

Security Dilemma in Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations During Islamic Emirate Government

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Abstract

Since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's control of power, there has been a lot of optimism in Pakistan's policy and security makers. The perceptions were very optimistic, based on per-conceived assumptions about the Taliban and Pakistan's security and insecurity. The Taliban's political behaviour and the ongoing security chaos in Afghanistan proved all optimism into a zero-sum game. The expectations were or are still in Pakistan that the pro-Pakistan government will ensure its security interests and minimize pressure on the strategic flank (western border). The central security threat of India and its proactive engagements with the past governments in Kabul and under the US security umbrella kept Pakistan's policymakers in perpetual security dilemma. The optimism turned into blurred realities as India re-established its engagement with the Afghan Taliban and the latter welcomed and applauded the efforts for development and reconstruction. The return of the TTP, ISK, and the border clashes with the Afghan Taliban marked the end of pre-perceived jubilation in Pakistan's policy circles. The great powers' geo-politics in the post-US withdrawal is also important to mention. The Afghan coldrum affected and will likely affect Pakistan's internal security parameters. The state of Pakistan's is now in strategic trap relating to decision-making and policy approach towards Afghan Taliban. The economic down turns are also important to mention in this context. Each side poses deep suspicions to each other's intentions and ends. The operational levels or the strategic environment is overheated, the rise of insurgency in ex-FATA is important in this context. The dilemma has surpassed the operational levels and now is in the psychological parameters.

Keywords: perceptions, misperceptions, blame game, terrorism, spiral cycle, TTP, security implications

Introduction

The concept of security dilemma as a theory in international relations put considerable and influential light and explanation on the complex relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The bilateral political and security relations between the two states remain full of ups and downs. The mutual trust, lack of confidence, blame game,

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misperceptions, and the great powers involvements marked these relations as troublesome. The trajectory of downward in bilateral relations traces back to decades-old conflict of Border. The Afghan Jihad, the Taliban's capture of power in Kabul, 9/11 accident can be termed as major catalysts that affected their mutual relations. The US withdrawal in the post-Doha deal scenario also marked the beginning of new realities and hard choices for Pakistan. The decision-makers in Pakistan are in dilemmas over security matters. The international pressure on the issue of the Taliban and their social policies worsens scenarios and policy options for Pakistan are limited. The advocacy of the Taliban after the US withdrawal is now becoming a curse for Pakistan. The rise of TTP and the resultant activities across the state put Pakistan on a double-edged sword. The rising debate on dealing with, the Taliban and the TTP put pressure on the policymakers. The handling of political and economic situations is also an important consideration and becomes an important pillar of the internal security paradigm. Unfortunately, these are becoming worsening with time (Baqai and Wasi, 2022).

What matters for the State of Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Taliban regime is that both are stuck in the classical security dilemma. Each side blames the other for any security breach or incident. The spiral blame game continues, and they've seen no way out. The public attitude is also important concerning both state's policymakers. Ignoring the public perceptions and views can't be bothered by the two states.

The security, strategic, cultural, and economic aspects between Pakistan and Afghanistan are dependent on each other. Both states are dependent on each other according to the US late special representative Richard Holbrook coin the "Af-Pak" for mutual security and insecurity dependence. Afghanistan is also considered as a strategic plateau that affects Pakistan's as well as the regional strategic environment (Woodward, 2011). The security of both states is tied with each other and any considerations related to security measures, policy, and perspective are important to stakeholders of both. The traditional security and insecurity pattern exists between the two states and constantly re-assessing their threats perception and response. Any security situation good or bad is a long way to perceive, assess, and respond which is a long but immediate process and consideration. In the post-Westphalian state system, the security of the state is an important factor that shapes, molds, and measures state behaviour accordingly. In the context of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the regional cluster of security and insecurity exist and these perceptions turn into active policy response through operational threats and followed by the constant anarchy at the regional level.

Theoretical Framework

This descriptive and analytical study uses a security dilemma and constructivist theoretical lens to comprehend the pattern of security dilemma between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the post-US withdrawal scenario. The author chose the security dilemma because of the objectivist nature and subjectivist nature of Afghanistan and Pakistan's perceptions and misperceptions towards each other. Although various theories put insight into the relations between two states the most relevant theoretical approaches are taken as mentioned above. As argued by Booth and Wheeler (2008: 4) the security dilemma consists of two levels. At the first level, a security dilemma consists of the intentions and perceiving them as hostile. On the same level, each state or actor misinterprets the motives and intentions of others wrongly. The second level of the security dilemma link and conditioned to the first level. It means that uncertainty of each other intentions, misinterpretations at policy levels and lack of trust lead to security dilemmas between and among states. In the context of Pakistan and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the following discussion fits and explains their mutual relations under the prism and lens of a security dilemma.

Methodology

This descriptive and analytical study will answer the two questions i.e., what are those factors which constitute a security dilemma in Taliban-led Afghanistan? And what are the impacts of the existing security dilemma on their relations? This study has two main objectives i.e., to assess and analyse the various factors which lead to the security dilemmas between the two states and also aim to find out the impacts of the persisting dilemma on their mutual relations. Being a qualitative research method, this study will find out the potential factors that lead to mutual security and insecurity dilemmas between Pakistan and the Taliban. Furthermore, this study will utilize content analysis from the policymakers and their stances towards each other on various issues and then reach on conclusion and findings. The study will largely rely on secondary data.

Security Dilemma and Pakistan and Taliban Relations

The concept of security dilemma as a theory in international relations put considerable and influential light and explanation on the complex relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The bilateral political and security relations between the two states remain full of ups and downs. The mutual trust, lack of confidence, blame game,

misperceptions, and the great powers involvements marked these relations as troublesome. The trajectory of downward in bilateral relations traces back to decades-old conflict of Border. The Afghan Jihad, the Taliban's capture of power in Kabul, 9/11 incident can be termed as major catalysts that affected their mutual relations. The US withdrawal in the post-Doha deal scenario also marked the beginning of new realities and hard choices for Pakistan. The decision-makers in Pakistan are in a dilemma over security matters. The international pressure on the issue of the Taliban and their social policies worsens scenarios and policy options for Pakistan are limited. The advocacy of the Taliban after the US withdrawal has now become a curse for Pakistan. The rise of TTP and the resultant activities across the state put Pakistan on a double-edged sword. The rising debate on dealing with, the Taliban and the TTP put pressure on the policymakers (Baqai and Wasi, 2021). The handling of the political and economic situation is also an important consideration and becomes an important pillar of the internal security paradigm. Unfortunately, these are becoming worsening with time.

From social constructivists and critical theory perspectives, the elite views, perceptions, and policy matter in the context of formulating a security dilemma. In the social constructivist perspective, reality is shaped by perceptions it can be changed according to the elites of leaders' perceptions and their views (Checkel, 1998). This leads to different views of reality and policies which are subject to change. Furthermore, history, geography, social-cultural links, and political systems lead to the division of gap between them and us. This results in factions, a divergence that is the core of the security dilemma. In the context of Pakistan's relations with the Taliban, all the above elements lead to the formulation of a security dilemma. Many factors are subjective and others and objective.

In subjective factors in the context of Pakistan and the Taliban regime, the latter consider Pakistan's image and constitutional setup as based on Western-style which is contrary to their self-proclaimed system in Afghanistan. Similarly, there is a gulf of trust deficits as many Taliban leaders consider Pakistan's role in the War on Terror as dubious and in the US interest. The dilemma is that the Taliban worldview is contrasted. The objective factors that constitute a security dilemma between Pakistan and the Taliban regime are the active cross-border infiltration from Afghanistan and the recent wave of terrorism in former tribal areas. The sudden rise of the TTP led to many security repercussions for the Pakistani state. The already, war-torn areas are once again becoming active grounds for the terrorists and non-state actors. Despite prolonged counter-insurgency and military operations with massive material and security

losses after 9/11, the state of Pakistan cannot bear another wave of terrorism (Kaura, 2022).

The economic and political instability is also important in this context. Pakistan on many occasions argued that TTP was freely operating from the Afghan soil and there is freehand and facilitation to these elements. However, the Taliban regime constantly denied this by saying that they would not allow any actors to use their soil against any neighbour. What worsens the security situation is the rise of ISK in Afghanistan which is the most radical militant group in the region. Similarly, the border clashes in Chaman and Turkham borders are the objective aspects that actively constitute a security dilemma between Pakistan and the Taliban regime (Firdous, Valle, & Mehsud, 2023).

There is a particular security discourse on both sides. This leads to the established case of mind-set and perceptions about each other's. The security directions between Pakistan and the Taliban regime are contradictory, and antithesis of each other's. They have their security priorities and agendas. On Pakistan's side, the hopes, and expectations after the Taliban control became an illusion (Baqai and Wasi, 2022). The real threat and question for the state of Pakistan is how to deal with the Taliban. The discourse of security and insecurity from both states and their leader's perceptions further leads to creating a security dilemma.

Pakistan's Security Perceptions and Policy towards Taliban

The history of troublesome relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan dates back to the colonial era and the emergence and formation of an independent state. The Durand Line was the first bone of contention between the two states. The dominant mind-set in Pakistan was long occupied with threat perception from India and Afghanistan. Although the latter served as the strategic depth the realities and times change. Hence, it leads to changes in security perceptions, threats, and resultant response and policy options. The wisest course is to look at the now movement and assess and analysed the root cause of the security dilemma and misperceptions between the two states. History is gone. The pattern of regional power politics is changing. It will be unfortunate in the context of the two states that history repeats itself (Mir, 2022).

In Pakistan, the projection of security threats from the West i.e., Afghanistan is a major debate in security circles (Shirazi, 2023). The recent reoccurrence of militancy and links and blame on the TTA as a foreign hand involved is the root cause of the security dilemma, mistrust, misperception, and stalemate. The state of Pakistan looks at and militarizes the security perceptions towards Afghanistan under the prism of present

security challenges. This security-centric mind will continue in the foreseeable future. The problem lies somewhere else. The internal vulnerabilities of both states reinforce misperceptions and security dilemmas (Sayed, 2021).

Afghanistan's Security Perceptions and Policy

The post-US Afghanistan under the TTA is undergoing transition and major changes. The war-torn Afghanistan seemed to be the temporary sigh of relief but the internal compositions of the state and society at large are catalysts that are the major considerations for the new setup (Baqai and Wasi: 2021). Pakistan's role in the Cold War and War on Terror are shaping Afghanistan's security perception. Taliban security perception and threat are linked with the suspicious neighbours and hands in downgrading the Afghanistan security dynamics for their interests. Pakistan's relations with the US, India, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are also important attributes viewed by the Taliban as important security considerations.

The Taliban Response over TTP

The Taliban's stance and logic over TTP are very clear. The bond between the TTP and the Taliban are more ideological in the sense that both view *Sharia* as a political order and system. Further, both fought against the US and Western forces. Similarly, the TTP pledged their political alliance to the Taliban as their ideological leaders confirmed the nexus between them. The strategic and security alliances were traced to their providence of suicide bombers, men's power and logistic support, and safe havens (Aljaeera, 2023). On a similar note, the TTP, Taliban, and Al-Qaida share similar worldviews and ideologies. They are natural allies in one way or the other. These links were interpersonal and based on family lines and cultural traits. In this context, the relations between the Haqqani Network and the TTP were or are still as smooth as during the war on terror (Lodhi, 2023). The security threats for Pakistan are multiple, and challenging, and endanger the very basic fabric of the state and society. The problem further creates security burdens for Pakistan. The continued insurgency in Baluchistan and the re-emergence of violence in ex-FATA are the flanks that can be exploited at any time.

Pakistan's Grievances and Security Concerns

Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban have come into a crisis since the US withdrawal. Taliban view Pakistan as the major benefactor during the two-decade war and US campaign against insurgency. There is also a view

in the Taliban on how and why they should trust the major facilitators of the US which provide logistical support and serve as a major ally. The challenges for the two states are mutual, spiral and going and emerging in a spiral or what we can term a vicious cycle of self-reinforcing. For example, emergence of TTP in Pakistan, and the re-grouping of the ISIK members in Afghanistan (International Crisis Group, 2022).

The mistrusts are linked with the TTP and their activities across Pakistan by targeting security personnel and claiming to re-enforce Sharia rule in ex-FATA. One of the major escalations surfaced when Pakistan targeted TTP elements inside Afghanistan through aerial bombardment which claimed to end with killing innocent civilians. As a response, the Taliban defence minister Mullah Yaqoob summoned Pakistan's envoy in Kabul and threatened the same measures. Similarly, Pakistan lodged a diplomatic protest against the use and terror operations on Afghan soil. Pakistan also termed Afghanistan as a haven for the TTP elements. The border clashes at Chaman and the resultant closer of all major entry points remain closed for weeks. On the Taliban, pressure arose within society to handle Pakistan airstrikes (The Express tribune, 2022). As legitimate forces and power, the Taliban's reaction and response were natural in the future, it will also be the same. They also pointed out that wagging war and Jihad across the Afghan state and using the name of the Taliban is illegal and the Taliban government will deny any such activities (VOA, 2023). "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan once again emphasizes that it is not in favour of any attack on Pakistan and we will not allow anyone to use the soil of Afghanistan against Pakistan. However, it is not our responsibility to prevent and control attacks inside the territory of Pakistan" (Hussain, 2023). The issue is that the trust deficits and blame game create unfavourable situations and conditions in Pakistan and Taliban relations.

Pakistan's aggressive option to go for airstrikes was the TTP safe havens and the hesitant approach of the TTA to take or restrain the TTP elements openly operating in Afghanistan. After the control of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the TTP strengthened itself with modern weapons, ammunition, and advanced tactics in the former insurgency-affected areas (Shirazi, 2023). The re-emergence of the TTP across the former FATA was a shock to the security of the state. The panic and resistance spread over these areas in the shape of massive peaceful gatherings with slogans that we don't want the return of the Taliban. The TTP enjoys de facto political asylum in Afghanistan. Immediately after the Taliban takeover, the government of Pakistan demanded that the TTP activities should be curtailed, and the Taliban should start a crackdown on them. The Taliban were hesitant as to how to defy the group who fought with them side by

side against the US. In response, the Taliban argued that Pakistan should readdress the TTP demands and argued that they would facilitate these talks. After a series of dialogues covertly and overtly the state of Pakistan failed to address the TTP demands and terms of conditions. The situation became worse when prominent Pakistani *Ulema* returned unhelpful after negotiations on the issue of TTP (Dawn, 2022).

The situation became worse when TTP launched a spring offensive called “Al-Badr” against Pakistan (Shirazi, 2023). Islamabad’s stance and message were clear to the TTP that their safe havens are not safe inside Afghanistan. Similarly, the airstrikes also deterred the TTP from further escalating security problems for Pakistan across the border. Pakistan’s approach and message were also clear to give the Taliban a strong message that it would not compromise on the TTP issue if the Taliban government failed to contain them. This strategy also aims that the Afghan population is already against the Taliban and Pakistan will put pressure on the Taliban government to take concrete actions against TTP. There were also assumptions in Pakistan security circles that the pragmatic Taliban leader will reconsider their support to TTP keeping in view their political standing among the Afghan masses (Hussain, 2023).

As the policy continues what one can term in the context of security dilemma the spiral effects or self-defeating results were the reports that these strikes killed 20 civilians including children. The report’s coverage of these strikes did not confirm the killing of TTP elements. As a result, the aftershocks of these strikes were the massive anti-Pakistan sentiments across the masses in Afghanistan. Pakistan on their side argued that these actions were for security concerns and did not aim to target the civilian and innocent (The Express Tribune, 2022). However, the situation affected the bilateral trust between the Taliban government and the state of Pakistan. What can be termed a classical security dilemma? The pause continues to date. The mistrust will be there always. The consequences of unilateral actions will remain to hurt smooth relations. These actions are counterproductive. What Pakistan sees as self-defensive, is viewed by the Taliban as offensive. These are the major attributes of the security dilemma that the Afghan Taliban and the government of Pakistan are facing. It confirms that a security dilemma exists in their relations based on intense trust deficit, misperceptions, malign interests, and lack of rational and pragmatic engagement.

Pakistan’s Policy Response

The pattern of international politics demands a rational and pragmatic approach to peace. Particularly in the regional security complex

of Afghanistan and Pakistan, the trajectory of peace and security is not on the desirable pattern. Neither the US nor any third partner will be a viable option in this context. The statecraft demands a workable solution and listening to each other genuine grievances. The US left the spoil of Afghanistan. The threats for regional and neighbouring states are emerging in the shape of ISIK and Al-Qaida again. There is no other way out but a long-term serious consideration on security calculus for long term peace.

Conclusion

The amity exists or builds in the top to lower cadre and ranks of the Taliban leaders against Pakistan. This gave the Taliban a bargaining position and leverage over Pakistan to reconsider their terms of negotiations with Pakistan. The card of TTP is played well by the Taliban. It becomes clear that both states play strategic games with each other. The results are both self-defeating and lead to insecurities. What strategy, plan, and course of action does the state of Pakistan opt the truth is that the Afghan Taliban will never turn back on the TTP (Dawn, 2022). What matters for the State of Pakistan and Afghanistan under the Taliban regime is that both are stuck in the classical security dilemma. Each side blames the other for any security breach or incident. The spiral blame game continues and there is no way out. The public attitude is also important concerning both states' policymakers. Ignoring the public perceptions and views can't be bothered by the two states.

Pakistan's side is full of strategic blunders, miscalculations, highest expectations, meaningless calculation, and policy errors, caught in providence, dilemma of response and dilemma of dealing with reality, changed ground situation. What Pakistan should pick? Imagine. The Taliban side is distrustful, turning to alternatives, genuine grievances, unlimited options, and welcoming charm from the neighbouring states, as a victorious force, with the potential to start a new journey with enthusiasm and energy. What policy options Taliban can pick? Imagine.

Dealing with the TTP and Taliban is like a long bus ride in which Pakistan has missed all the stops i.e., dealing, resolving, and controlling. The only option left is to wait for the final stop. It will be disastrous. Remember. The circumstances demand to formulation of a long-term strategic oriented, viable, and well-calculated strategy that works for the near future. The short-term strategy will have repercussions on the state of Pakistan. Now it is the test case of Pakistani leadership and policymakers. However, it is said that in decision making there is no good decision at all. The fallouts and loopholes are always there. Hence dealing with TTP or

the Taliban will require the worst decision. The common wisdom is that in statecraft one opts and chooses the least bad decision among all repercussion options. The decision-makers should choose the best among the worst available options in the context of TTP and the Taliban.

Dealing with TTP through negotiations is showing them security weaknesses. It means surrender in common sense. The TTP will exploit these flanks. The basket is full of strategic cum-security errors. Repeating them will be unwise in the stratagem concept. The option of integration will be a double-edged sword and strategic blunder. The problem is that neither force can subdue any movement or arm resistance nor integration. The latter option is a blank word, meaning surrendering state writ and losing populous support and trust. The hard-core elements of TTP never deserve to be shown soft corners that challenge the very basic fabric/clutches of state and society at all.

History is gone but repeating itself. One should not forget that the major insurgent movements have emerged for centuries from the tribal belt including Pakistan and Afghanistan. Geography is a pivotal consideration in this context and even it is termed as destiny. The great mountains even slow down storms, redirect winds, social change, and new ideas. These are historical facts which should be understood.

Military operations are no longer the final solution. Integration of TTP in Tribal Society is, but not a viable, workable, and tolerable solution, particularly after the post-merger scenario and the new awakening among the masses. How can one tolerate a man who is totally against the norms, constitution, worldview, culture, and law of a particular society? This question will hunt policymakers.

If the key issues and grievances remain, unsolved between the Taliban and Pakistan, the former will find a common cause to move closer to their neighbours. The loss will be on Pakistan's side. Remember. This paper concludes and reaches the point that in the bilateral relations between the two states over their cumbersome past and especially after the post-US scenario security dilemma exists. The security calculations, deterioration in Pakistan's home insurgency re-emergence of TTP, blame game, closer of border points, and failed negotiations confirm empirical evidence that a perpetual security dilemma exists in their relations with Pakistan. The big question is how to overcome mutual self-repeating security dilemmas in the changing situation.

From the above inferences can be drawn that security, political aspects, blame game, and immense trust deficit exist between Pakistan and the Taliban relations. Both states are stuck in a classical security dilemma. Each state considers and blames others for their security leaps and events one way or the other. Both the states continue and will likely be continued

in their hostile blame game and will achieve nothing but losses on both sides. The issue is that the worsening security situation in Pakistan is linked with non-state actors in Afghanistan. Officially the state of Pakistan blames and points out TTP as freely operating from Afghan soil. As a response, the Taliban government denied these claims and argued that they will not allow anyone to use their soil for their militias design.

Being close neighbours and part of a regional security complex in which security and insecurity of both states are interlinked owing to close socio-cultural, linguistic, and more importantly geographic contiguity. It is the test cases of both state leaders how they manage to escape from the classical security dilemma and blame game. Both states have no exemption from each other. The future holds for both states as free of terrorism, blame game, and tit-for-tat approach. The realization, of sound strategic calculations is the only way out. Because the future holds in peace, stability, and mutual harmony. The worsening economic situation and indicators of Pakistan are also important considerations for Pakistan and will be in the future. The statecraft needs long-term and rational solutions and decisions for a mutual and peaceful future.

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