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Abstract

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Keywords: Afghanistan, Taliban, Pakistan, Regional Stability, Diplomatic Engagement, Economic Cooperation, Security Measures, Humanitarian Crisis

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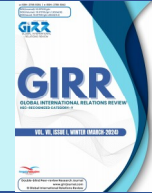
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This article critically observes the political, economic, and security backgrounds in Afghanistan post-2021, following the Taliban's coming into power, and examines the successive implications for Pakistan. It provides a detailed analysis of evolving scenarios in Afghanistan, encompassing stabilization efforts, international reactions, and the ongoing humanitarian crunch. Additionally, the article discovers Pakistan's strategic options for navigating these improvements, with a particular highlighting on diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and security measures. The study highlights the essential importance of a stable Afghanistan for the stability of the wider region and keeps in mind the need for Pakistan to adopt a multifaceted approach to efficiently address the complex challenges and opportunities presented by the new Afghan reality.

Keywords: [Afghanistan](#), [Taliban](#), [Pakistan](#), [Regional Stability](#), [Diplomatic Engagement](#), [Economic Cooperation](#), [Security Measures](#), [Humanitarian Crisis](#)

Introduction

The political Scenario of South Asia faced a significant transformation in August 2021, marked by the Taliban's coming into power in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces. This huge development has far-reaching implications for the region, particularly affecting neighboring countries. Pakistan, Pakistan shares a wide range of borders with Afghanistan and has a long history of involvement in Afghan dealings, finds itself at the forefront of this geopolitical shift (Rashid, [2021](#)).

This research analyzes the evolving situation in Afghanistan and measures the strategic options available to Pakistan in light of the new geopolitical situation. The Taliban's return to power introduces an intricate set of challenges and opportunities for Pakistan, impacting its security, economic interests, and regional influence. Understanding these dynamics is very important for formulating effective strategies to navigate the related realities in South Asia.



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Table 1

Aspect	Details
Political Landscape	<p>Event: the return of the Taliban into power (August 2021)</p> <p>International Response: Skepticism and demands for inclusive governance</p> <p>Stabilization Efforts: Diplomatic efforts for political stability and inclusive governance</p>
Economic Landscape	<p>Foreign Aid Dependence: Nearly 40% of Afghanistan's GDP before the Taliban takeover</p> <p>Crisis: Economic collapse, poverty, and food insecurity post-withdrawal</p> <p>Potential Cooperation: Economic integration, investment opportunities, and trade initiatives (e.g., extending CPEC)</p>
Security Landscape	<p>Militant Presence: Various militant groups, including ISKP</p> <p>Threats: Cross-border terrorism and regional instability</p> <p>Measures: Enhanced border security, counter-terrorism efforts, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms</p>
Pakistan's Strategic Options	<p>Diplomatic Engagement: Promoting inclusive governance and mediating between Afghan factions</p> <p>Economic Cooperation: Enhancing trade relations, investing in Afghan infrastructure, extending CPEC</p> <p>Security Measures: Strengthening border security, collaborating on counter-terrorism with international partners</p>
Regional Stability	<p>Importance: A stable Afghanistan crucial for regional peace and security</p> <p>Impact: Stability in Afghanistan benefits Pakistan and broader South Asia</p> <p>International Role: Need for global cooperation and support to stabilize Afghanistan</p>

Literature Review

Historically, Afghanistan has been a central point of regional power struggles, simply known as the "graveyard of empires" due to the various failed invasions and occupations by foreign powers (Rashid, [2021](#)). The Soviet

attack in 1979 and the subsequent U.S.-led invasion in 2001 have left lasting impacts on the country's socio-political backdrop. These invasions not only interrupted Afghanistan's internal matters but also influenced the broader geopolitical atmosphere of South

Asia. The legacy of these foreign interruptions is evident in the persistent instability and the involved web of alliances and hostilities that characterize the region today.

The previous term of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 was characterized by strict Islamic governance and international isolation, which shaped Afghanistan's historical and political context (Katzman, [2022](#)). The way they rule, marked by rigid enforcement of Sharia law and human rights violations, led to international condemnation and economic sanctions. Understanding this historical background is a must for contextualizing the current condition, as it provides insight into the challenges and opportunities facing Afghanistan and its neighbors. The historical patterns of foreign involvement, resistance, and internal law are key to comprehending the complexities of the present geopolitical scenario and anticipating future developments in the region.

Political Dynamics

The political scene of post-2021 Afghanistan is now being taken over by the Taliban, whose promises to form a wide-ranging government have been met with considerable skepticism (Katzman, [2022](#)). Despite their claims of seeking wider representation, the Taliban's internal governance practices appear to remain largely unchanged from their earlier regime, with limited opportunities for minorities and women. This continuity in ruling style raises concerns about their commitment to inclusivity and human rights, which are crucial for ahead of international legitimacy and support.

Most of the research indicates the significance of political stability in Afghanistan for achieving regional peace, underlining that political exclusion often results in internal conflict and invites external involvement (Rashid, 2021). The lack of inclusive governance can accelerate tensions

within the country, which is leading to instability and spills over into neighboring regions. Therefore, the international community realizes the need for an inclusive political process in Afghanistan to maintain stability and decrease the risk of conflict, both within its borders and in the broader South Asian region (Giustozzi, [2019](#)). these dynamics are essential for assessing the future plans of Afghanistan and its impact on regional geopolitics.

Economic Conditions

The economy of Afghanistan depends on foreign aid, which created nearly 40% of its GDP before the Taliban's takeover (World Bank, [2022](#)). This confidence in external financial support underlines the fragility of the Afghan economy, which has struggled to develop viable internal revenue sources. The infusion of foreign aid was Imported for funding essential services, infrastructure projects, and social agendas that supported Masses of Afghans. This inter-dependency created a risky economic situation, when a country depends on aid flows could have severe consequences for the economy of the country, stability, and development.

The unexpected withdrawal of international support following the Taliban's arrival to power has caused a significant economic crisis in Afghanistan. This sudden pause in aid has led to increased poverty and food insecurity, worsening the already dire humanitarian situation (Shaikh, [2022](#)). The economic damage has had a wide range of repercussions, including the deterioration of public services, and loss of livelihoods, because of a sudden stop of aid it increase the ratio of migration. The condition is particularly dire for helpless populations, Which is based on women and minorities, who face huge risks during the economic downturn. The incapability of the Taliban government to replace lost foreign aid with

substitute revenue streams has further severe the crisis, highlighting the urgent need for economic interventions and international meetings to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

Research shows that economic stability in Afghanistan is essential not only for the country's own development but also for regional economic integration and prosperity. A stable and economically Strong Afghanistan can serve as a hub for trade and transit, easing economic connectivity between Central and South Asia (Kugelman, [2021](#)). The potential for regional economic integration offers significant welfare for nearby countries, particularly Pakistan, which shares profound economic and cultural ties with Afghanistan. Afghan economic cooperation could lead to increased trade, investment opportunities, and improved infrastructure connectivity, fostering joint economic growth and stability in the region. Therefore, discussing Afghanistan's economic challenges is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a strategic requirement for regional development and security.

Security Issues

Security remains a paramount concern in Afghanistan, with various militant groups, including the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), posing significant threats to both national and regional stability (Giustozzi, [2022](#)). The resurgence of the Taliban has not eradicated the presence of these extremist factions, which continue to exploit the country's political and economic instability. According to Fair ([2022](#)), the risk of Afghanistan becoming a sanctuary for international terrorism is substantial, raising alarms about the potential for these groups to orchestrate attacks beyond Afghanistan's borders. This scenario not only threatens Afghanistan's internal security but also jeopardizes the stability of the broader South

Asian region, where the ripple effects of such instability can lead to increased violence and conflict.

Effective counter-terrorism measures and robust international cooperation are deemed essential for addressing these security challenges. As highlighted by Rashid (2021), regional and global stakeholders must collaborate to implement comprehensive strategies that include intelligence sharing, coordinated military actions, and support for local security forces. The international community's involvement is critical in preventing Afghanistan from descending into a safe haven for terrorist activities, which would have far-reaching consequences. Furthermore, Giustozzi (2022) emphasizes that addressing the root causes of militancy, such as poverty and political disenfranchisement, is crucial for long-term security and stability. Therefore, a multifaceted approach that combines immediate counter-terrorism efforts with broader socio-economic and political reforms is necessary to mitigate the security risks emanating from Afghanistan.

Emerging Scenarios in Afghanistan

Political Landscape

The Taliban's return to power has fundamentally altered Afghanistan's political dynamics, bringing significant changes to its governance and international relations. With their control reestablished, the Taliban face the monumental task of transitioning from an insurgent group to a governing entity capable of managing a complex, diverse society. Their ability to govern effectively and inclusively is critical for achieving domestic legitimacy, which is essential for maintaining stability and preventing internal dissent (Katzman, 2022). However, the Taliban's historical governance, marked by strict Islamic rule and exclusionary practices, casts doubt on their commitment to inclusivity and effective

administration. Ensuring minority representation and upholding the rights of women and other marginalized groups will be pivotal in gaining the trust and cooperation of the Afghan populace.

The international community remains highly cautious in its approach to engaging with the Taliban-led government. There is a consensus among global powers that any form of diplomatic recognition or economic aid will be contingent upon the Taliban's adherence to fundamental human rights and the establishment of an inclusive government (Rashid, 2021). This cautious stance stems from concerns over the Taliban's past record and current actions, which have so far shown limited progress toward inclusivity and respect for international norms. For instance, reports of human rights violations and the exclusion of women from public life and education have reinforced skepticism about the Taliban's willingness to change (Shaikh, 2022). As a result, the international community has set clear preconditions for engagement, including verifiable improvements in governance and human rights.

Additionally, the Taliban's mission for international recognition and legitimacy is interrelated to Afghanistan's economic needs. The country is facing severe economic challenges, exacerbated by the sudden end of foreign aid and the freezing of assets (World Bank, 2022). International recognition is a must for unlocking financial aid and investment, by unlocking the foreign aid which is necessary for the economic recovery and development of Afghanistan. The Taliban must route a delicate balance: implementing reforms to meet global demands while managing internal pressures and resistance to change (Giustozzi, 2022). The path to international legitimacy and domestic stability is full of challenges, but it is very important

for Afghanistan's future dignity and integration into the global community.

Economic Challenges

The economic condition of Afghanistan is horrible, exacerbated by the sudden stop of international aid, which earlier accounted for nearly 40% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2022). This sudden withdrawal of financial support has embarked Afghanistan into severe economic chaos, characterized by a wide range of poverty, food insecurity, and a deteriorating humanitarian situation. The lack of external funding has disturbed public services and infrastructure projects, which increased the unemployment rate and also marginalized vulnerable populations, including women and minorities. The economic instability poses significant challenges to the Taliban's ability to govern effectively and maintain social order.

The Taliban's governance will be critically assessed based on their capacity to revive the economy and provide essential services to the Afghan people. Ensuring economic stability is paramount for achieving domestic legitimacy and mitigating public dissent. According to Katzman (2022), the Taliban must develop strategies to stimulate economic growth, such as attracting foreign investment, rebuilding infrastructure, and improving agricultural productivity. However, their ability to implement such measures is hindered by international sanctions and the reluctance of foreign governments to engage with a regime that has yet to demonstrate a commitment to human rights and inclusive governance (Rashid, 2021). The challenge for the Taliban is not only to restore economic stability but also to create a sustainable economic model that reduces dependency on foreign aid.

Regional cooperation, particularly with Pakistan, could play a crucial role in Afghanistan's economic recovery. As Afghanistan's immediate neighbor and a

significant trading partner, Pakistan is positioned to facilitate economic integration and provide vital support in areas such as trade, investment, and infrastructure development (Shaikh, 2022). Enhanced bilateral relations could lead to joint economic projects, improved border management, and increased trade flows, which would benefit both countries. Kugelman (2021) suggests that regional economic integration, involving other neighboring countries as well, could create a more stable and prosperous environment for Afghanistan. Such cooperation is essential not only for economic recovery but also for fostering long-term peace and stability in the region.

Security Concerns

Afghanistan's security landscape is profoundly complicated by the presence of multiple militant groups, each with its own agendas and territorial ambitions. The Taliban, despite their control over the country, must contend with factions such as the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and remnants of al-Qaeda, which continue to operate within Afghanistan's borders (Giustozzi, 2022). The Taliban's ability to effectively manage and neutralize these groups is crucial for preventing Afghanistan from reverting to a terrorist haven, a scenario that would pose severe threats to regional and global security. The international community is particularly concerned about the potential for Afghanistan to become a launchpad for international terrorist operations, echoing the pre-2001 era.

Pakistan, sharing a long and porous border with Afghanistan, faces significant security challenges arising from the instability across its western frontier. The porous nature of this border facilitates the unchecked movement of militants and arms, exacerbating Pakistan's internal security issues (Fair, 2022). The resurgence of the Taliban has reignited concerns about cross-border terrorism and the

infiltration of extremist ideologies into Pakistan. As a result, enhanced border management and robust counter-terrorism efforts are imperative for Pakistan to mitigate these threats. Measures such as the construction of border fences, increased surveillance, and coordinated military operations are essential components of Pakistan's strategy to secure its borders and maintain regional stability.

Exploring regional cooperation and global support are also critical in addressing the security challenges posed by militant groups in Afghanistan. Pakistan's efforts to manage its border and counter-terrorism would benefit significantly from cooperative initiatives involving neighboring nations and global powers. According to Rashid (2021), multilateral frameworks focusing on intelligence sharing, joint military training, and economic aid to bolster Afghanistan's governance capabilities are essential for a comprehensive security strategy. Such cooperation would not only help stabilize Afghanistan but also foster a more secure and peaceful South Asian region. Therefore, the collective commitment of regional actors and the international community to support Afghanistan's fight against militancy is indispensable for long-term security and stability.

Options for Pakistan

Diplomatic Engagement

The interests of Pakistan's strategy necessitate a nuanced approach to engaging with the Taliban regime, mainly given the complex and multifaceted nature of their association. Historically, Pakistan has maintained significant support for the Taliban, which can be leveraged to encourage stability and inclusive rule of law in Afghanistan (Kugelman, 2021). This influence should be rooted in a long-standing alliance, marked by shared strategic interests and mutual cultural

ties. By utilizing these connections, Pakistan aims to encourage the Taliban to adopt policies that foster stability and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a breeding ground for extremism and terrorism.

Diplomatic efforts are central to Pakistan's strategy, focusing on promoting inclusive governance within the Taliban regime. An inclusive government that represents all ethnic and political factions in Afghanistan is crucial for long-term peace and stability (Rashid, 2021). Pakistan can play a pivotal role in mediating between the Taliban and other Afghan political groups, as well as advocating for the inclusion of minorities and women in the governance process. Such efforts are essential to gaining international legitimacy for the Taliban government, which is a prerequisite for the resumption of much-needed international aid and economic investment.

Ensuring the Taliban's adherence to counter-terrorism commitments is another critical component of Pakistan's strategic approach. The presence of various militant groups in Afghanistan, including the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), poses

significant security threats to both Afghanistan and the broader region (Giustozzi, 2022). Pakistan, sharing a porous border with Afghanistan, is particularly vulnerable to cross-border terrorism. Therefore, it is in Pakistan's national interest to ensure that the Taliban take robust measures against these groups. This includes not only military actions but also efforts to address the socio-economic conditions that facilitate the growth of extremism.

Leveraging its historical ties with the Taliban, Pakistan can facilitate dialogue between the new regime and the international community. Such dialogue is essential for addressing global concerns about human rights and terrorism while also opening channels for economic and developmental support (Shaikh, 2022). By acting as a bridge, Pakistan can help align the Taliban's policies with international expectations, thereby contributing to regional stability. This engagement will enhance Pakistan's own geopolitical position, which can make it a key player in the efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and assimilate it into the global community.

Table 2

Options for Pakistan	Description	Rationale
Diplomatic Engagement and Mediation	Actively engage diplomatically with the Taliban-led government and facilitate dialogue between the Taliban and other Afghan political factions.	Promotes inclusive governance, mediates disputes, and builds consensus among different ethnic and political groups within Afghanistan.
Security Cooperation and Border Management	Enhance security cooperation with Afghanistan to combat terrorism and manage cross-border threats.	Strengthens border management, prevents infiltration of militant groups like ISKP, and mitigates security risks along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.
Economic Integration and Development	Promote economic integration by extending initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to include	It Stimulates trade, investment, and infrastructure development, contributes to Afghanistan's economic stability, and enhances

Options for Pakistan	Description	Rationale
	Afghanistan.	regional connectivity.
Humanitarian Assistance and Refugee Management	Address humanitarian needs of Afghan refugees in Pakistan while ensuring lawful stay and preventing illegal activities.	Manages refugee flows effectively, mitigates social tensions, and maintains internal stability within Pakistan.
Regional Cooperation and Peace Initiatives	Support regional peace initiatives and engage in multilateral forums to promote stability in Afghanistan and South Asia.	Enhances cooperative security frameworks, fosters trust-building measures, and contributes to regional peace-building efforts.

This table indicates a structured overview of the choices available to Pakistan for engaging with Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. Each option is conveyed by a brief description of its implementation and the rationale after its strategic importance. Pakistan's inclusive approach includes diplomatic exertions, security assistance, economic integration, humanitarian assistance, and regional collaboration to stand-in stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and the broader South Asian constituency.

Economic Cooperation

Afghanistan's economy depends on stability not just for its own growth but also for the stability of the South Asian region as a whole. Pakistan, a neighboring nation with close economic links to Afghanistan, may make a substantial contribution to this stability by fostering better commercial relations and funding infrastructure projects in Afghanistan (Shaikh, 2022). Pakistan has the potential to mitigate extremism and violence by bolstering economic cooperation with Afghanistan. This may be achieved by improving living standards, generating employment opportunities, and stabilizing the country's economy.

Expanding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to include Afghanistan is one possible way to improve economic interdependence. Through infrastructural development and economic cooperation, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship initiative of China's Belt and Road Initiative, seeks to connect Gwadar Port in Pakistan to China's Xinjiang province (Shaikh, 2022). By simplifying trade channels and enhancing connectivity, extending this corridor to Afghanistan might integrate the Afghan economy into larger regional networks. Such measures encourage mutual interdependence among regional entities, which not only contributes to peace and stability but also growth in the economy.

Security Measures

Pakistan's top priority is to strengthen border security, particularly given the difficulties caused by cross-border terrorism that originates in Afghanistan. The historical facilitation of terrorist and weaponry movement via the porous and sometimes unmonitored border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has posed serious security risks to Pakistan's stability (Fair, 2022). To stop illegal activity and stop terrorist infiltrations, effective border management is crucial. This

includes erecting physical barriers and improving monitoring systems. Preserving Pakistan's territorial integrity and reducing the impact of violence and instability from Afghanistan need the implementation of such policies.

An additional crucial component of Pakistan's security policy is the management of refugee movements. Pakistan's infrastructure and resources are under tremendous strain due to the flood of Afghan refugees who are escaping the violence and economic difficulties they face in their own country. Over several decades, Pakistan has offered asylum to millions of Afghan refugees in accordance with international conventions and humanitarian principles (Giustozzi, 2022). However, the prolonged presence of refugees has strained public services, exacerbated socio-economic challenges, and raised security concerns. Discussing the humanitarian needs of refugees while safeguarding their lawful stay and provoking illegal activities is essential for maintaining social cohesion and security within Pakistan.

Collaborating with international partners on counter-terrorism and regional security initiatives is crucial for Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism originating from Afghanistan. Joint efforts with countries such as the United States, and China, and regional organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) can strengthen intelligence-sharing mechanisms, enhance military cooperation, and coordinate cross-border operations against terrorist groups (Fair, 2022). These partnerships not only bolster Pakistan's capacity to tackle terrorism but also promote collective security measures that benefit the entire region.

Furthermore, fostering intelligence-sharing mechanisms with the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan is a delicate but necessary step in mitigating security threats. Regardless of historical tensions and different ideological

perspectives, establishing channels for communication and cooperation with the Taliban on security stuff can help prevent misunderstandings, strongly facilitate targeted operations against terrorist networks, and promote stability in the region (Fair, 2022). Such engagements require careful diplomacy and mutual trust-building efforts to ensure effective collaboration while respecting Pakistan's national security comforts.

Recommendations

Pakistan needs to maintain diplomatic relations with the Afghan government, which is run by the Taliban, as well as other political groups within the country. Prioritizing human rights, inclusive governance, and international legitimacy should be the main goals of this engagement. Pakistan may assist in bridging internal conflicts and fostering positive ties between Afghanistan and the international community by serving as a mediator and conversation facilitator.

Pakistan has to strengthen counterterrorism measures and give priority to border security in light of the security risks posed by Afghanistan. This entails stepping up border patrols, using cutting-edge monitoring technology, and closely collaborating with foreign allies on intelligence-sharing and combined military operations. In addition to being essential for Pakistan's security, border security also stops terrorists and illegal activity from into the country.

Pakistan should leverage its strategic location and historical ties with Afghanistan to promote economic cooperation and development initiatives. Extending economic corridors like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan can stimulate trade, investment as well as the creation of infrastructure. Pakistan has the potential to enhance regional stability and connectivity

while aiding Afghanistan's economic recovery through trade route facilitation and infrastructure investment.

Initiatives aiming at advancing peace and stability in Afghanistan and the larger South Asian region should have Pakistan's active support. This entails taking part in international forums such as SAARC and conversing with neighboring nations to tackle shared security issues and promote collaborative resolutions. Pakistan can bolster the dynamics of regional security and its position as a stabilizing force by supporting efforts to promote peace in the area.

Pakistan need to persist in offering humanitarian aid to Afghan refugees, while also guaranteeing their legitimate residence and averting illicit actions. Effective management of refugee movements is critical to meeting humanitarian needs, reducing societal unrest, and preserving Pakistani stability. Working together with global humanitarian groups can facilitate the distribution of supplies and encourage initiatives aimed at enhancing the living circumstances of refugees.

Pakistan may effectively negotiate the intricacies of Afghanistan's post-2021 terrain by putting this advice into practice. Pakistan can safeguard its national interests and regional security while promoting economic cooperation, addressing humanitarian issues, strengthening security measures, fostering diplomatic engagement, supporting peace initiatives in the region, and supporting peace initiatives in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

After 2021, Pakistan will face new chances as well as problems in Afghanistan. Given their shared border and historical links, Pakistan has a stake in a peaceful and successful Afghanistan. Pakistan must adopt a

multipronged strategy that includes strong security measures, economic collaboration, and diplomatic engagement. Pakistan may contribute to regional peace and stability and effectively negotiate the intricacies of the contemporary Afghan situation by using a proactive approach.

Pakistan's physical closeness to Afghanistan emphasizes how crucial stability is for its neighbor to the West. An unstable Afghanistan has the potential to cause ripple effects that might destabilize Pakistan, such as a rise in terrorist activity and refugee flows. As a result, maintaining border security and stopping terrorism that comes from Afghanistan are top concerns. In addition, Pakistan may use its historical clout and connections to various Afghan factions—including the Taliban to promote communication and collaboration. By addressing issues of shared security and advancing inclusive government in Afghanistan, this diplomatic effort can support stability.

A stable Afghanistan would be advantageous for Pakistan's economy in terms of increased commerce, infrastructure development, and regional connectivity programs. Proposals to expand the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to encompass Afghanistan have the potential to enhance economic integration by establishing novel avenues for trade and investment. Pakistan can support Afghanistan's rebuilding efforts while enhancing its own economic prospects by investing in Afghan infrastructure and taking part in regional economic initiatives. In order to effectively navigate the intricacies of Afghanistan's post-2021 terrain and realize the prospects for regional collaboration and growth, Pakistan must adopt a proactive and comprehensive strategy.

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