

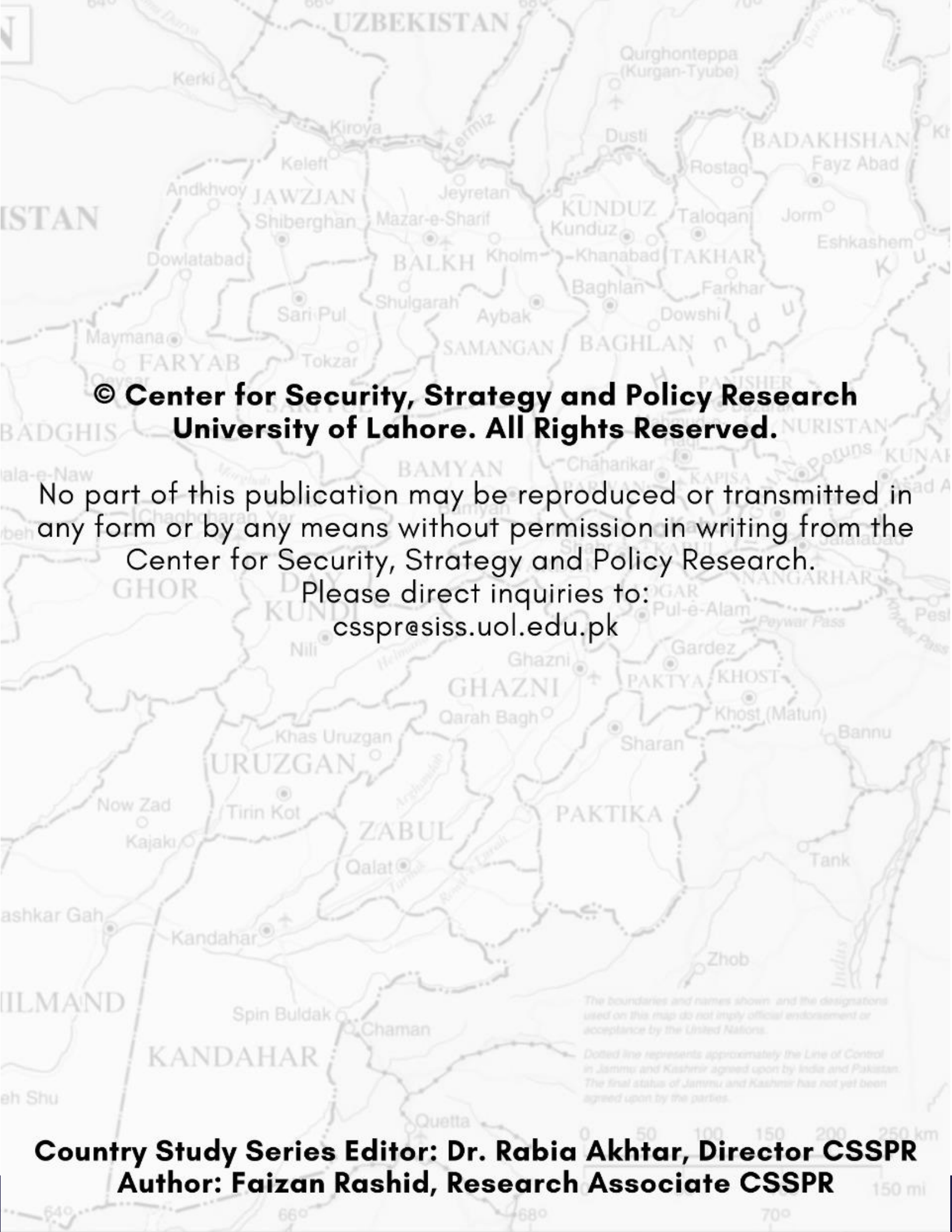


AFGHANISTAN

COUNTRY STUDY



THE
UNIVERSITY OF
LAHORE



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Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

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Country Study of Afghanistan

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked country at the crossroads of Central and South Asia. It has borders with Iran to the west, Pakistan to the east and south, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan to the north, and China to the northeast.¹

Geographic Contours

1. Terrain

It is a mountainous country with a mix of plains in the north and southwest spread over a 652,230 square kilometer area. It is the world's 42nd largest country in size and it mostly possesses a rugged terrain with plateaus and river basin in between.² It is dominated by the Hindu Kush range (the Himalayas western extension) and Karakoram range on its northeastern side, all mountainous with fertile valleys.³ The Hindu Kush ends at the west central highlands creating planes like "Turkestan Plains" and "Sistan Basin" having a semi-desert landscape with grasslands on the periphery. Despite being riverine in makeup, its major areas are mostly dry bounded, mainly the "Sistan Basin" which is one of the driest regions in the world. The Amu, Hari, Rud, and the Arghandab are the main rivers with a number of tributaries like Helmand River, however Kabul River follows in an easterly direction, joining Indus and finally the Arabian Sea.⁴ The country mostly remains snowbound during winters and its melting snow becomes the source line for its rivers, lakes and streams. Water management is, however, a big issue and warrants rehabilitation of its irrigation system at a gigantic scale. Badakhshan located on the northeastern Hindu Kush is geologically an active area and remains the epicenter for most earthquakes originating in the region.⁵

2. Climate

It has a continental climate with harsh winters in the central regions, glaciated spells in its Northeast (Wakhan and Nuristan corridors) and hot summers in its low lying areas around Sistan Basin. Jalalabad Basin and Turkistan plains have high rising temperatures in the summers, up to 43° Celsius at the highest.⁶ Generally arid in summers however, rainfall spell stays between December to April. Lower areas of Western and Northern Afghanistan are the desert with little precipitation. Its forest and grassland regions are full of vegetation and colder regions are composed of flowering plants and hardy grass. The country is deprived of monsoon rain except the Nuristan province, which occasionally receives summer monsoon spells.⁷

Historical Perception

Afghanistan and its geo-strategic location has provided it with value added editions of diverse cultures of different civilizations. Persians under Darius the Great (522 to 486 BCE), the Greeks led by Alexander the Great (356 to 323 BCE) and the Buddhist civilization from late first century CE under its kings, all left their respective marks of cultural heritage on its landscape till the end of the 10th Century.⁸ Then Arabs moved in with Islam as their prime mover and established their foothold seeking power away from Turks.

Thereafter, Genghis Khan moved in the 13th century and for the next few hundred years Afghanistan remained the battleground between various Indian and Persian empires. In the 18th century, Pushtuns under Ahmed Shah Durrani defeated the Mughals and the Persians and established an empire that remained unstable, inviting outsiders to fill the vacuum. The country got entangled in the 'Great Game' in Anglo-Russian power struggle.⁹ Britain tried to exercise direct control, but lost badly in the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42). The British Empire attempted again in the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880) and annexed much of Afghanistan's territory. Britain provided modern weapons and an annual subsidy to Afghan rulers for the maintenance of a buffer zone to keep Russian imperialism out of distance from British Empire's crown jewel - India.¹⁰

In the later decades, the Durand Line gets fixed up with British India, dividing the Pushtoon tribes on both sides of the border. The country was eventually taken over by Nadir Shah and later his son, Zahir Shah governed the state. In 1973, King's cousin Sardar Mohammed Daoud Khan staged a coup proclaiming Afghanistan a republic and became the president himself. By 1978, Daoud Khan was overthrown and Noor Muhammad Taraki took over. His radical reforms sparked local rebellions with army insurrections and resistance groups emerging in the country. Fearing the U.S. would take advantage of the chaotic unrest, the USSR entered the scene. It later became USSR's Vietnam as the Mujahideen captured large parts of Afghanistan. Their internal crisscross later allowed entry of the Taliban in the political arena of Afghanistan.¹¹ The U.S. launched 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in response to the terrorist attacks at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 and Kabul was captured on November 30, 2001. Stage managed political developments continued on and in 2001 Hamid Karzai took over the presidency. Due to the rising insurgency, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) took over the responsibility for security in the state.

On February 29, 2020, a diplomatic milestone for peace was achieved between the United States and Taliban at Doha, Qatar. The provisions of the peace agreement include the withdrawal of all American and NATO troops from Afghanistan, a Taliban pledge to prevent al-Qaeda from operating in areas under Taliban control, and talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Intra-Afghan negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan government began on September 12, 2020 after the Afghan government had agreed to the prisoner exchange stipulated in the Doha Agreement.

Society

1. Demography

Afghanistan has a population of 32.9 Million out of which 23.9% is urbanized and remaining 71.4% lives in rural areas including the 4.7% nomadic community. It has a population growth of 2.34% and is expected to reach 82 Million by 2050 if the current birth rate continues.¹² Life expectancy in spite of all odds still has seen an upward trend, credited to its harsh topography and nature bounded lifestyle.

2. Ethnic Groups

There are several ethno-linguistic groups in Afghanistan, to include Pushtuns (42%), Tajaks (27%), Hazara and Uzbeks both maintaining equal representation of 9% on its demographic scale. Afghanistan's 2004 constitution recognizes 14 ethnic groups: Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik, Pamiri Uzbek, Gujar, Baloch, Turkmen, Arab, Brahui, Nuristani, Qizilbash, Pashai and Aimaq.¹³

3. Languages

Dari and Pashto are the official languages of Afghanistan. Dari is very closely associated with Persian which functions as the lingua franca in Kabul and its northwestern regions. Pashto is the native language of Pushtuns but in spite of their being in majority, Dari remains the preferred language for government and bureaucracy. Number of regional languages are also in use depending upon the population concentration of respective groups. Urdu and English speakers are also found in Afghanistan. Afghan Persian or Dari is spoken by 77% of the population, Pashto 48%, Uzbek 11%, English 6%, Turkmen 3%, Urdu 3%, Pashayi 1%, Nuristani 1%, Arabic 1%, Balochi 1%.¹⁴

4. Social Structure

a. Social Affiliations

Every ethnic group in the country uses the identification term 'Qaum' to explain a complexity of affiliations, familial relations, or professional occupations.¹⁵ Every individual born to a family belongs to a certain qaum which provides support, assistance, security and social identity. In a more restricted sense, qaum refers to descent groups, from kin to ethnic group. In tribal areas qaum refers to a common genealogy from an extended clan or tribe.

b. Women and Gender Roles

Male and female roles in society are strongly differentiated. The domestic sphere is the realm of women whereas the public sphere is strictly the domain of men. Women's social mobility is strongly dependent on the males of her family. Among the nomadic groups, they have more freedom of movement. Due to social restrictions, women comprise only 23% of the labor workforce.¹⁶ Female education has been a major issue in Afghanistan for many decades, which has limited women's employment opportunities.

5. Religion

Majority of the citizens identify Islam as their religion. Muslims constitute 99.7% of the population (Sunni 84.7 - 89.7%, Shia 10 - 15%), other 0.3%.¹⁷

6. Education

Education system in Afghanistan like other public service establishments stands fragile in its makeup. Efforts are being undertaken to enroll the 3.7 million children who are out of school.¹⁸ Female education is receiving more emphasis and around 39% female students are in schools attending classes from primary to higher secondary school level.¹⁹ The literacy rate still stands at 43% and participation rates in basic and secondary education are also pretty low.²⁰ Gender inequality is another outstanding issue in its education system and needs to be focused on for improved results. Teachers' workforce lacks adequate training and outdated textbooks need revision. Afghanistan has about 1600 general education government schools but lacks capacity on basic education configuration.²¹

Higher education system, despite rapid expansion over the last decade, also suffers from shortcomings thus forcing students to pursue postgraduate degree programs in foreign universities. Mostly, their outbound mobility links them to Iran, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States of America. The prevailing educational laws mandate 9 years of compulsory education and free education is a constitutional right in Afghanistan until the undergraduate level.²² The cost of private education is variable and largely unregulated. The private higher education sector has expanded widely in the last decade. Higher education sector is still struggling with capacity issues whereas private sector has swept up a substantial number of students. Untrained and unqualified faculty is also a glaring issue with education system and number of PhD level faculty staff in the public sector is at minimum scale. Although all public and private higher education institutions are subjected to accreditation, practically these reforms are still being oversights owing to the governance issues.

7. Health Care

Afghanistan's healthcare system has been in disarray for many years due to decades of insurgency and poor governance system. Its rebuilding is being undertaken by the Afghan

government aided by the United States and several NGOs, yet many hurdles are in the way of its upward growth. Malnutrition, physical/psychological trauma and human rights abuses are significant problems in this field. Its healthcare status is improving slowly and still much is needed to bring it to some optimum level. Emergency medicine in Afghanistan has not yet developed and as such reliable emergency services are not available for the general public. Poor communication infrastructure and lack of required number of ambulances are also the handicaps of emergency services. Much efforts have been undertaken in establishing primary care hospitals but a coordinated health care infrastructure has not yet been developed in the country. Approximately 70% of medical programs are being implemented by aid organizations.²³ Lack of trained medical workforce is a major cause of concern in its primary health care system. Health care quality and resources vary widely from urban to rural areas. Concerted efforts in terms of resource allocation are required to revitalize hospitals, especially primary health care units. Improvement in the economy, viable funding sources and focused interest of the Afghan government will certainly enhance the access and affordability of health care to its masses.

8. Sports

The national sport is Buzkashi, however, football and cricket are the two most popular sports in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan Cricket Board is Afghanistan's representative at the International Cricket Council (ICC) and was an associate member of ICC from June 2013 to 2017.²⁴ The Afghan Sports Federation promotes basketball, volleyball, track and field, chess as well besides cricket and football.

Government

1. Constitution

The constitution of Afghanistan was approved by consensus and adopted in 2004. It has 162 articles and was officially signed by then President Hamid Karzai on January 26, 2004. It provides for a presidential system of government.²⁵

2. Government Structure

Afghanistan is an Islamic Republic having executive, legislative and judicial pillars of its governance. The National Assembly is the country's legislative house having two entities: the 'House of the People' (Wolesi Jirga) and the 'House of Elders' (Meshrano Jirga). The whole system is led by the president with two vice presidents in the system. Supreme Court (Stera Mahkama) is the apex court for justice dispensation with chain of subordinate courts spread throughout this country. "Loya Jirga" (Grand assembly) is the main instrument of Afghan governance for settling national and regional issues.

The Wolesi Jirga consists of 250 delegates and has the primary responsibility for making and ratifying laws and holds considerable veto power over policies and senior appointments.²⁶ The Meshrano Jirga consists of local dignitaries and experts appointed by provincial councils, district councils, and the president himself.

Presidential and parliamentary elections are held every five years. Presidential elections are conducted on two-round system whereas parliamentary elections are run on one-round based on a single non-transferable vote. The country at present has thirty four provinces and 400 districts being run under the governance system in force.²⁷ Provincial governors are appointed by the president and head the provincial councils as their chief executive.

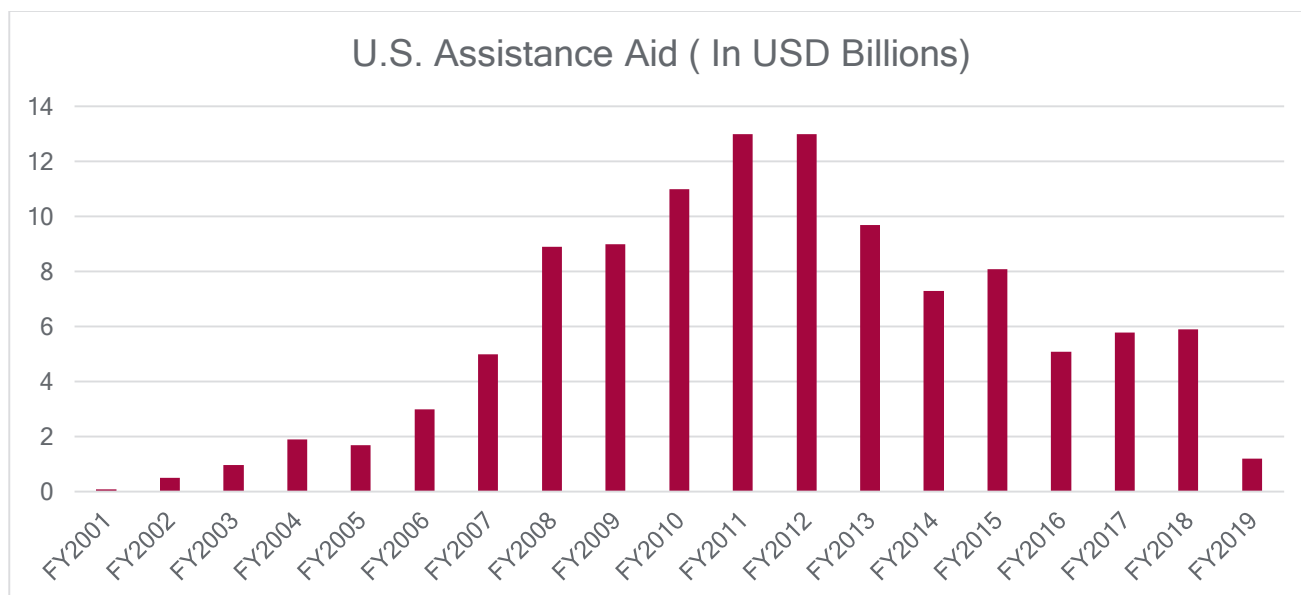
3. Political Parties

Afghanistan has a multi-party system in place with numerous political parties that join together to form the coalition government. The law requires that 10,000 members be signed for a political party to be officially recognized. The major political parties in the run are: National Enlightenment Consensus Party of Afghanistan, National United Party of Afghanistan, Republican Party of Afghanistan and other small parties.

Economy

Afghanistan stands on poor economic footings and is being sustained through foreign aid. Shortage of services like clean water, healthcare, electricity and job production are the offshoots of its weaker economic lifeline. Land-locked status of the country aside, prevailing insecurity due to ongoing insurgency, weak governance and poor communication infrastructure all are contributing to not letting its economy take off. It has one of the lowest living standards in the world and foreign aid reserves are depleting.

Fig. 1.1. U.S. Aid to Afghanistan



Source: USAID Data Services, <https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/AFG>

Tremendous amount of foreign aid has not been able to boost up Afghanistan's economic condition owing to widespread corruption in the system. Corruption is the root cause of low job creation, weak government capacity and poor public infrastructure. The government has introduced certain economic reforms, but it will take time to implement these and till that time it

shall remain donor intensive to move on. Afghanistan's agricultural growth following recovery from drought lifted it to 3.9% in 2019 and is likely to increase this year.²⁸ COVID-19 has also impacted Afghanistan's economy negatively because of shortage of foreign remittances and investment constraints. Inflation is modest at 2.3% and its trade deficit remains extremely large at 31% of its GDP.²⁹ Poverty level remain high due to low labor demand and security-related constraints on service delivery. For economy maximization, continuous investment is required in expanded infrastructure, regional connectivity, human capital, and an improved business regulatory environment.

1. Agriculture

Agriculture is the backbone of the Afghan economy. Agriculture contributed about 24% to the country's GDP while the labor force engaged in this sector is 61.6%.³⁰ The country produces nuts, vegetables, grain, and livestock products including wool, animal hides, cashmere and many of these commodities are moving towards the export market. The agriculture sector is nearly one-quarter of the national GDP and is the second largest sector behind services. As majority of the population (70%) lives in the rural area, agriculture plays an important part in their livelihoods.³¹ Most Afghan farms are very small, and their annual productivity is so low that rural farmers can only fulfill their household, with limited agricultural production entering commercial marketing channels. The agricultural sector is entirely run by private enterprises, including input suppliers, agribusiness processors, herders and exporters. The low share of agricultural income, despite the fact that there is a high employment share of the labor force, is due to the high number of unpaid family workers and limited market participation.

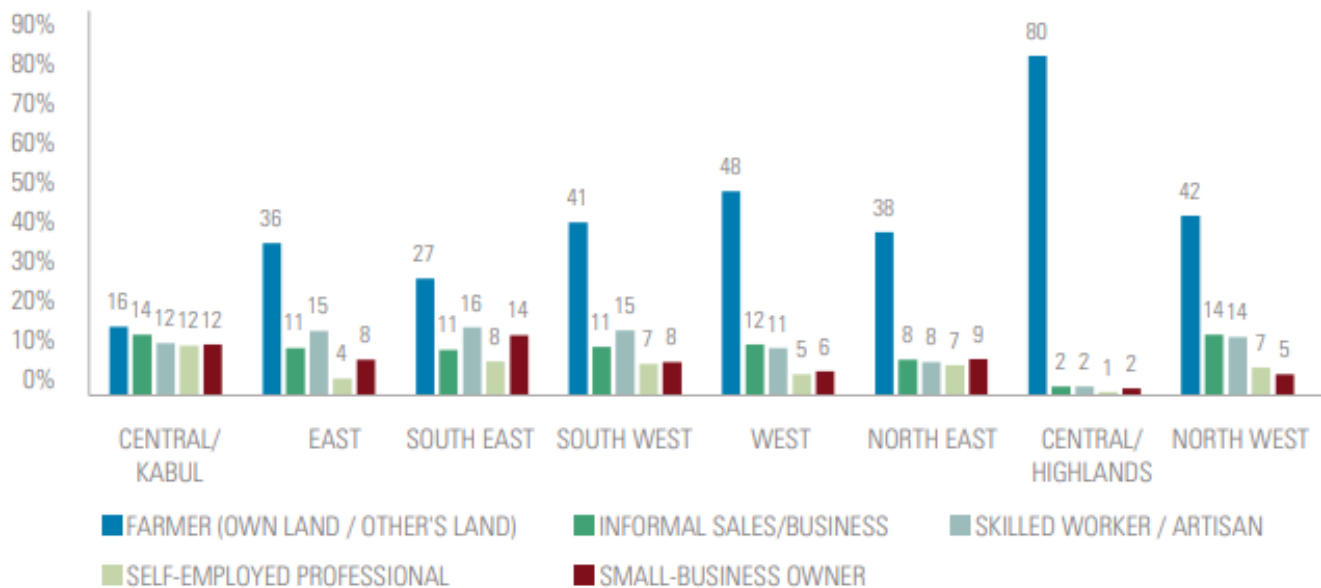
2. Industry and Service Sector

The country's major revenue generating sectors are textiles, bricks, furniture, shoes, soap, fertilizer, non-alcoholic beverages, mineral water, beverages apparel, food-products, cement, hand-woven carpets, copper, coal and natural gas.³² Political uncertainties, however, have decreased foreign direct investments and dampened private sector confidence. Rising risks with the services sector remain due to deterioration of security conditions, reduction in aid flows, political instability, and possible adverse regional political and economic developments.

3. Human Resource Management

The poverty rate was 55% at the time of the last household survey (2016/17) and is expected to have worsened since due to declining per capita incomes.³³ Afghanistan's rural economy is experiencing an influx of youth workers into the labor force, increasing the competition for every new job. The rural economy, however, is not yet equipped to absorb all workers into the labor market. As a result, more than 50% of rural youth workers are involved in livestock and agriculture, mostly as unpaid family workers. The female labor force participation rate (women that work for paid income) in rural areas continues to be low at 29 percent, with 60 percent of employed women working in the livestock sector.³⁴

Fig.1.2. Employment Type by Region in Afghanistan



Source: Survey of the Afghan people, Asia Foundation, https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019_Afghan_Survey_Full-Report.pdf

4. Communication Infrastructure

The communication infrastructure is in a pretty bad shape and its road network needs thorough up gradations, especially in intercity connectivity. Kabul and Kandahar International Airports are the main worldwide service providers whereas other satellite airports are mainly for domestic connectivity. Crude traffic ability owing to mountainous terrain friction, weak economy and polarized law and order situation are the major handicaps in the up gradation of Afghan communication systems.

Armed Forces

1. Law and Order

The Afghan National Police carries the responsibility of law enforcement in the country and is controlled by the Ministry of Interior. It is subdivided into the Police force and Border police. Maintenance of security, crime prevention and property protection are the main responsibilities of police force whereas border police manages borders and international airports within the country. The Afghan intelligence agency, National Directorate of Security (NDS), assists police in security matters. Issues of militancy, terrorism, kidnapping and robberies are the common security hazards in Afghanistan warranting requisite response by the police.

2. National Security

The military forces of Afghanistan consist of the 'Afghan National Army' and the 'Afghan Air Force'. The President is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and exercises his command and control through the Ministry of Defence. Its strength is about 200,000 excluding the National Police which stands at 91,000 in number.³⁵ Afghanistan's military training institutes have been built and modeled on U.S. military lines to impart training to their rank and file. It has five corps and one 111th capital division. Ethnic balance is being maintained with 43% Pushtuns, 32% Tajiks, 12% Hazaras, 8% Uzbeks and other groups represented.³⁶ Russian and western equipment, especially American military hardware is presently the mainstay military armaments with Afghan forces. India has also contributed in terms of training and provision of indigenous military equipment. Currently American and French instructors are training the Afghan National Army. Afghanistan's Air Force is divided in four wings placed at different geographical locations in the country. Presently it consists of 183 aircraft with 6800 personal in its inventory.³⁷ CESSNA 208 (US) and A-29 Super Tucano (Brazil) are the mainstay combat aircraft with Afghan Air Force. Hamid Karzai International Airport at Kabul, Kandahar International Airport, Shindand Airbase, Herat International Airport, Camp Marmal and Bagram Airfield are the main Air Force installations being used for operational purposes.

Foreign Policy

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has close and friendly relations with regional and global states and its foreign relations are based upon its traditional values and faith endorsed in its constitution. It maintained a policy of neutrality and non-alignment before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 but thereafter underwent a number of changes in its status. It regulates its foreign policy in order to preserve its independence, territorial integrity, mutual respect, equality of rights and, above all, its national interests. Observance of the United Nations Charter, interstate agreements and universal declaration of human rights are the fundamental pillars of its foreign policy. Afghanistan exists as an important link between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East and also remains a bridge between the Islamic world and the family of pluralistic democracies. Decades of instability have resulted in loss of its traditional and conventional balance in maintaining its relations with the regional and neighboring states. Instead of an independent and sovereign nation, its status has been relegated to a sub-entity, thereby it is not being treated as an equal partner in regional relationships. Though Afghanistan has gained memberships of regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), its internal instability remains a bigger handicap in its relations with neighboring countries.

Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan has a turbulent history of make-and-break depending upon the changing geopolitical environment. Various other issues, including the global war on terror in Afghanistan, the presence of Afghan refugees in Pakistan since the 1990s and

Afghanistan's burgeoning relationship with India also supplement the prevalent frictions in Pak-Afghan bilateral relations. Although building stronger, closer and cooperative relations with Afghanistan, is a high priority of Pakistan's foreign policy, but mistrust and lack of confidence in each other have not allowed both countries to do so. However, lately the situation has changed for the positive. Pakistan in spite of its own financial constraints has assisted the development of Afghanistan in communication infrastructure, education, healthcare and capacity building of both civil and military professionals. Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship is thus marked by inherent peculiarities, major discontinuities, and number of nuances, which make it a unique relationship in spite of Islamic brotherhood and their being neighbors. Afghanistan has close ties with the western bloc, especially the United States which has invested heavily in improving Afghan governance, security institutions and economy.

With the Doha agreement signed on Feb 29, 2020, the peace process has a chance to bear fruit in Afghanistan, improving prospects of durable peace and stability in the country and the region. This will enable it to play a constructive role in regional stability and economic prosperity. It also has working relations with Russia, Iran, the Central Asian states and especially, with India and China, who are assisting Afghanistan to raise its economic and industrial capacity to workable standard.

1. Pakistan and the Afghan Peace Process

Pakistan's efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan started in 2009. Following are some of the milestones achieved:

2009

February

Pakistani delegation met with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to discuss on sensitive issues like the scope of the American commitment in Afghanistan, airstrikes and peace negotiations.³⁸

March

The Afghan government had been exploring the potential for negotiations with the Taliban leadership council of Mullah Muhammad Omar and with a renegade mujahedeen leader, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, with support of the Pakistani government.³⁹

2010

January

At the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Military Committee's two day meeting in Brussels, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani recognized the necessity for cooperation with ISAF; he emphasized Pakistan's instrumental role in the success of the Afghan peace process.⁴⁰

March

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton met Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi to reinforce strategic ties. Both dignitaries committed that they would work together for “peace and stability in Afghanistan”.⁴¹

2011

January

U.S. Acting Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Frank Ruggiero met with Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi. The Foreign Minister reaffirmed that Pakistan would not shirk from taking necessary steps possible to promote and facilitate reconciliation of the Afghanistan-driven process.⁴²

April

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani accompanied by the chief of the army staff, Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani met with President Hamid Karzai and members of the Afghan High Peace Council to set up a joint commission for promoting reconciliation.⁴³

June

First Meeting of the Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Commission for Reconciliation and Peace was held by the Presidents of Afghanistan and Turkey. Afghanistan and Pakistan expressed their commitment to an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process of reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan and called upon all of Afghanistan’s partners in the international community to support such a process.⁴⁴

September

Burhanuddin Rabbani, the leader of Afghanistan’s High Peace Council, former president, was assassinated dealing a severe blow to the reconciliation efforts with the Taliban.⁴⁵

2012

January

Pakistan facilitated the peace process in Qatar, where the United States wanted the Taliban to set up a liaison office for the purpose of conducting negotiations, by allowing Taliban representatives to travel to the Persian Gulf state.⁴⁶

February

After a phone discussion with President Hamid Karzai, Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani issued a statement calling on the Taliban to participate in the reconciliation process. Two-day trilateral meeting hosted by the Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari with the leadership from Iran and Afghanistan discussed ways to push the peace process forward.⁴⁷

November

Taliban prisoners released by Pakistan to help broker peace talks with the Taliban and Afghan government. The releases were to bolster the efforts of the High Peace Council, the Afghan government’s negotiating body, to start talks with the Taliban. Prisoner releases had been a core demand of the council, and Pakistan’s move was a good-faith effort to advance the moribund peace process.⁴⁸

2013

September

18 Taliban prisoners were released by Pakistan and Afghanistan to facilitate the peace negotiations with the Taliban.⁴⁹

2014

January

Four-member commission made by Pakistani Prime Minister to start talks with Taliban for peace negotiations.⁵⁰

2015

June

Afghan government delegation met with Taliban officials in Islamabad in a significant effort to open formal peace negotiations. Both parties hailed it as the “first step toward reaching peace”.⁵¹

December

Fifth Heart of Asia Conference was hosted in Islamabad with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani in attendance. A joint statement from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States called for immediate efforts to restart peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban.⁵²

2016

January

Quadrilateral meetings with senior diplomats from Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States (Quadrilateral Coordination Group) was hosted in Islamabad to chalk out a roadmap for Afghanistan peace talks.⁵³

2018

June

The Taliban halted operations against Afghan forces for three days of Eid al-Fitr. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke by phone with Pakistan’s Army Chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa a day before the cease-fire was announced. Gen. Bajwa also reiterated the need for maintaining focus on success of Afghan Peace Process.⁵⁴

October

Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, cofounder of the Afghanistan Taliban was released at the request of the United States. He was appointed the chief of the Taliban’s diplomatic office in Qatar and served as one of the new chief negotiators in high-level peace talks.⁵⁵

2019

September

U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad met with the Pakistani leadership to discuss the Afghan peace negotiations. Khalilzad on behalf of the U.S. President asked Pakistan to facilitate in bringing Taliban to the negotiations table and Pakistan reaffirmed that it will do its best to make it happen.⁵⁶

October

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi met with the Taliban co-founder Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and his delegation at the Pakistan Foreign Ministry in Islamabad. It was the first such meeting after peace negotiations had been halted by President Trump due to increased Taliban violence in September.⁵⁷

2020

February

Pakistan's efforts which started in 2009 finally bore fruit in bringing the U.S. and Taliban on the negotiating table resulting in the U.S. signing two deals: the 'Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America' and the 'Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan' opening the door to Intra-Afghan negotiations.

September

America's peace envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, visited Pakistan and conveyed Washington's gratitude for the important role Islamabad played in easing the start of reconciliation talks between warring Afghan parties. Both parties stressed the need for regional and international support for this historic opportunity for the Intra-Afghan talks. In the meeting between the Foreign Minister and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the Foreign Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast resolve to forge a common understanding on the Afghan peace process.⁵⁸

2. Opportunities for Economic Security

Afghanistan is in a crisscrossed configuration for the last 50 years because of its continuous political instability and militancy. As of today, the U.S. still boots down in strength on Afghan soil, power struggle between the sitting government and the Taliban is on the rise, the governance is at its lowest ebb and, above all, the national spirit to remain in race with global developments is missing. Under these circumstances it is wishful to join economic connectivity initiatives for development. Therefore, peace has become all the more elusive. Political stability and durable peace is of paramount importance for economy to improve in Afghanistan. Number of development projects are pending, awaiting Afghanistan's stability. Blessed with a great geo-strategic location, it can serve as a transit hub in regional economic connectivity thus cashing the immense revenue for its own development and economic growth. Trans-Afghan pipeline for gas supply to its neighboring countries has the capacity to change the basic economic dimensions in Afghanistan provided peace is restored and its infrastructure is developed.

Afghanistan's economic security with its related developments can only be ensured if there is peace and stability around. To achieve this, they have to lower the security cost being paid at present and also reduce dependency on foreign aid. Rebuilding of damaged infrastructure and restoration of basic services shall help in reduction of poverty and unemployment, thus boosting its economic growth. Security, political dynamics and economic developments are all interlinked and can be the linchpin of progress if weighed properly. Efforts, however, are underway at the global level to restore political stability and security in Afghanistan and if done, shall jumpstart its economy.

Fig 1.3. Regional Connectivity through TAPI and CASA-1000



Source: Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA), 2018, <http://recca.af/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/RECCA-2018-Summary-SP.pdf>

a) Extension of CPEC to Afghanistan

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), being the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and lifeline for Pakistan's economic sustenance, is also beneficial for Afghanistan. Afghanistan has been interested in joining CPEC since 2016, something which complements China's desire to reach out to Afghanistan for its natural resources reserves. CPEC will provide Pakistan an easy access to the Central Asian States, and reduce the economic burden created by the Afghan refugees present in Pakistan, once the situation in Afghanistan is conducive for their return. Afghanistan will get its infrastructure in order and uplift its economic status by attracting foreign investments. The Torkham-Jalalabad and Peshawar-Torkham roads have already been completed by Pakistan and are ready to provide connectivity to CPEC once Afghanistan joins in. Similarly, the road from Dera Ismail Khan to Angoor Adda, linking Paktika and Khost provinces of Afghanistan are classic examples of connectivity enabling Afghanistan's access to enormous consumer markets in South Asia. CPEC will also

boost both China's and Afghanistan's respective socioeconomic strength and shall become the pilot project for employment opportunities. China, has no history of involvement in Afghanistan's internal dynamics therefore CPEC's extension to Afghanistan is a welcome step. CPEC also aims at enhancing Afghanistan's connectivity with regional states providing all the benefits of a transit hub for its bright economic future.

b) TAPI - Revitalized Energy Project

The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline (TAPI) is a Trans - Afghanistan pipeline project, connecting four countries for provision of natural gas to its founding members. The pipeline spreads over 1814 Kilometers and passes through Herat, Kandahar, Quetta, Multan and to India onwards to facilitate trade and cooperation amongst its member states. It is funded by Asian Development Bank with \$ 8 billion dollars on its inventory load. It will initially transport 27 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas per year, providing additional benefit of transit fee to countries en route.⁵⁹ India and Pakistan joined this project in 2012 but the project's final shape is still not in order thus, casting apprehensions on its final materialization. India has adopted a 'wait and see policy' in Afghanistan, an approach that might change in-line with the final outcome of the Afghan peace process. This policy might come under stress if the Taliban form the government in Kabul.

c) Central Asia-South Asia Power Project (CASA – 1000)

The Central Asia-South Asia Power Project (CASA) is a project for provision of electricity transmission system from Kyrgyzstan to Tajikistan bringing surplus hydroelectricity to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Both of these countries have a surplus of electricity in summers while Pakistan and Afghanistan suffer from chronic electric shortage. An inbuilt mechanism of 'Open Access Clause' is being invoked through which Pakistan will export its surplus electricity during winter to other three member states using same structure of CASA project. This way it becomes a two way trade of electricity amongst member states. Transit loss of electricity in Afghanistan due to security environment will be borne by source countries not by the buyers. It will have 750 kilometers high voltage direct current (DC) transmission system between Tajikistan and Pakistan via Afghanistan with converter stations at different places. Industrial growth both in Pakistan and Afghanistan is handicapped due to non-regular flow of electricity resulting in closure of small businesses and job losses. This shortage will be overcome by provision of surplus electricity from these state countries, thus catering for overriding electricity shortages in Pakistan and Afghanistan that too at easy and comfortable terms manageable by both the states. It is a \$ 1.16 billion project funded by the World Bank. The member countries have established an Inter-Governance Counsel (IGC) for project development. About 1 GW of power will be transmitted to Pakistan and roughly 300 megawatt to Afghanistan once it is operationalized. It will run about 70 kilometers of its part in Pakistan terminating at the national grid for onward transmission to various other parts of the country. Over a period of time, now electricity generation in Pakistan has increased by over 9000 Megawatts and is likely to

enhance further thereby viability of this project now may become unsustainable for Pakistan but at bilateral level it still remains in order.

3. Regional Ties

Afghanistan maintained a policy of neutrality and non-alignment in international relations before the Soviet invasion. It managed to receive economic assistance from both USSR and U.S. even in the days of the Cold War. During the Soviet occupation only symbolic diplomatic relationship was maintained by the USA and its western allies and many countries even closed their missions due to instability and ongoing insurgency after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Relationship with regional countries during Taliban regime also remained lukewarm with limited scope of expansion in economic and other related geopolitical fields. The Government of Pakistan is focused on providing continued assistance for rebuilding Afghanistan's communication network with a view to reshaping the economic profiles of both countries. The relationship with Pakistan has remained on a vibrating nod but the Doha agreement has given it almost a different complexion because it revolves around Pakistan's efforts to make the Taliban negotiate directly with the United States. Pakistan's role in bringing peace to Afghanistan has been well registered in global geopolitical scenario. Unstable Afghanistan has its own weight, especially for Pakistan because its continued state of instability will complicate Pakistan's ability to refurbish its weak economy.

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