

Afghan Refugees in Pakistan: Humanitarian and Security Challenges

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Abstract:

The subject of the 'Afghan refugees' in Pakistan remains a very critical part of the national security discourse from the multiple standpoints. According to the United Nations latest statistics, Pakistan currently ranks third largest refugee hosting country in the world. It accommodates over 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, 840,000 Afghan Citizen Cardholders (ACC) and an estimated 500,000 undocumented Afghans (UNHCR, 2022). While general Pakistani estimate about the number of Afghan refugees varies between three to four million people. The present research study deliberates upon the traditional and non-traditional policy perspectives vis-à-vis the Afghan refugees. That is, to institute a proactive Afghan refugee policy, both the humanitarian perspective and the traditional security concerns (border management, drug and narcotics trade, arms smuggling, terrorist outfits based in Afghanistan targeting Pak-

istan) cannot be set aside from the Islamabad standpoint. This study explores the complex underpinnings of Afghan refugee construct in the internal and external security prism of Pakistan. With this, how Islamabad has been balancing its ethnic, cultural, religious and territorial bonds (both positive and negative) with the Afghans along with the international humanitarian obligations (UNHCR).

There is an attempt to dwell upon the following inter-linked queries: How Global War on Terror (GWOT – led by USA) in Afghanistan led to the Afghan refugees influx into Pakistan; War on Terror implications on Afghan refugees residing inside Pakistan, and; How the post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan has led to another surge of Afghan refugees into Pakistan and finally, how Islamabad is coping with this situation in lieu of its humanitarian and security standpoints?

By addressing these questions, the aim of this paper is to underscore the need for Pakistan to craft a comprehensive and futuristic policy on Afghan refugees keeping in view the geographic realities, centuries old social affinities, tribal, ethnic, and religious associations of the people on both sides of the border and also in the light of unfolding geo-economic prospects of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is argued that stability and peace in Afghanistan is essential to the economic and human development of all the stakeholders in South Asia and beyond. This can translate into the peaceful repatriation of the Afghan refugees into their homeland.

In crux, the paper notes that Pakistan's Afghan refugee policy does exhibit trends of both the humanitarian and the hardcore security perspectives from time to time. And the need to have a holistic policy vis-à-vis Afghan refugees remains inconclusive.

Introduction

Persistent conflict and war in Afghanistan has caused continuous inflow of refugees in Pakistan since the late 1970s. It has become a protracted and seemingly unsolvable challenge for the country for past forty plus years. This persistent inflow of refugee and their legal and illegal settlement in the country has posed diverse challenges for the Pakistani state over the years; especially during the two decades long period of War on Terror (WOT). At the same time, humanitarian considerations often led Pakistan, though reluctantly to overlook its security concerns and economic limitations and let the fresh inflows of refugees with any emergent crisis situation in Afghanistan.

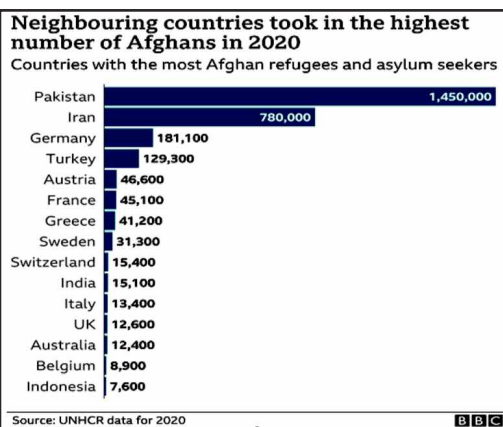
According to the documented sources, Pakistan received at least four waves of refugees from Afghanistan. The first wave started with the

famous Sour Revolution in 1978. By the end of 1979, some 190,000 Afghans migrated to Pakistan seeking refuge.¹ The second and major refugee inflow towards Pakistan was the result of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. By the end of 1980, there were more than four million Afghan refugees in the country with the number still growing.² After the end of Soviet war and during the brief period of Mujahedeen rule, it was studied that during the early 1990s around 1.2 million Afghan refugees repatriated for their home country. It was estimated that by the start of 1994, the number of Afghan refugee population decreased in Pakistan from 3.2 million to 1.47 million.³ The third period occurred after the incident of 9/11 and with the U.S invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. This foreign intervention again forced a large scale refugee movement towards Pakistan and by 2002, UNHCR

documented three million Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan.⁴ The fourth major influx of Afghan refugees to Pakistan is again witnessed with the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August 2021.

Different waves of refugees caused different policy measures as well to deal with the surging refugee issue (Hennel et al., 2022). During the initial period of Afghan refugee influx in Pakistan, they received warm welcome with religious feelings. Refugees did not face any constraints to their movement inside Pakistan and enjoyed the rights to work and live across Pakistan. However, with the increasing number of refugees and their protracted stay in the country over the years, this initial warmth did not maintain its momentum and they were seen as putting pressure on services and the labor market of Pakistan. At the same time, surge in crime rate and terrorism in the country also caused skepticism towards Afghan refugees. In this situation, during the mid-1990s, 'Voluntary' repatriation of refugees became the primary policy response to address the Afghan refugee issue in Pakistan. Similarly, later waves also generated varied response from Pakistani side.

The exact number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan cannot be effectively calculated due to the nature of persistent and multilayered conflict in Afghanistan with tenacious up and down of the situations and with different regimes in power. Similarly, there have been many attempts of repatriation of the refugees as well that helped to return some refugees but renewed conflict has also kept them coming back to the neighboring Pakistan. Similarly, tribal, ethnic, religious and cultural ties with the local population also assisted



them to assimilate with them and not to register with the local authorities or with the UNHCR to avoid forced repatriation or restriction on their free movement in the country.

The uncertainty of the exact number of refugees can be gauged by the documentation of UNHCR's data of the year 2020 reported by the BBC that during the year some 1.5 million Afghan refugees fled to Pakistan.⁵

Today, United Nations latest statistics rank Pakistan as the third largest refugee hosting country in the world. It houses over 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, some 840,000 Afghan Citizen Cardholders (ACC) and an estimated 500,000 undocumented Afghans.⁶ While general Pakistani estimate about the number of Afghan refugees both registered and unregistered varies between three to four million people and they are scattered all across Pakistan.

Generally, despite various security concerns, humanitarian considerations remain dominant in Pakistan's Afghan refugee policy. Though, Pakistan is not a signatory party to the 1951 Refugee

¹ Shabana Fayyaz, "Pakistan Counter-terrorism (CT) - Afghan Refugee Question," *South Asian Studies* 33, no. 2, July – December, 2018, p. 590.

² "Afghanistan's Refugees: Forty Years of Dispossession," *Amnesty International*, June 20, 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/06/afghanistan-refugees-forty-years/>

³ Peter Marsden, *Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 37.

⁴ "They Left us So Helpless, We Did Not Know What to Do," *Aljazeera*, September 2, 2021. <https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2021/afghanistan-refugees-karachi/index.html>

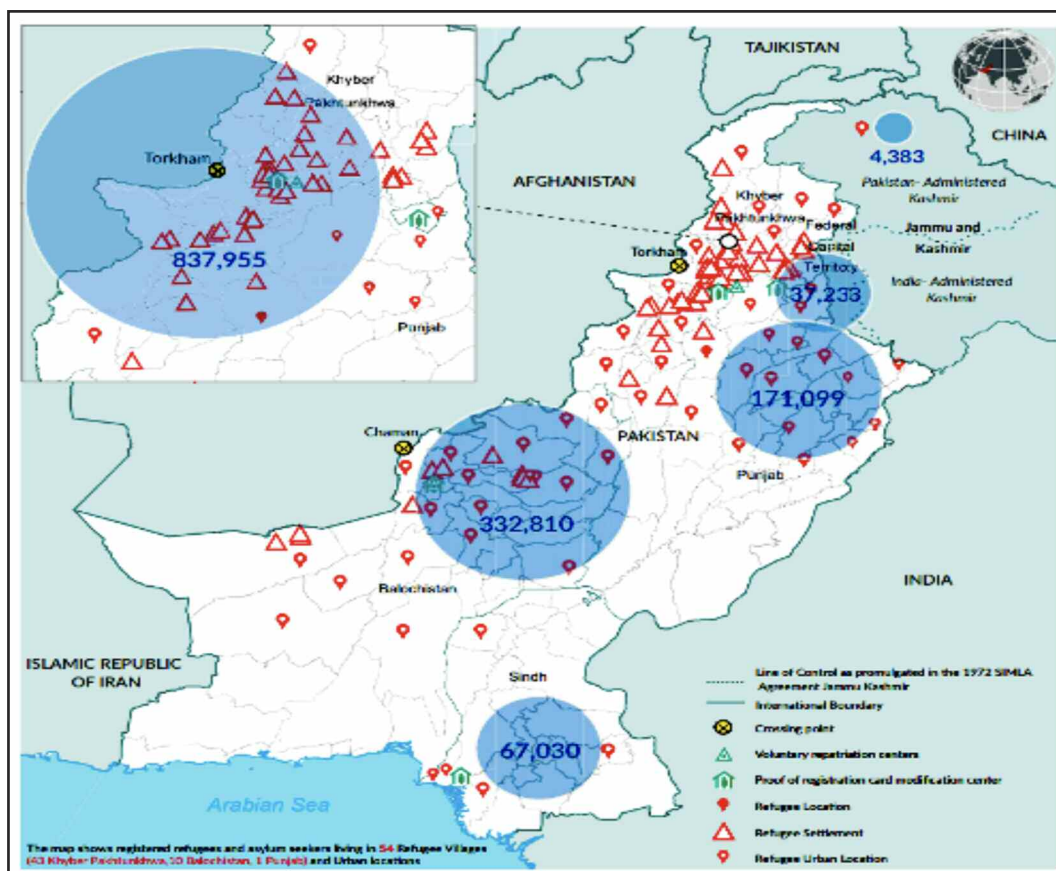
⁵ "Afghanistan: How Many Refugees are There and Where Will They Go?," *BBC News*, August 31, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58283177>

⁶ *United Nations High Commission for Refugees*, "Fact-sheet Pakistan," January 2022, p. 2. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90451>

Convention and similarly, does not have a national asylum system in place but allows United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to conduct registration process for individuals with urgent security needs. In line with the registration policy, the UNHCR exercises freedom to prioritize registration of those refugees and asylum seekers with heightened security claims. Hence, segment of refuge seekers like minorities, women, children, older persons and single parents at risk, people with disabilities and with specific security concerns are registered and investigated by the UNHCR. Upon the completion of the registration process, the documentation is issued to the refugees and asylum seekers and Pakistan generally accepts UNHCR decisions to grant refugee status and allows them to

remain in the country without any further conditions attached.⁷ The following map underscores the presence of Afghan refugees across Pakistan that is reflective of their free movement and settlement in the country. Afghan Refugees' settlements and presence in Pakistan

The paper focuses upon the subject of highly complex Afghan refugees through multi-layered queries: How Global War on Terror (GWOT – led by USA) in Afghanistan led to the Afghan refugees influx into Pakistan and also impacted the Afghan refugees residing inside Pakistan? And how the post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan has led to another surge of Afghan refugees into Pakistan and how Islamabad is coping with this situation in lieu of its humanitarian and security standpoints?



Source: UNHCR, July 2021. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88124>

⁷ United Nations High Commission for Refugees, "Fact-Sheet Pakistan," January 2022, p. 3. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90451>

By addressing these questions, a comprehensive and futuristic policy on Afghan refugees on part of the Islamabad is stressed. This is critical given the unfolding geo-political and geo-economic dynamics specifically Chinese led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC being a flagship part of this initiative. Thus, peace and stability is critically required not only for Afghanistan but for all stakeholders.

Global War on Terror in Afghanistan and Refugee Influx in Pakistan

Terror and refugee situation have socio-economic implications (ZAVIS & OLAH, 2022). The Global War on Terror (GWOT – led by USA) in Afghanistan led to the third massive wave of Afghan refugee influx into Pakistan. This refugee movement was in response to a very different and challenging situation for both Pakistan and Afghans. An international development resulted in the initiation of an international war in Afghanistan. That war also led to the regime change and the Afghan Taliban government was replaced by the Northern Alliance's government with Western support. Both groups represented the ethnic divisions of Afghanistan, as former is considered to be the representative of the Pashtun population that constitutes the majority of the Afghan population and latter composed of non-Pashtun population co them rising, Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara communities. Taliban's and Northern Alliance's hostility is well known and well documented. Post-9/11 regime change in Afghanistan reportedly also resulted in the large scale revenge killings of the Taliban by the Northern Alliance. To escape the American coalition's aerial bombing campaigns and revenge killings by the Northern Alliance, Afghans comprising all nationalities including foreign Arab elements, long stationed on Afghan soil, fled to Pakistan.

Pakistan due to its geographic proximity, porous nature of border, historical, tribal, ethnic, and religious ties with the people of Afghanistan and most importantly, under humanitarian considerations was unable to effectively control the entry of Afghans into its border regions. This is despite the fact that Pakistan, first time in its history had deployed considerable number of its military troops to the border region to stop the cross border movement and to capture the Arab fighters crossing into Pakistan from Afghanistan.

WOT clearly demonstrated the intricacy of Pak-Afghan relations. As the years passed, this refugee influx invited an extensive anti-Pakistan campaign with the allegations of cross-border terrorism in Afghanistan for which Pakistan was held accountable. Hence, for Pakistan, its humanitarian considerations cost a heavy price.

War on Terror Implications on Afghan Refugees Residing inside Pakistan

Due to WOT, security considerations of Pakistan dominated the refugee discourse during the war years. Dispersal of the Afghan refugees across the country, as shown in the map above, was increasingly viewed from the security lens by the security managers, especially with the rising tide of terrorism faced by Pakistan during the WOT phase. Unlike earlier episodes of refugee influx in Pakistan, refugees driven because of WOT in Afghanistan faced a different scenario in Pakistan, mainly due to the perception of their possible association with the Afghan Taliban. Hence, trust deficit, and suspicion was the direct result of this challenging situation. With this context in place, resurgence of war and conflict inside Afghanistan, since 2006, caused further difficulties for both Afghan refugees and for their Pakistani hosts as well.

In this scenario (specifically 2006 onward) constant allegations of cross-border terrorism against Pakistan, leveled by the Afghan authorities, United States, and other NATO countries stationed in Afghanistan, also forced Pakistan to start a massive campaign of Afghan refugee documentation and even ask for their repatriation to Afghanistan to address the alleged accusations. There was of course overlooking of the humanitarian considerations putting a lot of pressure on refugees. Islamabad faced immense challenges (internal and external) to its national security due to resurgence of violence in Afghanistan and also being held responsible for that.

Surge in crime rate and terrorism both in Afghanistan and Pakistan also exerted enormous pressure on Afghan refugees in the context of sanctuaries as their refugee camps were seen as reservations for Afghan militants. Hence, triangular nexus among refugees, crime and terrorism dominated the Pakistani narrative surrounding Afghan refugees during the WOT years.

Allegations of cross-border terrorism, allegedly emanating from Pakistan to Afghanistan was another layer of the complex situation and remained a dominant Western, Indian, and Afghan discourse from 2006 onwards till the end of the war in 2021. During the War years, high profile Taliban attacks in high security zones, including Capital Kabul, always caused Afghan accusation at Pakistan and sparked a row between the two countries. One of such incidents was the killing of the former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani in September 2011 in a suicide attack at his residency in Kabul. In response to Afghan allegations, holding Pakistan responsible for the attack, the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar, while briefing the Senate of Pakistan clearly stated that, “We are not responsible if Afghan refugees crossed the border and entered Kabul, stayed in a guest house and attacked Professor Rabbani.”⁸ Reported by *AFP*, another Pakistani official (without mentioning the name) was quoted by saying that Afghan refugees are the important issue for Pakistan as more than 90 percent of terrorist attacks inside Pakistan at the time were traced back to Afghan refugees.⁹

Similarly drastic surge of terrorism inside Pakistan by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan, formed in December 2007 (which generally comprised the local dissident people and groups), and their possible connections with Afghan Taliban also caused strains for Afghan refugees as the natural suspicious group for Pakistan and to some, a scapegoat.¹⁰ 2014 Army Public School attack in Peshawar that killed 154 people, majority of them school children, was a major development regarding the refugees’ involvement in a terrorist attack. Investigation had disclosed that the attack was

planned in Afghanistan and involvement of an Afghan refugee who was an employee of the school was also confirmed. At the time, senior Pakistani military officials, including the then Army Chief Rahil Shareef, went to Afghanistan to provide the evidence about Afghan involvement and conveyed their concern to the then President Dr Ashraf Ghani and Afghan military officials.¹¹ This episode clearly undermined the position of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and caused manifold difficulties for them.

Hence, fresh refugee inflow and people who were already residing in Pakistan were increasingly regarded as to undermining Pakistan’s counter terrorism efforts especially in the former FATA region that remained a stronghold of TTP since 2007. TTP’s cross-border terrorism inside Pakistan from Afghan soil also caused great difficulties for Afghan refugees as Pakistani authorities were suspicious of TTP militants entering Pakistan in the garb of Afghan refugees.

Post-US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and the New Wave of Refugee Influx in Pakistan

US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 led to the fourth wave of Afghan refugees in Pakistan as fear of the Taliban rule and uncertain future circumstances due to various reasons (general fear of oppressive rule of Taliban regime, possibility of revenge for those who served in previous government and its armed forces, and to avoid any emerging economic or humanitarian crisis, etc.),¹² forced Afghans to rush at the doorsteps of Pakistan. Already overburdened with millions of registered and unregistered Afghan refugees, Pakistan appeared reluctant to open its borders. Initially, Pakistani offi-

⁸ “Pakistan Blames Afghan Refugees for Rabbani’s Murder,” *The Express Tribune*, December 14, 2011 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/306490/pakistan-blames-afghan-refugees-for-rabbani-murder>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ayaz Gul, “UNHCR to Pakistan: Not All Afghan Refugees Are Terrorists,” *VOA*, June 23, 2016. <https://www.voanews.com/a/unhcr-pakistan-afghan-refugees-terrorists/3389461.html>

¹¹ Margherita Stancati, Saeed Shah, “Pakistan Army Chief Flies to Kabul After School Attack,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 2014. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistan-army-chief-flies-to-kabul-after-school-attack-1418814449>

¹² Ayaz Gul, “More than 300,000 Afghans Flee to Pakistan since Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan,” *VOA*, Dec 16, 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/a/more-than-300-000-afghans-flee-to-pakistan-since-taliban-takeover-of-afghanistan-/6357777.html>

cials had openly stated their opposition to the new arrivals.¹³

In an effort to timely address the possible humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan (in the context of the possibility of civil war at the time, that did not happen as the Afghan army collapsed within days of US withdrawal) and resultant refugee influx, Pakistan also organized and hosted a special gathering of foreign ministers of Islamic countries to mobilize their essential support for humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Afghan people inside Afghanistan. It was a preemptive effort by Pakistan to prevent another humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and to avoid another wave of Afghan refugees.

Though partially fenced, the 2600 km long and difficult border terrain and weak border management system posed immense pressure on border patrol agencies and administration. Despite its security concerns and initial denial to allow entrance to fresh Afghan refugees, it ultimately authorized their arrival on humanitarian basis. The then Information Minister, Chaudhry Fawad Hussain had shared that by mid-December 2021, after four months of US withdrawal from Afghanistan, some 300,000 Afghan refugees have made their entries into Pakistan, both legally and illegally.¹⁴ Hence, despite Pakistan's various traditional security concerns, it was compelled by host of factors involving geographic contiguity, ethnic, tribal, religious ties and humanitarian considerations to let in the new refugee inflow into its territory

As mentioned earlier, Islamabad's initial response was the refusal to have new wave of

refugees from Afghanistan. Pakistani concerns regarding new refugee inflow were also shared at international level by the then National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf in an interview with the *Washington Post*, in which he had stated that "Afghan instability could lead to more terrorism, refugees and economic hardship for Pakistan."¹⁵ This reflects the traditional security concerns related to the new influx of Afghan refugees.

Similar refugee concerns had also been reported from other neighboring countries that prompted United Nations to appeal to the Afghanistan's neighboring countries, including Pakistan to open their borders for desperate refugees.¹⁶ Islamabad tried to cope with the new situation in lieu of both its humanitarian and security standpoints. New refugee crisis prompted Pakistan to adopt 'Iran Model' which meant to keep them confined into the refugee camps along the border areas and not allowing them free access into the country like its previous and longstanding policy.¹⁷ But in effect, again due to the nature of geography, demographic linkages, structural administrative weaknesses, humanitarian considerations and sudden nature of crisis, it could not effectively construct the needed infrastructure to confine the refugee movement in the border regions. Ultimately, new arrivals also dispersed across the country as was the traditional pra.

Afghanistan's Geo-strategic and Geo-economic Significance

Afghanistan, though a land locked country but is a gateway to central Asia and beyond for Pakistan and other countries of South Asia. Sim-

¹³ Zia UR Rehman, "Pakistan Considers Iran Model to Tackle Afghan Refugee Spillover," *TRT World*, July 20, 2021. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/pakistan-considers-iran-model-to-tackle-afghan-refugee-spillover-48521>

¹⁴ Ayaz Gul, " More Than 300,000 Afghans Flee to Pakistan since Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan," *VOA*, Dec 16, 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/a/more-than-300-000-afghans-flee-to-pakistan-since-taliban-takeover-of-afghanistan-/6357777.html>

¹⁵ "Afghan Instability Means More Terrorism, Refugees for Pakistan," *The News*, August 27, 2021. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/883874-afghan-instability-means-more-terrorism-refugees-for-pakistan>

¹⁶ "Half a Million Afghans could Flee Across Borders - UNHCR," *Reuters*, August 27, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/half-million-afghans-could-flee-across-borders-unhcr-2021-08-27/>

¹⁷ Zia UR Rehman, "Pakistan Considers Iran Model to Tackle Afghan Refugee Spillover," *TRT World*, July 20, 2021. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/pakistan-considers-iran-model-to-tackle-afghan-refugee-spillover-48521>

ilarly, it is also an entrance-way for Russia, and Central Asian Republics to reach out to South and South East Asia. In this context Afghanistan holds critical geographic location for regional connectivity. Persistent instability in Afghanistan has definitely impacted Pakistan the most by all means but also hampered the development of the wider region and its economic integration vital for Pakistan and for the regional development. Energy rich Central Asia and energy deficient South Asia is detached by the unstable Afghanistan for past forty plus years. Hence, any prospect of regional networking for trade and energy is dependent on the security conditions of Afghanistan.

Announced in 2014, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a \$ 900 billion project. This aims to physically and economically connect China to diverse markets of Central Asia, Middle East and Europe through maritime and road transport networks. In essence, it is to revive the ancient Silk Road trade routes that once served as the heart of the greater Eurasian economy.¹⁸ At the heart of this mega Chinese project is the conception that "greater connectivity leads to greater growth."¹⁹ For this greater connectivity, Afghanistan is ideally positioned to do the job of regional trade, transportation and connectivity.

On the other hand, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is part of wider BRI project and connects the regional road networkings to CPEC. CPEC is delineated as the BRI's flagship project

and most ambitious undertaking in any single country.²⁰ Pakistan's Gwadar Port is the key to this project, located on the Arabian Sea at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, characterized as CPEC's jewel.²¹

Since the BRI and CPEC are for regional trade and connectivity and Afghanistan also holding the important geographic location in this regard, is definitely a key player. Since October 2016, Afghanistan also expressed a strong desire to join the project. Afghanistan's ambassador to Pakistan, Dr. Omar Zakhilwal, expressed his country's desire to join CPEC and stressed the importance of CPEC not only to Pakistan but also for the entire region.²² However, in October 2017, the then Afghan President Ashraf Ghani expressed his reluctance to join the CPEC projects and conditioned it to Afghan trade access to India.²³ Despite Afghan reluctance, on December 26, 2017, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated China and Pakistan's willingness to extend the CPEC to Afghanistan in a proper manner for mutual benefit of all the three parties.²⁴ In March 2022, Chinese foreign Ministry reiterated Chinese desire of extension of CPEC to Afghanistan.²⁵ However, south Asian regional politics involving the trilateral relations of Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan have overshadowed this prospect so far.

This documentation reflects that instability and insecurity in Afghanistan is not the only impediment that hinders Afghanistan inclusion in

¹⁸ Annie Cowan, "Afghanistan Reconnected: Challenges and Opportunities in the Context of China's Belt and Road Initiative," *East West Institute*, Policy Brief, March 2018, p. 3.

<https://www.eastwest.ngo/sites/default/files/arp-challenges-and-opportunities-in-the-context-of-bri.pdf>

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ David Sacks, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor - Hard Reality Greets BRI's Signature Initiative," *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 30, 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/china-pakistan-economic-corridor-hard-reality-greets-bris-signature-initiative>

²¹ Ibid.

²² Aurang Ram Chandran, "Why Afghanistan Should Join CPEC," *The Diplomat*, May 5, 2017. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/why-afghanistan-should-join-cpec/>

²³ "Ghani Refuses to Join CPEC while Access to India is Blocked," *Tolo News*, October 25, 2017. <https://tolo-news.com/afghanistan/ghani-refuses-join-cpec-while-access-india-blocked>

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi: To Discuss Extending CPEC to Afghanistan in a Proper," December 26, 2017. <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cegh/eng/zgyw/t1522540.htm>

²⁵ "China willing for extension of CPEC to Afghanistan," *Daily Times*, March 26, 2022. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/907601/china-willing-for-extension-of-cpec-to-afghanistan/>

the CPEC project. Trust deficit between the two respective countries and Pakistan-India relations also act as obstacles to materialize the Afghan inclusion into the CPEC project for wider benefit of the region.

It has been reported that in 2015, Pakistan and India were the final destinations for over 70 per cent of Afghanistan's total exports. The major export products included carpets, dried fruit, and medicinal plants, and not the copper, iron and other valued resources Afghanistan is known to possess in abundance.²⁶ It has been recognized that Afghanistan's inclusion into wider BRI projects and CEPEC would definitely help boost its economic conditions in two ways: firstly, Afghanistan would gain access to wider markets in China, Central Asia, and parts of Europe that it doesn't currently trade extensively with due to lack of needed infrastructure and secondly, with Chinese investments, it would get an opportunity to diversify its trade products by exporting copper, iron, and other resources it is enriched with.²⁷ Both ways it would gain economic prosperity needed for the war torn country.

Thus, one point is crystal clear that Afghanistan's geo-strategic and geo-economic significance is critical in the unfolding construct of Chinese led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and CPEC respectively. Likewise it is conditioned with the long desired peace and stability in Afghanistan. At the same time, it necessitates the development of cordial relations between India and Pakistan. Restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan is the long desired aspiration of Pakistan for diverse reasons including the peaceful repatriation of the Afghan refugees. Thus, stability and peace in Afghanistan is essential to the economic and human development of all the stakeholders in South Asia and beyond.

Conclusion

Following an academic enquiry into the multi-layered questions this study underscores the need for Pakistan to craft a comprehensive and futuristic policy vis-a-vis Afghan refugees given the geographic facts, centuries old social bondings, tribal, ethnic, and religious assimila-

tions of the people on both sides of the border and also in the light of unfolding geo-economic construct primarily the initiation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The major conclusion is: Pak-Afghan relations have registered cyclical curves marked by animosity and fraternity. At times, this uneasy relationship has weighed heavily on the plight of the common Afghan citizen that has been adversely affected by the civil war or foreign inflicted misery on their country. The title of being an 'Afghan Refugee' has often earned them a warm welcome by the Islamabad on the humanitarian basis. However, at times the same status has earned them a label of 'agents of chaos and crises' by the host country (that is, Pakistan).

Following the War on Terror (post 9/11 WTC incident) massive dislocation of the Afghan citizens was registered. Pakistan being the next door neighbor faced critical choice of how to balance its humanitarian commitments with the hardcore security concerns. Thus, humanitarian concerns at time forced the Pakistani state to let in the massive influx of refugees at the cost of its security anxieties while at times it appeared to be overlooking the humanitarian concerns to either avoid or secure its security challenges. In crux, a holistic and proactive policy versus Afghan Refugees at the Islamabad end needs more introspection. In nutshell, sustainable peace in Afghanistan is essential for its people and beyond.

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