

Regional view

Pak-Afghan ties: views of Pakistan's political and religious parties

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Introduction

Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan go back to 1947 when Pakistan came into being. These relations hold special importance due to the shared geostrategic, ethnic, cultural and religious bonds. In a televised speech on October 3, 2011, Afghan President Hamid Karzai described the two countries as “inseparable brothers,” primarily due to the shared religious and ethnic connections. This, however, does not mean that there has always been smooth sailing in bilateral ties. They started on a low. Afghanistan was the only country to oppose Pakistan joining the United Nations in September 1947. In the 1970s, the relations nosedived when Afghanistan accused Pakistan of supporting rebels such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Ahmad Shah Massoud and Jalaluddin Haqqani.

Soon after the assassination of Afghan President Daoud Khan in 1978, and the execution of Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.¹ The United States and Pakistan joined forces to counter the Soviet influence in the region by training guerillas to fight the Soviet army (Jamestown Foundation, 2006). The Afghans crossed the Durand Line in big numbers to flee the war in the 1980s. The mujahideen insurgent groups also crossed the Durand Line back and forth. In February 1989, the Soviet troops completed their withdrawal after a decade-long campaign in Afghanistan. Contrary to popular expectations, the mujahideen were unable to take Kabul for a number of years. In April 1992, the mujahideen managed to overthrow the Moscow-backed Najib government in Kabul. The main reason for the collapse of the Najib government was the discontinuity in political, economic and military support from the Soviet Union after the latter's dissolution in December 1991 and continued outside support for

¹ For details see Ewans, 2002.

mujahideen from Pakistan and elsewhere (Grau, 2004). However, the mujahideen were at each other's throats almost instantly and failed to establish peace, something that gave rise to the Taliban.

After capturing important cities such as Kandahar and 12 Afghan provinces in 1994 through assistance from Pakistan, the Taliban successfully managed to create the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 1996 after gaining control of most of the Afghan territory. They maintained close ties with the Pakistan government. However, these relations deteriorated when the Taliban refused to recognize Durand Line as an international border, arguing that there should be no borders between Muslim countries (Roashan, 2001). The 9/11 attacks changed the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban as Islamabad decided to side with the West in its war on terror. With the invasion of Afghanistan and collapse of the Taliban government, the US-led transitional government was put in place in 2002. It was headed by Karzai, who was made president in 2004 after the creation of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The new political administration refused to recognize the Durand Line with Hamid Karzai describing it as "a line of hatred that raised a wall between two brothers" (Harrison, 2009).

Border security became a major source of tension between the two countries. A new and worrying development for Pakistan on its western borders was cross-border attacks by Afghanistan-based Pakistani Taliban militants on Pakistani security forces' posts. At least 30 such strikes were reported on the Pak-Afghan border at Chitral, Dir, Bajaur and Kurram, resulting in the killing of 250 Pakistani security personnel and civilians in 2011 and 2012 (Rana & Sial, 2013). These militants were part of the Taliban factions that fled to Afghanistan's border provinces, mainly Kunar and Nuristan, in the face of military operations at home and their attacks contributed to deterioration in bilateral relations.

Millions of Afghan refugees had poured into Pakistan following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and about 1.7 million refugees remained in Pakistan in early 2014. The repatriation process remained problematic as the Afghan government repeatedly admitted that it lacked the capacity to absorb the returning refugees (Ali, 2014).

With the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in sight, the relations between the two states hold great importance as both are engaged in internal conflicts.

This study is aimed at evaluating how the political parties in Pakistan, including the religio-political ones, view the relations between the two states in the prevailing circumstances and what strategies, if any, they have devised to counter the problems being faced by the two states. The study was conducted through a critical evaluation of the party manifestos and published material on foreign policies of these parties. Interviews with party representatives were also conducted to fill the gaps in information collected through secondary sources.

The party representatives were asked the following questions in the interviews.

1. What is the party's position on Pak-Afghan relations and where does Afghanistan stand in the party's policy?
2. How do you see relations between the two countries after the withdrawal of NATO forces?
3. What constraints and opportunities are there in Pak-Afghan ties and how does the party plan to use them to improve relations?
4. How does the party look at the various issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan?
 - Cross-border infiltration and militancy
 - Pak-Afghan joint security issues
 - Afghan refugees
5. How can trade between the two countries be improved?
 - Formal trade
 - Informal trade (smuggling of weapons and narcotics)

Views of political parties

Pakistan Peoples Party

The Pakistan Peoples Party is one of the largest political parties in Pakistan. Founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967, the party has come to power in the centre four times (1971-1977, 1988-1990, 1993-1996 and 2008-2013). The PPP is

currently in power in the province of Sindh. Known to be center-left, progressive and a social democratic party, it has supported military operations against extremists. The party's 2013 manifesto makes the commitment to "Undertake targeted military operations against all militant and terrorist outfits that challenge the writ of the state." The party takes credit for counter-terrorism initiatives such as the Swat operation in 2009. Pakistan Army has played a leading role in shaping the foreign policy towards Afghanistan and the US-led war on terror. Pakistan maintained a soft spot for Afghan Taliban during the PPP regime, which drew criticism from the international community and the Afghan government. This approach was due to Pakistan's constant suspicion of growing Indian interest in Afghanistan. During the last days of the PPP government, issues concerning Pakistan-Afghanistan border continued including the US operation that killed Bin Laden and the NATO airstrikes on Pakistani military checkpoints. Repeated infiltration into Pakistan's territory by NATO forces, Afghan security forces and the Taliban were some factors complicating relations between the two countries during the PPP government.

Realizing that cross-border militant infiltration from Afghanistan was allowing the militants to regroup, the party supported a policy of coordinated assaults on the militants by both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The party proposed joint operations based on collective intelligence from both states to tackle extremist elements hiding in areas along the Pak-Afghan border (PPPP, 2013). The PPP also takes credit for deploying 151,000 troops along the western border to protect the country from cross-border infiltration of militants, criminals and narcotics smugglers. It also claims to have set up over 800 border security posts to monitor the movement of these elements (Ibid). The PPP's young chairperson, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, has been vocal on social media in supporting what he calls "jihad against the [Pakistani] Taliban" (*The Nation*, 2014). He has also actively criticized right-wing political parties in Pakistan that have a soft spot for the Taliban. The PPP supports the Afghan-led process for achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan (*Dawn*, 2012). The focus on an Afghan-led peace process is important as Pakistan has been criticized by the Afghan government and some international actors for supporting the Taliban. Realizing that the return of Afghan refugees in Pakistan is an important matter in terms of the state's economy and security, the party supports a comprehensive plan for the repatriation of Afghan

refugees, in close coordination with the Afghan government and international organizations. The party also encourages voluntary and safe resettlement of Afghan refugees and favors cultural, commercial and people-to-people cooperation between the two states (PPPP, 2013).

The party also calls for better economic relations with Afghanistan by initiating free trade agreements, comprehensive economic partnerships, financial and banking systems, trans-regional and intra-regional energy supply and energy security arrangements, and secure transport and freight corridors (Ibid).

The party reaffirms the fact that Pakistan's alliance with the US and Afghanistan is critical to ensuring peace and stability in the country, and supports a trilateral policy to carry out joint efforts to curb militancy by formulating coordinated anti-terrorism strategies. However, the party is committed to non-interference in Afghanistan by supporting only Afghan-led path to stabilization, reconciliation and peace, without favoring any group, faction or tribe (Ibid).

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) is currently the most important political player in the country. In the 2013 elections, the party managed to secure 186 seats in the National Assembly, and formed the government at the federal level. It is a center-right and socially conservative party. Earlier, it had twice remained in power in the centre; from 1990 to 1993 and from 1997 to 1999. It had served as a powerful opposition when not in government. Punjab, the most populous province, is its stronghold.

The party has managed to engage strong militant groups in the country to sit on the negotiation table for peace talks. Whether this approach would succeed is yet to be seen as militants continue to attack the security forces and civilians while seemingly remaining interested in talks.

Understanding that the situation will be critical after NATO forces pull out of Afghanistan, the PML-N calls for inclusive political engagement with the Afghan Taliban as a key to lasting peace in the country. The PML-N also emphasizes an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process, in which Pakistan

can act as a facilitator (*The Express Tribune*, 2014). Known for its emphasis on economic development, the party has expressed its commitment to improving trade relations with Afghanistan. It recently signed an agreement to boost the trade volume and strengthen economic ties with Afghanistan (*The Nation*, 2013a). The party manifesto emphasizes the importance of achieving peace by strengthening regional cooperation (PML-N, 2013).

Realizing that addressing the Afghan refugee issue is proving problematic for the state, the PML-N government is determined to carry out a coordinated repatriation program. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan stated that "some 98,000 illegal residents, mostly Afghan refugees are living in the slums of Islamabad, many of them criminals" (Pakistan News Day, 2013). The government is focused on carrying out the registration process of these slums and hopes that the repatriation will pick up pace after NATO forces leave Afghanistan.

The PML-N has called for an effective border management system in coordination with Afghan security forces to curb cross-border infiltration. During a visit to London, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said in October 2013: "Pakistan does not want its soil or that of Afghanistan to be used by enemies against the other" (*Dawn*, 2013).

It seems clear that the party is determined to maintain good relations with neighboring countries, and is focused on resolving issues through collaboration and cooperative means. It emphasizes the importance of greater regional cooperation to not just fight off internal threats but also engage with the international community.

Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf

Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) is a centre-right progressive party. It has markedly grown in popularity in recent years. Imran Khan, a former cricketer, is its chairman. The party is particularly popular among the youth and its emphasis on fighting corruption is appreciated by a great deal of people. It strongly believes in friendly relations with neighboring countries. It emphasizes strong relations with all the Muslim countries. In its 2013 election manifesto, the PTI advocated Pakistan's friendly relations with Afghanistan and a policy of non-interference. It stressed that neither country

should interfere in the other's internal affairs; Pakistan should not fight Afghanistan's war and should only help Kabul when help is sought (PTI, 2013).

On the issue of cross-border infiltration and militancy, the PTI promises to take strong action against those who use Pakistan's soil for carrying out terrorist activities. It believes that it is the responsibility of every country to prevent such activities. It is of the view that Pakistan Army has done enough to fight extremism and that it is now the duty of the government to have dialogue and settle issues with extremists (Ibid).

The PTI strongly opposes the CIA targeting militants through drone strikes. It says that most casualties of drone strikes are innocent civilians and not wanted terrorists and that through drone attacks the United States is committing a war crime against Pakistani citizens (Ibid). To protest repeated drone strikes, PTI has blocked the NATO supply passing through Pakistan on a number of occasions. According to PTI, peace cannot be attained in the country unless drone strikes are stopped (*The Nation*, 2013b).

It does not think that there is any military solution to the Afghan imbroglio and the war on terror is destroying Pakistan. The PTI believes that American presence is fueling extremism in regional countries and Pakistan will implode if the US does not leave Afghanistan. If NATO forces leave Afghanistan, Pakistani security forces will get rid of terrorism. But as long as the Americans are in Afghanistan and ask the Pakistanis to do more in the tribal belt, the situation in Pakistan will worsen (PTI, 2013).

On the matter of trade, the PTI supports and welcomes trade with Afghanistan as it will benefit Pakistan. The party also says that it wants to connect the regional countries via rail and road for carrying out legal trade and that it will work to stop the illegal trade in the region (Ibid).

Awami National Party

Led by Asfandyar Wali Khan, the Awami National Party (ANP) is a secular and left-leaning political party based in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The party has its following in the Pashtun belt and after the 2008 elections it was part of the coalition government with the PPP in the center and in

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It has a policy of maintaining cordial ties with Afghanistan as it believes that neighbors cannot be changed and good relations with all neighboring countries will help Pakistan.² In its view, Pakistan should not interfere in the internal matters of regional countries, including Afghanistan. Pakistan has tried to bring someone else's war into its own land and has to pay for that in the form of terrorism, which is a growing problem for the region, the party holds.³

The ANP believes that it is imperative for both countries to take action against cross-border militant activities. If a terrorist activity is carried out from Pakistan's territory, Islamabad should take responsibility and take strict action against the offenders. Similarly, if militant activities are carried out from the Afghan soil, the Afghan government should put its foot down and respond firmly.⁴ The party supports peace talks as the first option to counter religious extremism in Pakistan. However, in case the dialogue fails the military option should be used against groups that engage in violent activities against the state.⁵

The party wants Pakistan to promote trade with Afghanistan. It advocates that there should be economic, commercial, educational and cultural cooperation between the two countries. It is for expanding bilateral road and rail links. It says that the Torkham and Spin Boldak road links are not enough; ten more road and rail links should be created.

The ANP does not support a complete withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. It believes that foreign troops should stay until Afghan forces are fully capable of taking over security duties. Afghanistan and Pakistan should come up with a mutually-agreed policy before a complete withdrawal of US and NATO forces. The absence of such a policy would lead to more bloodshed in the tribal belt and revival of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan.⁶ It believes that a rapid departure of Western forces from Afghanistan would

² Marwat, Sadar-ud-din, ANP spokesperson. Telephonic interview by the authors. March 6th 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

benefit extremists not just in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan, who have been waiting for such an opportunity so that they can make a comeback. The United States should keep its promises of combating extremism and bringing stability to the region (Kakar, 2011).

Muttahida Qaumi Movement

Founded and headed by Altaf Hussain, the MQM is largely the party of descendents of Urdu-speaking émigrés who had migrated from India when Pakistan became an independent country. The party has its support base mainly in Karachi and Hyderabad. It is the second biggest party of Sindh in the parliament in terms of the number of lawmakers. It believes that Pakistan should reshape its foreign policy by looking eastwards, particularly towards its neighbors and it should reduce its dependence on the West. The MQM says that being a brotherly country, Afghanistan is of great importance. It believes in a policy of peaceful coexistence and holds that all disputes among countries should be resolved through dialogue. On the issue of joint security and cross-border militancy, the party believes that the Taliban and Pakistan are opposed to each other and cannot coexist. The Taliban's ascendancy will put the country's security and sovereignty in jeopardy. Pakistan should take strict action against the militants, it says. The MQM supports military action against the Taliban and expresses solidarity with Pakistan army. Force is the only option left to deal with the extremist groups and Taliban sympathizers are traitors, the party advocates. Appreciating the MQM's stance, President Karzai wrote a letter to Altaf Hussain saying Pakistan and Afghanistan would have to take joint action against terrorism and extremism as these posed a big threat to both countries now and in the future (The News, 2012).

The border between the two countries remains porous. As the Afghans do not accept Durand Line as international border, stopping smuggling and Afghans from crossing the frontier is difficult, MQM says and wants both governments to act against cross-border militancy. Terrorism has caused a lot of instability in the country and the biggest threat to Pakistan are its internal conditions.

Efforts should be made to bring stability to the region by combating this menace.⁷

The party thinks that although US forces are withdrawing from Afghanistan in 2014, no specific date has been given. So drawing a conclusion on the future situation would be premature. Pakistan should not interfere in Afghanistan's internal affair, but being a brotherly neighbor Pakistan can provide assistance, if that is sought. Afghanistan should rebuild itself once the American troops depart.⁸

The MQM favors trade with Afghanistan and believes that in this era of regional development countries do not progress alone and no country can grow in isolation. It says that Pakistan and Afghanistan should strengthen their brotherly bonds and trade would strengthen bilateral relations, benefiting Pakistan's economy. However, dependence on any state weakens sovereignty in terms of foreign policy. Pakistan should opt for numerous options for growth of its economy and energy and promote its national interest.⁹

Balochistan National Party

Formed in 1996 by Sardar Attaullah Mengal, the Balochistan National Party (BNP) is a nationalist and secular political party. It believes in greater provincial autonomy through peaceful and democratic means. Sardar Akhtar Mengal, former chief minister of Balochistan, is the president of the party. The party believes that it is imperative to have friendly relations with the neighboring countries and Pakistan and Afghanistan should not interfere in each other's internal matters.¹⁰ Both countries should take strict action on terrorist activities carried out from their soil, it stresses. The first and foremost step that the Pakistan government should take when the US troops leave

⁷ Jaleel, Wasay, deputy in-charge of Central Information Committee of the MQM. Telephonic interview by the authors, March 8th 2014.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Baloch, Agha Hassan, a BNP leader. Telephonic interview by the authors, March 10th 2014.

Afghanistan is to send the Afghan refugees back to their country because illegal trade has prevailed because of these people.¹¹

With the number of Afghan refugees rising in the country, smuggling had become big business, and human trafficking, drug trafficking, religious fundamentalism, terrorism and the Kalashnikov culture had taken root in the region. After Peshawar, Quetta hosts the highest number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, and the federal government should help the provincial authorities expel Afghans from the city.¹²

Militants from Afghanistan come to Pakistan's border regions for refuge from time to time. The porous border makes it difficult for the authorities to keep a full check on the movement of people crossing the border. The party says that the American drones often target militants hiding in Pakistan's tribal areas. The security authorities believe that many Afghan refugees are involved in terrorist activities in Pakistan. Some of the refugees have also been arrested.

The BNP supports legal trade, which strengthens bonds between the two countries. However, it emphasizes that primary importance should be given to Pakistan's internal security rather than the security of neighboring states. It considers internal security vital for national and regional security.¹³

National Party

Headed by Dr. Abdul Malik Baloch, the current chief minister of Balochistan, the National Party is a left-wing nationalist party. It is one of the largest parties active in Balochistan. It won 10 seats in Balochistan Assembly in the 2013 elections, and also has a seat in the National Assembly.

Dr. Baloch believes that a complete withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan could result in the Taliban gaining control of the state. This would be an unmitigated disaster not only for Afghanistan but also for Pakistan. Therefore, in his view, all stakeholders, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States should collectively formulate a policy to

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

ensure that they stay on until the Afghan security forces are capable of tackling the Taliban and other extremist groups in Afghanistan (Malik, 2013). He is of the view that currently the Afghan security forces are not capable of preventing the Taliban from taking over Kabul. He believes that the West's military engagement in Afghanistan would go to waste if the Taliban regained control of the state from the democratically elected government (Ibid).

Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party

Headed by Mahmood Khan Achakzai, Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) is a nationalist political party representing largely the Pashtun population of Balochistan. The party's ideology is to reunite the Pashtuns of Balochistan, KP and FATA in order to make them a strong force in national and international politics (PkMAP, 2013).

The party supports the present government in Afghanistan and its efforts to rebuild the state. It strongly advocates that Afghanistan is a sovereign state and, therefore, should have control over its external and internal affairs free from outside interference. They PkMAP also supports a non-interference policy for Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO forces (Ibid). The party condemns interference by Pakistani agencies in Afghanistan and believes that this interference can prove counterproductive for Pakistan in the future, as it has been in the past.

Jamaat-i-Islami

The Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) is the best organized and arguably the most powerful religio-political party in Pakistan. Currently headed by Sirajul Haq, it supports the idea of brotherly relations with Afghanistan and other Muslim countries. Its objective is the establishment of an Islamic state, governed by the Sharia law. It opposes ideologies such as capitalism, socialism and secularism.

It vehemently opposes Pakistan's support for the war on terror and condemns General Musharraf for casting his lot with the US. It holds that Pakistan does not need any problematic alliances and that it is about time that Pakistan

breaks off ties with the United States.¹⁴ Pakistan should strengthen ties with the Muslim world, the JI says, and advises the government to remain focused on peace talks with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The party prefers talks over military action against extremist groups, arguing that the use of force would exacerbate the problem.¹⁵

On the question of joint security efforts and the presence of US troops in Afghanistan, the JI says that imperial powers follow their own interests and divide nations to manipulate them; it says that that is exactly what the US is doing in Afghanistan. The party says that there would be a civil war in Afghanistan if the US leaves now. It holds that it is the responsibility of Iran, Pakistan and all the stakeholders to set up an interim government in Afghanistan, and the armies of the Muslim world should stay there to support such a government.¹⁶ It also believes that the US has its eye on Central Asia's natural resources. It favors severing relations with the US and working for better ties with China. The US is responsible for the killing of Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Iraq and Afghanistan, the JI says. It supports the Afghan Taliban and considers President Karzai a US puppet and a major hurdle to peace talks between the Taliban and the US.¹⁷ The party says that Karzai's non-serious attitude would obstruct the withdrawal of NATO forces. The party supports trade not only with Afghanistan, but also with the rest of the Muslim world. It bemoans the fact that only 11% of Pakistan's imports and 17% of its exports are with Muslim countries and says that the government should not give control of national resources to the West. It believes that trade with Afghanistan is in favor of Pakistan, and the government should also strive to curb illegal cross-border trade in the region.¹⁸

¹⁴ Azeez, Abdul Ghaffar, director, Foreign Affairs, JI. Telephonic interview by the authors, March 7th 2014.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl

Headed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the JUI-F is arguably the most popular religio-political party in Pakistan. It is currently the fifth largest political party in Pakistan, with seven members in the National Assembly from southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern Balochistan.

The party believes in cordial relations with Afghanistan. In order to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict, the party supports dialogue with those who want to have negotiations. The party spokesperson says that it has a zero-tolerance policy for those who continue to stage attacks.¹⁹ The JUI-F sees peace in FATA as vital for peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The groups fighting against the state of Pakistan in FATA not only carry out frequent attacks targeting Pakistani security forces and civilians, but also help the Afghan Taliban find refuge from security forces in Afghanistan. Similarly, the Pakistani Taliban also go to Afghanistan to find hideouts and stage attacks on Pakistani security forces personnel and civilians.

Even though the party regularly criticizes American intervention in Afghanistan and supports the withdrawal of NATO forces, it believes that a sudden departure would create a power vacuum and cause further instability in the region. Therefore, it believes in a well-planned and coordinated withdrawal of NATO forces, enabling the Afghan security forces to take over. The party also supports provision of assistance (military and political) by the Pakistan government to Afghan authorities in this critical period of transition. It firmly believes that a comprehensive withdrawal plan needs to be formulated based on coordination among Afghan, American and Pakistani authorities. It believes that unless that happens there is a strong possibility of the Taliban regaining control of important areas and causing total chaos in the country.²⁰

¹⁹ Achakzai, Jaan, JUI-F spokesperson. Telephone interview by the authors, March 7th 2014.

²⁰ Ibid.

The party supports robust trade relations with Afghanistan to help the economies of both states. It believes that increase in formal trade would not just help the two countries, but also the region.²¹

Conclusion

Political and religious parties of Pakistan have substantial convergence of views on the shape that Pakistan-Afghanistan relations should take. There is a general agreement that relations between the two states should be cordial not only because they are neighbors, but also since Afghanistan is a fellow Muslim country. The parties believe that both countries should refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs, but help each other when and where needed.

While discussing terrorism, the most important problem being faced by the two states, most political parties opted for a peaceful resolution of conflict through dialogue between the Afghan government and the Taliban. However, some parties including the ANP, PPP and MQM believe that in case of failure of talks, military operations should be used as the final option to resolve the ongoing crisis. While advocating a policy of non-interference in Afghanistan's affairs, most parties argue that interference by Pakistani agencies in Afghanistan has been disastrous for both states. Meanwhile, some parties, including Jamaat-i-Islami and the JUI-F believe that interference would result in further bloodshed in Afghanistan. Therefore, they suggest that all stakeholders, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the US should formulate a comprehensive plan to deal with the situation after the withdrawal of NATO forces.

All parties agree that the regional bloc needs to be strengthened and that can only be done through political, military and economic collaboration. Some believe that alliances should be formed on a religious basis, i.e., relations with Muslim countries should be improved, while other political parties follow the more pragmatic approach of regional cooperation with neighboring states irrespective of religion to help make the bloc stronger.

²¹ Ibid.

Furthermore, most political parties agree that trade with Afghanistan should be welcomed. The ANP believes that the current trade routes are not sufficient and more rail and road links should be created to boost trade with Afghanistan. Meanwhile, efforts should be made to stop illegal trafficking of smuggled goods, drugs, weapons, material used for making explosives, etc. Both countries have to figure out how their mutual border can be secured. Border security is also considered important by all parties to stop movement of militants between the two states, posing security challenges for both and helping militants find sanctuaries.

Most parties agree that Afghan refugees pose a major challenge to Pakistan's security and economy, and their repatriation should be expedited. Members of leading political parties also claim that most Afghan refugees are engaged in criminal activity, and therefore should be sent back immediately.

Almost all the parties believe that both countries are linked in such a way that the security situation in one invariably affects the other. Therefore, political and military establishments of both countries should collectively come up with policies to bring peace to the two countries and the region.

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