**Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations**

[Abdul Hadi Mayar](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/abdul-hadi-mayar/)

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If Pakistan objects to Afghanistan’s bilateral relations with India, it will be tantamount to its sheer meddling with the internal affairs of an independent neighbouring state. But if Afghanistan holds its relations with Pakistan hostage to its interactions with India, or any other country for that matter, it will be equally unfair on its part.

Former President Hamid Karzai had rung alarm bells in Islamabad when, during his tenure, he uttered that India was Afghanistan’s “best friend.” Soon afterwards, he played more shrewdly when, during a visit to Islamabad, qualified his utterance with the announcement that Afghanistan and Pakistan were like “conjoined twins.” That might be a political statement. But the layers and cross-layers in the historic, cultural, religious and ethnic linkages between Pakistan and Afghanistan virtually make them inseparable.

It would also not be appropriate for Pakistan to discriminate between Pashto-speaking and Persian-speaking Afghans. If there are any linguistic or ethnic rivalries and hostilities among Pashtoons, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmen or Baloch communities in Afghanistan, it is their internal matter. For Pakistan, all of them should be equal. As for Pakistani Pashtoons–double the number of those in Afghanistan, and also including Pakistanis of Afghan origin, by the way–, they have been serving as a binding force between the two neighbours, whether anyone accepts it or rejects it in a fit of arrogance.

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Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan had remained tense for most of the time before the first Afghan war. That Afghanistan had equally better relations with India, an avowed enemy of Pakistan, should not be surprising. The enemy of my enemy is my best friend. Every country–at least in the Third World Asian and African regions–has an odd relationship with its next-door neighbour while hobnobbing amicably with the one behind the neighbour. This is something natural–and psychological too. Or, maybe, this represents a stage in the evolution of inter-state relations. In medieval Europe, all states were steeped in the same prejudices and hostilities, each entangled in a perpetual state of war with the other. After the renaissance, however, political enlightenment converted their enmities into intimacies.

History is revolving itself–in a spiral way. The end of the Cold War left the world in total disarray. But things are now returning to gradual betterment. Not more than a century from now, people will be only amusing themselves with our stories of killing each other for cultural, political or religious adversities. Even today, diversity in every aspect of life is what an exemplary society can vie for. The time is not far when human beings will defy the false political barriers dividing them on artificial pretexts. History takes its course. And so does, geography. Geopolitics is gone. The future belongs to geo-economics.

Pakistan and Afghanistan are located at the confluence of civilisations. No attempt to connect Central Asia with South Asia, the Far East, the Middle East and Africa can bypass these two points, nor can any of them refuse to provide link and transit to the other. The turbulent years of the first Afghan war had brought the people of the two countries closer to each other. By the second Afghan war, they had intermingled to the extent that hundreds of thousands of Afghans share much in common.

Today, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have families divided between Afghanistan and Pakistan. If they have ancestral homes and assets in Afghanistan, they have their children brought up, getting an education and doing business in Pakistan. It would not be easy for those Afghans, who were born in Pakistan and spent the golden years of their childhood and youth in this society, to outrightly relinquish their shared affinities with their Pakistani friends and neighbours.

The departure of American troops and the resultant ascension of the Taliban, once again, dislodged a good number of Afghans. Most of them do not find any easier shelter than in Pakistan. That each side of the political divide accuses the other of interference and of abetting separatist or jihadist tendencies on its soil is reciprocal and equally harmful for both.

There has been a sharp rise in terror acts inside Pakistan after the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Taliban have to check the cross-border infiltration of elements perpetrating it. Taliban and Afghans also have to reciprocate Pakistan’s sincere efforts urging the United States to release Afghanistan’s frozen assets and forcing the international community to engage the country.

Last week, Agha Rafiullah, a PPP member of Pakistan’s National Assembly from Balochistan, while speaking inside the House, lamented the harsh behaviour of Pakistani law enforcement agencies with the visiting Afghans. He called for more facilities for Afghan traders who, he said, wanted their economy to be linked with Pakistan. Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrli, a Jamaat-e-Islami MNA from Chitral, called for facilities at the border for those Afghans who wanted to cross over to Pakistan for medical treatment and other purposes. Pakistanis and Afghans have, therefore, a common future. The sooner our states and their statesmen accept this reality, the better it would be for the two countries and the people.

*The writer is an independent freelance journalist based in Islamabad covering South Asia/ Central Asia.*