

Against all Expectations:

Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations after the American Withdrawal

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Abstract

Many researchers, policymakers, and officials in Pakistan and abroad assessed that the Taliban's renewed rise to power in Afghanistan in August 2021 would strengthen the relations between Kabul and Islamabad. For about two decades, Pakistan assisted the Taliban economically, politically, and intelligence-wise, believing that the organization's transformation into a sovereign in Kabul would serve Pakistan's political interests and strengthen its regional position. Some even claimed that Pakistan saw itself as a "patron" of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime. However, contrary to expectations, after it retook power over Afghanistan, the Taliban government turned its back on Pakistan, strengthened its ties with India (Pakistan's historical rival), and supported organizations seeking to carry out a coup in Pakistan. The crisis between the two governments reached the point of exchanging well-publicized threats and localized military frictions in the border areas. The article suggests that the Taliban's institutionalization process from a non-state violent actor to a state actor, in addition to Pakistan's policy in Afghanistan, led to the "surprising" cooling in the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan the day after the American withdrawal. Firstly, the Taliban pragmatically chose to warm its relationship with India (over Pakistan), which it sees as a long-term strategic partner. Secondly, Pakistan's violation of Afghanistan's sovereignty led to tensions and mistrust between the two governments. Thirdly, the Taliban continued to support the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), an organization with a similar ideology to its Afghan counterpart, which seeks to overthrow the government in Pakistan and turn it into a 'Muslim state'. Fourthly, the lack of recognition of the Durand line by the Taliban led to incidents along the border with the Pakistani forces.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Taliban, India, TTP, terrorism, jihad, foreign relations, al-Qaeda

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Introduction

Following the events of September 11, 2001, in the United States, Washington decided to invade Afghanistan as part of the global war on terror. The main goal was to destroy the al-Qaeda organization responsible for the attacks in the country, whose base, as mentioned, was in Afghanistan. Since 1996, the Taliban made up of groups of students from Pakistani 'madrasahs' (Islamic Schools) supported by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), has been the ruler in Kabul and provided a safe haven for al-Qaeda. With the American invasion, the Taliban retreated, and in its place, a new government was formed in Afghanistan with a new constitution, parliament, and judiciary under American auspices. In 2001, the Taliban, most of whose leadership fled to Pakistan with the fall of power in Afghanistan, began reorganizing as a militant movement, carrying out offensive operations mainly in the eastern parts of Afghanistan. In 2003, the Taliban increased its influence into de facto geographic control over parts of northern Afghanistan and began to mobilize local resources, an informal governance system, and support centers. In this way, the Taliban weakened the administrator in Kabul but did not yet challenge it. Under the security auspices of the United States and NATO forces, Afghanistan remained in a good security situation until 2009, the year the Taliban began a wave of violence across Afghanistan, which included suicide bombings in public places and sporadic attacks on government centers.

At the same time, the new administration in Afghanistan encountered some difficulties, which, as mentioned, led to its final collapse in August 2021. First, at least in the first years of its tenure, there was an evident disdain for the Taliban's abilities to threaten the concept of sovereignty in Kabul and its political power. Although the Taliban represented a significant portion of the country's Pashtun minority, its socio-political legitimacy was denied, giving many residents a reason to oppose the pro-Western government. In addition, the ethnic complexity in Afghanistan, which has made it difficult for anyone who has been at the head of the government in Kabul to this day, has resulted in many ethnic tensions and, as a result, political divisions in the country. To this can be added the corruption in the Afghan leadership and the reliance on the Americans militarily and economically. (Sakhi, 2022).

What accelerated the strengthening of the Taliban at that time, under the surface, was, among other things, Pakistan. From establishing the Taliban in 1994, Pakistan saw it as a strategic and political ally, providing it with economic, military, and political support. When the Taliban first came to power in 1996, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were the

only ones to recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, after the American decision to invade Afghanistan, Pakistan changed its strategy towards the Taliban and started playing a double game. On the one hand, Pakistan, under President Musharraf, announced its support for the American war against global terrorism, decided to provide assistance against the threats of al-Qaeda and the Taliban and to sever ties with the Pashtun terrorist organization. Pakistan wanted to avoid global sanctions and improve its image, and therefore sided with the Americans right from the start. On the other hand, sometime after the September 11 attacks, the Taliban leaders found a safe haven in Pakistan, where they stayed for the two decades they were not in power (Ullah, 2022). During this period, various reports indicated the continuous assistance of the ISI to the Taliban, and in particular to the 'Haqqani Network' - the Taliban faction closest to Al-Qaeda militarily, economically, and diplomatically. Pakistan excused its relationship with the Taliban as an attempt to create a ground for peace in Afghanistan. However, more than once, it has vehemently denied its deep connection with it (Walman, 2010).

Pakistan realized that the Americans and NATO forces would not stay in Afghanistan forever. They must ensure that a pro-Indian government like the one that served between 2001 and 2021 will not be established in Kabul. In 2007, Georgetown University published a series of documents from the American National Security Archives, which included Intelligence reports that described Islamabad's commitment to the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The reports detailed the Pakistani training and logistical and financial assistance to the Taliban while showing the Pakistani attempts to somewhat balance the organization's extremism (Barbara, 2007). In a broad view, Pakistan was preparing for the day after the Americans. It wanted to ensure that after the withdrawal, the Taliban would return to power in Afghanistan and thus regain its significant influence in Afghanistan, which should have helped it in the long term strategically, security-wise, and economically (Ullah, 2022).

In 2011, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, announced that by 2014 the United States would withdraw its forces from Afghanistan and transfer responsibility to the Afghan forces. After the assassination of former al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, the United States decided that the primary goal of its war on terror had been achieved, and now the baton must be passed to the Afghans. With the rise of the Trump administration, the withdrawal from Afghanistan picked up speed, and in 2018 peace talks began in Doha between the Taliban and the Americans. As part of the Doha agreement, signed after the peace process between the parties in May 2020, it was determined that the United States would finally withdraw from

NATO forces on May 1, 2020. On the other hand, the Taliban would undertake not to assist terrorist organizations led by al-Qaeda. Finally, the Biden administration completed the withdrawal in August 2021. After the change of American intentions, the Taliban prevailed over the Ghani administration and the Afghan security forces, gained control of Kabul in mid-August, and crushed the quest for peace in Afghanistan (Ayalon, A. Raz, I. G. & Amiel, B., 2022).

On August 15, 2021, a few days before the official withdrawal of the United States and NATO forces from Afghanistan, the Taliban seized control of the presidential palace in Kabul. While many governments worldwide expressed concern, the Prime Minister of Pakistan at the time, Imran Khan, said the next day that the Afghans had “broken the shackles of slavery”. Khan, who was also called, among other things, "Taliban Khan" had several reasons to celebrate due to the American withdrawal (France 24, 2022). The prevailing assumption among the top Pakistani leadership and the Pakistani security system was that the Taliban's rise to power would allow Pakistan to manage a "proxy" regime or as a patron to Kabul, thus allowing it to advance its political interests (Shaw, 2021). Many analysts also believed that Islamabad's continued support for the Taliban would allow it to come to its senses (Riedel, 2021).

Despite the various assessments, reality proved otherwise regarding Pakistan-Afghanistan relations after the American withdrawal and the rise of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. This article will focus on the various reasons that led to the cooling of relations between August 2021 and March 2023 by analyzing the historical core issues that have affected the relations between the countries since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, the perceptual change made by the Taliban from a violent non-state violent actor to a state actor since coming to power in Afghanistan and the ideology of the organization alongside the rise The terrorist organization TTP (Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan or Talibani Pakistan) in Pakistan. This article refers to Pakistan-Afghanistan relations as the Pakistan-Taliban relations during the current research period due to the Taliban's exclusive control over the government in Afghanistan.

Part One: Core historical issues in Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

Dealing with the specific issue of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations after the American withdrawal requires discussing several core issues in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, which have proven independent of the administration in Kabul. Despite Pakistan and Afghanistan being two Sunni Muslim countries sharing a border, language, culture, and customs, their historical relations have been full of friction since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947. The

researchers Muhammad Idris and Mansur Ahmad Nasser defined three main reasons. The Durand Line - the historical borderline between the countries; matters of the Pashtun nationality; the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan. While the various administrations in Islamabad tried to improve relations between the countries, the three reasons above kept the administrations in Kabul from taking a similar step (Idrees & Naazer, 2022).

A. The Durand Line, which stretches along 2,640 kilometers between Pakistan and Afghanistan, was decided by the Afghans and the British, within the framework of two agreements in 1879 and 1893, without the knowledge in Kabul that Britain was planning to grant independence to India and Pakistan and that this borderline would cut between Afghanistan and another country. Afghanistan felt cheated and expressed a strong position following the British decision. The government in Kabul claimed that parts of Pakistan's (present-day) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, east of the Durand Line, belonged to Afghanistan during the reign of Ahmad Shah Abdali from 1747 to 1773. Beyond that, Afghanistan tried to create obstacles for the new Pakistani state, and evidence of this was its vote against Pakistan's membership in the United Nations in 1947 (Idrees & Naazer, 2022). Over the years, several different Afghan claims have been raised regarding the illegality of the borderline, such as the fact that there is no signature of the Afghan ruler in a document from 1893 and that the document only refers to a hundred years, meaning that it expired in 1993 (Lambah, S, K, 2012).

B. The problem following the border line was the division of the Pashtun tribes. The Pashtuns are the most significant minority in Afghanistan (about 42%) and a significant minority in Pakistan as well (about 15% as of 2018) (Minority Rights Group International, n.d). Their division created hostility towards Pakistan over the years, and they were branded as a violent group. The fact that the leadership of the Taliban is Pashtun, and its ideology is intertwined with the Pashtun tribal culture only strengthened this. Until the 1990s, Afghan leaders called for the independence of the Pashtuns, which caused, among other things, violent incidents with the Pakistani forces. Despite this, the rise of the Taliban was a blessing in this respect for Pakistan, in that it represented the Pashtuns and at the same time held a pro-Pakistani position (Siddique, 2012). Of course, with the loss of his power in 2001, the Pashtun issue rose to the agenda in the relations between the two countries.

C. Indian influence on Afghanistan stems primarily from its core conflict with Pakistan since its inception. The two countries subject to a conflict over territory (mainly Jammu and Kashmir) have waged armed conflicts, armed themselves with nuclear capabilities, and waged

diplomatic struggles worldwide. Afghanistan was a vital ground in the conflict due to its geographical location. The interest of India, which does not share a border with Afghanistan, is to obscure Kabul's connection with Afghanistan, thereby undermining Pakistan's perception of security. Over the years, several strategic interests have strengthened the relationship between New Delhi and Kabul, which, on the other hand, has sowed grave concern in Islamabad. India used soft power to strengthen its relationship with Afghanistan, which manifested in the launch of financial programs, road rehabilitation projects, construction of dams, and an unprecedented donation of about 1.2 billion dollars until 2009. Only in 1996, with the rise of the pro-Pakistani Taliban to power in Afghanistan, India withdrew its support for the government in Kabul. However, its interest did not stop, and as mentioned, it returned to strengthen its influence in Afghanistan in 2001 (Idrees & Naazer, 2022).

Part Two: The Taliban 2.0 - From A Non-State Violent Actor to a State Actor

For about two decades (2001-2021) out of power, the Taliban functioned as a non-state violent actor in Afghanistan. However, after regaining control of almost all parts of the country in August 2021, the Taliban became a state actor in Afghanistan. The process that went through these two decades required him to make various strategic adjustments to continue operating as a militant opposition with the aim of one day returning to power in Kabul. After about two decades, the adjustments it made as a non-state violent actor proved themselves, and the Taliban found itself for the second time as the sovereign in Afghanistan - in other words, as a state actor. This chapter will analyze the processes carried out by the Taliban from a violent non-state violent actor to a state actor, also referred to as the "establishment process" and thus will help to understand its relations during this period with Pakistan.

In the literature, it is customary to call the organization during this period the Taliban 2.0, not because its ideology differs from the Taliban 1.0, but because some of the faces in its leadership have changed. The change that took place in Taliban-Pakistan relations after the American withdrawal and ascension to power is directly intertwined with the Taliban becoming a state actor in Afghanistan. What suited his interest as a militant opposition no longer suited him, or suited him less, as a sovereign in Afghanistan.

Hoffman and Shanker claimed several characteristics that define non-political violent actors.

1. The players are willing and able to use violence to persecute their opponents.
2. They are not integrated into the official state institutions.
3. Have a certain degree of autonomy regarding politics, military operations, resources, and infrastructure.

Hoffman and Shanker added that

often political actors support non-political violent actors for their national interest (Hofmann & Schnecker, 2011). The goal of these actors is to create insecurity and instability in the country when they act through violence (DCAF and Geneva Call, 2015). These actors have a basic command/leadership structure and exercise a certain amount of control over territory and population. Their level of organization may even reach similar levels as that of countries (Munive & Stepputat, 2014).

In order to understand the process of "establishment" that the Taliban went through from a non-state violent actor to a state actor, the article will discuss the example of a similar actor. The Hamas movement, which began as a socio-religious movement in 1987 and held a Sunni religious ideology similar to that of the Taliban, turned in June 2007 from a non-state violent actor into a semi-state actor that controls the Gaza Strip. The institutionalization process required Hamas to act with political pragmatism and more restrained use of violence as a political tool. For example, the leader of Hamas stated in August 2008 to journalists that Hamas is not interested in a confrontation with Israel, even though the confrontation with Israel is one of the central values of its ideology. Furthermore, as a semi-state actor, the Hamas regime had to consider foreign relations, the international arena, and the population it ruled. This policy sometimes comes at the expense of its ideology, at least temporarily, out of a perception of specific responsibilities. At other times, Hamas has put its ideology ahead of its responsibilities as an "almost" state actor. For example, after the devastation caused in its territorial territory by 'Operation Protective Edge' in 2014, Hamas focused on restoring its military capabilities instead of the citizens and civilian infrastructure (Michael & Dostri, 2018).

Due to the similarities between the groups, the establishment process of Hamas will help analyze the establishment process of the Taliban (from a non-state violent actor to a state actor) later in the chapter. This part will touch on two main points within the process - the Taliban's pragmatic thinking in choosing to get closer to India at the expense of Pakistan and the importance the Taliban places before its eyes in maintaining Afghanistan's sovereignty. These points are essential in understanding the shaky relations between the parties since the Taliban seized power in Kabul.

1. Wanted for the Taliban: A New Partner

When the Americans and NATO forces invaded Afghanistan and led to the overthrow of the Taliban from power, the organization's leaders were not left with many options. The friends on the other side of their eastern border, particularly the ISI activists, saw them as of long-term

strategic importance and, most importantly, welcomed them. Step by step, primarily out of the limelight, Pakistan helped the Taliban recover with the goal that one day it would return to rule Kabul. It is possible that the Taliban activists at that time also saw the Pakistanis as faithful allies, and perhaps they intended to act in a similar way to what was expected of them in Pakistan one day.

The Taliban accepted Afghanistan in an awful economic situation. The country's economy was 75% dependent on foreign sources until it came to power, with the United States being the principal financier. Beyond a purely financial contribution, the World Bank, led by the United States, operated the Afghanistan Reconstructive Trust Fund (ARTF), which was the funding source for teachers, people in the health system, and others. Beyond that, many human rights organizations and non-governmental organizations were active in Afghanistan that helped the citizens and the country. The Taliban knew that after taking power, the situation was not likely to improve in light of the policy it chose to operate: Removing women from the workforce would increase the unemployment rate on the one hand and trigger a reaction of international sanctions on the other. The Taliban's aversion to foreign intervention in the management of the country - will lead to the suspension of the activities of those international organizations, will cut the aid packages from various countries (such as the freezing of 7 billion dollars by the United States), will reduce trade with other countries, thus making it difficult for the economy (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Ainsworth, 2023).

Along with the fateful decisions the Taliban chose to make, it was clear that it could not hold the country without some external partnership. India, a country with 1.4 billion inhabitants, stood on one side of the barrier. According to various estimates is expected to become a world power, third in strength after the United States and China by 2030. Until the rule of the Taliban 2.0, India operated about 500 projects in various fields in Afghanistan in broad fields such as agriculture, education, water, and energy supply in each of the country's 34 provinces. Moreover, India expressed its friendly approach and willingness to help the Afghans by supplying wheat in other areas (Summers, Mehta, etc., 2022). On the other side of the barrier was Pakistan, which has proven politically and economically unstable over the years. The ousting of its former President, Imran Khan, in April 2020 after a vote of no confidence, the massive debt to the World Monetary Fund, and the floods that caused much damage to the country in the summer of 2022 are only the tip of the iceberg (Raz, 2023). In such a strategic reality, where the Taliban is forced to choose either India or Pakistan, India is the pragmatic choice that pays off in the long run.

In early June 2022, Indian diplomats arrived in Afghanistan for the first time to discuss relations between the countries, trade, and humanitarian aid, according to the words of the Taliban Foreign Ministry spokesperson on Twitter (Reuters, 2022). He added that India wants to help Afghanistan with various infrastructure projects, education, and more, all without interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs (Aamaj News, 2022). Following the meeting, various reports claim that India reopened its embassy in Kabul, even though it does not officially recognize the Taliban government (like the rest of the world), and even invited senior officials of the Taliban's foreign ministry to participate virtually in the prestigious Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) training (Laskar, 2023). In addition, it was reported that over 20 Afghan cadets graduated in July 2022 from the cadet course at the Indian Academy, which began before the Taliban came to power. The Taliban welcomed these cadets and will likely use their abilities for new purposes. They would probably be imprisoned if seen as supporters of the previous regime (The Print, 2022). The Taliban's approach to India is a finger in the eye of the Pakistanis, who see it as a significant threat to the country's world views.

2. Do not give up sovereignty

After the United States withdrew its last forces from Afghanistan, it promised to continue its war on global terrorism, albeit without feet on the ground. On July 30, 2022, it provided the first proof of this after it killed the leader of al-Qaeda at the time, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in the heart of Kabul using a drone. The operation came just two days after a phone call between Pakistan Army Chief of Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa and US Central Command Commander Michael Eric Korilla. Beyond the American importance in eliminating the leader of al-Qaeda, the fact that the Taliban was caught helping the organization's leader, contrary to the repugnant agreement for which the withdrawal was made, proved to the world that there is no one to trust. The Taliban, for its part, pointed the finger of blame at Pakistan for aiding the Americans, which the Pakistanis denied. Beyond the phone call two days before the attack, which may have conveyed intelligence information from Pakistan to the Americans, reports indicated that the American drone launched an attack from Pakistani territory.

The Taliban's Defense Minister Muhammad Yaqoob stated that he warned the neighboring countries of "bad consequences" for helping the United States use their territory even before the assassination and, at the same time, expressed his anger at the blatant violation of Afghanistan's territorial sovereignty. This event brought tensions on the Pakistani side as well. Islamabad's foreign minister's spokesman, Asim Iftikhar Ahmed, rejected the Taliban's claims

and accused them of being outrageous allegations against the norms of responsible diplomatic conduct (Gul, 2022A; Fazl-e-Haider, 2022).

A few months before, in April 2022, the Pakistani army attacked several targets in Afghanistan near the border areas in the provinces of Khost and Kunar without coordination with the Taliban. According to the Pakistanis, the target of the attack was TTP (Pakistani Taliban) operatives who, according to their claim, used the territory of Afghanistan for attacks in Pakistan (which will be expanded upon in the next chapter). In response to the attacks in which at least 37 civilians were killed, the foreign minister, on behalf of the Taliban, summoned the Pakistani ambassador and warned him of the consequences of carrying out militant actions on the territory of Afghanistan (The Economic Times, 2022; Gul, 2022A).

These two incidents demonstrate the tension and mistrust between the Taliban and Pakistan regarding violating Afghanistan's sovereignty. On the one hand, the elimination of the leader of al-Qaeda reflected the Taliban that it could not trust Pakistan from a security point of view - as long as Pakistan helps the United States intelligence-wise and territorially and works behind its back. On the other hand, it reflected the Taliban a feeling that Pakistan feels comfortable acting militantly in Afghanistan without its permission, certainly in an attack that killed many civilians and led to public outrage.

Part Three: Pakistan, the Taliban, and the TTP

Pakistan believed the rise of the Afghan Taliban to power in Afghanistan would help it deal with another militant organization operating in its territory since 2007 - the Pakistani Taliban (TTP). This belief was quickly disproved, and it became clear that the Afghan Taliban supports and overlooks the TTP's operations in Pakistan.

The TTP is a sister organization of the Afghan Taliban and shares a similar ideology, based on establishing a halachic state (according to the 'Sharia') in Pakistan through a violent coup. The organization is composed, similar to the Afghan Taliban, mainly of the Pashtun nationality. After internal divisions and various difficulties between 2014-2015, the TTP raised its head again in 2018 and carried out attacks on Pakistani security personnel. After the image of victory provided by the Taliban over the Western world when it came to power after a coup in August 2021, the TTP, like other jihadist organizations, received high motivation and belief that such a coup could also be carried out in Pakistan (Ahmed, 2022; Sayed & Jadoon, 2022). Not only has the TTP increased the number of its attacks since August 2021, but it has also significantly increased the number of its operatives. The Pakistani Ministry of Interior estimates there are

between 7,000 and 10,000 TTP operatives in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Ahmed & Younus, 2023).

As far as Pakistan is concerned, the hopes planted in the Afghan Taliban against the TTP worked as expected in the first months when they mediated peace talks between Pakistan and the TTP, which eventually led to the signing of temporary ceasefire agreements. The Taliban's outwardly neutral stance helped it to calm the Pakistanis on the one hand and, on the other hand, allowed it not to turn its back on the TTP. After meetings held by the three parties in May 2022, the Taliban spokesman said: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, in good faith, is making efforts to take the process forward. We hope that both sides will be courteous and show flexibility" (Khan, 2022). However, beneath the surface, the Taliban's position towards the TTP differed.

First, Pakistan has repeatedly accused the Taliban of turning a blind eye to TTP attacks in Pakistan that originate in Afghanistan. These resulted in many clashes in the border areas between the countries between the TTP activists and the Pakistani security forces, exchanges of accusations between the Taliban and Pakistan, and even direct incidents between the Afghan Taliban activists and the Pakistani security forces. The Security Report of the Pakistan Research Institute for 2022 indicated that many operations of the TTP are carried out from inside Afghanistan and that the Afghan border guard forces are sometimes involved in these incidents (Khan, 2023). The exchange of fire and attacks in the border areas resulted in temporary closures of the border crossings between the countries, which are an essential axis in trade between the countries (Gul, 2022B; Al-Jazeera, 2023). In December 2022, for example, an exchange of gunfire developed near the border located in the Chaman district of Balochistan province on the Pakistani side. Following the incident, Pakistan temporarily closed a crossing border in the area, blaming the Taliban, who returned the blame (Times of India, 2022).

Second, various reports indicated the recruitment of Afghan Taliban fighters into the ranks of the TTP. Most Taliban operatives before August 2021 were militant operatives who eventually led to the occupation of Afghanistan. After the war with the former Afghan security forces ended, many of these activists found themselves lost, jobless, and primarily directionless. This fact led many of them to look for new challenges in the shadow of the jihad they were brought up on under the education in the madrassas. Recruitment to the TTP, which promotes a similar agenda, suited some like a glove. In March 2022, for example, a TTP operative, who had previously fought in the ranks of the Afghan Taliban, blew himself up inside a Pakistani army

camp (Sayed. and Jadoon, 2022). Therefore, the fact that the Taliban provided shelter and did not prevent attacks by the TTP operatives, responsible for most of the terrorist acts in Pakistan since the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan, resulted in heavy damage to Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. (Khan, W, 2023) The jihadist-Pashtun ideology of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban caused the leadership in Kabul to support the TTP and, on the other hand, not to prevent security incidents in Pakistan.

The Durand Line

In 2016, Pakistan completed the digging of 1,100 km of canals along the Durand Line and, in 2017, decided to expand the project to build additional fences and canals along the border. While the Pakistani goal was to prevent drug smuggling and the infiltration of terrorist operatives into the country, for the Taliban, which is mainly made up of the Pashtun minority living between the two sides of the border, this is a step that distances the unity of the minority and prevents freedom of movement (Vasudeva, 2021). Like the governments in Kabul that preceded Taliban 2.0, the Afghan lack of recognition of the borderline was consistent, but the resistance of Taliban 2.0 was more active. The Taliban damaged the fence and the works fence at several checkpoints after warnings from the Taliban. One of the Taliban commanders at the border even stated that "No matter what (Pakistan) did before, we will not allow it anymore. There will be no more work on the fence" (Kaul, 2022). In addition to damaging the fence, some clashes between the Taliban forces and the TTP and the Pakistani forces along the border come in protest over the Durand Line that separates the Pashtuns. The lack of agreement on the long border between the countries has significantly clouded Taliban relations with Pakistan since August 2021 and is expected to continue to be a focus of friction in the diplomatic and militancy between the countries (Hussain, 2022).

Conclusion

The "surprising" deterioration in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, or other words Taliban-Pakistan relations, since the American withdrawal in August 2021 can be explained through the process of institutionalization carried out by the Taliban from a non-state violent actor to a state actor. When the Taliban fought for power in Afghanistan as a militant opposition, it benefited from Pakistani aid, but when it took power, its interests changed. Pragmatically, the Taliban understood that in light of the difficult economic situation in the country, it would be better for it to benefit from the assistance of Pakistan's rival, India, which is stronger and more stable than its Muslim neighbor. Furthermore, India had no interest in interfering in the internal

affairs of the Taliban. At the same time, Pakistan sometimes saw it as its "proxy" and even violated Afghanistan's sovereignty when it attacked the country without the coordination of the Taliban.

As part of the Taliban's institutionalization process, it continued clinging to its ethnic-religious ideology and supported the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) in its struggle against the Pakistani state. This support created tensions between Kabul and Islamabad that manifested in the exchange of accusations, militant frictions, and temporary closures of the border crossings. Facing this background, the ideological disagreement on the border (Durand) between the countries, separating the Pashtun minority, added to the tensions between the countries and led to incidents at the border fence.

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