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Pakistan's Foreign Policy Responses to Taliban Governance in Afghanistan: Implications for Regional Stability and Security

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Abstract: *The evolving political and security dynamics in Afghanistan have significantly shaped Pakistan's foreign policy and regional interactions. Understanding these dynamics is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of Pakistan's strategic, diplomatic, and security responses. This study examines Pakistan's foreign policy and security strategies toward Afghanistan, focusing on strategic and security determinants, regional stability implications, and the effectiveness of diplomatic and security measures. It aims to explore how threat perception, power balancing, and pragmatic engagement influence policy formulation and regional outcomes. A qualitative approach was adopted using a systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework. Ten peer-reviewed studies on Pakistan–Afghanistan relations, regional security, and policy effectiveness were systematically identified, screened, and analyzed. Thematic analysis was used to categorize findings into three main themes: strategic and security determinants of foreign policy, implications for regional stability, and effectiveness of diplomatic and security measures. The study finds that Pakistan's foreign policy is predominantly security-driven, shaped by cross-border militancy, regional rivalries, and strategic calculation. Diplomatic and security measures mitigate immediate threats, but structural, governance, and regional coordination challenges limit long-term effectiveness. Pragmatic engagement with Afghanistan is necessary but insufficient for sustained stability. The study highlights a realist-based understanding of Pakistan's foreign policy, emphasizing the importance of integrated, context-sensitive, and multilateral strategies to maintain sustainable regional stability.*

Introduction

The restoration of Taliban rule in Afghanistan in August 2021 was a game-changer both in terms of South Asian geopolitics and the nature of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and regional security politics. According to the conclusions made by Fair (2014), the Pakistani involvement in the Afghan Taliban has always been based on some strategic considerations associated with the opposition to the Indian cast and a supportive government in Kabul. On the same note, Abbas (2014) contends that the Afghanistan

policy of Pakistan has always been driven by the forces of security, especially in the area of strategic depth and border instability. When U.S. left, Islamabad received the Taliban takeover initially with a feeling that there would be better bilateral cooperation and a decrease in the presence of Indian in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the changing nature of the Taliban regime governance and its international low status has made the creation of a diplomatic stand of Pakistan hectic. According to the study, which was conducted by Kaleem and Iqbal (2023), Pakistan has taken a pragmatic position, trying to reconcile participation with the Taliban with the demands of demanding international recognition under the condition of inclusivity and counterterrorism. The model of governance practiced by Taliban which is characterized by internal factionalism and administrative incompetency has only added to the uncertainty in the area. This means that, the foreign policy reactions of Pakistan should be seen in the wider context of the changing power relations, changing security challenges and the redefining of regional alliances comprising of China, the United States, Russia and Iran.

However, this was not to be as new security concerns, especially the re-emerging Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have made the strategic calculation of Islamabad more difficult. According to the results of Riedel (2011), the issue of militant spillover between Afghanistan and Pakistan has long been a great threat to the internal stability of Pakistan, and this trend seems to have re-emerged in the post-2021 context. Moreover, Giustozzi (2019) points to the multifaceted and decentralized character of Taliban forms of governance, implying that the centralized influence on militant groups is still lacking, which limits the possibilities of Pakistan to anticipate security collaboration. The vulnerability of bilateral relations has been highlighted by cross-border attacks and the growing tensions along the Durand Line since 2021. According to the report of International Crisis Group (2022), the current approach of Pakistan to engagement has changed to cautious containment, with the scope being focused on border fencing, diplomatic pressures, and multilateral coordination with the help of such forums as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. These trends show that Pakistani foreign policy on Taliban-led Afghanistan is increasingly influenced by domestic security issues and not ideology. The changing balance has major consequences to regional stability, especially concerning counterterrorism collaboration, movement of refugees, economic connectivity measures like CPEC, and greater power rivalry in South and Central Asia.

Problem Statement

There is a substantial amount of research exploring Pakistan's engagement with Afghanistan and the Taliban, often highlighting strategic interests, border security, and regional dynamics. As per the findings of Akbar (2024), the Taliban's return to power in 2021 has intensified Pakistan's security challenges, particularly due to the resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and cross-border insurgency along the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. However, specifically examining how Pakistan has responded diplomatically and through security measures to Taliban governance, and the broader implications of these responses for regional stability, remains scarce. This gap is critical because Pakistan's foreign policy is increasingly shaped by the need to balance strategic engagement with threat containment. Understanding the rationale behind these policy decisions, their impact on regional security and their effectiveness in managing emerging threats is essential to evaluate Pakistan's role in fostering a stable geopolitical environment in South and Central Asia.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the strategic and security considerations shaping Pakistan's foreign policy toward Taliban-led Afghanistan.
2. To study the implications of Pakistan's policy responses on regional stability and security.

3. To evaluate the effectiveness of Pakistan's diplomatic and security responses in managing threats emanating from Afghanistan.

Significance of the Study

The research has significant academic, policy and regional implications as it can be seen to provide a systematic meaning of the foreign policy responses of Pakistan to the Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The work contributes to the further elaborated understanding of the decision-making in Islamabad considering the strategic and security consequences that predetermine the course of action taken by Pakistan regarding the situation in the region that is quite complicated. Furthermore, the examination of implications of the policies by Pakistan on the stability and security of the region helps the policy makers, security experts and academics to assess potential threats such as the insurgency across the borders, migration of refugees, and geopolitical friction. An assessment of the success of the diplomatic and security operations of the Pakistani government presents feasible information about the pitfalls and constraints of the statecraft in the management of threats posed by Afghanistan. All in all, this study fills a very important gap in the body of knowledge in South Asian security affairs, as well as helping future policy-makers make more informed, strategic, and balanced decisions on how to enhance stability in Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

Literature Review

Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations and Strategic Depth in Regional Politics

A longstanding relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been informed by the geopolitical opposition, boundary issues, and regional politics driven by power struggles in the region. Rubin and Rashid (2008) argue that the presence of Pakistan in Afghanistan has always been motivated with strategic depth, which seeks to ensure that there is a friendly government in Kabul to respond to the influence of India in the region. Such strategic reasoning has contributed to the diplomatic and security relations of Pakistan with different regimes of Afghanistan especially at times of political unrest. Bilateral relations have also been complicated by the Durand Line controversy and the movement of refugees, a factor that supports policymaker-security trends.

According to the report by Jones (2009), militant groups present along the border of Afghanistan-Pakistan have developed a complex security environment where instability in Afghanistan is directly influencing the internal security processes in Pakistan. To illustrate, insurgent groups across borders and the existence of non-state armed groups have increased the mistrust between Kabul and Islamabad. Also, according to Fair (2015), the Afghanistan policy of Pakistan represents a calculated approach of retaining influence by selective engagement, and not alignment by ideas. This move has been construed as an effort to gain an advantage in the regional politics as well as to counter the perceived encircements by India.

The strategic environment in South Asia, as proposed in the research of Tellis (2008) is defined by long-held rivalry and insecurity and therefore Afghanistan was a strategic location of competition between the regional parties. This implies that the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan cannot be discussed separately but within the framework of the regional balance-of-power politics. The literature evidence has repeatedly shown that the Pakistan involvement in Afghanistan is driven by the strategic and security imperatives, in support of the centrality of strategic depth in its regional policy orientation.

Taliban Governance and Its Influence on Regional Security Dynamics

The Taliban rule has had immense effects on the South and Central Asian security architecture by transforming regional alignment and perception of a threat. Giustozzi (2012) argues that the governance structure in the Taliban has long been marked by decentralized power, internal divisions, and lack of

institutional capacity, which impacts its control to employ effective territorial control. These patterns of governance pose a challenge to the security of its neighbors, especially Pakistan that is interested in a predictable partnership in security issues along the western border. The decentralized structure of the Taliban government has repeatedly complicated the work of counterterrorism, since the commanders on the ground may enjoy greater or lesser autonomy.

According to the results of Nasrat (2020), the Taliban has a political policy that unites ideological stubbornness and practical diplomacy, which enables the organization to be active at the regional level without giving up on its fundamental principles of governing life. This two-way strategy has significant regional security effects. In case, as an illustration, although the Taliban have been attempting to engage in diplomatic talks with the neighboring nations, there have been fears of the existence of transnational militant groups in the Afghan territory. This uncertainty has increased the worry among the regional powers, such as Pakistan, Iran, China, and Central Asian states, all of whom worry about spillover instability.

The resurgence of the Taliban to power has changed the regional balance, according to the study of Katzman (2022), since it decreased the influence of the West and increased the role of regional stakeholders in the future of Afghanistan politics. Lack of inclusive governance and continued economic crises further makes instability worse which adds to refugee movement, illicit trade, and militant cross-border movement. As an example, the situations with border security have sometimes intensified the situation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to the literature, thus, Taliban rule is neither an internal Afghan problem nor a local security issue but a regional security problem, which affects diplomatic relations, counterterrorism policies, and geopolitical confrontation. These dynamics of governance are crucial to understanding how the neighboring states formulate policies to ensure the stability of a dynamic and uncertain regional environment and especially Pakistan.

Cross-Border Militancy and Security Challenges in the Afghanistan–Pakistan Context

The Afghanistan-Pakistan context has experienced cross-border militancy as one of the most consistent security dilemmas that in turn have severely impacted the bilateral relations and the stability of the region. According to Ahmed (2010), the history of the militant networks that have been running across the porous Durand Line have been in a position to take advantage of poor governance of its borders, tribal affiliations, and political instability to continue with insurgency operations on both sides. The emergence of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is an exemplary experience of how militant groups have stopped their window dressing towards the accomplishment of Afghan-related objectives to come out openly challenging the Pakistani state. This transnational relationship has presented a complex security dilemma because the instability in Afghanistan is likely to be transferred to internal security environment of Pakistan.

The outcome of the study by Fair, Malhotra, and Shapiro (2010) has identified the localized grievances, ideology narrative, and popular goodwill as the factors that assist the militant groups to survive in the Pakistan border regions. Their study reveals that it is not the war in Afghanistan that paves the way to militancy but rather a combination of political, religious and socio-economic factors at home. Indicatively, insurgent safe havens within the border regions have traditionally facilitated militant reorganization and manoeuvrability, which is difficult to counterterrorism. This intersecting space of security erases the boundaries between internal and external threats and Pakistan has to use military and diplomatic strategies to restrain cross-border violence.

As it is proposed by the research of Staniland (2014), insurgent groups can build sustainable frameworks and transnational networks that allow them to endure the pressure of the state. As in the case of

Afghanistan and Pakistan, operational capacity has been maintained by such networks in spite of intermittent crackdown and border fencing efforts. The continuation of militant safe havens has occasionally put a strain on the relationship between Kabul and Islamabad as each accuses the other of sheltering insurgents. As a result, cross-border militancy is still pivotal in explaining the security-centric foreign policy on Afghanistan by Pakistan. According to the literature, militant spillover will keep on destabilizing the security of the region unless there is proper coordination of border management, and political stabilization in Afghanistan. Therefore, it is not just a bilateral issue, but a point of cross-border militancy that must be addressed to enhance the greater stability and enduring peace in South Asia.

Regional Power Competition and Geopolitical Dynamics in South Asia

The South Asian geopolitical environment has been greatly influenced by the presence of regional powers, where Afghanistan has been a strategic venue of rivalry between regional and global powers. Ganguly and Kapur (2010) argue that the long-standing enmity between India and Pakistan has played a key role in shaping their policies towards Afghanistan making it a battleground in proxy wars. The fear of Indian influence in Kabul has been among the reasons why Pakistan has been seeking to achieve strategic leverage since time immemorial whereas India has been pursuing developmental and diplomatic presence in the region to gain a presence there. This competition has strengthened an enduring security dilemma, and it makes it difficult to pursue co-operative regionalisms.

According to the results of Tellis (2011), the strategic environment in South Asia is marked with asymmetrical power relations and nuclear deterrence, which enhance the competition at the periphery levels like Afghanistan. Retreat of the Western forces has also changed the regional alignment, giving more power to neighboring forces such as China, Iran, and Russia. As an illustration, the economic involvement of China in terms of connectivity programs and security talks is seen to be an extension of stabilizing Afghanistan and safeguarding its investments in the region. The existence of such changing alliances unveils that the development of Afghanistan and its politics directly influence the strategic preferences of the region.

The Malone (2011) research indicates that historical instability of Afghanistan has been the target of external intervention and this has made Afghanistan a crossover of geopolitical forces that link South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East. Opposition to strategic interests, including counterterrorism and economic connectedness has contributed to the formation of disjointed regional reactions. To illustrate, one state is involved with diplomatic relations with the Afghanistan government, and the other states are involved with isolation or conditional cooperation. Such deviation is sabotage to unity of regional security structures and increases the level of uncertainty. The literature therefore unveils the fact that, geopolitics of power in the region remains to be characterized by regional power rivalry, and Afghanistan just happens to be a geopolitical pivot. These geopolitical dynamics are central to the explanation of the foreign policy responses of Pakistan because the decisions of Islamabad are highly embedded within the environment of the bigger politics of the region and the shift in the power distribution.

Theoretical Framework: Realism and Neo-Realism

One of the most powerful theories of international relations is realism, which focuses on power, national interest, and survival of states in the international environment that is anarchic. Waltz (1979) argues that the lack of a central power in the international politics leads states to focus on security and use self-help strategies to defend their sovereignty. States in this structural environment are mainly tasked with the balancing of threats and the relative position of power. This line of thought presupposes that the foreign policy making is rather influenced by the ideology than rather strategic decisions taken

to maintain the national interests.

According to the observations of Mearsheimer (2001), states are also power-seeking actors, and therefore they aim to maximize their influence to provide survival in an anarchic international order. According to offensive realism, uncertainty of the intentions of other states is a motivator of an endless competition, especially in unstable areas. In this regard, alliances, strategic alliances, and security arrangements are commonly used to offset perceived enemies. Another implication of the theory is why states can have pragmatic relationships with non-state actors or regional governments should an engagement be in the best interests of their larger strategic goals.

According to the study of Morgenthau (1948), political realism envisages international politics operating under the objective laws that lie in the nature of man, where national interest is determined by power. Morgenthau highlights that in terms of foreign policy, moral or ideological factors can be secondary to the strategic necessity. It is the realist theory which then offers a consistent understanding of state behavior in conflict-prone areas, where policy making processes are dominated by security dilemma, balance-of-power politics and perceptions of threats. Realism can be used as an analytical tool to explain the foreign policy behavior in the complex regional settings by paying attention to power competition, strategic calculation and national security priorities.

Literature Gap

The current literature presents a thorough discussion of the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan in the context of the strategic depth, regional rivalry, cross-border militancy, and overall geopolitical rivalry. Researchers have touched upon the insecurity motive behind Pakistani policy towards Afghanistan, the disjointed system of government in the Taliban, and how militant groups have remained active in the border. Also, the application of the realist theory has been immensely used to explain the conduct of states in the region. Nonetheless, even with this rich literature, specific studies that comprehensively combine these dimensions to evaluate Pakistan particular foreign policy reactions to Taliban rule and their direct consequence to stability in the region is limited. The analysis of historical trends, militancy, or regional rivalry is made in most studies in isolation and not in establishing the efficiency of current diplomatic and security policies in Pakistan. Thus, an in-depth evaluation of a correlation between strategic deliberations, policy responses, and regional security outcomes is still not sufficiently discussed in the existing body of literature.

Methodology

Research Method

The current paper will pursue a qualitative research design to analyze the foreign policy responses of Pakistan toward the Taliban rule and its effects on the stability and security of the region. Qualitative approach is suitable since the study is aimed at interpreting strategic behavior, security perceptions, diplomatic engagements, and regional power relationships as opposed to quantifying variables that are measurable. Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher wants to find meanings, interpretations, and contextual processes in a complex social and political context. Because the foreign policy decision-making is based on perceptions of threat, strategic calculations, geopolitics, and so on, the qualitative inquiry offers the depth required to gain an understanding of these dynamics.

Moreover, the qualitative research enables interpretive analysis of policy documents, scholarly debates, and conceptual arguments, which are main concern in the international relations of state behavior. Qualitative methods can be of great help whenever one is investigating phenomena that are influenced by the historical, political and institutional settings (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Since the Pakistani

involvement with Afghanistan is rooted in the regional security systems, a qualitative approach will guarantee an elegant venture into these interconnected aspects.

Research Design

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the main study design. The SLR offers a systematic, transparent and reproducible approach to identifying, selecting and synthesizing pertinent academic literature. Kitchenham (2004) argued that a systematic review increases methodology rigor by reducing bias by pre-established search strategies and selection criteria. This design is particularly suitable in this research as it seeks to summarize the available academic debate on strategic issues, security implications in the region and policy effectiveness.

Instead of gathering primary information, the research systematically examines 10 peer-reviewed articles in order to determine the predominant patterns and conceptual trends and gaps in the analysis. The use of the SLR design is explained by the fact that the research pieces that are fragmented in nature, such as security studies, regional geopolitics, etc., can be managed to become a coherent analytical mechanism. This systematic synthesis makes the research reliable and more transparent.

Data Collection

The research is based on secondary data, only, gathered through peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Secondary data is suitable due to the fact that the study aims to examine the available academic arguments and policy interpretations instead of producing new empirical field information. The advantages of working with secondary sources are that it will be possible to get scholarly content that has been peer-reviewed and the results will be credible.

Databases

To offer a wide coverage, multiple academic databases that are reputed to index social sciences and international relation studies were searched to identify literature.

Table 1: Databases Used for Literature Search

Database	Justification
Scopus	Indexes high-impact peer-reviewed journals in political science and security studies.
Web of Science	Provides access to reputable journals in international relations and strategic studies.
Google Scholar	Ensures broad interdisciplinary coverage and accessibility of recent publications.
Taylor & Francis Online	Offers specialized journals in South Asian and security studies.
SpringerLink	Covers international relations and geopolitical research.

Keyword Strategy

Keywords were developed from the central concepts of the study and refined iteratively.

Table 2: Keyword Strategy

Category	Keywords
Core Concept	Pakistan foreign policy
Governance Context	Taliban governance, Afghan Taliban
Security Dimension	Regional stability, security implications
Threat Context	Cross-border militancy, TTP
Strategic Lens	Strategic depth, regional power competition

This systematic search strategy made retrieval complete and conceptually clear.

Boolean Operator Strategy

Boolean operators were used to refine search precision and reduce irrelevant results.

Table 3: Boolean Operator Strategy

Search Combination	Purpose
"Pakistan foreign policy" AND "Taliban governance"	Identify core policy discussions
"Pakistan" AND "regional stability"	Capture regional implications
"Taliban" AND "cross-border militancy"	Focus on security challenges
"Strategic depth" OR "regional power competition"	Broaden strategic analysis
"Pakistan" AND "Taliban" NOT "1970s"	Exclude irrelevant historical contexts

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain rigor, explicit criteria were applied.

Table 4: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed articles	Blogs, editorials
Language	English	Non-English
Time Frame	Contemporary relevance	Pre-2022 studies
Focus	Pakistan–Afghanistan relations	Unrelated regional studies
Accessibility	Full-text available	Abstract-only

These criteria ensured relevance, credibility, and analytical depth.

Data Analysis

The analysis is based on the use of thematic analysis that serves to analyze the common patterns in the selected literature. Qualitative synthesis is appropriate because thematic analysis enables one to think through conceptual similarities and differences among studies (Braun and Clarke 2006). This was carried out by repeatedly reading every study, preliminary coding of strategic and security themes, sorting them into bigger analytical groups, and narrowing down on the research objectives. This approach is reasonable since it allows comparing various studies with each other and maintaining the contextual depth. Thematic synthesis Purely syntactic analysis does not proceed to interpretation, but thematic synthesis does precisely, right to the goals pertaining to strategic reflectance, regional resonance, and policy performance.

PRISMA Framework

In order to be transparent and reproducible, the study is conducted in accordance with the PRISMA. First, 120 articles were located in selected databases. Screening After eliminating 50 duplicates, 70 studies was left to screen. In the screening process, 30 were eliminated on the basis of irrelevancy or inaccessibility of the full-text. Another 30 were filtered out during the eligibility cheque-up because they did not directly answer the research objectives. Finally, 10 quality and thematically appropriate studies were picked to be analyzed finally as expressed in the figure 1 below. The PRISMA methodology serves to increase the methodological transparency and minimize selection bias because it records every step of the review.
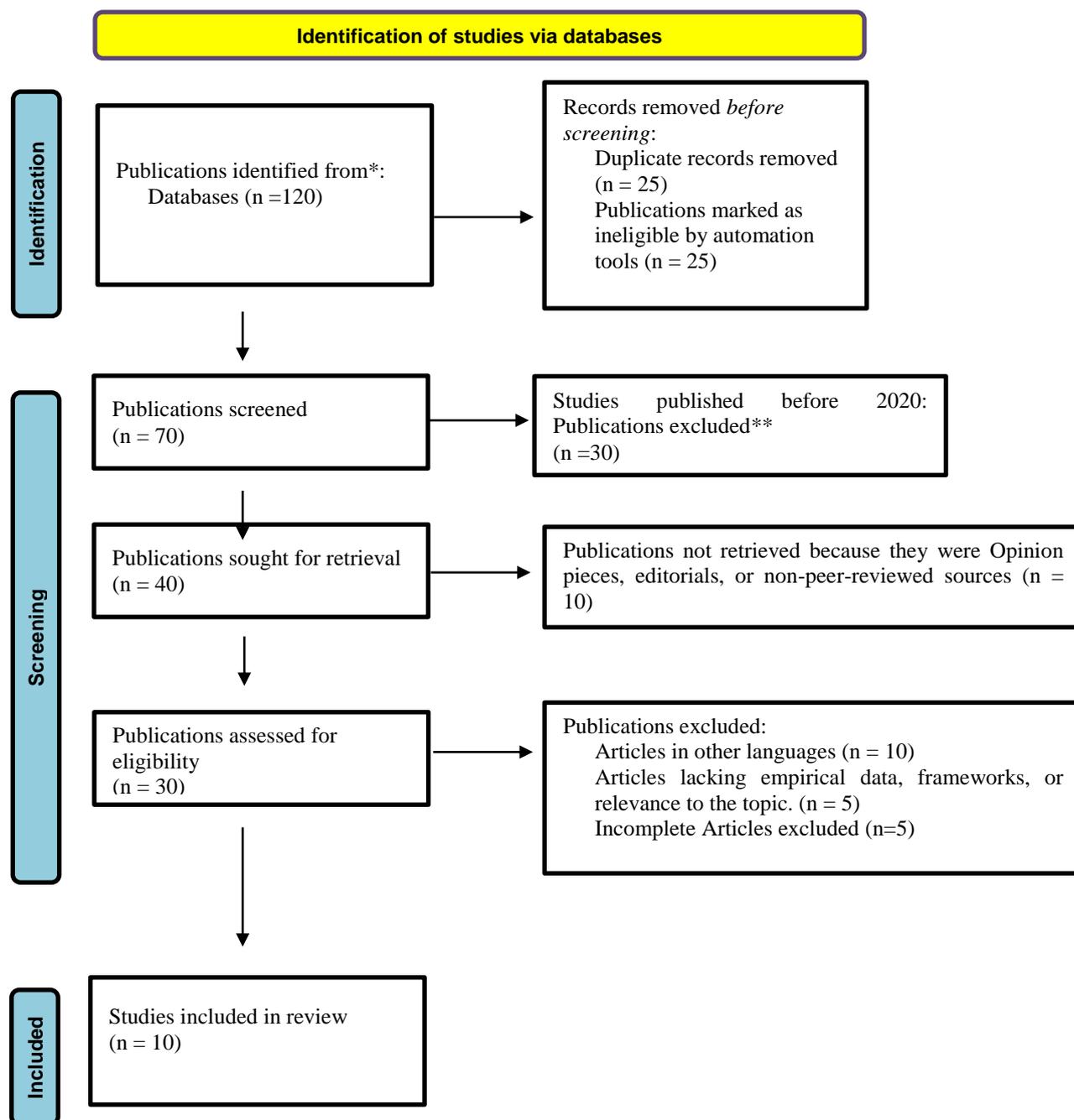
Identification of studies via databases

Identification

Publications identified from*:
Databases (n =120)

Records removed *before screening*:
Duplicate records removed (n = 25)
Publications marked as ineligible by automation tools (n = 25)

Screening

Publications screened
(n = 70)

Studies published before 2020: Publications excluded**
(n =30)

Publications sought for retrieval
(n = 40)

Publications not retrieved because they were Opinion pieces, editorials, or non-peer-reviewed sources (n = 10)

Publications assessed for eligibility
(n = 30)

Publications excluded:
Articles in other languages (n = 10)
Articles lacking empirical data, frameworks, or relevance to the topic. (n = 5)
Incomplete Articles excluded (n=5)

Included

Studies included in review
(n = 10)

Figure 1: Prisma Framework

Ethical Considerations

Although the study does not involve human participants or primary data collection, ethical standards were strictly maintained. All sources were properly cited, intellectual property rights were respected, and findings were represented accurately without distortion. Transparency in methodological decisions ensured academic integrity and minimized bias in interpretation.

Findings and Analysis

Publications chosen for Review

The table below summarizes the selected publications based on key aspects such as objectives, keywords, methodology, and findings.

Table 5: **Publications Chosen for Review**

Author(s)	Year	Title	Objective	Keywords	Methodology	Findings
Akbar, A.	2024	Taliban 2.0: Implications for National Security of Pakistan	Examine security implications of Taliban governance for Pakistan	Taliban 2.0, National Security, Pakistan, Regional Stability	Qualitative Analysis	Taliban's return has intensified border insecurity, TTP resurgence, and strategic uncertainty for Pakistan.
Asma, N., Akhtar, N., & Ullah, B.	2024	Nexus between TTP and Afghan Taliban: Implications for Pakistan's Security	Analyze linkages between TTP and Afghan Taliban and their impact on Pakistan	TTP, Afghan Taliban, Militancy, Security Threats	Qualitative Study	Strong operational and ideological linkages between TTP and Afghan Taliban pose persistent cross-border threats.
Akhtar, N., & Iqbal, A. R.	2022	The Evolving Dynamics of Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations under Taliban Rule	Assess changing diplomatic and strategic relations after Taliban takeover	Pakistan–Afghanistan Relations, Strategic Depth, Foreign Policy	Analytical/Qualitative	Pakistan's policy reflects strategic recalibration balancing security concerns and regional diplomacy.
Khan, A., Mahmood, A., & Amin, T.	2024	Strategic Challenges and Policy Pathways in a Post-Taliban Era	Identify strategic challenges and propose policy options for Pakistan	Post-Taliban Afghanistan, Security Policy, Strategic Challenges	Policy Analysis	Pakistan must combine diplomatic engagement with counterterrorism measures to manage instability.
Muhammadi, A. A.	2025	Post-2021 Terrorism in Afghanistan and Its Geopolitical Impact on Regional Security	Examine terrorism trends and regional geopolitical consequences	Terrorism, Regional Security, Geopolitics	Qualitative/Descriptive	Rising militancy in Afghanistan has reshaped regional security calculations, affecting Pakistan directly.
Bibi, M., & Muzaffar, M.	2023	The Rise of Taliban in Afghanistan: Opportunities and Challenges for Pakistan	Explore opportunities and risks for Pakistan after Taliban resurgence	Taliban Resurgence, Opportunities, Security Risks	Qualitative Study	While diplomatic space has expanded, security spillover and economic instability remain major risks.
Bashir, S.	2023	Unraveling Pakistan-Afghanistan Strategic Relations in the Post-US Withdrawal Era	Analyze bilateral strategic relations after US withdrawal	US Withdrawal, Strategic Relations, Regional Security	Qualitative Analysis	Reduced Western presence has increased Pakistan's strategic responsibility and regional balancing role.
Wattoo, M. Z. S., & Khan, A. B.	2025	Impacts of 2021-Reemergence of the Taliban Regime on Pakistan's Strategic Dynamics	Assess internal and external strategic consequences for Pakistan	Strategic Dynamics, Security Policy, Taliban Regime	Analytical Study	Taliban reemergence has complicated Pakistan's internal security environment and diplomatic posture.
Ali, H. M., Khan, A. R., & Khan, A.	2025	Pakistan's Afghanistan Policy: Strategic Depth,	Evaluate evolution of Pakistan's Afghan	Strategic Depth, Refugees, Regional Politics	Policy Review	Strategic depth doctrine continues to influence policy, but refugee and economic pressures

		Refugee Politics, and Regional Fallout	policy and its regional consequences			complicate implementation.
Khan, I.	2025	Borderland Struggles: Consequences of the Afghan Conflict	Examine border security and conflict spillover effects	Border Security, Cross-Border Militancy, Afghan Conflict	Qualitative/Regional Analysis	Persistent border instability undermines bilateral trust and challenges counterterrorism effectiveness.

Theme 1: Strategic and Security Determinants of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of Pakistan has long been influenced by strategic and security concerns, especially regarding Afghanistan and the changing role of the Taliban. The determinants are essential to the study of the diplomatic strategies and the defence strategy of Pakistan and its participation in the region during the post-Taliban period. The four studies, which include Akbar (2024), Asma et al. (2024), Akhtar and Iqbal (2022), and Khan et al. (2024), investigate various aspects of the security issues and strategy approaches in response, which gives a comprehensive perspective of foreign policy priorities of Pakistan.

Akbar (2024) states that the rise of Taliban 2.0 has a serious implication on the national security of Pakistan. The paper presents the issues of cross-border militancy, the possible revival of terrorist groups, and the strategic weaknesses of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Akbar stresses that the security apparatus in Pakistan should be proactive and multidimensional, i.e. focusing on military preparedness and the coordination of the intelligence system, as well as diplomatic interaction. The paper goes on to claim that the inability to make strategic policies relevant to the regional facts can further enhance the security challenges and weaken the overall foreign policy goals of Pakistan.

Likewise, Asma et al. (2024) investigate the nexus between the Tehrik-i- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Afghanistan Taliban and clarify the consequences of this nexus on the internal and external security of Pakistan. The authors observe that cross-border insurgency threats have escalated due to ideological and operational connexions between these groups, frustrating the counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan. According to Asma et al., preventive diplomacy, community resilience measures, and sharing of regional intelligence should be included in strategic policy frameworks. This analysis strengthens the argument that the security environment in Pakistan is closely linked with the politics of Afghanistan and the delicate policy manipulations are needed to curb the arising threats.

Akhtar and Iqbal (2022) offer an insight into the changing relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan during the Taliban rule. Their study emphasizes the intricacy of bilateral relations, and it points to such issues as border control, refugee migration, and trade collaboration. Based on what they have discovered, the foreign policy of Pakistan is not only guided by immediate security interests, but long-term strategic interests such as stability in the region, economic interests and geopolitical orientation. The paper stresses that a balance should be achieved in terms of aggressive security practises and diplomatic interaction in Pakistan to prevent the aggravation of tensions but promote positive dialogue with Afghanistan.

Khan et al. (2024) additionally discuss the strategic issues and policy directions in the post-Taliban period. The paper emphasizes the need to formulate adaptive strategies that combine the security, economic and diplomatic priorities. Khan et al. emphasize that the foreign policy of Pakistan should be prospective to realize the changes in the balance of power in the region, the development of terrorism threats and the significance of geopolitics across the globe. They propose that Pakistan needs to combine military watchfulness, tactical alliances, and multilateral diplomacy to enhance the security

posture and the influence over the region.

Collectively, these papers demonstrate that strategic and security determinants are the core of the foreign policy of Pakistan. Unlike Akbar and Asma et al., who priorities the issue of threats and counterterrorism, Akhtar and Iqbal and Khan et al. are more concerned with diplomatic and long-term strategic aspects. Together, they are indicating that the policy structure in Pakistan should be able to be flexible, context-sensitive, and proactive, balancing short-term security needs with regional and geopolitical imperatives.

Theme 2: Regional Stability Implications of Pakistan's Policy Responses

The policy reactions of Pakistan to the post-2021 events in Afghanistan have far-reaching consequences on the stability in the region. The re-emergence of the Taliban, combined with the continued cross border militancy, has established a sophisticated security environment in the South Asian region. Muhammadi (2025), Bibi and Muzaffar (2023), and Bashir (2023) are studies that examine the impact of the strategic decisions of Pakistan at the regional level, including opportunities and challenges and the severe necessity of measured policy actions.

Muhammadi (2025) looks at the situation of post 2021 terroristic activities in Afghanistan and their geopolitical consequences. The paper contends that security calculus of Pakistan has been largely determined by the spillover effects of insurgency and the possibility of the extremist groups to exploit the porous borders. Muhammadi describes Afghanistan as being in a state of instability that has increased the probability of a regional conflict and therefore proactive involvement of Pakistan in regional security is necessary. The paper is critical in stating that such policies by Pakistan would be counterproductive in that the reactive or overly security-based policies may cause a further destabilization of the region by fostering deep mistrust between the neighboring states and restricting the possibilities of collaboration in resolving the conflict.

Bibi and Muzaffar (2023) take a more balanced view by evaluating both the threats and prospects that the rise of the Taliban entails. They opine that the involvement of Pakistan with Taliban is potentially advantageous in terms of diplomatic bargains, such as having a say in the interior politics of Afghanistan as well as providing trade connexions. Yet, the authors also underline that the strategies of Pakistan should have a tradeoff between these possible advantages and the danger of radicalizing the extremist activity and provoking tension in the region. Bibi and Muzaffar claim that any form of selective support or participation of the Taliban authorities without clearly coordinated efforts by the multilateral may unwillingly jeopardize the regional balance, which will hurt the long-term strategic interests of Pakistan.

Bashir (2023) centers on the theme of Pakistan-Afghanistan strategic relations during the aftermath of the US withdrawal, providing the reader with the information about the impact of the policy decisions of Islamabad on the stability of the region. According to Bashir, even though Pakistan has tried to exercise a security-focused and diplomatically sensitive foreign policy, its neighbors, such as India, Iran, and Central Asian nations, believe that its policies are skewed and even destabilizing. The paper critically notes that the Pakistan preoccupation with short-term tactical objectives like counterterrorist operations and control over the border can impede long-term trusting relations in the region. Bashir underlines the necessity to implement a holistic approach combining the security issues with the economic cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and multilateral relations, to minimize tension and improve predictability in regional politics.

Taken together, these sources point out that the policy reactions of Pakistan to the Taliban rebirth are the key to the stability in the region. As the first two (Muhammadi) focus on the dangers of reactive security measures, the latter two (Bibi and Muzaffar) give greater attention to the risks of diplomatic

and economic opportunities, and the third one (Bashir) focuses on the role of strategic balance and multilateral involvement. Most importantly, the literature is united in the opinion that the course of action should be active, coordinated, and context-specific, without resorting to unilateralism and taking advantage of regional alliances in overcoming instability and facilitating sustainable security in South Asia.

Theme 3: Effectiveness of Diplomatic and Security Measures

The surge of the Taliban in 2021 has compelled the re-evaluation of the diplomatic policies and security policies of Pakistan, both on the bilateral and regional levels. This theme will analyze the effectiveness of the actions taken by Pakistan to counter the threat of cross-border security threats, deal with refugees and handle geopolitical issues in the region. Three works, Wattoo and Khan (2025), Ali et al. (2025), and Khan (2025) present an incisive view of the achievements and shortfalls of such actions and give a subtle view of the effect they have on the strategic climate in Pakistan.

Wattoo and Khan (2025) examine how the Taliban returning to power is going to affect the strategic dynamics in Pakistan. Their point is that, although Islamabad has assumed a mix of diplomacy and military alertness, the performance of these strategies is not consistent. An example is the border security programs and intelligence-sharing systems that have helped reduce some threats, yet the continued activities of TTPs and cross-border view insurgency cases show that existing measures are ineffective. The paper is critical to note that reactive security in the absence of proactive diplomatic action is likely to generate short-term containment but not provide any solution to long-term instability.

Ali et al. (2025) dwell on the Afghanistan policy of Pakistan in terms of strategic depth, politics of refuges and the regional fallout. Their study points to the difficulties of the massive flows of refugees that place socio-economic and political strains on Pakistan and influence bilateral relations with Afghanistan. Based on their discoveries, the diplomatic efforts by Pakistan such as negotiation with Taliban to manage border and provide humanitarian aid have been moderate in saving the tension. However, Ali et al. posit that the measures would be incomplete without the multilateral engagement, since the wider regional implications such as the effect on Iran, Central Asia, and India would not be completely addressed. The paper highlights the need to fuse security enforcement and diplomatic foresight in order to maximize their effectiveness.

Khan (2025) discusses the effects of the Afghan conflict on the borderlands of Pakistan, highlighting factors of security and governance at the local level. Khan notes that despite the prevention of large-scale spillovers by the military and paramilitary activities of Pakistan, these activities have occasionally led to bad relations between the military and the local populations, thus diminishing the effectiveness of security. In addition, the research paper points out that borderland instability are symptomatic of systemic problems, such as unsealed borders, poor infrastructure, and uneven policy enforcement. It means that it is impossible to ensure long-run stability without other socio-economic and local governance factors with a mere diplomatic approach.

A combination of these studies demonstrates that the diplomatic and security policies chosen by Pakistan have been successful to a certain extent with significant drawbacks. Wattoo and Khan are concerned with operational and strategic limitations, Ali et al. are concerned with the necessity to act in multi-lateral and humanitarian affairs, and Khan is concerned with the problems of the structure at the local level. Notably, the literature rallies on the notion that a coherent approach (integrating the security enforcement, negotiations in diplomacy, controlling refugees alongside regional collaboration) is required to enhance the effectiveness of the Pakistani response to the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

Comparative Analysis

Table 6: Comparative Analysis

Theme	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4	Comparison
Strategic and Security Determinants of Pakistan's Foreign Policy	Akbar (2024)	Asma et al. (2024)	Akhtar & Iqbal (2022)	Khan et al. (2024)	They all stress security as a core element of the foreign policy of Pakistan. Akbar puts emphasis on immediate threats by Taliban 2.0, Asma et al. on TTP connexions, Akhtar and Iqbal on alterations in bilateral relations and short-, medium-, and long-term strategic courses and regional impact, and Khan et al. emphasise object.
Regional Stability Implications of Pakistan's Policy Responses	Muhammadi (2025)	Bibi & Muzaffar (2023)	Bashir (2023)	—	Each of the studies discusses policy of Pakistan on the stability in the region. Muhammadi criticises a reactive approach to the security, Bibi and Muzaffar discuss the opportunities and risks of interactions with the Taliban, and Bashir focuses on the multilateral diplomacy and structural aspects that influence the long-term stability.
Effectiveness of Diplomatic and Security Measures	Wattoo & Khan (2025)	Ali et al. (2025)	Khan (2025)	—	Everything emphasises the operational and diplomatic policies. Wattoo and Khan concentrate on the tactical achievements and restrictions, Ali et al. examine the dynamics of refugees and diplomats, and Khan concentrates on borderland and local governance issues. Together, the research findings indicate that short-term threats can be handled, yet long-term performance needs a comprehensive integration of holistic solutions.

This comparative study outlines major insights in the three themes. In Theme 1, four studies (Akbar, Asma et al., Akhtar and Iqbal, Khan et al. are concerned with the issue of security-oriented foreign policy of Pakistan, although their priorities are different in terms of emphasizing on the threats now and future-oriented steps toward the long-term strategies. In Theme 2, Muhammadi, Bibi and Muzaffar as well as Bashir demonstrate the impact of policy responses on the stability of a region and balance between the reactive security strategies and diplomacy. Theme 3 (Wattoo, Khan, Ali, Khan) boasts of operational successes but indicates that there are structural and governance constraints. Generally, it can be concluded that the short-term security is under control; however, to achieve sustainable stability, multilevel approaches, multilevel strategies, and context-sensitive strategies are needed.

The table correlates the results of the study with the questions that formed the basis of the research showing a direct relationship between the research and its results.

Table 7: **Relation of Findings to Research Questions**

Research Question	Related Themes	Key Findings
How do strategic and security considerations shape Pakistan's foreign policy toward Taliban-led Afghanistan?	Theme 1: Strategic and Security Determinants of Pakistan's Foreign Policy	Security concerns, cross-border militancy, and Taliban dynamics strongly influence policy decisions. Studies highlight both immediate threats and long-term strategic pathways for regional influence.
What are the implications of Pakistan's policy responses on regional stability and security?	Theme 2: Regional Stability Implications of Pakistan's Policy Responses	Policy measures impact regional stability by balancing reactive security interventions with diplomatic engagement. Effectiveness depends on multilateral coordination and structural factors in South Asia.
How effective are Pakistan's diplomatic and security responses in managing threats from Afghanistan?	Theme 3: Effectiveness of Diplomatic and Security Measures	Tactical operations and diplomatic initiatives manage immediate threats, but structural, governance, and local-level challenges limit long-term effectiveness. Integrated, proactive, and context-sensitive strategies are required.

Discussion

The results of the study show that the foreign policy of Pakistan in the relation to the Taliban-led Afghanistan is mainly influenced by strategic and security considerations. Perceptions of threats, cross-border militancy, and fears of power rivalry in the region play a major role in the policy orientation in Islamabad. This observation is consistent with the works of Walt (2018), who believes that the foreign policy formulation undertaken by a state is mainly based on perceived threats and power changes, as opposed to ideological inclinations. The involvement of Pakistan with the Taliban government can thus be termed as involving strategic calculus in order to protect national security.

Results also indicate that Pakistan has had mixed policy reactions with regard to stability in the region. Increased border control and counterterrorism activities reduce short-term risks, but they do not guarantee the long-term peace in the region. This finding is consistent with those made by Buzan and Waever (2003), who state that in a regional security complex, insecurity in one state is bound to impact other neighboring states. The uncertainty of Afghanistan therefore limits structurally the efforts of Pakistan to gain unilateral stability, which further justifies the interconnectedness of South Asian security.

In addition, the research also finds that diplomatic involvement has been practical yet small-scale. Though some talk with the Taliban government has alleviated the short-term tensions, other underlying complications like pressures of refugees and lapses in governance have not been addressed properly yet. This observation aligns with Ikenberry (2018), who notes that the key to achieving long-term stability is institutionalized and multilateral collaboration instead of temporary bilateral agreements. This means that the long-term regional leverage of Pakistan can be curtailed by its mainly security-based diplomacy.

The study also notes that the security in Pakistan is mostly counter-measures. Large scale threats have been contained in military operations and intelligence coordination but structural weakness has been manifested in recurrent insurgent activity. This goes in line with Tang (2016), who returns to the security dilemma and claims that defensive policies in anarchic systems might inadvertently continue the loop of mistrust and competition. Defensive securitization of the Pakistani western border though imperative may also contribute to building up regional mistrust.

In theory, this evidence is a solid argument in favor of Realism and Neo-Realism. Waltz (1996) suggests

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that the anarchic nature of the international system requires states to use self-help strategies to guarantee survival. The adherence to military preparedness and strategic engagement is a structural limitation of Pakistan and does not have any ideological underpinning. In a similar theme, Mearsheimer (2019) argues that states prefer to maximize relative power in an attempt to achieve status within the uncertain environment. The policy of the calculated attitude of Pakistan to Afghanistan can therefore be discussed as an effort against regional encircling and maintaining strategic depth.

On the whole, the discussion has shown that the foreign policy behavior of Pakistan is consistent with the assumption of the realist theory based on the need to survive, balancing power, and dealing with threats. Nevertheless the nature of regional instability marked by its continued existence implies that the security-focused approaches which are vital, need to be supplemented by more embracive diplomatic and institutional systems so as to attain sustainable regional stability.

Conclusion

This research was primarily aimed at examining the strategic and security considerations affecting the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Taliban-led Afghanistan, examining the effects that the Pakistan reactionary policy policies have had on the stability of the region and how efficient its diplomatic and security policies have been with regard to responding to emerging threats. The study theoretical framework was founded on the Realism and the Neo-Realism theoretical concept and the focus was to understand the influence of the national interest, power balancing, and perception of threat on the policy behavior of Pakistan in the volatile regional setting. The aim of the study was to carry out a thorough and theoretically informed assessment of the state action in the post-2021 Afghan predicament by locating the foreign policy of Pakistan within the greater structural processes of the international system.

The qualitative research design based on thematic analysis of the existing academic literature was the research methodology. There were ten sampled peer-reviewed articles, which were synthetically analyzed and separated into three themes of centrality in the research: strategic and security determinants of foreign policy, implications of policies in the region and effectiveness of diplomatic and security actions. This thematic synthesis has provided the opportunity to organize the comparison of perspectives among various academic contributions and remain in line with the aims of research. The qualitative research method enabled the profound interpretation of the patterns, convergences, and divergences in the literature in such a way that any findings were analytically consistent and theoretically sound.

The study results reveal that the Pakistan foreign policy towards Taliban-dominated Afghanistan is mainly security based, indicating the realist views of survival and great game in an anarchic system. Regional rivalries, the cross-border militancy, and geopolitical unpredictability are all strategic issues that influence policy formulation greatly. Although the diplomatic activity and security operations in Pakistan have partially proven to be effective in addressing the short-term threats, their efficiency in the long-term is dependent on the generalized regional effort and structural stability. The paper also states that the policy responses are multi-layered when it comes to implications on regional security, which supports the interrelationship characteristic of South Asian geopolitics. In general, the study highlights that the policy of Pakistan is marked by pragmatic involvement and strategic management of its security affairs; nevertheless, long-term stability in the region can be achieved through the harmonious blending of security enforcement, the roles of diplomatic vision, and multilateral coordination in the context of the wider region.

Study Limitations and Future Directions

The research is mainly founded on qualitative research of the available literature and, therefore, constrains the extent of empirical validation. The use of secondary sources limits the availability of real-time information, governmental opinion, and inference on foreign policy and security operations in Pakistan at the field level. The study is also centered on the Pakistani involvement with Afghanistan in general, which might not be effective in reflecting all the emerging dynamics and changes in geopolitical dynamics in the region.

Conducting mixed-method research, such as interviewing policymakers, security analysts, and regional analysts, is a potential approach in the future, which would help present the primary evidence and gain deeper contextual insights. Generalizability could also be improved by conducting comparative studies on the similar responses of states in other conflict-prone areas. Additionally, the longitudinal study of the policies in Pakistan in terms of policy implications would provide a reflection of effectiveness of Pakistan diplomatic policy and security strategies in the long term.

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