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**Abstract**

*Conflict in Afghanistan, either Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or war on terror in post 9/11 period, has deep impact on Pak- US relations. In both the cases Pakistan got the status of the most important state strategically. It played important role as a front-line state to fight against the Soviet Union during Soviet attack of Afghanistan. As a result, America extended economic and military support to Pakistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, American Foreign policy towards Pakistan was changed; it stopped all kind of economic and military support to Pakistan and imposed sanctions on it. Again, in post 9/11 attacks on American soil, America decided to attack Afghanistan and it needed Pakistan's logistic support. Pakistan extended the required support and again became an important American ally in operation in Afghanistan. Thus, we may say, that conflict in Afghanistan has deep impact on Pak- US relations.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Instability, Invasion & Terrorism

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Cite Us



## Title

### Conflict in Afghanistan and Its Impact on Pak-US Relations

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#### Abstract

Conflict in Afghanistan, either Soviet invasion of Afghanistan or war on terror in post 9/11 period, has deep impact on Pak- US relations. In both the cases Pakistan got the status of the most important state strategically. It played important role as a front-line state to fight against the Soviet Union during Soviet attack of Afghanistan. As a result, America extended economic and military support to Pakistan. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, American Foreign policy towards Pakistan was changed; it stopped all kind of economic and military support to Pakistan and imposed sanctions on it. Again, in post 9/11 attacks on American soil, America decided to attack Afghanistan and it needed Pakistan's logistic support. Pakistan extended the required support and again became an important American ally in operation in Afghanistan. Thus, we may say, that conflict in Afghanistan has deep impact on Pak- US relations.

**Keywords:** [Conflict](#), [Instability](#), [Invasion & Terrorism](#)

#### Introduction

Afghanistan and Pakistan share a deep cultural and historical connection, but their relationship was marred from the beginning. Just as Pakistan was established, Afghanistan contested the Durand Line established in 1893, advocating for a separate 'Pushtoonistan' within Pakistan's territory. Afghanistan was the sole dissenting vote against Pakistan's UN membership. While tensions persisted over the years, they managed to avoid escalation, with Afghanistan refraining from exploiting Pakistan's vulnerabilities during conflicts with India. (Miller, [2019](#)) Concerns arose

in Islamabad when Sardar Mohammad Daoud took power in 1973, given his past animosity towards Pakistan- (Bashir, [2023](#))

Daoud, aiming to consolidate power and pursue territorial ambitions against Pakistan, sought support from the Soviet Union. Initially encouraged by Premier Alexei Kosygin's suggestion for Afghanistan-Pakistan reconciliation, Daoud soon realized Soviet interference in Afghan affairs. The Soviet Union's support for a communist faction in Afghanistan disrupted Daoud's political agenda. In an effort to counter this growing Soviet influence, Daoud sought to strengthen his

country's relationships with nearby nations, particularly those with significant Muslim populations. He initiated diplomatic efforts, including reciprocal visits with leaders from these countries, which helped to enhance bilateral ties. This diplomatic outreach became increasingly important after a new military leadership took power in a neighboring country in 1977. (Pearl, [2011](#))

Ethnic tensions, regional disparities, and struggles for power among political factions added complexity to the nation's challenges. Moreover, the country's foreign policy decisions and military actions also contributed to its isolation, particularly concerning its stance on issues like Afghanistan and nuclear proliferation. All these factors combined to create a complex web of challenges for Pakistan, both domestically and internationally. (Kux, [2001](#))

Pakistan's response was deeply emotional, but when it came to making decisions, it aimed to be cautious (Shahi, [1988](#)). Despite being fully aware of the potential consequences of opposing a superpower, Pakistan understood that accepting the situation as it was would pose even greater risks. Not only would it compromise the fundamental principle of rejecting aggression, but it would also increase the likelihood of collaboration between the Soviet Union and India, potentially leading to a scenario where Pakistan felt squeezed between the two powers.

Zia's government took two days to deliberate before issuing a carefully worded statement. It highlighted Pakistan's deep concerns, citing its religious, geographical, and non-aligned connections with Afghanistan. The statement expressed hope for the prompt withdrawal of foreign troops. While it avoided direct condemnation, the cautious approach was evident in its wording. (Kux, [2001](#))

The conflicts in Afghanistan have not only affected Pak-US relations but have also significantly influenced the geopolitical dynamics of neighboring countries like Iran, India, and China. You can add information on how Iran viewed both the Soviet invasion and the US invasion of Afghanistan, balancing its interests with concerns about regional stability and influence. India's evolving stance on Afghanistan,

from its condemnation of the Soviet invasion under Charan Singh to a more pro-Soviet stance under Indira Gandhi, and then alignment with the US post-9/11, reflects its broader geopolitical strategy. This can provide a more comprehensive picture of how the Afghan conflict influenced wider regional politics. After 9/11, Pakistan's decision to support the US-led war on terror was influenced by several internal factors, including the need to counterbalance India's growing influence in Afghanistan and to manage internal extremist elements. It might be valuable to explore the domestic pressures within Pakistan, such as the role of Islamist parties and the military's calculations in aligning with the US while managing anti-American sentiments among the populace. Discuss the influence of the Afghan Taliban and its splinter groups on Pakistan's internal security, particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, which have borne the brunt of spillover violence and instability from Afghanistan.

### **Non-aligned Policy**

Pakistan observed the intense response from the United States and Western European nations but, wary of getting entangled in the Cold War's potentially perilous consequences, chose to align its diplomatic efforts with the prospect of resolving the crisis politically through the United Nations. The belief was that Moscow, despite its cynicism, would find it challenging to ignore global condemnation, which encompassed not only Western nations but also Islamic and non-aligned countries.

The resolution strongly expressed disapproval of "recent armed intervention in Afghanistan" and urged for "immediate, unconditional, and complete withdrawal of foreign troops to allow the Afghan people to determine their own government and choose their socio-economic and political systems without external interference, subversion, coercion, or constraint of any kind." At the behest of Islamabad, a resolution was put forth that refrained from explicitly naming the Soviet Union, instead opting for a more subdued term, 'deplore,' rather than 'condemnation.' Notably, Foreign Minister Agha Shahi played a crucial role in navigating these resolutions through the intricate diplomatic

process. This episode underscored the diplomatic tensions surrounding the Soviet Union.

Actions, likely related to events such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which prompted international concern and condemnation (Shahi, 1988)

The USSR faced a significant blow to its reputation as it encountered widespread criticism following a resolution vote in which even a majority of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) members, including India, initially voiced disapproval. Charan Singh, India's Prime Minister at the time, strongly condemned the intervention in December. However, after Indira Gandhi, who took a more pro-Soviet stance, won the subsequent election in January 1980, India's position shifted. In a notable turnaround, India not only refrained from criticizing the Soviet intervention but also echoed their assurance of limited troop withdrawal. Indira Gandhi even ridiculed Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to pressure the Soviets, highlighting India's own non-compliance with UN resolutions on Kashmir. This shift in stance marked India's alignment with a group of nations supporting the Soviet Union, leading to their obstruction of resolutions regarding Afghanistan within the NAM Coordinating Bureau. Consequently, while this episode didn't significantly impact the Afghan cause, it did tarnish the credibility of the NAM itself (Khan, 1987).

During the session, numerous members expressed strong criticism. The resolution passed during the meeting strongly condemned the Soviet intervention and also resulted in the suspension of Afghanistan's OIC membership. Furthermore, it expressed solidarity with the Afghan people's fight to protect their religious beliefs, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

The opposition to the Soviet intervention within Afghanistan proved to be more influential in determining the outcome of the crisis than foreign criticism.

The Afghan people, deeply rooted in their historical pride, had previously thwarted British colonial invasions, demonstrating their resilience.

It highlighted the need for a comprehensive approach to rebuilding Afghanistan, focusing on peace, stability, and respect for its independence. The resolution also tasked the UN Secretary-

General with facilitating a political settlement, potentially including guarantees of non-aggression against neighboring states. Subsequent resolutions, with updated language, garnered increasing support over the following years, growing in 1980 (Khan, 1987).

### **Revival of the US Alliance**

During the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan found itself in a delicate position vis-à-vis the United States. This was compounded by the strained relations caused by the Carter administration in 1979 (Khan, 1987). Pakistan was

unsure whether the U.S. would strongly oppose the Soviet intervention, given Washington's relatively muted response to prior events such as the communist coup in April 1978 and the killing of American ambassador Adolph Dubs. Additionally, Pakistan's stance against the Soviet intervention aligned with its own interests in the region, but it had to carefully navigate its relationship with the

### **U.S. Amidst these Geopolitical Complexities**

The Soviet invasion prompted a response from the United States, yet it failed to convince Pakistan that it could rely on the U.S. to reconsider its stance towards Pakistan. Unbeknownst to Islamabad, Zbigniew Brzezinski, an advisor to the U.S. National Security Council, advised President Carter that the situation warranted a reassessment of U.S. policy towards Pakistan. Brzezinski recommended providing more assurances and aid to Pakistan and acknowledged the necessity of prioritizing security concerns over non-proliferation objectives (Coll, 2004). Washington did not communicate its intentions regarding security assurances or the possibility of waiving nuclear sanctions to Islamabad. Had there been any discussions, Islamabad would have sought a commitment from the United States for support in the event of an attack by the Soviets or an India backed by the Soviet Union. To achieve this, Islamabad wanted to strengthen the 1959 defense cooperation agreement, turning it into a legally binding treaty. However, President Ziaul Haq later voiced skepticism about the dependability and long-term commitment of American promises, pointing out a common perception that the United

States had let Pakistan down during critical times, particularly in the wars of 1965 and 1971.

The Pakistani government perceived the military aid component as potentially escalating involvement in the Cold War. Additionally, the aid package was perceived as burdened with stringent conditions that could impede Pakistan's nuclear program efforts, rendering the offer irrelevant to its defensive capabilities (Shahi, 1988). President Zia publicly dismissed the offer, deriding it as insignificant. This choice of words inadvertently conveyed the impression that Islamabad sought a larger aid package.

### US Aid

This package, totaling three billion dollars over five years, marked a substantial improvement over the previous offer under the Carter administration, which amounted to \$400 million for 18 months. Despite this enhancement, Pakistan's concerns regarding defense against Soviet influence and potential Indian threats remained unaddressed initially. Negotiations ensued, with the US side explaining that formal security guarantees to Pakistan faced reluctance in Congress. Nevertheless, the administration demonstrated a clear understanding of Pakistan's strategic challenges as a frontline state, acknowledging its unique security concerns and geopolitical pressures. Additionally, they showed empathy toward the economic and political difficulties Pakistan faced due to its proximity to the conflict. Demonstration of US commitment to Pakistan's security, the potential sale of 40 F-16 aircraft was entertained. Furthermore, the five-year program instilled a sense of lasting commitment from the US (Kux, 2001)

In the realm of nuclear affairs, both nations upheld their established stances, with Pakistan reaffirming its commitment to ongoing research while the US reiterated its concerns regarding non-proliferation. However, Washington

reduced its focus on Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. Understanding past prejudices and Pakistan's perspective, the United States accepted assurances from President Zia that Pakistan would not pursue the development of nuclear weapons or disseminate sensitive nuclear technology. Following this, Washington managed to get

Congress to approve a waiver of the Symington Amendment. Lawmakers who had previously supported sanctions against Pakistan found their influence diminished.

Instead of accepting low-interest loans for military equipment, Pakistan chose to pay standard market interest rates, aiming to uphold its stance of non-alignment. Islamabad sought to maintain its independence and was determined to encourage the Soviet Union to pursue a diplomatic resolution to the Afghan conflict, avoiding a strict Cold War alignment. However, this decision did not garner appreciation from either Moscow or New Delhi. Despite India's prior deal with the USSR for advanced military equipment at significantly reduced prices, Pakistan's principled stance went unrecognized. In hindsight, Pakistan's adherence to its principles did not yield significant political advantages, leading critics to view it as an expensive posture, irrespective of non-aligned principles (Kux, 2001). The article could benefit from an analysis of the economic impact of hosting millions of Afghan refugees over several decades. This includes the economic burden on Pakistan's infrastructure, healthcare, and social services, as well as the socio-political implications of the refugee presence in border regions. The role of international aid, or the lack thereof, in managing the refugee crisis and its impact on Pakistan's economy and international relations, particularly with

Western countries. The US strategy in Afghanistan evolved from the containment of communism during the Cold War to a focus on counter-terrorism and nation-building post-9/11. You can elaborate on how these shifts affected Pak-US relations, including periods of cooperation and tension, particularly regarding issues like drone strikes in Pakistani territory, cross-border militancy, and the perceived 'double game' of Pakistan.

### Geneva Accord

The United Nations' push for a political settlement gained traction in 1981 with the appointment of Diego Cordovez, a high-ranking UN official from Ecuador, as the Secretary General's personal representative. Cordovez encountered a peculiar situation as he prepared for the inaugural Geneva

meeting. Iran opted out of participation, insisting on unconditional Soviet withdrawal, while Pakistan refused to engage with the Afghan regime due to its lack of recognition. Cordovez had to convince Kabul to agree to indirect negotiations. Despite the Soviet Union's stance that its presence in Afghanistan was at Kabul's invitation and contingent upon their wishes, it declined direct participation in the talks. Nonetheless, it dispatched high-ranking officials to Geneva for potential consultations (Barfield, [2010](#))

In June 1982, negotiations commenced in Geneva with the aim of structuring a settlement that aligned with the UN General Assembly resolution regarding the conflict in Afghanistan. Diego Cordovez, a skilled diplomat, played a pivotal role in steering the discussions away from past controversies. He proposed an agreement focusing on mutual non-interference and non-intervention between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries, which ultimately led to the Soviet Union committing to withdraw its troops. Cordovez also addressed the Soviet demand for assurances of non-interference from the United States by suggesting dual guarantees from both superpowers.

Initially, negotiations faced challenges as Moscow overestimated its military prowess, believing its modern weaponry could swiftly defeat the Mujahideen insurgency. Nevertheless, this turned out to be a strategic error, as the Mujahideen, bolstered by the Afghan people's support and armed with advanced weapons provided by the United States, demonstrated significant resilience in guerrilla warfare.

### **In March 1983, when UN Secretary-General Perez de**

Cuellar and Diego Cordovez met with Andropov, they received fresh encouragement to continue UN-mediated efforts. Andropov carefully articulated the Soviet Union's reasons for seeking a resolution, highlighting issues such as the heavy toll in terms of human and financial costs, increasing regional tensions, the setbacks to détente, and the diminishing influence of the Soviet Union in the Third World. This exchange

underscored a growing willingness within the Soviet leadership to engage in diplomatic solutions and signaled a potential shift in the Soviet foreign policy approach (Shahi, [1988](#)).

Cordovez played a pivotal role in pushing both sides to reach agreements during the Geneva talks of 1983. He emphasized the need for key components in a comprehensive settlement, assurances from other nations, and plans for the voluntary return of refugees. Progress was made during these talks, raising Cordovez's hopes for a resolution, especially with the prospect of a gradual Soviet troop withdrawal. However, the Kabul regime, supported by the Soviets, showed hesitance, particularly during Andropov's illness and subsequent leadership changes. Despite some positive signs, hardline factions within the regime stalled progress and later resorted to a militaristic approach under Chernenko and Gorbachev. This stance persisted until the late summer of 1987, prolonging the conflict further.

The asymmetrical struggle in Afghanistan showcased the bravery and ingenuity of the Mujahideen, who remained resolute despite escalating Soviet aggression. Their unwavering commitment and endurance garnered well-deserved recognition and admiration. As the Soviets intensified their onslaught with advanced weaponry, including artillery, helicopter gunships, and bombers

targeting villages, support for the Mujahideen surged to counter this onslaught. The United States escalated covert funding for arms supply. Additionally, significant aid poured in from China, Iran, and other nations. Pakistan cautiously managed assistance to the Mujahideen to mitigate the risk of conflict spillage but grew more assertive over time, realizing that while defeating a superpower militarily was improbable, attrition within Afghanistan coupled with international diplomatic pressure could wear down Moscow (Burke, [1990](#)).

While the official agenda did not include discussions on potential compromises between the Kabul regime and the Mujahideen, Cordovez and the Pakistani delegation occasionally broached the topic. United Nations resolutions emphasized the Afghan people's right to determine their own governance and economy, without mandating the



removal of the Soviet-established regime. Initially, both Kabul and Moscow denied internal resistance, attributing opposition solely to external influences.

During these talks, efforts were made to address the complexities of Afghanistan's political landscape, where various factions vied for power amidst external interventions. Despite the emphasis on respecting Afghan sovereignty, the influence of regional and global players continued to shape the negotiations.

By mid-1987, the Soviet timeline extended to 18 months, contrasting with Pakistan's demand for withdrawal in seven months. In July 1987, Najibullah, the leader of the PDPA in Afghanistan, proposed a coalition government to the Mujahideen Alliance, offering them twelve ministerial positions and the vice presidency. This move was supported by Gorbachev as part of an effort to foster national reconciliation and rebuild Afghanistan. However, the Mujahideen Alliance leaders unanimously rejected the idea of forming a coalition with the PDPA. In September of the same year, Cordovez put forward a 'Scenario Paper' suggesting the resolution of this stalemate was postponed until the Soviet military campaign failed in the summer of 1987. Following this setback, Mikhail Gorbachev decided to cease the effort, driven by the need to focus on domestic democratic and economic reforms, which necessitated reducing tensions with the West. Formation of a representative assembly that would include the seven Mujahideen Alliance parties, the PDPA, and other Afghan figures to establish a transitional government. Despite this proposal, Islamabad, where the Mujahideen Alliance was based, didn't show much interest in the idea. The Alliance leaders had already dismissed any possibility of dialogue with the PDPA back in early 1988. Key figures like Engineer Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Maulvi Yunus Khalis also rejected the involvement of the king in the transitional arrangement. Instead, Pakistan prioritized supporting the resistance against the Soviets, fearing that pressing the Mujahideen Alliance too much on the issue could lead to divisions and weaken their overall stance against the Soviet occupation.

Gorbachev and Shevardnadze managed to secure the support of the Politburo of the

Communist Party for the strategy of ending military involvement in Afghanistan. The immense toll on human lives and resources, along with the widespread criticism, both domestically and internationally, far outweighed any potential benefits of maintaining control over Afghanistan. The newer generation of Communists lacked the fervent ideological dedication of the founders and no longer believed in the inevitable triumph of communism.

However, the Soviets were adamant about not prolonging the negotiations. When Zia requested a delay in the final Geneva round on February 9, Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov's response was pointed and skeptical, indicating a shift in their stance: "You've been urging us to leave Afghanistan for eight years. Now you want us to stay. I smell something fishy!"

The sudden reversal in Zia's stance towards the Geneva Accords left both Pakistan's allies and Prime Minister Junejo perplexed, as it contradicted Pakistan's longstanding position. Zia's abrupt shift was not only illogical but also seemingly unnecessary, given Moscow's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. Pakistan's ability to obstruct the Geneva Accords wouldn't prevent the Soviets from withdrawing, whether independently or through an agreement with the Kabul regime. Opting for withdrawal under the Accords would offer distinct advantages: the Soviet Union would be bound by international obligations to fully withdraw its forces within a specified timeframe and under UN supervision, while also committing to non-intervention in Afghanistan. Additionally, Pakistan would benefit from guarantees of non-interference from both the Soviet Union and the United States. Conversely, a unilateral withdrawal would lack such binding commitments.

Aware of his nation's position and adept in negotiation tactics, he agreed not to escalate the situation further. He also didn't dispute the rationale that the cessation of arms supply was crucial for peace in Afghanistan. Vorontsov explained convincingly that Moscow couldn't backtrack on its commitments to Kabul. While 'negative symmetry' wasn't viable, he didn't raise objections when informed that 'positive symmetry' would ensure continued supplies to the

Mujahideen. This discussion effectively averted potential misunderstandings.

The final round of negotiations in Geneva commenced on March 2, 1988, but progress was hindered by the lack of authorization for the Pakistani delegation to finalize the Accords. Despite the Soviets' agreement to shorten the withdrawal timeframe to nine months, discussions proceeded slowly. The Kabul representatives continued to object to the phrase 'existing internationally recognized boundaries,' proposing 'international borders' as a substitute. Pakistan deemed this issue artificial, emphasizing that the Geneva talks were not intended to address the Durand Line. Pakistan was willing to accept a neutral phrase urging both states to refrain from threatening or using force to avoid violating each other's boundaries.

The Geneva negotiations did not originally include the replacement of the Kabul regime as a focal point. However, Diego Cordovez emphasized in a statement on April 8th that the establishment of a broad-based Afghan Government was crucial for achieving a comprehensive settlement. He agreed to lend his support to this objective. Eventually, Zia understood that insisting on the formation of such a government as a precondition for finalizing the Accords was not feasible.

The foreign ministers of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Soviet Union, together with the U.S. Secretary of State, emphasized that their signing of the agreements did not equate to an endorsement of the Kabul government. They stressed that their commitments were reciprocal and reserved the option to offer military assistance to Afghan factions, contingent upon similar actions from the Soviet Union.

This miscalculation resulted in heavy losses, with over 13,000 Soviet soldiers killed and 35,000 wounded. The withdrawal also had profound geopolitical consequences, altering regional alliances and shifting power dynamics. The financial burden of the war, which cost around 100 billion rubles, exemplified the classic mistake of 'imperial overreach.' The conflict in Afghanistan became a critical moment for the Soviet Union, much like the Vietnam War was for the United States, where both internal and external pressures significantly contributed to their eventual

withdrawal and decline in influence (Coll, 2004). However, attributing the Soviet defeat solely to these factors doesn't detract from the bravery of the Mujahideen fighters or the endurance of the Afghan people. Additionally, internal political challenges within the Soviet Union, logistical issues, and the tenacity of Afghan resistance further complicated the situation.

## **9/11 and Afghanistan**

On the morning of September 11, 2001, the United States experienced a series of devastating attacks. Four airplanes were hijacked between 8:45 a.m. and 10:03 a.m., with the first two crashing into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center, the third into the Pentagon in Washington D.C., and the fourth in Pittsburgh. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 2,750 civilians and inflicted billions of dollars in economic damage, affecting people from 90 different countries who worked in the World Trade Center. Responsibility for the attacks was claimed by Al-Qaida, a fundamentalist Islamic terrorist network led by Osama bin Laden, who had previously been supported by the United States during the Soviet-Afghan War. This event sparked a strong, unilateral response from the United States, with a determination to pursue justice without regard for international proposals or concerns. Within days, Secretary of State Colin Powell identified Osama bin Laden as the mastermind behind the attacks, leading President George W. Bush to declare war on bin Laden and other terrorist elements on September 16, 2001. Additionally, there were suspicions of involvement by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad, with reports of Israeli citizens being arrested in connection to the attacks published in the Washington Times.

Pakistan's attempts to diversify its foreign relations, including its outreach to Russia, which historically was an adversary but has seen warmer ties in recent years due to mutual interests in counter-terrorism and regional stability.

Before the terrorist attacks, the Taliban had been in talks with American companies, particularly Unocal, regarding the construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan. However, the Taliban shifted their preference to the Bridas Corporation of Argentina.

During these negotiations, US officials made it clear to the Taliban that they had to comply with American conditions or face severe consequences. This marked a significant departure from the previous liberal internationalist approach to US foreign policy seen during the administrations of

senior Bush and Clinton. Ultimately, on October 7, 2001, the US launched its official invasion of Afghanistan as part of the broader War on Terror. This period of American dominance was viewed by some as a "liberal empire" while others simply labeled it as an empire or hyper-power.

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