

The Role of Durand Line Dispute in Shaping Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

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ABSTRACT

The Durand line is 2,240Km long and lies between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The British Indian government and then Amir Abdur Rahman of Afghanistan agreed in 1893. their future Afghan rulers renewed the treaty in 1905,1919 and again in 1930 However, After Pakistan gained independence in 1947, Afghanistan made a U-turn and declared that the Durand line was never an international border. The territory up to the Indus River Afghanistan claims as part of its empire during Ahmad Shah Abdali in the 18th century, which Pakistan wholly denies on legal and historical grounds. The Durand line has been a central issue in the contentious relationship between the two countries. Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the border has strengthened demands for Pashtunistan which seems to threaten Pakistan's integrity. The hostility has led to serious security problems for Pakistan, particularly since India is threatened from the east. The rule by the Taliban (1997-2001) led to temporary cooperation but relations have remained tense since then. This paper aims to analyze how the Durand line dispute shaped Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and which factors contributed to the dispute's shaping of the relations.

KEYWORDS

Durandline; Pashtunistan; Pakistan-Afghanistan relations; Border dispute; Security Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Why the Durand line was created at that time there was some reason that firstly the threat to Herat by Russia through her proxy Persia in 1833 and 1837 and secondly the meddling policy of Britain for the installation of their puppet on the Afghan throne as the cause of the first Anglo-Afghan war 1838-1842 and thirdly treaty of friendship between Britain and Afghanistan in 1857 as the result of Russia threat to Herat through her proxy Persia in 1855 (Gul & Wazir, n.d.).

The Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship has been problematic ever since Pakistan was created. In the United Nations Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's membership The core issue here is the Durand line, the border constructed by the British as part of their colony. Pakistan views it as its official border, while Afghanistan does not recognize it (Wasi, 2021).

For decades, the two countries have been in a strained relationship and mostly maintained states of politically strained relationships. Support of Afghanistan by Pakistan during its invasion by the Soviets in the 1980s is appreciated, but many Afghans have accused Pakistan of meddling in Afghanistan's affairs over the years, this development has led to strong anti-Pakistan feelings in Afghanistan (Wagner & Christian, n.d.).

In contrast, Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of supporting India and, as well as allowing anti-Pakistan militants to operate from Afghan territory such accusations have contributed

to further mistrust between the two nations despite all their conflicts the two countries share many cultural and historical ties, particularly among the Pashtuns living on both sides of the border (European Foundation for South Asian Studies [EFSAS], n.d.).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical context of Durand line

Henry Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdurrahman Khan of Afghanistan under orders from the British government drew the Durand line in 1893, marking Afghanistan's eastern and southern borders. This treaty represented the complete resolution of a border debate between British India and Afghanistan. Successive Afghan rulers confirmed the agreement in 1905 when it was signed by Amir Habibullah Khan and in 1921 by Amir Amanullah Khan. Pakistan continued to inherit the Durand line after gaining independence in 1947 as its border with Afghanistan.

Afghanistan however changed its stance on the border in 1949 the Afghan parliament declared that it did not recognize the Durand line or related agreements. It also opposed Pakistan's entry into the United Nations in 1947 but later established diplomatic relations (Anwar, Bibi, & Khan, 2020).

Tensions increased in the 1950s when Afghan Prime Minister Sardar Daud Khan supported the formation of a separate state called Pukhtunistan for Pashtun in Pakistan. The relationship strained and became uncooperative as well as closing borders and breaking any trade. Backed by Afghanistan more nationalist movements created unrest in Pakistan. Despite these, these debates, the Pukhtunistan issue went to the backburner after the Soviet-Afghan war between 1979 and 1989 as Pakistan supported anti-USSR Afghan fighters. The Durand line remains a contentious issue since it symbolizes the historical tussles between these two neighbors (Awan, A. M, 2017).

Another example is the Durand Line dividing Afghanistan and Pakistan. Drawn in 1893 which separated the Pashtun people leading to tensions that prevail today. Another is the McMahon Line drawn by Britain between India and China in 1914, leading to disputes and even war between the two countries.

The colonial boundaries in South Asia which were left by the British continue to shape that region. Borders often cut across areas without considering people's cultures or histories. Such is the case with the 1947 division of British India to form India and Pakistan (Bangladesh). This division led to brutal violence massive migration and trauma as millions of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were compelled to leave their homes. The legacy of such borders is continuously present as questions of territory, migration, and identity continue to be a cause of unrest. The borders created for the interests of colonialism continue to impact South Asia's peace and development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on secondary data and historical literature. It analyzes academic articles, historical treaties, and government documents to understand how the Durand Line dispute has shaped Pakistan–Afghanistan relations across political, security, and economic dimensions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Durand Line as a core Dispute

The Durand line border drawn between British India and Afghanistan remains one of the most contentious issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The agreement signed by British Official Sir Mortimer Durand and Afghanistan's Amir Abdur Rahman divided Pashtun tribal

areas separating families and communities with strong cultural ethnic and historical ties. The Afghans viewed the Durand line as an illegitimate colonial imposition signed under duress when Abdur Rahman was dependent on British subsidies and military support. The line ceded Britain some 40,000 square kilometers of Afghan territory by giving it protection in return however it served the interests of the British for instance safeguarding trade routes diminishing Pashtun nationalism and countering Russian expansion. Nonetheless, the border was immediately challenged by local tribes, and Afghanistan never fully embraced the arrangement. After the partition of British India in 1947 Pakistan inherited the Durand line as its western border which it considered legally binding under international law. Then Pakistan would accept that all these treaties –again the 1893 pact and the 1919 treaty of Rawalpindi between Afghanistan and British India remain valid under the principle whereby successor states inherit established borders indeed Afghanistan disputes this claim because it holds that the border was not a fair settlement. Tensions continued to escalate in 1949 when Afghanistan’s Loya Jirga (tribal assembly) declared the Durand line as invalid thus further straining bilateral relations. Afghanistan also started supporting the notion of Pashtunistan as an independent state for Pashtuns in Pakistan’s tribal areas which escalated tensions even further. Ironically before Pakistan’s creation, most Afghans welcomed the idea of a majority Muslim state in South Asia but following the establishment of Pakistan Afghanistan opposed the country’s admission to the United Nations and refused to recognize its border. Successive Afghan governments including the Taliban have refused to accept the Durand line claiming that it splits families and communities (Biswas, A. (n.d.)). In 2021 after overthrowing the US-backed government the Taliban reaffirmed their rejection of Pakistan’s border fencing along the line calling it a division of boundary supported by British endorsements and international allies like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The Durand line problem has caused mistrust border conflicts and disruptions in commerce between the two countries owing to cultural and historical reasons. At the same time, the Durand line conflict also affects security cooperation between the two nations Pakistan blames Afghanistan for hosting militants against Pakistan and Afghanistan claims Pakistan interferes with Afghanistan’s domestic affairs. Rectification efforts have been proven failure after failure and today the Durand line is an icon of partition and colonialism. The unresolved border dispute continues to define Afghan-Pakistani relations and undermines regional stability and cooperation in South Asia.

The Durand line has been a major issue in the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan that always breeds mistrust and frequently fuels friction. Afghanistan never accepted the Durand line as a lawfully defined border calling it a historical mistake of colonial history that wrongly divided Pashtun families and tribes who share the same culture and history. In return, Pakistan considers it as an international boundary that it has been left with after the British Indian sub-continent gained independence in 1947. the discussion has led to several conflicts over the border where Afghanistan refuses to accept Pakistan building fences along the line. This unresolved border issue has made it difficult for the two countries to collaborate on significant issues like trade, security, and the fight against terrorism. Afghanistan constantly accuses Pakistan of interfering in its internal activities and supporting militant groups while Pakistan blames Afghanistan for not preventing anti-Pakistan fighters from using its territory. This has generally undermined their capacity for cooperation despite those two countries holding cultures and historical ties in common. The Durand line disputes continue to serve as an element of division and create political and economic challenges preventing the two nations from building stable and friendly relations it remains a barrier to peace and progress in the region (Desk2, Web., 2023, October 17).

Security And Border Management Challenges

For over 70 years Durand line has been one of the most problematic border lines between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Both countries have been at strife controlling that particular borderline area which allowed some extremist organizations like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda to get hold of it and then use it as a safe hiding place and base for attacks dangerous for the world altogether. If this continues then there will be another major attack like 9\11 Pakistan has attempted to curb terrorism through its military but it has little control in some areas like the old tribal regions FATA and Baluchistan. This made it easy for militants to set up training camps.

Over time the violence spread across the border into Afghanistan. Many problems like disagreements over the Durand line India's involvement in the region and Afghan refugees have made the situation worse. After 9\11 Pakistan helped the US fight terrorism but this caused huge losses for Pakistan including thousands of deaths and major damage to its economy.

Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan all suffered greatly from the war on terror with millions of people killed. Being lengthy and difficult to defend the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan militants can easily sneak in and create trouble anywhere from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Baluchistan, Sindh to Punjab. There is besides great difference in major policies between the governments of the two countries and with ethnic bodies notably the Pashtuns. Both countries accused each other of supporting terrorists however Pakistan denies it and has even proposed erecting fences to secure the border fighting along the border has intensified since 2012. Pakistan is important in bringing peace to the region because of the many Afghan refugees it hosts and it can help stabilize Afghanistan. The CPEC like other projects in the area will seek to develop the economy and improve security in the region thereby reducing violence (Wagner, A. K., & Christian. (n.d.).

A prime example would be the highly porous Durand line on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border used constantly as a smuggling route and terror-friendly haven this creates serious threats to national security across the board for both these nations. Under national law by UN Security Council resolution 1373 Afghanistan and Pakistan are mandated under their domestic laws to stop such usage by terrorists across the board of their territories. Military Operation Zarb-e-Azb is an answer to such activities.

Pakistan has the legal right to fence its side of the border to prevent illegal crossings and enhance national security considering the security challenges. This is on par with the U.S. fencing its border with Mexico under the Secure Fence Act of 2006 which was ruled lawful under international law. The unilateral decision by Pakistan to fence the border is also justified as a measure to protect its sovereignty, curb terrorism, and fulfill its international responsibilities (Desk2, Web, 2023, October 17).

Impact on Trade and Economic Relations

The Durand line is the border demarcation between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the border has a significant influence on trade and economic relations in the region. The border stretches 2,640 kilometers and was established in 1893. this is a contentious issue that has shaped the dynamics of formal and informal trade while affecting the region's potential for economic integration and the Durand line has been a major point of political tension that directly impacts the trade routes between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The closure of borders and security issues lead to the halt of the goods flow thus causing delays and increasing transportation costs. For example, major border crossing points like Torkham and Chaman are vital trade centers but regular blockades result in serious economic losses. This disrupts the transportation of vital goods including food, fuel, and industrial products to both local economies. Political wrangling over the legitimacy of the border discourages long-term investment in infrastructure such as roads and railways which otherwise would improve the

region (Treisbach, J., 2007).

The Durand line has a deep impact on the trade and economic relationships between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Border disputes and informal trade are major barriers but they also represent the need for stronger regional cooperation. If these problems are addressed, then both nations can unlock their economic potential promoting development and stability in the region. But due to strict border controls and a lack of formal trade agreements smuggling and informal trade have flourished along the Durand line. Informal trade forms a major part of the local economy fuel, cloth, and electronics crossing frequently often through unofficial means, and smuggling networks often exploit tribal connections and geographical features to avoid official checkpoints. It supports livelihood in many areas by providing essential commodities, undermining states' revenue, and allowing corruption. The loss of customs duties and taxes deprives both governments of crucial funds that could be reinvested in development and a border separating Pakistan and Afghanistan has long been one of the major hotspots for smuggling. These operations are always related to terrorist groups and organized crime smugglers trade all kinds of accommodations from weapons to drugs and even US dollars.

Illegal firearms easily available have made it a Kalashnikov culture where weapons are readily accessible and pose grave security threats to Pakistan. Smuggling has economic impacts, it damages local industry by flooding the market with cheap, illegal goods that lead to job losses and reduced revenue for the government. Pakistani customs officials have seized smuggling vehicles, narcotics, and weapons worth billions of rupees from 2018-2023. However, smuggling is still a significant problem.

Recently, the Pakistani government has increased efforts to curb smuggling. In 2023-2024 they confiscated smuggled goods to billions of rupees, illegal currency, and non-custom paid vehicles. These measures are meant to safeguard Pakistan's economy and prevent financial crimes such hundi hawla money transfer system.

The problem of smuggling however faces the government with many challenges such as corruption and resource constraints to fully address smuggling. To effectively overcome this problem there should be a focus on the root causing poverty, unemployment, and political instability in the long-term it is possible to help better the situation through international cooperation and stronger enforcement (Jaffer, M., 2015).

Ethnic Dimensions

The Durand line a border drawn in 1893 between British India and Afghanistan has deeply affected the Pashtun population. This line splits the Pashtun homeland with many Pashtuns living on both sides of the border now in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pashtuns are a unique ethnic group with a shared ancestry culture and a strong moral code called Pashtunwali, which guides their behavior and sense of community. Pashtunwali emphasizes such values as justice, hospitality, bravery, and protecting honor, land, and women. One of the basic principles is hewaad or country. Again, this creates a paradox where Pashtun should protect his piece of land however, on both sides of the border there lie their split territories, rendering them divided politically and almost stateless. The line severs villages and tribal lands, ripping apart families' tribes, and communities. This divides their cultural unity. British officials, such as Sir William Kerr Fraser Tyler, called the border illogical in that it was a division of an area that seemed to ignore the natural and cultural continuity of the Pashtun people. Scholar Louis Dupree criticized it as the artificial boundary that split an otherwise fairly cohesive cultural area. The rugged mountain terrain on the border is hard to control. People often cross it to visit relatives, trade, or move their livestock. Further blurring the border and complicating efforts to enforce it. It shows how the line divides not only the land but also the identity and unity of the Pashtun people. When British India gained

independence in 1947, Afghanistan claimed the Pashtun areas that now form part of Pakistan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (kpk), Afghanistan argued that these areas had briefly been part of Afghan territory in the 18th century. However, an agreement in 1893 known as the Durand line had already defined the border between India and Afghanistan. This treaty was signed by Sir Mortimer Durand, representing the British and King Abdul Rahman Khan of Afghanistan. In the 1940s, Afghanistan rejected the Durand line and promoted the idea of greater Pashtunistan, which included regions like Dir, Chitral, and parts of Baluchistan.

Meanwhile, some local leaders in British India such as Ghaffar Khan, also known as Frontier Gandhi sought an independent Pashtun state non-violent movement which was Khudai Khidmatgar. No consideration of how came on his part in the 1947 referendum on the option of Pashtun Independence by the British instead of NWFP now KP people had to vote for joining either India or Pakistan. Despite Ghaffar Khan and his followers having boycotted the vote, the majority still chose to go with Pakistan. Soon after Pakistan was formed, movements of Pashtun nationalism like Khudai Khidmatgar were declared outlawed. Another group known as the National Awami Party (NAP) was founded much later under the leadership of Abdul Wali Khan, Ghaffar Khan's son. However, it aligned itself with identical demands in East Pakistan. It was regularly declared illegal. Some extreme leaders even started to receive arms support from Afghanistan to demand an Independent state. In the 1980s, the Afghan war and Afghan refugees in Pakistan weekend, the support of Pashtun nationalist parties. Religious parties such as Jami at Ulama Islam (JUI) gained prominence during this period, particularly under General Zia's military regime. Over time many Pashtuns were integrated into Pakistan's military bureaucracy and politics. Pashtuns have occupied key positions such as two presidents of Pakistan. Even Wail Khan had admitted in 1975, that Pashtuns were amply represented in the armed forces and civil services of Pakistan. The demand for a sovereign Pashtun state became less vocal (Rubin, 2006).

The Role of External Actors

The main reason for the dispute is that the Durand line divides the Pashtun tribal areas, where the Pashtun people live. These tribes share a common language, culture, and history and their communities were split when the border was drawn. On both side borders, there are Pashtun who have economic and family relations with each other. For this reason, Afghanistan has always refused to recognize the Durand line as an international official border, claiming that it was imposed by the British and did not consider the rights and unity of the Pashtun people. The dispute over the line intensified after Pakistan became an independent country in 1947.

Afghanistan argued that huge portions of Pakistan, mainly the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan regions, were historically part of Afghan territory. This led to relations between the two countries. Afghanistan was the only one only country that opposed Pakistan's entry into the United Nations, arguing the border issue was still resolved. However, Pakistan considered the Durand a legitimate international border because it claims to have inherited this border from British India. It should be respected as a recognized border under international law. Control of this particular border is crucial for Pakistan's national security and the prevention of illegal activities like smuggling and terrorism, Pakistan has recently reinforced the border by erecting barbed wire fence and also installing roadblocks. These initiatives are considered to control the passage of moments across the border and address the looming threat of militant and terrorist forces operating along the borders. In Afghanistan, however, these developments are viewed as an endeavor by Pakistan to institutionalize a boundary that Afghanistan refuses to recognize.

The Durand Line controversy has also caught the attention of regional powers like India,

Iran, and China, India supports Afghanistan's position on the Durand Line due to conflicts with Pakistan. In this respect, India has been developing strong relations with Afghanistan, to weaken Pakistan's influence in the region. India has poured a significant amount of money into Afghanistan funding, infrastructure projects, and offering military and economic assistance. By supporting Afghanistan in this regard India is strengthening its strategic position against Pakistan, putting pressure on Pakistan from both sides of its eastern and Western borders.

Iran is relatively neutral in the dispute over the Durand line. Iran has a long border with Afghanistan primarily for its interests. It desires. Iran wanted stability in the region. Iran is keenly interested in preventing foreign powers, especially the United States from increasing their influence in the region. While Iran has amicable relations with both Pakistan and Afghanistan, it carefully monitors the situation for its own security and economic interests. On the other hand, China is a very close ally of Pakistan in entirely supports its stance on the Durand line. A stable border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is therefore crucial for China which has a huge Belt and Road initiative (BRI) that includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which wants economic development in the region.

Therefore, china wanted Regional stability will help China protect its investments and maintain internal security. The international community, including the United Nations and most of the Western countries, largely acknowledged the Durand line as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan during the US-led war in Afghanistan. Washington supported Pakistan on the line as it was critical to ensure that supplies in military operations ran smoothly. However, International actors have also urged Pakistan and Afghanistan to engage in dialogue and cooperate to settle their differences peacefully. They understand that unsolved border disputes can provide fuel for instability and conflict in an already unstable region (Rubin, 2006).

The situation between Afghanistan and Pakistan may not change shortly the consequences of the situation have to change. Both countries have to work to reduce tensions and address the issues that divide them. Any solution has to involve the people living in the border regions. Since neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan seems ready to quickly dissolve the border issues. The process should start with easier steps to build trust, such as stopping the use of harsh language between the two governments. Some suggested having informal dialogues between the two sides, but others felt that these would only work if both sides were serious about finding a solution. Smaller steps may involve the promotion of trade and setting up a committee to engage the border villages in improving security coordination. A peace gathering such as that in 2007 in Kabul could be an appropriate first step for this type of conversation. And Acceptance that the Durand line (the border) has been recognized internationally for more than one hundred (100) years despite its history. Being disputed. Any shift in the border would probably be along the current line, without large territorial shifts. Aware of this fact, but for such free movement, both have to go on their border. Pakistan needs to have effective governance on its side, and Afghanistan must respect what people want over there. It is about measures undertaken along with international aid that shall benefit to build trust over this situation, which includes a positive up-gradation trade, along with enhanced security of this region. The US and its allies should be helping bring both sides together, offering political support and keeping them on track. Pakistan wants assurance that Afghanistan won't contribute to its security problems, especially with India. Afghanistan wants access to ports like Karachi, help with its economy, and for Pakistan to stop interfering in its politics. The real advance will be to keep the peace process, moving forward, and in the case of both countries, long-term security guarantees and aid packages will be inevitable. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly concerning the Durand line that separates the two nations in brief, would be like this.

Advantages of an open border

It would bring more defined citizenship rights to Pashtuns on both sides of the border and allow them to trade, communicate, and develop together. It would strengthen democracy in both countries and help Pakistan to access central Asia giving Afghanistan access to the sea. It could reduce ethnic tensions and improve unity in both countries.

Economic Corporation

There is a need to trade between the two countries and improve infrastructure like highways and telecommunication. Establishing special trade zones and promoting agricultural development could help regional Corporations international organizations like the UN, NATO, and the US should help Pakistan and Afghanistan corporations. This could include political dialogue, economic support, and addressing issues like the Taliban insurgency. Diplomatic efforts: pressure must be mounted on Pakistan from the US and NATO to take action regarding the Taliban heavens. Pakistan and Afghanistan should also be encouraged to take collective action on border-related issues. Political cooperation needs to increase between Pakistan and Afghanistan rather than just military coordination. Afghanistan should try to give signals to Pakistan that it has goodwill towards Pakistan and would want to resolve the issue peacefully at the border.

People-to-people contact

There is a lot of interaction between people on both sides of the border. This should be encouraged. Further government should facilitate communication and cooperation to foster peace. In conclusion, the opening of the border, though with many benefits, has to overcome the challenges of insurgency and historical tensions which demand significant political will reform and international support. Both countries need to hold dialogue and cooperate in an effective effort to improve their relations and solve the border problems peacefully.

CONCLUSION

The Durand Line dispute has remained a central issue in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, shaping the political, security, economic, and cultural landscape of both nations for over a century. Initially established under British colonial interests in 1893, the border has continuously fueled tensions between the two countries, with Afghanistan refusing to recognize it as an international boundary. The division of Pashtun tribes and communities, a direct consequence of the Durand Line, has added a deeply ethnic and historical dimension to the dispute. This, coupled with external influences and regional dynamics, has contributed to the persistence of the conflict.

Despite shared cultural and historical ties, Pakistan and Afghanistan have failed to establish a stable, cooperative relationship. Issues of border security, terrorism, illegal trade, and ethnic divisions, particularly among the Pashtuns, continue to complicate relations. The porous nature of the Durand Line has facilitated cross-border smuggling, militant movements, and other illegal activities, causing significant security challenges for both nations. Additionally, Afghanistan's support for Pashtunistan and Pakistan's accusations of Afghanistan harboring anti-Pakistan militants have exacerbated the mistrust between the two governments.

On the economic front, the border has severely hindered trade and regional integration. Frequent border closures, informal trade routes, and security issues have led to increased costs, disrupted supply chains, and economic losses for both nations. The lack of formal trade agreements and infrastructure has further entrenched the economic divide.

The involvement of external actors, particularly India, China, and the United States, has further complicated the situation. India has supported Afghanistan's stance on the Durand Line, while China has aligned itself with Pakistan, driven by its strategic interests in regional stability and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The international community, including the UN, has recognized the Durand Line as the de facto border but continues to push for dialogue between the two countries to address the dispute and foster cooperation.

In light of these challenges, the long-term solution to the Durand Line issue requires a combination of trust-building measures, effective governance, and diplomatic engagement. Both countries must take incremental steps toward resolving the dispute, starting with improving security coordination and promoting economic cooperation. The involvement of international actors, including the US, UN, and NATO, will be crucial in facilitating dialogue and offering support for the peace process.

Ultimately, a peaceful resolution of the Durand Line dispute holds the potential to transform Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. An open border could enhance economic ties, improve security, and foster people-to-people connections, contributing to the stability of the region. However, this will require overcoming deep-rooted ethnic and political tensions, with both nations demonstrating a genuine commitment to peace and cooperation. Through sustained dialogue, political reform, and international assistance, the long-standing conflict over the Durand Line can be resolved, paving the way for a more prosperous and stable future for both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

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