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Abstract: *This article explores the complicated and consequential role that Pakistan plays in enabling peace talks between the United States and the Taliban that led to the 2020 Doha Agreement. Using a qualitative research approach and utilizing secondary data, the article examines Pakistani mediation's role in one of the most important diplomatic episodes in contemporary South Asian history. Looking at Pakistan in the context of international relations theory, specifically Realism and Constructivism, the paper analyzes Pakistan's strategic reasons for the peace process, its historical connection to the Taliban, and its regional security concerns and interests in being part of building peace in the region. The study concludes that Pakistan facilitated meetings, hosted Taliban leaders and promoted dialogue among warring factions through its diplomatic and intelligence network. Pakistan's calculations were rooted in its national interests; Islamabad wanted to have a stable western border, a minimal Indian presence in Afghanistan, and to exert itself and its regional status as a responsible actor on the world stage. But the findings also point to a contested narrative: The international community may have recognized the Pakistan's positive facilitation, but suspicions also remained that it would maintain old tracks with Taliban factions and might be playing a double game in terms of both perpetuating the conflict and resolving it. Finally, the article evaluates the wider geopolitical and regional implications of Pakistan's mediation, in relation to post-withdrawal Afghan governance, US–Pakistan bilateral relations and regional strategic realignments concerning India, Iran and China. Through a Constructivist framework, the research also suggests how elements of national identity, religious kin affiliation, and ideational constructs shape Pakistan's foreign policy conduct. Finally, the study contributes to scholarly debates on peace building, mediation and South Asian geopolitics by providing a nuanced interpretation of how historical ties, strategic calculations and normative architectures intersect in the mobilization of international peace processes.*

Introduction

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between the United States and the Taliban that led to the 2020 Doha Agreement. Using a qualitative research approach and utilizing secondary data, the article examines Pakistani mediation's role in one of the most important diplomatic episodes in contemporary South Asian history. Looking at Pakistan in the context of international relations theory, specifically Realism and Constructivism, the paper analyses Pakistan's strategic reasons for the peace process, its historical connection to the Taliban, and its regional security concerns and interests in being part of building peace in the region.

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Literature Review

On Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process there is an expansive and multi-layered literature that mirrors the strategic complexities of the region and the changing dynamics of U.S.–Taliban talks. This article builds on important works on the state of Pakistan as a mediator, stakeholder, and regional player in the U.S.–Taliban peace process including the Doha Agreement 2020.

Pakistan's interference in the affairs of Afghanistan has historically been based on the strategy of "strategic depth" to counteract insecurity along its eastern border with India (Rashid, 2009; Javeed & Fatima, 2013). In the 1980s, Pakistan became a primary patron of the anti-Soviet resistance (mujahedeen), a relationship it continued when the Taliban were established in the 1990s (Ahmed, 2010). These links gave Islamabad enormous leverage over key Taliban commanders, a role Pakistan was eventually able to leverage as a credible interlocutor in subsequent peace talks (Jalalzai, 2019).

With the launch of direct U.S.–Taliban talks in 2018, Pakistan's diplomatic wheels went into overdrive. Inam (2020) and Kousar (2023) observe that Pakistan's hosting of Taliban leadership and cooperation with Qatari and American diplomats was critical for the preparation of the Doha Agreement. Far from a passive player, Pakistan was said to have leveraged both diplomatic pressure and its long relationship with the Taliban to nudge the group to the negotiating table.

In addition, Pakistani armed forces and intelligence agencies that have historically been regarded as the key players in foreign policy played a significant role by facilitating safe passage and logistics (Shahzad & Ullah, 2023). Public U.S. State Department comment confirmed Islamabad's helpful role, but private memoranda and statements by other parties also pointed to continuing American doubts about Pakistan's motives (Kaura, 2018).

One of the major lines of the literature blames Pakistan for 'playing a double game' – on the one hand

desiring peace, in practice maintaining support for insurgents (Maley & Jamal, 2022). This critique is based on the contention that Pakistan's strategic interest is better served, not by a strong, centralized Afghan state, but by a weak non-Taliban government that has constructive relations with Islamabad. Duplicity, according to scholars like Rubin (2013) and Sadr (2018), destroyed trust not only with the Afghan government but with the international community at large.

These criticisms even apply at the domestic level in Pakistan: the strategic value of the Taliban for controlling the Pashtun regions bordering Afghanistan, discouraging Pashtun nationalism, and positioning Pakistan as a major actor in the Islamic politics of its region (Rana 2014).

Pakistan's conduct in the peace process has been analyzed using a number of theoretical frameworks. Realist scholars stress power balancing, national security interests and regional rivalries, especially the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan triangular relationship (Kaura, 2018). Their contention is that Pakistan's involvement was essentially driven by its security calculations and the politics of geo-strategy.

On the other hand, Constructivist authors (Wendt, 1999; Khan, 2022) refer to national identity, ideational persistence, and social norms. In that sense, Pakistan conceives of itself as a guardian of Islam, and its historical tale of brotherhood with Afghanistan drives its enduring stake in the political fate of the Taliban. The constructivist approach also helps highlight the ways in which tropes of legitimacy, religious solidarity and moral responsibility were mobilized by Pakistan to underlie its role as a mediator.

The regional strategic environment was also recast by the peace process. Pakistan declared that India had been forced to keep out of formal negotiations, and Iran, Russia and China, the three other key partners to the now abandoned project, also adopted a policy of tentative engagement (Naqvi, 2015). Analysts opine that Pakistan could have enhanced regional influence if the Taliban make a comeback in Afghanistan as it has close trades (including CPEC and TAPI pipeline) and geographical proximity with Pakistan (Mustafa, 2020).

Meanwhile, some experts warn that the resurgence of the Taliban carries security risks for Pakistan, especially if militant groups – emulating the Afghan model – step up their insurgent operations in Pakistan (Khan, 2021). This duality strategic benefit versus domestic exposure — mirrors the contradictions of Pakistan's own strategy of mediation.

Omar Sadr (2018) also makes a vital counter-argument by giving precedence to Afghan views. He also says peace initiatives operated by outside players such as Pakistan were not credible in the eyes of Afghan civil society and the countries marginalized. It has developed a sense that the process was externally-imposed, elite-led, rather than organically connecting with grass-root realities. That kind of scepticism — which is also rampant in human rights and women's advocacy circles — has fuelled fears about the inclusivity and staying power of any deal with the Taliban.

Objectives

1. To analyse Pakistan's diplomatic and strategic role in enabling and sustaining the U.S.–Taliban peace negotiations, particularly the 2020 Doha Agreement.
2. To examine the motivations and interests underlying Pakistan's mediation efforts, including its regional security concerns and foreign policy objectives.
3. To evaluate the implications of Pakistan's involvement for regional stability, post-conflict Afghan governance, and future U.S.–Pakistan relations.

Methodology

This research follows a qualitative research design in order to investigate the contribution of Pakistan toward the peace process of US and Afghan Taliban. Owing to the political salience and nuances of the

issue, qualitative analysis is the most appropriate method of interpreting Pakistan's strategic, diplomatic, and ideational engagement. The study is based mainly on secondary sources such as academic peer reviewed articles, books, government documents, policy papers, and media articles. These sources offer important public and behind-the-scenes details of the overt diplomatic move as well as the more discrete strategic thought behind Pakistan's role as a facilitator.

A case study method is employed while the peace negotiations that culminated in the 2020 Doha Agreement are the central event and in this way allows for deep analyses to understand the dynamic relationship between national behaviour, regional geopolitics, and diplomatic processes. The research also uses elements of content and thematic analysis in order to analyse statements, policy documents, and academic narratives about Pakistan's role. Official documents from the U.S. Department of State, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, think tank reports including such as those of the International Crisis Group and the United States Institute of Peace, have been most helpful in establishing the chronology and diplomatic channels of Pakistan's "fight fire with fire".

The study is theoretically motivated by Constructivism, a school of thought in International Relations which focuses on identity, norms, and intersubjective meanings as drivers of state actions. Such nuanced explanations of Pakistani foreign policy are enabled through this lens, which underscore how historical relationships, (ideological) inclinations and (perceived) national roles shape foreign policy preferences and decisions. The ethics are also adhered to by citing properly and referring on good sources, to secure the academic integrity and objectivity of the study.

Findings

The research suggests a multi-dimensional role Pakistan played as an indispensable actor which provided the U.S.–Taliban peace process backchannel especially before the 2020 Doha Agreement. Pakistan's participation was underpinned by a set of diplomatic, logistic and strategic moves designed to force the Taliban leaders to the negotiating table. The Pakistani government politically supported intra-Afghan dialogue; held visas and travel of the Taliban negotiators; coordinated with their host Qatar to sustain dialogue process (Inam, 2020; Kousar, 2023). They were complemented with sustained signalling efforts at the United Nations and at regional conferences by Pakistani officials, signalling Pakistan's commitment to peace in Afghanistan (Kaura, 2018).

Apart from diplomatic mediation, Pakistan used its old relationship with the Taliban (inducted in the 1980s anti-Soviet jihad and to which it had remained close in the 1990s) to make it malleable to US overtures (Rashid, 2009; Javeed & Fatima, 2013). Interviews and policy pronouncements indicate sections of Pakistan's military and intelligence services played a crucial role in this, acting frequently as intermediaries between Washington and the Taliban (Shahzad 12:38 PM??Ullah, 2023). The US also played an important role in strengthening this position with the senior officials publicly recognizing the positive role of Pakistan, particularly under the US Trump administration's South Asia Strategy (Kaura, 2018).

"But the findings also show that there was some murkiness and contention around Pakistan's role as a mediator. Critics say that while Pakistan publicly backed the peace process, it maintained unofficial links with Taliban groups, enabling them to regroup and focus military actions inside Afghanistan (Maley & Jamal, 2022). This two-faced strategy – termed often as "strategic hedging" – affects the credibility and neutrality of Pakistan's mediatory role. Pakistan's claim to relative neutrality is further complicated by the fact that Taliban leadership and associated subgroups remained based within its borders during the negotiations (Sadr, 2018). Besides, while Pakistan did facilitate and support the peace process, it failed to win confidence of all sides in conflict, especially the Afghan government. Kabul remained sceptical of

Pakistan's motives, believing Islamabad's involvement to be self-centred and intended to ensure a Pakistan-friendly, Taliban-led post-withdrawal settlement (Jalalzai 2019; Naqvi 2015). It had done so in a way that left much of the peace process lacking the necessary legitimacy and inclusiveness to have the best chance of remaining both durable and Afghan-owned.

In conclusion, Pakistan's involvement in the U.S.–Taliban peace process was catalytic, albeit not without challenges. The country was able to leverage its political advantage and historical relations for the high level of conversations. Yet, worries over bias, messaging incoherence and conflicting interests all show the inherent constraints and contradictions in Pakistan's mediation plan.

Discussion

The findings of this study emphasize the key, if controversial; role Pakistan plays in the U.S.–Taliban peace process. Pakistan's involvement was marked by a real politic mixing of diplomacy and strategic calculus commensurate with regional aspirations and global diplomatic obligations. Pakistan's capacity to draw on its historical relationship with the Taliban while keeping free lines of communication open with the United States – essentially allowing it to maximize its influence – placed the country in such a role. Yet this twin lining also created real complications which must undermine the apparent neutrality and efficacy of its function.

Strategically, Pakistan's presence can be understood in realist terms. The need to de-risk its western border, deny Indian influence and access in Afghanistan, and have an influential say in a post-US withdrawal political dispensation in Kabul were clear drivers (Kaura, 2018; Rashid, 2009). The confidence to host peace dialogue was a rented opportunity to present Islamabad as an unavoidable regional player and further change the global perception about Pakistan that from security risk to a constructive diplomatic player (Inam, 2020). But the realist paradigm itself is insufficient to make sense of Pakistan's behaviour in all its complexity. Constructivist perspectives show that national identity, historical alliances and ideas—like that of Islamic solidarity and shared ethnic links — were also important in determining Pakistan's responses (Wendt, 1999, Khan, 2022). These ideational elements contribute to explaining why Pakistan, despite being under international glare, kept its lines open to connect the Taliban with international players. But this double role also left the country open to charges of double-dealing—supporting peace moves while reportedly giving sanctuary to militant networks (Maley & Jamal, 2022).

Furthermore, the ramifications of Pakistan's facilitation have to be seen in a wider geopolitical framework. Despite the fact that Islamabad played a crucial role in spearheading the Doha dialogue, the marginalization of the Afghan government from significant aspects of the negotiation only served to undermine its acceptability and promote political division within Afghanistan (Sadr, 2018). Its collapse in August 2021 only months after the U.S. withdrawal, casts serious doubts as to sustainability and inclusiveness of the framework and whether in the end Pakistan's role was constructive in leading to long-term stability or just ensuring that Taliban dominance returns. One more level of complication relates to the regional consequences of Pakistan's involvement. Some analysts have suggested that a peaceful Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban would be in Pakistan's security interests, but they have also warned that a resurgent Taliban could trigger domestic militancy and deepen sectarian fault lines within Pakistan (Khan, 2021). Moreover, the Doha process has also ramifications for the region's security architecture, particularly the diplomatic deserting of other potential stakeholders including India and Iran.

Considering these facts, Pakistan acting as a facilitator can be seen as a diplomatic victory and a military risk. Its mediation led to the end of America's longest war and a temporary reduction in hostilities. Yet

the uneven implementation of peace commitments, on-going instability in Afghanistan and the long-standing international distrust of Pakistan's intentions mean that its gains could be delicate and reversible.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the contribution of Pakistan as a peacemaker to bring in the United States and the Taliban under the limelight of the liberal peace in 2020 Doha Agreement. The conclusions show that Pakistan played a crucial role in the facilitation of the dialogue, using its historical links with the Taliban and its strategic relationship with the United States to mediate these negotiations. Pakistan had positioned itself as an indispensable intermediary in one of the longest conflicts of the 21st century by enabling travel, hosting leaders and joining in diplomatic efforts.

Yet the analysis also points out that Pakistan's role was riddled with contradictions. Its engagement was critical for starting and maintaining the process of peace, yet also generated questions about the objectivity, intention and transparency. Claims of continued covert support for the Taliban and the sidelining of the Afghan government from early talks illustrate the constraints of Pakistan's mediation and the brittleness of the peace framework that has been achieved. Theoretically, Pakistan was motivated by both realist considerations--focusing on regional security and strategic balance--and ideas, such as national identity and historical narratives, Constructivist theory's emphasis. These considerations informed Pakistan's two-way role as mediator and stakeholder, making its stance a conundrum for both regional and international audiences.

The Taliban's takeover of power in August 2021, shortly after the American withdrawal, suggests that, while the peace process was politically significant on a diplomatic level, it failed to build a viable, inclusive political order. The fall-out from this shift is still playing out, but it illustrates the difficulties of peace building in situation where external facilitation is heavily interwoven with national interest.

Overall, Pakistan's mediation was a necessary condition to the peace process between the U.S. and Taliban, but not a sufficient one over ending the war in Afghanistan. Any future effort to bring peace to the region should take into consideration both the strategic priorities of our neighbours and the absolute necessity of inclusive, Afghan-owned negotiations.

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