



---

**Failure of Ashraf Ghani's Rapprochement Policy towards Pakistan (2014-2020):  
An Anatomization in Neoclassical Realist Perspective**

Azhar Waqar,<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Saeed Uzzaman,<sup>2</sup> & Javed Hassan Hashmi<sup>3</sup>

**Abstract:**

The article aims to critically evaluate President Ashraf Ghani's rapprochement policy by assessing its impact on Pak-Afghan bilateral ties and outlining the influencing factors that led to its failure. The failure of Ghani's rapprochement policy is examined comprehensively through the lens of neo-classical realism. The article is based on the qualitative nature of data and relies upon the integrative review. It is found that despite Ghani's rapprochement towards Pakistan; the bilateral relations between the two states were challenged by plethora of quagmires. The domestic level of analysis proposes that internal schisms, weak institutions, multi-ethnic groups, and power struggles influenced the respective leadership's decision making as well as policy praxis. The international level of analysis emphasizes the importance of the US role and explicitly rules out Ghani's rapprochement policy. As a result, domestic factors as well as the anarchical structure played a significant role in stifling the rapprochement policy. According to the study, while acknowledging the existence of anarchy, Pakistan and Afghanistan must accommodate each other's national interests and capitalize on their geographical proximity for greater economic benefits.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Pakistan, rapprochement, bilateral relations, anarchy, national interests

**INTRODUCTION**

Bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have never remained cordial despite of sharing historical, geographical, cultural and religious commonalities. The two neighbouring states have experienced many ups and downs since Pakistan's independence as their bilateral ties are marked by mutual distrust and antagonism (Qassem & Durand, 2008). Many issues, such as the Durand-line and Pakhtunistan, as well as insurgencies and instability in Afghanistan, have had direct consequences for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Following the 9/11 tragedy, the United States and its allies launched an attack on Afghanistan in the name of the "War on Terrorism."

Pakistan served as a frontline ally of the international coalition, providing all necessary logistical and intelligence support. Despite her efforts, the Afghan government, led by President Hamid Karzai, blamed Pakistan for the country's chaos and instability. During this time, many Afghans

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: azhar.waqar@numl.edu.pk

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer, Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Rawalpindi. Email: saeed.uzzaman@numl.edu.pk

<sup>3</sup> PhD Scholar, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: javedhashmi6@gmail.com

migrated to Pakistan, and the country faced serious challenges such as smuggling, drug trafficking, increased terrorist activities, and a burden on its fragile economy (Neumann, 2015). Pro-India lobbying in Afghanistan, foreign interventions, and Karzai's anti-Pakistan stance strained bilateral relations even further. During his second term, Karzai attempted to maintain good relations with Pakistan, ostensibly because he realized that Afghanistan requires Pakistan for peace and stability. Pakistan's inclusion in the High Peace Council, as well as the signing of an Afghan–Pakistan transit trade agreement to address shortcomings in previously signed agreements, were significant achievements during his second term. Pakistan also changed its foreign policy toward Afghanistan, adopting a more moderate stance toward the country (Dalrymple, 2013).

In September 2014, Ashraf Ghani was inaugurated as Afghanistan's president. During his tenure, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations underwent significant changes. He announced a policy of rapprochement in bilateral relations, which Pakistan welcomed. He stated that he would accommodate Pakistan's interests in exchange for Pakistan's facilitation of the Taliban dialogue process. Both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding and strengthened their military ties in order to deter terrorism and cross-border infiltration (Qayum & Tariq, 2021). The leaders of the two countries also pledged to strengthen their economic ties and signed a trade agreement to increase it from 1.6 billion dollars to 5 billion dollars by the end of 2017. Pakistan responded positively and successfully held the first round of peace talks. Domestic issues and border clashes harmed relations between the two countries. The Indian lobby's propaganda and the behaviour of certain elite groups at home put pressure on President Ghani. During Ghani's tenure, Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral relations have been marked by both cooperation and contention (Iqbal, 2015).

The important aspect in relations of both states is that people-to-people contact is sorely missing, and goodwill gestures from both sides have failed to build trust and cooperation between two states in order to build smooth cordial relations. Notwithstanding, this study focuses on understanding the major developments by investigating the various prospects of Pakistan-Afghan bilateral relations during Ghani's tenure in the context of neo-classical realism. Despite geographical proximity, historical ties, and a shared cultural and religious identity, relations between the two countries have been strained. Following 9/11, Pakistan-Afghan relations became quite uncertain in many ways, and multiple factors contributed to changing patterns in bilateral relations. Traditionally, Pakistani security concerns were focused on the country's eastern borders with India, but after 2001, the threat was perceived from the country's western border as a result of India's open involvement in Afghanistan. Pakistan expressed its concerns to Afghanistan about India's growing role and cross-border terrorism.

Similarly, Afghanistan remained skeptical of Pakistan's close ties with the Taliban. Pakistan-Afghan bilateral ties have remained strained due to mutual distrust, as both countries have engaged in blame games against each other. Unlike his predecessors, President Ghani chose an outreach strategy toward Pakistan. Both countries collaborated in a variety of areas; however, Ghani faced numerous domestic and structural challenges in terms of rapprochement policy toward Pakistan. As a result, ambiguity and uncertainty in relations persist, affecting both states directly and indirectly regional security. As a result, it is critical to understand and identify the local and international factors that influenced the relations of both neighbouring states during Ghani's tenure. In contrast to his predecessors, Ghani demonstrated a positive attitude toward

strengthening Pak-Afghan relations and chose an outreach strategy to Pakistan. However, it is critical to understand how President Ghani's rapprochement policy impacted Pak-Afghan bilateral ties and why the rapprochement policy failed to build harmonious bilateral relations.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Yusuf and Smith (2015), in the absence of other viable options, Ghani made this bold decision to achieve peace in Afghanistan because he believed that the real problem was Pak-Afghan hostile relations, not Taliban insurgency. He hoped to use China's positive engagement in Afghanistan to exert influence on Pakistan in order to persuade the Taliban to negotiate. Pakistan's response was also expected to determine the future of Afghanistan's stability and peace in the region (Yusuf & Smith, 2015).

In his report "Pak-Afghan Relations After Karzai," Sial (2016) discussed President Ghani's initiatives to improve Pak-Afghan relations. Karzai's arm deal with India has already been suspended by Ghani (Sial, 2016). He also assisted Pakistan in locating and apprehending the perpetrators of the Peshawar Army public school attacks, who were hiding in Afghanistan. Pakistan reacted positively to the initiative, holding the first round of peace talks in Murree on July 7, 2015. However, before the second round of peace talks, an increase in Taliban violence put additional pressure on Ghani, and domestic backlash enacted by structure's influence derailed the peace process. President Ghani and other Afghan officials began making anti-Pakistan statements, accusing Pakistan of causing insecurity in Afghanistan. The Heart of Asia Conference, held in Pakistan in December 2015, raised hopes for the resumption of peace talks. This peace process was hoped to be aided by the Quadrilateral Monitoring Committee, which included representatives from China, Pakistan, the United States, and Afghanistan. They also stressed the importance of Pakistan and Afghanistan working together to improve economic and security cooperation in order to combat cross-border terrorism.

In a study titled "Pak-Afghan Relations During Ashraf Ghani's Tenure," Maqsood (2014) argued that while Pak-Afghan relations have never been cordial, Ghani's first visit to Pakistan raised hopes for improvement in bilateral relations. Following the APS attacks, both countries pledged to strengthen military-to-military contacts in order to conduct counter-terrorism operations, and a landmark agreement for intelligence sharing between ISI and NDS was signed. Afghanistan also sent six cadets to PMA Pakistan for training. Pakistan announced the launch of 500 million US dollar ventures for Afghanistan's health, infrastructure, education, and other sectors, as well as an offer for 100 Afghan students to attend LUMS Pakistan. Both countries made good-will gestures to improve bilateral relations, but the 'June 2015 attack' on the Afghan Parliament harmed both countries' confidence. Afghanistan accused Pakistan's ISI of orchestrating the attack because Pakistan did not want a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. Pakistan condemned the attacks and, as a result of its persistent efforts, the first round of peace talks was held in Murree in July 2015, laying the groundwork for resolving issues between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Daudzai (2015) criticized Ghani's positive overtures towards Pakistan in an opinion piece titled "Afghanistan and Pakistan: The False Promise of Rapprochement," arguing that Ghani was taking a huge risk at the expense of Afghanistan because the chances of reward from Pakistan were minimal. He went on to say that Pakistan's policy agendas were the same as in the past, and that their

approach to Afghanistan was based on the concept of strategic depth. As a result, instead of appeasing Pakistan, Ghani should focus on strengthening the Afghan national force to pressurize and influence the Taliban to hold talks with them (Daudzai, 2015).

In her article, Maliha Zeba Khan (2017) discussed various dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy toward Afghanistan and explained Pak-Afghan relations through the lens of regional security complex theory. She argued that their security situations are intertwined due to geographical proximity and close ethnic, cultural, and historical ties. Instability in one creates militancy problems and a futile security situation in the other (M. Z. Khan, 2017). She went on to explain that the shift in Pakistan's foreign policy following 9/11 was quite visible, with Pakistan acting as a front ally state against terrorism, cutting all ties with the Taliban regime, and launching border management efforts between Pakistan and Afghanistan to reduce infiltration of militants and insurgents. She stated that the unrecognized long border caused serious problems for both countries.

In their article "Pak-Afghan Relations (2001-2017): A Prisoner Dilemma Analysis," Tehseena Usman and Minhas Majeed explained the Pak-Afghan relations in the context of the prisoner dilemma approach. The root cause of the prisoner dilemma is Pakistan-Afghan relations marked by mutual distrust, combined with interventionist policies in each other's affairs that undermined their efforts to cooperate. Pakistan and Afghanistan are engaged in a zero-sum game and a Prisoner Dilemma approach, which limits the success of cooperation and increases the likelihood of defection (Tehseena Usman, 2017). They argue that when countries are unable to break through their impasses, they prefer to pursue a defection strategy. They contended that Pakistan and Afghanistan are at conflict on a number of issues, some of which have been ongoing for some time, such as the Durand line and Pakhtunistan. Both countries must adopt reciprocal strategies in order to gain each other's trust and increase the chances of mutual cooperation. If people-to-people contact between Pakistan and Afghanistan increases, it may lead to the development of harmonious bilateral relations.

According to Moeed Yusuf's report "Decoding Pakistan's Strategic Shift in Afghanistan," there has been a paradigm shift in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan since 2012, and Pakistan's establishment supports an inclusive reconciliation process to achieve its three policy goals: neutral government in Afghanistan, avoiding the surge in Pakhtunistan, and reducing the risk of militancy in Pakistan (Yusuf & Smith, 2015). He argued that Pakistan does not want an unstable Afghanistan, nor does it want the Taliban to be completely deposed, because he believes it would have a negative impact on Pakistan's society.

Previous studies on Pakistan-Afghan relations covered specific issues relating to both countries' political, strategic, and economic affairs. Multiple factors influence Pakistan-Afghan bilateral relations, and understanding and analyzing these relations comprehensively is a difficult task without identifying the role of leadership in bilateral relations. Furthermore, some authors have demonstrated certain biases in their perspectives on Pakistan-Afghan relations. For instance, Pakistani writers blamed Afghanistan for failing to cooperate in building harmonious bilateral relations, while authors on the other side of the border blamed Pakistan for every wrongdoing in Afghanistan. Furthermore, previous literature has mostly been understood through the lens of neorealism, including the prisoner's dilemma and security dilemma, and has been unable to analyze the role of leadership through the lens of neoclassical realism. As a result, this study attempts to fill

this gap by analyzing the role of Ghani's leadership and employing neoclassical realism to gain insight into the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The integrative review technique was used in qualitative research to collect and analyze data while keeping the article's main objective in sight. This type of research technique is relevant to the non-numerical methodology for apprehension and investigation of any given social fact. The use of qualitative data aids in the development of an understanding of a problem where numerical and statistical data fail to provide an in-depth understanding. Nonetheless, secondary data was gathered through text-based studies, which were then critically reviewed and analyzed. Finally, after consulting and gathering data from various secondary sources, the data was analyzed logically and orderly under the study's main argument. Thematic analysis at the national and international levels has been conducted in order to gain a proper understanding of both nations' bilateral ties.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NEO-CLASSICAL REALISM AND PAK-AFGHAN RELATIONS**

Neo-classical realism shares all of the characteristics of the previous strands, classical and neo-realism, with the addition that the role of leadership, ideology, and perceptions also play an important role in shaping any nation state's foreign policy. Obviously, survival is regarded as a primary concept in realism, as the state, like human beings, strives to survive. States act strangely in response to internal or external threats in order to survive. Furthermore, national security and national interests are given high priority, and it determines the states' foreign policy. It is also believed that anarchy exists at the international level, which means that there is no central authority with the authority to implement and execute decisions made by other states (Ratti, 2006).

However, Neo-classical realism also explains how the distribution of material power affects the bilateral relations of states, and as a result, the state, as a rational actor, shifts its foreign policy in the context of survival and maximizing interests and security (Sperling, 2015). While they believe in objective reality, material power, and security, they also take into account the subjective aspect of culture and perceptions. The elites or leadership assesses and recognizes threats, insecurity, shifts in power balance, changes in power distribution in the region and internationally, and changes in the intentions of other states, including non-state actors. As a result, neoclassical realism has been used to comprehend the nature of bilateral relations between the two neighbouring countries.

After taking office, President Ghani identified five circles for the conduct of his country's foreign policy in his inaugural speech on September 29, 2014; the first circle consisted of immediate neighbouring countries, the second of the Islamic world, the third of the United States, Canada, Japan, and European countries, the fourth of Asia, and the fifth of international organizations. As a result, he made positive gestures and announced rapprochement with Pakistan, which was part of his first circle, while demonstrating understanding of the nature of 'anarchy' and the uncertainty and mistrust between the two states. President Ghani concluded that Afghanistan is dependent on Pakistan in many ways, and that it would be in Afghanistan's best interests to foster positive relations with Pakistan so that they could accommodate each other's national interests. Afghanistan, led by President Ghani, took the initiative and announced a policy of rapprochement with Pakistan in order to gain confidence and strengthen bilateral ties.

In comparison to Afghanistan, Pakistan is politically, economically, and socially stable, and it has a strong military with extensive experience in the war on terror. Afghanistan's economic interests are heavily reliant on Pakistan, owing to the population living in border areas relying on Pakistani soil for their bread and butter. Furthermore, President Ghani was deeply concerned about Afghanistan's insecurity and instability, and the Taliban were unquestionably playing a dominant role in this regard. Though since Pakistan had historically had good relations with the Taliban, the Afghan leadership assumed that Pakistan needed to be accommodated. Engaging a neighbouring state is always preferable to disengaging. President Ghani visited Pakistan and discussed expanding cooperation in a variety of areas, with a particular emphasis on combating terrorism. It was also emphasized that people-to-people contact between the two countries should be increased. The Neoclassical realism school of thought holds that states are rational actors, and that rationality drives Pakistan and Afghanistan's foreign policy decisions.

President Ghani assured Pakistan that Afghan soil would not be used against Pakistan for the sake of broader strategic interests, and the TTP leadership in Afghanistan felt the pressure as well. Pakistan has also been invited to investigate some anti-Pakistan extremists in Afghan prisons. Such initiatives were risky because Afghanistan's various ethnic and political groups were dissatisfied with the developments. However, both states' rationality was constantly influenced by other international, regional, and domestic factors. As a result, the power struggle, security quandary, perceptions, international, regional, and domestic factors under the anarchical structure serve as constraints to President Ghani's rapprochement policy, and both countries have failed to develop mutual trust and cooperation with each other, and it is widely expected that this uncertainty in Pak-Afghan relations will continue.

### **GHANI'S RAPPROCHEMENT POLICY AND PAK-AFGHAN BILATERAL RELATIONS**

President Ghani assumed office in Afghanistan in 2014, and it was expected that not only would there be a smooth democratic power sharing in Afghanistan, but that bilateral ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan would improve. Pakistan's President, Mamnoon Hussain, paid a visit to Kabul to attend President Ghani's inauguration ceremony on September 29, 2014, as a goodwill gesture and to normalize bilateral relations. On November 14, 2014, President Ghani also paid a two-day official visit to Pakistan (Qayum & Tariq, 2021). Ghani met with Pakistani President Hussain and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, as well as visiting the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi, and praised Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism. General Raheel Sharif briefed him on the operation to eliminate the terrorist heavens in North Waziristan. Furthermore, it was revealed that significant actions are being taken against Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) safe havens in Kunar and Nuristan, Afghanistan's northeastern provinces, which were causing insecurity and instability in northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. During their meeting with General Sharif, both sides discussed ways to improve border security and management, strengthen security and defence ties, and reduce the threat of terrorism. During his meeting with President Hussain, he assured him that the Afghan people and government wished to strengthen bilateral relations in all areas of mutual interest (Iqbal, 2015). A month after Ghani's visit, the Taliban carried out a brutal attack on Army Public School Peshawar on December 16, 2014, killing more than 150 students. This incident shocked Pakistan, and the Pakistani political and military leadership was under pressure to

apprehend the perpetrators of the APS attack. This incident drew two neighbouring countries closer together in order to combat the threat of terrorism (Mustaqeem, Ramli, & Dalib, 2018).

Following the attacks, Pakistan's Army Chief, General Sharif, and Rizwan Akhtar, Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence, travelled to Afghanistan to seek the assistance of Afghan officials in apprehending the mastermind of the attack, Mullah Fazalullah, who was operating from Afghan soil. Intelligence information was shared between the two countries, and security-to-security contact was increased. In a meeting with General Sharif at GHQ, Rawalpindi, General Sher Mohammad Karimi, Chief of the Afghan National Army, and General John Campbell, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, reviewed the actions taken by both sides to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries. Both sides reached agreements on intelligence sharing and joint operations against militants (Qayum & Tariq, 2021). A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) and the ISI of Pakistan to conduct coordinated operations on both sides of the border and to share intelligence information in order to reduce the risk of militancy in their respective countries.

President Ghani requested close bilateral relations with Pakistan's security establishment, and he took specific actions to alleviate Pakistan's concerns about cross-border terrorism, while also increasing pressure on TTP belligerents who were seeking refuge in Afghanistan. Officials from the ISI were granted access to investigate anti-Pakistan elements hiding in Afghanistan. Furthermore, border patrolling along the Pakistan-Afghan border was coordinated. Unfortunately, these cooperative measures had a detrimental effect on Afghanistan's domestic politics, leading to severe criticism of Ghani's administration from the local population, parliamentarians, and ex-President Karzai, who accused the Ghani administration of signing an MOU for intelligence sharing with Pakistan. Nevertheless, President Ghani's policy of rapprochement with Pakistan was consistent with his stated five-circle policy, and it was implemented for two main reasons: first, he was well aware that peace in Afghanistan required harmonious bilateral relations with Pakistan, and he believed that politically engaging Pakistan would aid in effectively executing peace talks, as well as peaceful bilateral ties. Second, there were no other viable options for ensuring Afghanistan's peace and stability. Unlike his predecessor Karzai, who was a vocal critic of Pakistan during his tenure, Ghani attempted to address Pakistan's concerns in a way that safeguarded both countries' national interests. President Ghani also attempted to allay Pakistan's concerns about India by cancelling Karzai's trade agreement with India. Furthermore, during his April 2015 visit to India, he paid special attention to his statements, considering how Islamabad would interpret these proclamations, while also being concerned about how India perceived his rapprochement policy toward Pakistan. Ghani eventually realized that Afghanistan needed both India and Pakistan's help to get out of this security crisis. Furthermore, this collaboration may be extremely beneficial to the economic integration of South Asia and Central Asia (Kaura, 2017). Following President Barack Obama's announcement to withdraw all US troops from Afghanistan by 2017, President Ghani attempted to secure collaborative working relations with Pakistan and also offered Pakistan a critical role in not only bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table to achieve a comprehensive peace with the Kabul government, but also in demilitarizing and disbanding the Taliban. The goal of Ghani's outreach strategy was not to compel Pakistan to use force against the Taliban, but rather to persuade them to negotiate with the Afghan government through any appropriate means.

Ghani's demand could be met without requiring Pakistan to completely turn against the Taliban, as Pakistan has always refrained from doing so due to concerns about militancy in Pakistan. Successive Pakistani governments have also made efforts to improve bilateral relations between the two countries. In May 2018, the "Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS)" comprehensive bilateral cooperation agreement went into effect. APAPPS was solely a Pakistani initiative for collaboration in counter-terrorism and violence reduction, peace and reconciliation, refugee repatriation, and joint economic development. It established a framework for increasing mutual trust and deepening interaction in all areas of bilateral engagement. During his first visit to Afghanistan in November 2020, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan assured President Ghani of his government's full support in reducing violence and achieving a cease-fire. President Ghani, whose repeated calls for a cease-fire have been ignored by the Taliban, described Khan's visit as "historic" and emphasized the need for an immediate cease-fire. It is unfortunate that the structure did not play a positive role in achieving peace and stability, and that it harmed the efforts of leaders of both states.

### **Ghani's Rapprochement Policy and Level of Analyses**

#### **National Level of Analysis**

##### **A) Multi Ethnic Society and Divergence of Political Interests**

Historically, Afghanistan's political division along ethnic lines has been a major impediment to the national reconciliation and peace process, threatening the country's future stability. Ethnicity is such a powerful factor that it may lead to the collapse of the Afghan government structure and other components, including Afghan national security forces. However, this ethnic division is not limited to Afghanistan, as it has a significant impact on neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan. In Afghanistan, there is injustice, illiteracy, poverty, and a slew of other social and economic issues. Local groups are interacting in anarchy, with no effective governmental authority, to seize resources for their survival in Afghanistan. There are several reasons for Afghanistan's instability and chaos, but the main reason for the country's deteriorating situation is an internal schism between different factions of Afghan society seeking power. Following decades of conflict, different ethnic and political factions of Afghan society came together in 2001 at the Bonn Conference in Germany. Except for the Taliban, different political and ethnic groups participated in an inclusive process for the first time, and all agreed on this new power-sharing mechanism to reshape Afghanistan's future. Nonetheless, the lack of representation and participation of Moderate Taliban in the Bonn conference and in Karzai's government compelled them to seek refuge elsewhere. This shifted the agenda of hardline Taliban leaders toward the moderates in order to reach an agreement with the Karzai government. Neither the Bonn agreement nor the US-brokered National Unity Government (NUG) agreement have been able to address Afghanistan's subtle ethnic and political differences. It is also worth mentioning that some ethnic groups in Afghanistan, such as the Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, were opposed to peace talks with the Taliban. All factions of Afghan society, Pashtun and non-Pashtun, were fighting to maximize their power and achieve their desired goals by any means possible. Pakistan is also a multicultural society, but the situation appears to be better in Pakistan due to the operation of a relatively stable political system.

**B) Weak Governance and Institutions**

One of the aspirations of states is to control, manage, and groom their citizens, but with weak institutions and poor governance, this becomes difficult, and people begin to lose trust in the state institutions. People attempt to migrate from that state or join powerful groups in order to ensure their survival. Despite contentious election results, the first democratic transition occurred in 2014, resulting in the formation of the National Unity Government on the basis of a power-sharing arrangement (NUG). However, governance structures and formal terms of agreement remained tenuous throughout the five-year tenure. The failure of an ad hoc arrangement to form a separate head of government and head of state did not resolve the competition for power among different factions of Afghan society; this situation raised concerns about the legitimacy and efficacy of the government. Under the current presidency, competition for resource and power sharing between influential people in the central government and provincial actors has gone unaddressed in pluralistic Afghan society. The situation exacerbated dissatisfaction with the current administration and a sense of deprivation, which exacerbated factionalism. Two NUG leaders, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, publicly committed to reforms but were unable to address issues related to ministerial appointments and other official designations, resulting in delays within the cabinet formation. In general, non-Pashtun groups claimed that they wanted a reasonable path to win the presidency of a non-Pashtun candidate, but electoral fraud and the prevalence of insurgency in Afghanistan, particularly in Pashtun areas, have eroded their equitable share of power. NUG was still divided between two political leaders, and not all ministers were equal or accountable in front of two leaders. However, following the formation of the NUG, Afghanistan's security situation became more complex.

The intensified ethnic division, insurgency, rising cases of kidnapping and criminality, increased terrorist attacks in the countryside, economic recession, inept interference by neighbouring countries, and a shift in international community priorities remained a source of concern for Ghani's administration. Furthermore, Ghani's government failed to follow through on its commitment in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) to enforce a legal framework to combat the widespread corruption in Afghanistan. In a nutshell, President Ghani's lack of decision-making, combined with bad governance, contributed to increased insurgency in the country, resulting in political instability in Afghanistan. Pakistan has also had a few governance issues, and the state is more concerned with security than with people's development. However, Pakistan has an advantage over Afghanistan in terms of institutions such as the military, the Supreme Court, and economic institutions, as well as good infrastructure. Furthermore, democracy is functioning in Pakistan; though it is illiberal yet political issues have been resolved through dialogues among political parties. Certainly, poor governance and weak institutions shape immature policies, which is one of the reasons Ghani's rapprochement policy did not succeed.

**C) Insurgency in (Ex) Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)**

Pakistan's FATA is located along Pakistan's northwestern border along the Durand Line, and it is divided into seven tribal agencies: Bajaur, Mohmand, Orakzai, Khurram, Khyber, South Waziristan Agency (SWA), and North Waziristan Agency (NWA), as well as six Frontier regions. It is argued that the roots of insurgency and militancy can be traced back to the US-sponsored "Jihad" against the Soviet Union, in which Non-State Actors (NSAs) such as native "Mullahs" and religious parties

were strengthened to fight against Soviet expansion in Afghanistan. This 'Jihad' policy had a long-term impact on the tribal people because the region became a hub for various militant groups. However, the US invasion of Afghanistan following the events of 9/11 brought about a significant change in these tribal areas where mujahideen, now known as militants, sought refuge. No country has suffered more as a result of the US war on terrorism than Pakistan, which is a neighbouring country. Furthermore, Pakistan's alliance with the US in the war on terrorism fueled the emotions of these militant groups, and they immediately started to operate against the state of Pakistan. They established their organizational structure in tribal areas, primarily in the SWA and NWA. Between 2010 and 2014, they carried out deadly terrorist attacks in Pakistan, including at Mehran Base, Jinnah International Airport, and Kamra Air Base, which fundamentally altered Pakistan's perspective on counterterrorism operations (Naveed, 2019).

Militancy-related issues have grown in Pakistan, threatening the country's internal security and stability. In June 2014, Pakistan launched operation 'Zarb-e-Azb' in retaliation for those militants who were involved in insurgency in Afghanistan and were also putting Pakistan's security situation in jeopardy. Operation 'Zarb -e Azab' was a success in eliminating terrorist safe havens, as there was a significant decrease in terrorist attacks. However, this operation had unintended consequences, and the tribal region's inhabitants suffered yet again. There were approximately one million registered internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled the NWA war zone. However, retired Lieutenant General Talat Masood stated that *"The military gains will only be a part of the exercise. The operation's success is entirely dependent on the rehabilitation of displaced people and the development of the tribal region."* Similarly, in February 2017, the Pakistani military announced Operation 'Radd-ul-Fasaad' to continue the National Action Plan (NAP) and completely rid Pakistan of the threat of terrorism, particularly in its tribal belt. Since the US invasion of Afghanistan, the government of Pakistan has struggled to implement reforms in (ex) FATA tribal areas. The APS Peshawar attacks in 2014 compelled Pakistan to implement a National Action Plan (NAP) to root out terrorism in this region, and the government was eager to address these complex issues. Finally, on May 24, 2018, the National Assembly passed the 31st constitutional amendment to merge FATA and KPK. Furthermore, the entire border with Afghanistan has been fenced in order to prevent cross-border movements. Pakistan's political and military actions have begun to have an impact, and peace in the troubled region has been largely secured.

## **International Level of Analysis**

### **A) US Influence on Ashraf Ghani**

The United States is a powerful country that has justified its presence in Afghanistan by fighting a war against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the name of the War on Terror. Since the Cold War, the United States has had a strong interest in South Asia, owing to Afghanistan's important geostrategic location. Furthermore, it has some powerful neighbours, such as Russia, China, and India, who are emerging on the global stage and may challenge the US's dominance. In 2017, Donald Trump was elected as the 45th President of the United States. Trump announced his South Asian policy, which included Pakistan and Afghanistan. The increased US influence on Ghani's administration, combined with Ghani's reliance on the US to fight the Taliban and other terrorist groups, has purposefully impacted Ghani's outreach strategy to Pakistan. In March 2015, Ghani visited the United States and asked President Obama to decelerate the withdrawal process, stating that a

slower withdrawal would allow Afghan forces more time for better training and equipment. Additionally, he said that, "*Tragedy brought us together - interests now unite us,*" (Dobbins & Malkasian, 2015).

Afghanistan has also remained reliant on the US for foreign aid; since the Taliban's fall, the US has invested 111 billion dollars in Afghanistan through the end of FY2016. During fiscal year 2017, the United States invested \$4.2 billion in Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). During fiscal year 2018, President Donald Trump requested \$4.9 billion for ANDSF training and equipment. On August 21st, 2017, President Trump announced his new policy toward Afghanistan and South Asia, adopting a realist approach toward Afghanistan and giving the US military a dominant role in all Afghan matters, marginalizing Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, and ordering the deployment of an additional 4000 troops in Afghanistan (Pathak, 2017). This strategy advocated for a greater Indian role in Afghanistan. Senator Mushahid Hussain of Pakistan argued that President Trump is focusing on military means and that supporting India's dominant role in Afghanistan would lead to instability. Afghanistan's conflict requires a political solution with the assistance of regional countries such as Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and China. He asserted that we cannot ignore India's role in Afghanistan, and that Pakistan remains an important player as far as the factor of peace in Afghanistan is concerned (Munir & Shafiq, 2017). The United States' increased role, particularly Trump's hardline policy toward Afghanistan, played a significant role in the failure of Ghani's outreach strategy toward Pakistan. Because, in his opinion, Pakistan's 'Zarb - e- Azab' operation and 'Radd-ul Fasaad' have given militant groups an opportunity to penetrate Afghanistan and cause more instability and anarchy (Khan & Siddiqua, 2018). The US was assisting ANDSF militarily and economically, but it was also conducting air strikes against militant hideouts in Afghanistan. As a result, Ghani's administration became more reliant on the United States while alleviating Pakistan's interests and concerns in Afghanistan.

## **B) Domestic Features and Anarchical Structure Superseded Rapprochement**

States are always looking for ways to improve their security and power by expanding their influence and maximizing their material gains. Pakistan's story is similar, and from the beginning, Pakistan was concerned about its survival because, on one side, India became a rival country, and, on the other side of the border, Afghanistan was not pleased with the emergence of the new country due to some border and irredentism. The prevalent anarchy and hegemonic desire of the United States, the former Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and India played a critical role in allowing Pakistan to think in terms of survival, self-help, and securing national interests. Furthermore, Afghanistan's long history has contributed to the country's foreign policy being viewed through a realist lens. The national level of analysis proposes that foreign policy is a reflection of domestic policy or situation, and the domestic features of Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot align with President Ghani's rapprochement policy. Because Afghanistan is more vulnerable in terms of its political system, institutions, civil society, economy, violence, and ethnic divisions, all of the aforementioned variables strongly influenced the Afghan leadership's thought process and, as a result, became a barrier to conducting foreign policy effectively, efficiently, and independently. The geographical location of Pakistan and Afghanistan is also important, and domestic issues have an impact on the country's domestic politics as well as a spillover effect. The international level of analysis suggests that it is less about Afghan foreign policy or Ghani's rapprochement policy and

more about US interests and dictation. The United States has spent a lot of money on the war on terror and in Afghanistan in order to pursue its strategic and political interests. Furthermore, in light of India's increased role in Afghanistan, Ghani's rapprochement policy is unlikely to succeed because Pakistan can go to any length to exclude India's role in Afghanistan. The perception that Ghani is a puppet president who cannot go against the US exacerbated the situation in terms of Ghani's legitimacy; thus, his policy could not be effective or long-lasting. As a result, it is argued that the clash of interests of various local, regional, and international players played a key role in destabilizing President Ghani's rapprochement policy. The states have been pursuing their interests zealously, and without a convergence of interests, the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan-Afghan relations would remain uncertain under the anarchical structure.

## CONCLUSION

Since Pakistan's independence, Pak-Afghan relations have been variable, with an element of mistrust in their bilateral ties preventing them from cooperating and increasing the likelihood of conflict. Under the anarchical structure, both states were unsure of each other's intentions, and irredentism also contributed to the deterioration of their bilateral relations. Ghani's reconciliation policy failed due to a lack of comprehensiveness, objectivity, rationality, and consistency. Various factors contributed to the failure of the rapprochement policy, as both states continued playing blame game with each other. Afghanistan has continued to blame Pakistan for its internal strife, while Pakistan is concerned about encirclement as a result of the Kabul government's proclivity toward India. Pakistan's dominant security-oriented policies influenced relations, and the military establishment became a key player in shaping the country's foreign policy toward Afghanistan. The Pakistani establishment also assumed and perceived Afghanistan as a strategic depth, which had ramifications for the smooth relationships. Since Pakistan's inception in 1947, the Durand Line and Pashtunistan have been major impediments to developing harmonious bilateral ties. In modern times, Pakistan initiated some pragmatic efforts such as the construction of forts, the installation of biometric systems, the establishment of checkpoints, and the project of border fencing on its side of the Pak-Afghan border to root out the nuisance of terrorism, but Afghanistan viewed it suspiciously and continued to derail the border management process. Nonetheless, Ghani's poor governance, combined with competing ethnic and political factions, is a major setback for Pakistan-Afghan bilateral relations.

## References:

- Dalrymple, W. (2013). *A deadly triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India*: Brookings Institution Press.
- Daudzai, M. U. (2015). Afghanistan and Pakistan: The false promise of rapprochement. *New York Times*.
- Dobbins, J., & Malkasian, C. (2015). Time to Negotiate in Afghanistan. *Foreign Aff.*, 94, 53.
- Iqbal, K. (2015). Afghanistan back in focus. *Defence Journal*, 18(10), 10.
- Kaura, V. (2017). India-Afghanistan Relations in the Modi-Ghani Era. *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 30(1/2), 29-46.
- Khan, A. U., & Siddiqua, A. (2018). Islamic State in Afghanistan: Challenges for Pakistan. *Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses*, 4(2), 103-118.

- Khan, M. Z. (2017). Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan since Operation Freedom Sentinel: An overview. *Margalla Papers*, 21(1).
- Munir, M., & Shafiq, M. (2017). Trump's new Afghan strategy: Policy options for Pakistan. *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, 6(2).
- Mustaqeem, S., Ramli, R., & Dalib, S. (2018). Reasons & Reactions of Army Public School Attack and solution via Communication Strategies.
- Naveed, N. (2019). OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: RETROSPECTIVE VIEW IN THE CONTEXT OF US RESPONSE. *MARGALLA*, 139.
- Neumann, R. E. (2015). *Failed Relations Between Hamid Karzai and the United States*: United States Institute of Peace.
- Pathak, S. (2017). Trump's South Asia Policy: Implications for China. *Perspectives on Trump's South Asia Policy*, 13.
- Qassem, A. S., & Durand, H. (2008). Pak-Afghan Relations: The Durand Line Issue. *Policy Perspectives*, 87-102.
- QAYUM, H., & Tariq, M. (2021). Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations During Ashraf Ghani Era. *Rashhat-e-Qalam*, 1(1), 145-159.
- Ratti, L. (2006). Post-cold war Nato and international relations theory: The case for neo-classical realism. *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 4(1), 81-110.
- Sial, S. (2016). Pakistan-Afghanistan ties in the changing regional dynamics. *Conflict and Peace Studies*, 8(1), 61-86.
- Sperling, J. (2015). Neo-classical realism and alliance politics. In *Theorising NATO* (pp. 61-92): Routledge.
- Tehseena Usman, M. (2017). Pak-Afghan Relations (2001-2017): A Prisoner's Dilemma Analysis. In: Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad.
- Yusuf, M., & Smith, S. (2015). *Ashraf Ghani's Pakistan Outreach*: JSTOR.

Date of Publication	June 22, 2021
---------------------	---------------