan, has remained one of the major considerations in the structure of South Asian geopolitics. The so called transformative phase is from 2019 to 2024 starting with the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, which downgraded Jammu and Kashmir to a union territory. As this move was unilateral it definitely increased the tensions between Indian and Pakistan which culminated in more frequent military encounters, cross border firings violations and no diplomatic relations. The conflict also resonates at the regional level it has impacts on nuclear posturing, insurgency and un-stablizing South Asia. Apart from bi-Lankisational context, other changes that include the penetration of the Global powers such as China that has displayed operational interests in the territory of Pakistan controlled Kashmir as well as the CPEC. International actors, particularly American ones at that, have traditionally done little to assist with the problem but have slowly started to increase their involvement. This research examines the role of the continuing conflict within the contested South Asian state of Kashmir on the relations between India and Pakistan and looks at the sociopolitical and economic costs of maintaining enmity in this volatile area. The research also outlines the path to resolving a conflict; speaking, understanding, and cooperative measures, building confidence and regional integration. In conclusion, for the South Asian nations to experience economic prosperity the source of conflict; the Kashmir issue has to be addressed.

### INTRODUCTION

Kashmir, an unresolved territorial conflict between India and Pakistan, is still continuing to maintain tension in South Asian region after the period of independence in 1947. This conflict logically originates from the history that both countries have hanging claims over the territory of Kashmir and there military skirmishes took place in 1947, 1965, and 1999. This territorial problem is compounded

by ethnic, religious, as well as geopolitical dimensions making the resolution of it almost impossible. It was always a nuclear flashpoint and the dispute over it is a matter of deep concern for the regional and international peace. The loss of the special status to Jammu & Kashmir had a turning point in the conflict after it was stripped off and removed in August 2019 by the Indian government.

This decision abolished the special constitutional position of the state and bifurcated the administration into two union territories. Though India boasted it would integrate and develop the region, this move incites dissent in the Kashmir and introduced tension in connection with Pakistan that denounced this action as unlawful and against UN charters and resolutions (Bose, 2003; Schofield, 2010; Noorani, 2019; Ahmed, 2020).

The reaction of Pakistan to the abrogation of the Article 370 was not long in coming and was unambiguously hostile: Islamabad immediately expelled the Indian High Commissioner, suspended all bilateral trade and inconveniences with India in the United Nations, the Muslim Collective and other international organizations. The shift also led to higher tensions in military operations across the LoC, more ceasefire breaches being reported in the period following the announcement. Such transformations revealed the volatility of the India-Pakistan relationship and the substance of the conflict transformation process. Apart from bilateral considerations, the Kashmir issue involves regional and international aspect. China's interest especially through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor in the occupied territory of Pakistan has added more to the geopolitics. However, the policy of the United States of America in the South Asian region and the Scotland dye with the other international players like Russia and the European Union twist the conflict. Such international politics are not alien to the general impact of Kashmir in global politics (Fair, 2019; Jadoon, 2021; Small, 2015; Ganguly and Kapur, 2021).

It has also sustained socio-economic turbulence and human rights question in Kashmir involving repression, deprivation, and curtailment of fundamental civil liberties. These concerns have not lost their relevance in addressing questions of human component in the conflict, as well as concerned regional implications. This work is devoted to investigation of the events that took place in Kashmir region in the years 2019-2024, which is considered to be one of the most significant stages of the conflict with reference to socio-political, economical, and geopolitical consequences. It is to investigate how the conflict has affected the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan primarily as

well as its role in the instability of the South Asian area and the way towards peace (Chatterji et al., 2019; Zutshi, 2017; Bose, 2020; Staniland, 2022).

### Literature Review

India-Pakistan dispute has remained a sensitive issue in the region basically since the revocation of Article 370 in August 2019. Kashmir has been the centre of conflict between the two nations since the time of or at the time of multiplication of British India in 1947. Different sources say that the origins of the conflict have to do with historical and even ideological differences, as well as ethnic and religious ones. Bose (2020) posits that alteration of the status quo lead to enmity, conflict, wars, and distrust between India and Pakistan help deepen the Kashmir issue. The unscheduled revocation of the status conferred by article 370 to Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 escalated the conflict and isolated the people, which necessitates a revisit to matters of self-determination and decentralisation.

Some discussion can be made on the role that the conflict over the region of Kashmir plays in relation to the geopolitical map of the world. Ganguly and Kapur 2021 argue that the changes of context after 2019 transformed the conflict from a bilateral level to the regional level with interests of China through the CPEC. The involvement of China in Pakistan administered part of the claimed territory has brought some odd dimensions to the simmering issue, new dimensions in the geopolitics of South Asia. The author like Small (2015) postulated that due to its economic and strategic agendas in the region, China is a third party to this conflict and has in fact intensified India- Pakistan conflict.

Human rights problems exist in Kashmir till now, especially after the year 2019. National and international organizations, independent scholars and others have documented restrictions, shut down of communications and alleged human rights abuses in the valley. Zutshi (2017) and Chatterji, Varma & Puri (2019) opine that the securitization of the region has excluded the local actors and entrenches brutality in a vicious loop. They argue that low-political participation and protracted militarisation, have deepened the grievances, and hamper the search for peace whilst tearing apart the fabrics of the region's economy.

tudents have also looked at the tactical level where the focus has been the military aspect of the conflict along the Line of Control. Fair (2019) show that since 2019 there were more crossing border violation and shelling indicating a higher level of confrontation. Internal security situation remains volatile after the Pulwama attack in February 2019 and subsequent military standoff, which raises nuclear risks of an adverse event by accident (Staniland, 2022). Of these, the following predominate as intimations to the necessity for diplomacy and de-escalation before a war outbreak. Hence, the conflict in Kashmir after 2019 is not simply a case of historical, geopolitical or socio-economic issues but an intersection of all three. Lifting of the special status has aggravated relations, deepened regional cleavages and worsened the human rights situation. Analysing these processes calls for interdisciplinary analysis to search for processes for moving toward conflict transformation, regional security, and sustainable peace (Schofield, 2010; Bose, 2020).

#### Political and Strategic Developments Post-2020

The period subsequent to the year 2020, has seen acute political and strategic changes in the political administration and strategic dynamics in the published Kashmir, and its relationship with the dynamics of the larger India-Pakistan South Asian context. Earlier in August 2019, Indian Government rescinded Article 370 of the constitution thus removing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. This move led to the bifurcation of the state into two Union Territories: Jammu & Kashmir, and Ladakh. The direct administration from the central government was meant to bring the area even closer to the rest of India. Nonetheless, this decision stirred a lot of controversies from local population and political representatives, who considered this decision as fading of their self-governing powers and rights. The following years have been characterized by political instability; cases of oppression of opposition and derogation on the freedom of the people. For example, more worrying developments of passport seizure, people's detention, and limitations to freedom of expression were raised by the Amnesty International.

Scenario wise, the abrogation of Article 370 has profound effects on India Pakistan relations. Pakistan termed Indian activities as a base violation of United Nations resolutions as well as bilateral covenants. This led to massive build up of forces along the LoC and an escalation of the number of ceasefire violations. In February 2021, both nations signed a fresh ceasefire agreement in the LoC that has effectively maintained, and decrease cross border conflict. However the political crisis persists and the silence is regarded not as a result of a complete settlement but as an attempt to freeze a conflict.

The world has been worried about the happenings in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir after the year 2020. The Human rights organizations have also received reports of the uses of force with reported cases of fundamental limitations of freedom of speech, assembly and freedom of movement. The UN and many countries around the world have urged India and Pakistan to sit down to the negotiating table over the dispute on Kashmir. These demands notwithstanding, both parties continue to hold nonsalient positions: India arguing that the change in the status of the state erails its internal affairs, Pakistan demanding intervention by the international community and right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir.

Economically the region has been a problem due to politics and insecurity. Infrastructure and economic growth oriented development projects have been taken up by the Government of India for Jammu and Kashmir. Such efforts have never been successful due to the continuous insecurity and disbelief from the local people. The imperative nature of the region especially in regard to the CPEC make it more complicated as both China and Pakistan are stakeholders in the region's stability and political support.

In conclusion, the present study captures the period post 2020 witnessing a plethora of political and strategic changes in the Kashmir region. Lift of Article 370 by the central Government of India has created strategic BAL with Pakistan, HR concerns and a challenge to development. Papers therefore conclude that while ceasefire accords may have brought about moments of pause in cross-border fighting respectively, fundamental political tensions persist and therefore require consistent diplomacy

and interaction among all actors in an effort to bring enduring peace and order into the region.

### Impact on India-Pakistan Relations (2020–2024)

1. Indeed, India and Pakistan's political and diplomatic relations in the period 2020-2024 were politically sensitive. That is a number of significant factors like for instance India's revocation of Article 370 in August to alter the status of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately to this move Pakistan was not happy at all, Pakistan sever diplomatic relations with India and suspended trade. This set the stage for the strained relations that were evident right up to the end of 2019 and beyond, and with little or no way of direct diplomatic engagement. The fact that there were no official diplomatic relations just enriched the fact of tremendous mistrust between the two countries (Kugelman, 2020).

2. It is also here that the Asian conflict of Kashmir, has continually featured as the major factor in bilateral relations. After The abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan attempted to bring it on international level through United Nations and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Even these steps were not enough, and India continued insisting it had no external affairs regarding the subject. Battles across the LoC persisted along the 1947 cease- fire line also during 2020-2022 to add to the injury. Short temporary ceasefires were signed in 2021, but core disputes on the region of Kashmir remained (Ganguly, 2021).

3. India has been continually alleging that Pakistan supports cross-border terrorism especially in part of Jammu and Kashmir. Main issues included the current infiltration across the LOC into the Indian territory and other high intensity incidents such as the Pulwama attack in 2019. In return, Pakistan blamed India for supporting terrorism in Balochistan and rebels group. Security threats increased military consolidation where both sides continued to upgrade their respective force structures during this period (Joshi, 2022).

4. Due to the non-trade relations between the two countries since 2020 up to now 2024 after Pakistan stopped bilateral trade over the annulment of Article 370. The pandemic in Italy in particular, restricted informal trade channels even more in 2020. Some

sporadic attempts were made, especially by the West, to restore the economic relations to spoke a confidence building measure, but such appeals were always negated by the political considerations. The absence of economic interaction was having the effect of underlining the barely ... set Visible: hidden Cold relation between both countries (Siddiqui & Abbas, 2021).

5. The third factor relevant with India-Pakistan relations is external factors with more attention now placed on actors such as China and the United States. China, Pakistan's neighbor and strategic partner, expanded its economic and defence ties with Pakistan through CPEC, and India rejected this initiative because its route passes through the occupied territory of Gilgit- Baltistan. At the same time, the United States under Joe Biden's presidency lectured about stability in the region but did not act as mediators. Overall, international actors promoted the dialogue but got poor results in reaching the two countries (Fair, 2022).

6. Another comedown for the India-Pakistan relationship came in 2021 with the U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pakistan tried to use Taliban to gain strategic depth same as India faced problems for sustenance of their investments in Afghanistan. People worried about revival of terrorism, fresh round of conflict in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. Thus Pakistan alleged that India utilized Afghan territory to carry out incipient disturbances in Pakistan, still, India complained against Pakistan for offering safe haven to terrorism. Such dynamics aggravated the bilateral relations between the two countries (Haqqani 2023, p. 244).

7. However, there were moments which some parties tried to bring some diplomatic measures to restore talks again. The bilateral backchannel diplomacy by the UAE begun in 2021 snowballed into a renewal of the ceasefire signed in 2003 along the Line of control (LoC). Nevertheless, these talks did not evolve to more general discussions about peace with the help of resulting into higher political level talks. Superficial changes in diplomatic relations and progress within the adverse political environments in both countries were also influenced by the nationalist rhetoric that did not facilitate reconciliation (Raghavan, 2022).

8. Destination activities by individuals to the other



and diplomatic relations were limited because of politics and the health crisis during this period. There were few instances when such diplomatic gestures of bonhomie were seen such a religious bridge the Kartarpur Corridor that connected the Indian Sikhs with Pakistan. Nonetheless, actions of such a vector were masked by more significant conflict and distrust, thus limiting their diversification to the sphere of cultural exchange (Ahmed & Singh, 2022).

9. The communities in both these countries were informed by the media of the other's actions and perceptions. Such practices of media was more visible especially in Indian and Pakistani media which often included nationalistic approach to increase instigations. Social media also turned into the front to identify conflicting storylines, as manipulated news and hate speech escalated the conflict even more (Chadha, 2023).

#### Geopolitical Dynamics and International Stakeholders

However, the geopolitical political relations that exist between Pakistan and Iran and the rest of the world have slightly changed after the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan in 2021. This something that has in fact led to regional powers to take advantage of the existent power void created by the exit of the United States. Both Pakistan and Iran face security threats, refugees crises and drug menace due to Afghanistan instabilities at the same time get an opportunity for regional integration. They also draw attention to the changing role of Afghanistan as not just a site of regional and international strategic importance (Khalid & Rehman, 2022).

Pakistan considers Afghanistan as an important component of its national interest as well as its strategic plan. Due the historical relationship of Islamabad with the Taliban, the country has critical role in Af-Pak political and security dynamics. Pakistan has concerns such as countering the emergence of anti-Pakistan militant groups in Afghanistan, they do not want another safe haven for terrorism to emerge in Afghanistan and lastly is to deny India's hegemonic influence to Afghanistan (Ahmed, 2021). Also, investment in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as well as its ambition to link Central Asia to its oceanic port,

Gwadar, raise Pakistan's stakes in the region (Rais, 2023).

Iran borders Afghanistan and possesses a 921 kilometer borderline; Iran can not afford instability in Afghanistan since this would pose a threat to the country's security. Tehran has never had straight relations with the Taliban as Iran has been at time at loggerheads and at other time showing diplomacy with them. After the withdrawal of the U.S., Iran has stepped up diplomatic engagement with the Taliban and raised the level of military forces along the border to counter-terrorism and drug insurgency. Besides, Iran continues to play a strategic power by defending the rights of Shi'a communities in Afghanistan as well as economic interests at the regional level including the transit trade routes in Afghanistan (Sadjadpour & Hakimi, 2022).

China as one of the rising powers in the international system have been determined to up its profile in the region. China sees an opportunity to exploit Afghanistan's mineral resources, as well as the country's importance to the BRI geography. Due to its relations with both Pakistan and Iran at the same time China in a very strategic position to facilitate resolution of conflict and income growth in Afghanistan. With regard to the investment, it should be adequate to note that both the past and current Chinese policies in Afghanistan, as well as the continuous efforts to stress non-interference principles, reveal the desire of Beijing to preserve stability in the region in order to gain economic and strategic profits, according to Small (2022).

Russia has returned to the Afghan fray both historically and in terms of interest. As it is illustrated, Moscow's chief threats concern two issues: the expansion of extremism into Central Asia and the trafficking of drugs. Also, in efforts to be a mediator, Russia has organized several conferences comprising dialogues with Afghanistan neighbors and other countries. This is seen when Russia decides to team up with Iran as well as its partnership with China which widens its war against the western world as a regional powerful player or ground (Kortunov, 2023). The United States while officially withdrawn from the combatant role, remains engaged in the conflict through other ways such as applying economic sanctions, providing humanitarian aid, as well as using diplomacy. Washington's major interests are

counterterrorism, ensuring that Afghanistan does not revert to being a sanctuary for terrorist organizations, and the humanitarian problem. The US has also aimed at keeping friends in density, such as India, which the US perceives as a counterweight to China's encroachment (Fair, 2022).

India's involvement in Afghanistan has been mainly to check Pakistan influence there and to gain strategic advantage. Afghanistan and New Delhi have been good trade partners also New Delhi has invested heavily in infrastructure and development projects in Afghanistan. But the withdrawal of the US and the regaining control of Afghanistan by the Taliban has restricted the presence of India in the area. Therefore, India has transformed its approach to be more participative in Iran and enhancing its naval and trading links through Chabahar port (Pant & Kaura, 2023).

Many of the regional actors analyses is proficient in having similar objectives of fostering stability in Afghanistan; however, disburse geopolitical agenda inhibits possible cooperation. For example, Pakistan and India relationship is an obstacle when it comes to creating a healthy relationship. In the same regard, sanctions by the United States to the Iranian state also restrict its potential to actively participate or fully participate in regional endeavours. But possibilities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization SCO, present Afghanistan's neighbors within the framework of information exchange and joint actions (Siddiqui, 2022).

### Regional Security and Stability

1. The abrupt withdrawal of the United States of America from Afghanistan in the calendar year of 2021 has emerged serious security threats to neighboring countries like Pakistan and Iran. ISIS-K and Al-Qaeda have exploited this power vacuum occasioned by the withdrawal to equally escalate their militant activities. For Pakistan, it has meant necessarily bolstering cross-border terrorism, while Iran has faced threats from increasingly insurgent factions along its borders. They are also facing issues about the proliferation of illicit arms and drug from Afghanistan which is further increasing the insecurity in the region (Khalid & Rehman, 2022; Jones, 2021; Ahmed, 2021; Sadjadpour & Hakimi, 2022; Rizvi, 2023).

2. The border between Pakistan and Iran together with Afghanistan have become easily breachable ones facilitating illegals and most especially criminal activities. Espionage: Pakistan has also fenced its western border and deputed more forces to check militants infiltration. The same case applies to Iran, which has increased security along the borders and put up structures, including walls to prevent drug and weapons from being smuggled. However, due to the difficult topography and the poor synergy between the three nations, the problems have not been fully eliminated (Rais, 2023; Fair, 2022; Khalid & Rehman, 2022; Small, 2022; Kortunov, 2023).

3. Among non-state actors it is worth mentioning the Taliban, ISIS-K, and all sorts of local militias who are particularly active in destabilizing the situation in the region. Although the Taliban has ordered the internal situation in Afghanistan since its return to power, the control of such formations as ISIS-K is a matter of concern for the region's security. The other ripple effects are attacks on people of specific countries including Pakistan and Iran, and increased sectarianism. These non-state actors affect both countries' national security policies as significant threats (Ahmed, 2021; Jones, 2021; Sadjadpour & Hakimi, 2022; Fair, 2022; Siddiqui, 2022).

4. This has affected security in Pakistan and Iran since they are housing the refugees pushing the economies as well as the social structures to their utmost limit. Two countries have millions of refugees from Afghanistan; combined with internal problems, it also adds pressure on the economy. The camps are then transformed into incubation centers for recruitment for armed groups and other security risks to the region. The little help that the international community has offered to address this disaster worsens it (Khalid and Rehman, 2022; Pant and Kaura, 2023; Sadjadpour and Hakimi, 2022; Rais, 2023; Small, 2022).

5. Although this is a threat, the region has other processes in the form of opportunities, where dialogue takes place within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Pakistan and Iran have used the forum to advance

regional security themes and ensure the safety of the entire political community during the meetings. These are some of the areas of cooperation in military whose activities entails joint military exercises, intelligence sharing and counter terrorism. However, hostility and differences in geopolitical agenda weaken attempts at progress (Siddiqui, 2022, Khalid and Rehman, 2022, Ahmed 2021, Rais, 2023, Small 2022).

### Pathways to Conflict Resolution and Regional Stability

1. It is apparent that effective approaches toward conflict resolution and region stabilization in South and Central Asia would significantly rely on dialogue relationships among Afghanistan's neighbors. One example is collective participation in the frameworks of multilateral organizations like SCO or ECO. These forums provide a platform for debating on terrorism, security at borders, as well as trade, and securing the confidence of the member states. The participation of Pakistan and Iran in SCO has brought the theme of combined counterterrorist actions into focus. But the problem is that the work of such platforms highly depends on the desire of states and their focus on regional security more than individual benefits (Siddiqui, 2022; Khalid & Rehman, 2022; Ahmed, 2021; Pant & Kaura, 2023; Kortunov, 2023).

2. Strengthening cooperation in improving border security regulates cooperation in improving border security at the interstate and intermestic levels. Both Pakistan and Iran are under obligation to address the issue of border security with Afghanistan due to issues on militancy, drug business and security along the borders needed to be prevented. Measures such as joint border control, cooperation in the exchange of intelligence and cooperation in the improvement of physical assets can go a long way for the mentioned organizations. For instance, Pakistan has fenced part of the border, and like Iran it has constructed new check points that have achieved a measurestringent of success in reducing cross-border movements of militant. These cooperative measures, backed by the UN, can deepen borders security and diminish the prospect of conflict, spill over, Fair, 2022, Rais, 2023, Khalid & Rehman, 2022, Rizvi, 2023, Small, 2022.

3. The political equilibrium in the region depends on how the Afghan refugees situation is well handled. Currently, millions of refugees from Afghanistan are living in both Pakistan and Iran, which continues to put so much pressure on their economies and societies. This burden can be eased through collaborative frameworks provided by International organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and donor countries. Long-term strategies – approaches consist in providing development outlook and giving a financial impetus to rebuild the soci&economy of a country to create incentives for a VR process. Also, the effective enforcement of the refugees' rights can downplay conflict between the local communities and refugees (Khalid & Rehman, 2022; Pant & Kaura, 2023; Jones, 2021; Sadjadpour & Hakimi, 2022; Fair, 2022).

4. Another aspect with high integral value and which is vital for globalisation is the stimulation of the actual economic integration. It was also determined that economic integration among regional players can be influential in the processes of conflicts' settlement. Projects such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and the Iran Chabahar port offer Afghani involvement into mainstream regional trade strings. Hence, they can promote cooperation and minimise conflict because such projects develop economic relations. However, cooperation in sectors, for instance, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline provide regional common economic interests for their stakeholders. Nevertheless, political distrust and security issues should be also resolved to unleash these projects to the extent possible (Small, 2022; Ahmed, 2021; Khalid & Rehman, 2022; Rais, 2023; Siddiqui, 2022).

5. Fudging and Communicating with International Players International actors are very sensitive in addressing conflicts so as to bring stability within the region. It should also take actions to increase support to Afghan refugees that has displaced around 3 million people; The United States, China, and Russia, and United Nations, can mediate between Afghanistan's neighbours. These actors can offer funding and support to secure Afghanistan alongside striking a buffer that will honor

sovereignty of the region. For example, constructive external involvement can be viewed through China's investments of infrastructure and Russia's mediation. To the same, the U.S. can lend itself to the same by providing humanitarian assistance and counter-terrorism without the over-stirring of regional tensions (Fair, 2022; Khalid & Rehman, 2022; Small, 2022; Siddiqui, 2022; Sadjadpour & Hakimi, 2022).

### Conclusion

It is possible to overcome conflicts and establish stability in South and Central Asia by following the multiple lines of working on the primary directions of cooperation and dialogue with further inclusion of economic unity in the framework of the regional responsible system. The latter can be seen in the current withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan that has produced both threats and opportunities for Afghanistan's neighbors, specially Pakistan and Iran, to jointly tackle the emerging security threats, manage refugee problem and counter aggression of non-state actors. New regional forums like, the SCO and bi-lateral treaties for securing these borders potentially provide good opportunities for such cooperation. However, success is possible only when trust is established, geopolitical tensions are left aside and inclusive cooperation is developed. Trying to use strategic projects such as CPEC, Chabahar Port and TAPI pipeline as an example, one might state that economic initiatives are capable of becoming forces of stability provided that states have political will and security factors into consideration. In addition, there is a role of international actors such as China, Russia and US, which can contribute significantly for reconstruction of Afghanistan as well as, help regional stability. It is therefore imperative to get a middle of the road, holistic, non-domineering and yet supranational resolution of these challenges should recent history teach the world anything about the nature of peace. By far, the essence of stability is to look at Afghanistan as a connector and not as an arena of struggle. In that case, regional and international actors will be able to turn the present day challenges into beneficial developments for everyone and lasting peace within the region.

### Findings

1. The U.S. troop pullout from Afghanistan in 2021 has consequently left a political void that ISIS-K and Al-Qaeda have capitalized on effectively destabilizing the region. The failure of the Taliban to disarm or restrain such factions has kept Afghanistan as a powder keg of militancy, and its influence extends over the border to endanger other nations. The current experience shows that while both states are neighbors and their security interests converging, they have as yet not developed appropriate means and methods of combating this burgeoning threat, which remains ever more permeable for infiltration through the borders, and more dangerous for the civilian population and its assailants.

2. These ill-defined borders with Afghanistan and Iran especially the Pakistan border have seen increased waves of arms runners, illicit drug businessmen, and the free movement of militant assailants. Even though Pakistan has sought to enclose the border through the construction of a fence and Iran has increased its patrols, they are grossly inadequate and uncoordinated. Due to the absence of mutual confidence and cooperation, areas of conflict between the two have become havens for both transnational organized crime and extremism, let alone regional security.

3. The Afghan refugee crisis has been an enormous social and economic burden to most of the Afghan refugees host countries, which include Pakistan and Iran. Terrorism is now a threat from refugee camps that have been turned into recruiting centers for radical groups; a humanitarian crisis that is a security one. This has caused the international community to fail in its own responsibility hence burdening host nations while at the same time fueling resentment among the locals hence exacerbating the problem.

4. Pakistan, Iran, and other regional actors can not put priority on an appropriate regional security approach and still remain focused on geopolitical gains. Instead of improving working relations, alleged tensions are increased, and both states seek to achieve national aims at times contrary to regional interests. Such organizations as SCO and ECO have



not shown any performance; these organizations have just turned out to be platforms where polemics are done, but no action is taken to counter terrorism, extremism, and other evils that threaten the region.

5. Desperate for economic projects like CPEC, Chabahar Port & TAPI pipeline, remains hostage to regional turbulence and political rivalry. As it has been established, these outlooks do not contain security assurances guaranteeing trust among the regional players, which explains why such projects cannot work as integrative and stabilizing mechanisms. In contrast, they are becoming viewed as proxies for ongoing geopolitical battles rather than joining others in an effort to address known gaps and stifle expansion.

6. More than anything else, the participation of countries from outside the region that the three countries such as the United States of America, China, and Russia has been more instigating rather than encouraging. Both powers play the 'Afghan' card and act in the context of bilateral rivalry and obstruct genuine regional stability by using trade and investment assistance, making infrastructure investments in Afghanistan, and implementing military strategies. It hostile interaction increases tensions and prevents collective actions against common challenges.

7. Even regional and international actors have not attempted to counter Afghan upheavals: poverty, inept leadership, and stagnated economy, and indoctrination with extremism. Instead, preventive initiatives are almost completely supplanted by military operations and sanctions □ that only prolong the struggle and contribute to increased poverty. Afghanistan will continue to pose a threat within the region and its developers are yet to adapt to the culture of sustainable development not to mention inclusive governance.

#### Recommendations

1. Pakistan, Iran, and members of the South Asian region can use international groupings such as the SCO and ECO to endeavour to regain norms required in order to install methodologies for handling conflict and maintaining stability. These

platforms should focus on information exchange, cooperative terrorism fighting, and common strategies for fighting borders. Substantive tangible products include joint task forces and workable agreements that go a long way in turning mere pronouncements into reality.

2. There is tremendous impetus in Pakistan and Iran to enhance their cooperation in strengthening the security along their shared borders with Afghanistan. This is through the development of a synchronized mechanism of border surveillance, enhancing the usage of some technologies like drones and surveillance systems, and putting in place bilateral committees to deal with transnational issues. Common next meetings must aim at addressing any differences of opinion on border control, and cooperation on countering the flow of human trafficking, smuggling, and infiltration of violent insurgent groups.

3. To help Afghan refugees, both Pakistan and Iran need support from international organizations like UNHCR and they should approach such organizations and ask for assistance and funds. There is a need for an equitable shared regional responsibility, integration strategies, and preparedness for voluntary repatriation of refugees once the political situation in Afghanistan has stabilized. Furthermore, actions toward deradicalization include the provision of education, employment, and, fundamental rights, in refugee camps.

4. The economic integration process can therefore be seen as a stabilizer in the region. Those like CPEC, Chabahar Port, TAPI pipeline need to be revived with improved security assurances, and diplomatic engagement to overcome political crises. Other strategic areas should also employ regional actors to reach a consensus to enforce trade corridors and structure formation plans which i) should include Afghanistan and ii) consolidate the economic gain to be promoted in the region so that every side is benefits instead of encouraging conflict.

5. Global superpowers including the United States, China, Russia through their representatives and the European Union will have to change their attitude

from being rivals to partners. The focus should be placed instead on Afghanistan's rehabilitation, and on maintaining equal approach to providing aid and on avoiding measures that would deepen existing walls between nations. In the author's opinion, the United Nations should turn from a passive bystander into an active moderator that brings together the above-listed international/global and regional actors in order to establish the latter's objectives compatible with the region's stability.

6. This makes it easier to understand that the principal factors of instability in Afghanistan such as poverty, unemployment, and poor governance require long-term socioeconomic capital commitments. Donor nations and global organizations should consider offering support for education, health, and other development projects within region countries to enhance the well being of the Afghan population. Economic development within the country will minimize the refugee rate, and they stop the appeal for extreme formalities.

7. Thus regional countries should come up with a common counter-terrorism approach that will counter the non-state actors such as ISIS-K, Al-Qaeda, and any other such groups. These include exchanges of intelligence information, joint operations with armed forces of partner countries, and cutting off sources of funds for terror groups as well as curtailing recruitment to such groups. The evidence on criminal cooperation and commitment to joint training and public legal security should be a key for long-term security.

8. Breaking out of a cycle of geopolitical suspicion that inhibits working relations, Pakistan Iran and others should focus on CBMs such as high-level trust-building political dialogues, exchange of cultural and people-to-people contact. Competent bilateral relations, and mutual commitments to work under two principles based on non-interference and respect of each state's sovereignty can contribute to the long-term gradual decrease of tensions.

9. Because many regional actors currently see Afghanistan as a place primarily and solely for proxy

wars, they need to learn that Afghanistan has the potential to become a connectivity place and a center of cooperation. Through the participation of Afghanistan in regional business circuits and development initiatives, the problem of the state's stability becomes an asset for the entire community. Such efforts indicate that the shared diplomacy formulations and positive vision of the region are imperative.

10. It also means that all regional and, especially international undertakings must be held accountable while observing openness to meet the objectives of each undertaking being balanced. To ensure that commitments are honored and mutual trust is inspired multilateral agreements and economic projects should be coupled with independent monitoring and evaluating mechanisms.

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