

**T.C.
ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**THE REASONS OF PAKISTANI SUPPORT THE
TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN 1994-2021**

MASTER'S THESIS

Sajjad SAMADI

**Department of Political Science and International Relations
Political Science and International Relations Program**

DECEMBER, 2023

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DECEMBER, 2023

ONAY FORMU

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not previously been sent to any other university for the award of any degree. I have collected and presented all the information in this thesis in accordance with the current rules and guidelines of the University's research ethics, and I have fully cited and referenced the material that is not original for this dissertation. (26/12/2023)

Sajjad SAMADI

FOREWORD

First of all, I want to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mehmet Turan Caglar, for all his guidance, support constructive feedback, and scholarly insights have played a pivotal role in shaping the direction and quality of this research. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my family. To my dear father, Dr. Abdul Satar Samadi, who has been my unwavering source of inspiration and support throughout my educational pursuits. Your wisdom, guidance, and encouragement have shaped me into the person I am today. To my beloved mother, Adela Samadi, whose love, strength has been my guiding light. Your unwavering faith in my abilities and your unconditional support has fueled my determination to overcome challenges and achieve my goals. Your constant presence, encouragement, and nurturing have been the foundation of my academic journey. This thesis is dedicated to my father and mother, as a tribute to their unwavering love and belief in me. I am honored to share my findings and insights with the academic community and beyond.

December, 2023

Sajjad SAMADI

REASONS FOR PAKISTAN'S SUPPORT OF THE TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN (1994-2021)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the support of Pakistan for the Taliban in Afghanistan, focusing on the underlying individual, national and regional factors, as well as global considerations. The study adopts a comprehensive approach, incorporating qualitative research methods to explore secondary sources and expert interviews.

The research reveals that Pakistan's support for the Taliban stems from a combination of national interests and regional dynamics. Nationally, historical, geopolitical, and security factors contribute to Pakistan's alignment with the Taliban. The longstanding strategic depth doctrine, concerns over Indian influence in Afghanistan, and a desire for a friendly government on its western border shape Pakistan's policy choices. Regionally, Pakistan views the Taliban as a potential ally to maintain influence in Afghanistan, protect its own security, and counterbalance competing regional powers.

The thesis examines how international dynamics, such as the changing geopolitical landscape, the war on terror, and shifting alliances, shape Pakistan's policy choices. It underscores the complex web of interests and alliances involving regional and global actors that impact Pakistan's engagement with the Taliban.

The thesis also delves into Pakistan's role in the Doha peace process. It highlights Pakistan's facilitative role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table and explores its motivations and challenges in promoting a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict. The analysis encompasses Pakistan's efforts to balance its relations with the Taliban, the Afghan government, and other stakeholders involved in the peace process. Overall, this thesis sheds light on the multifaceted factors driving Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, examining both national and regional influences as well as global dynamics. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship, providing insights

into the motivations, interests, and challenges that shape Pakistan's involvement. The findings also inform discussions on the potential impact of Pakistan's role in the Doha peace process and its implications for achieving sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Taliban, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Doha Agreement, National Interest

PAKİSTAN'IN AFGANİSTAN'DAKİ TALİBAN'A DESTEK VERMESİNİN NEDENLERİ (1994-2021)

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Pakistan'ın Afganistan'daki Taliban'a verdiği desteği, altta yatan bireysel, ulusal ve bölgesel faktörlerin yanı sıra küresel hususlara odaklanarak incelemektedir. Çalışma, resmî belgeler ve ikincil kaynakları içeren nitel araştırma yöntemlerini benimsemektedir.

Araştırma, Pakistan'ın Taliban'a verdiği desteğin ulusal çıkarlar ve bölgesel dinamiklerin birleşiminden kaynaklandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ulusal, tarihi, jeopolitik ve güvenlik faktörleri, Pakistan'ın Taliban'ı desteklemesine sebep olan unsurlardır. Uzun süredir devam eden stratejik derinlik doktrini, Hindistan'ın Afganistan'daki etkisine ilişkin endişeler ve batı sınırında dost bir hükümet arzusu Pakistan'ın politika tercihlerini şekillendirmiştir. Bölgesel olarak Pakistan, Taliban'ı Afganistan'daki nüfuzunu sürdürmek, kendi güvenliğini korumak ve rakip bölgesel güçleri dengelemek için potansiyel bir müttefik olarak görmektedir.

Bu çalışma, değişen jeopolitik kaygılar, teröre karşı savaş ve değişen ittifaklar gibi uluslararası dinamiklerin Pakistan'ın politika tercihlerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Pakistan'ın Taliban'la angajmanını etkileyen bölgesel ve küresel aktörleri içeren karmaşık çıkarlar ağı ve ittifakların önemine dikkat çekmektedir.

Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Pakistan'ın Doha barış sürecindeki rolünü de incelemektedir. Pakistan'ın Taliban'ı müzakere masasına getirmedeki kolaylaştırıcı rolü ve Taliban'ın Afgan ihtilafına barışçıl bir çözümü teşvik etmedeki motivasyonları ve zorlukları gösterilmiştir. Analiz, Pakistan'ın Taliban, Afgan hükümeti ve barış sürecinde yer alan diğer paydaşlarla ilişkilerini dengeleme çabalarını da kapsamaktadır.

Genel olarak bu çalışma, bireysel, ulusal ve bölgesel etkilerin yanı sıra küresel dinamikleri inceleyerek Pakistan'ın Afganistan'daki Taliban'a verdiği desteği

yönlendiren çok yönlü faktörlere ışık tutmaktadır. Araştırma, karmaşık Afganistan-Pakistan ilişkisinin daha derin bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunurken Pakistan'ın katılımını şekillendiren motivasyonlar, çıkarlar ve zorluklar hakkında öngörü sağlamaktadır. Bulgular aynı zamanda Pakistan'ın Doha barış sürecindeki rolünün potansiyel etkisi ve bunun Afganistan'da sürdürülebilir barış ve istikrarın sağlanması üzerindeki etkileri hakkında bilgi vermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Taliban, Afganistan, Pakistan, Doha Anlaşması, Ulusal çıkar.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BRI	: Belt and Road Initiative
CIA	: Central Intelligence Agency
CPEC	: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
ETIM	: East Turkistan Islamic Movement
EU	: European Union
FATA	: Federally Administered Tribal Areas
HN	: Haqqani Network
HRW	: Human Rights Watch
ICRC	: International Committee of the Red Cross
ISI	: Inter-Services Intelligence
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SCO	: Shanghai Cooperation Organization
TTP	: Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan
UAE	: United Arab Emirates
UN	: United Nations
UNESCO	: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNAMA	: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	: United Nations Development Program
US	: United States

I. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban in Afghanistan has been a subject of intense scrutiny and debate within academic, diplomatic, and security circles. Pakistan's enduring support for the Taliban, spanning the years 1994 to 2021, has raised questions about the underlying motives and strategic calculations that have shaped this complex alliance. Understanding the reasons behind Pakistan's backing of the Taliban during this period requires a comprehensive examination of historical, geopolitical, and regional dynamics.

This academic research begins by examining the historical context surrounding Pakistan's support for the Taliban. It explores the aftermath of the Soviet-Afghan War and the subsequent power struggles in Afghanistan, which paved the way for the Taliban's rise to prominence. The historical ties, cultural affinities, and shared Pashtun ethnicity between Pakistan and the Taliban provide a backdrop for understanding Pakistan's initial inclination to support the group.

Furthermore, this study evaluates the geopolitical factors that have influenced Pakistan's backing of the Taliban. Pakistan has viewed Afghanistan as a strategic buffer against its arch-rival, India, and has sought to secure its own interests in the region. It delves into how Pakistan's support for the Taliban aligns with its regional power calculations and aims to maintain influence over Afghanistan's internal affairs. The role of Pakistan's military establishment, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in strengthening and maintaining ties with the Taliban is also explored. This study explores alleged safe havens, military aid and intelligence cooperation, shedding light on the extent to which Pakistan has aided the military campaigns and political ambitions of the Taliban.

Pakistan has worked to create a cordial relationship with the Afghan government in order to solve its own security issues, such as terrorism and cross-border insurgency. How Pakistan's economic interests, particularly trade routes and resource access, may be served by the Taliban's dominance. Finally, this academic research examines the local and global repercussions of Pakistan's backing of the

Taliban. It examines the precarious power dynamics in the area, how they affect Afghanistan's stability, and how they may affect counterterrorism initiatives.

Over the years, Pakistan's involvement in Afghan politics, particularly its support for the Taliban, has continued to be the subject of scrutiny and analysis. It delves into the reasons behind Pakistan's engagement and examines why Afghanistan is of great importance to Pakistan, as well as explores the main purpose behind its support for the Taliban. Historically, the region has witnessed a series of conflicts and rivalries, including the Soviet-Afghan War and the subsequent emergence of the Taliban. These events played a crucial role in shaping Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan as it sought to protect its own interests and influence the political landscape across the border. Understanding the factors affecting Pakistan's support for the Taliban requires examining historical, strategic and geopolitical considerations.

The study also investigates the role of the Pakistani government, military, and the ISI in the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. It analyzes the alleged provision of safe havens, military assistance, intelligence, and logistical support to the Taliban, shedding light on the extent of Pakistan's involvement. Additionally, the impact of Pakistan on the Doha Agreement, which aimed to bring peace in Afghanistan, is explored, unraveling Pakistan's mediation efforts and its influence on the outcome. Furthermore, this explores how Pakistan utilizes the Taliban as an instrument to maintain its interests in Afghanistan. It delves into the strategic depth, countering Indian influence, addressing the Pashtun issue, and managing security concerns as key motives for Pakistan's support of the Taliban. The intricate relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban is examined, shedding light on the dynamics of their interactions and the implications for regional stability.

This study outlines the key intermediate variables for analyzing Pakistan's policy in support of the Taliban through a neoclassical realist framework. The focus is on the perceptions and evaluations of foreign policymakers as primary intermediate variables, including the prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, and relevant bureaucracy. These variables play a decisive role in Pakistan's foreign policy, impacting its relations with neighboring countries, security dynamics with India, and approaches to Afghanistan and Pashtuns due to cultural, social, and historical proximity. The study also emphasizes the significance of domestic factors,

such as the country's social and cultural framework, as intermediate variables influencing Pakistan's approach to the Taliban. The ethnic factor within Pakistan's social structure is highlighted as a national security issue directly impacting foreign policy. The interaction of these intermediate variables is seen in shaping decision-makers perceptions and in responding to societal demands and expectations, which, in turn, influence the formulation of foreign policies.

This thesis investigates the regional and international reasons behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban. It explores the geopolitical considerations, security concerns, refugee crisis, economic interests, and proxy competition with India as driving factors shaping Pakistan's approach. By comprehending these dimensions, a deeper understanding of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan politics and its support for the Taliban can be attained. In conclusion, this prepares the ground for examining Pakistan's influence on Afghan politics and its backing of the Taliban. We may learn more about the numerous processes that have moulded this complicated relationship by looking into historical, strategic, and geopolitical reasons, as well as by comprehending the significance of Afghanistan for Pakistan. Careful examination reveals a greater grasp of the causes and effects of Pakistan's participation in Afghanistan, opening the door for more investigation in later chapters.

A. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this academic study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the reasons behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan from 1994 to 2021. By examining the historical, geopolitical, and regional factors that have shaped this complex alliance, the study aims to achieve the following objectives. Unveiling the motives behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban will contribute to a deeper understanding of the strategic calculations and interests that have driven this enduring relationship.

The study aims to evaluate the impact of Pakistan's support for the Taliban on regional security and stability. By examining the implications of this relationship for Afghanistan's internal dynamics, cross-border militancy and counter-terrorism efforts, it aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of security implications in

the region. The study aims to analyze the wider regional geopolitics and the interplay of interests between Pakistan, Afghanistan and other regional stakeholders.

Overall, by examining the motivations, security implications, power dynamics, regional geopolitics, and policy considerations, the study aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of this relationship. It seeks to inform policymakers, researchers, and academics involved in the study of regional security, international relations, and conflict resolution in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

B. Importance of Topic

Assessing the security and stability of the area requires an understanding of the processes underlying Pakistan's support for the Taliban. This research intends to offer insight into the consequences of this connection on Afghanistan's internal dynamics, cross-border militancy, counterterrorism initiatives, and the wider regional security picture given the historical and geographical proximity between the two nations.

It also examines how the interests of numerous regional players, including Pakistan, India, Iran interact. The study contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complexities of regional geopolitics and power relations by looking at Pakistan's support for the Taliban in this larger perspective.

The subject matter of Pakistan's support for the Taliban spans several decades, which makes it historically significant. This study examines the evolution of this relationship from 1994 to 2021, shedding light on the continuity or changes in Pakistan's approach to Afghanistan. It helps identify patterns, trends and lessons that can inform current and future engagements in the region. The importance of the topic lies in its relevance to regional security, geopolitical dynamics, counterterrorism efforts, policy formulation, and academic scholarship.

C. Literature Review

The development and support of the Taliban in Afghanistan are thoroughly examined in Ahmed Rashid's book "Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia". The book examines the circumstances that made it easier for the Taliban to gain control and identifies the many types of support they

have received. Rashid thoroughly examines the economic, political, and historical context that contributed to the Taliban's ascent. He highlights how strongly foreign parties, particularly Pakistan, supported the Taliban during their rise to power.

The results of Rashid's study make clear the crucial role Pakistan's ISI, played in equipping, teaching, and supporting the Taliban (Rashid, 2001, p. 188). The book delves into the motivations behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban. Rashid emphasizes Pakistan's strategic interests and the desire to establish influence in Afghanistan as key factors. Explains how Pakistan viewed the Taliban as a proxy force that could safeguard its interests and counter the influence of regional rivals, particularly India (Rashid, 2001, p. 224). Moreover, Rashid explores the shared ethnic and ideological affinities between certain elements within the Pakistani establishment and the Taliban, contributing to their mutual cooperation and support. The pursuit of national interests and the dynamics of power between nations are highlighted in Rashid's writing. The region's numerous actors, including Pakistan, the United States (US), and other regional entities, may all be better understood by understanding the motives behind their actions. The significance of geographic location and regional dynamics in influencing events and outcomes is emphasised in Rashid's work. To comprehend the actions and strategies of various players, geopolitical elements such as strategic depth, closeness to rival powers, and control over oil resources may be analysed. Geopolitical issues may be used to explain Pakistan's role in aiding the Taliban as well as the difficulties the US has encountered in its nation-building efforts. The emergence of political Islam and religious extremism, as well as its effects on regional dynamics, are explored in Rashid's research.

"Pakistan and the Emergence of Islamic Militancy in Afghanistan" by Rizwan Hussain (2005) offers a thorough explanation of the complicated connections between Pakistan and the appearance of Islamic militancy in Afghanistan. Hussain provides insightful analysis of the elements that contributed to the growth of Islamic militancy and Pakistan's role in influencing these dynamics, with a focus on the historical backdrop and political events. Investigates the connection between Pakistan and Afghanistan historically, starting with the 1980s Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union. Hussain examines the ISI during this time in order to provide insight into Pakistan's assistance for Afghan Mujahideen organisations and delves

into the social, economic, and ideological factors that contributed to the emergence of Islamic militancy in Afghanistan. Hussain examines the influence of radical ideologies, the role of madrasas (religious schools), and the socio-economic conditions that provided fertile ground for the growth of extremist ideologies (Rizwan, 2003, p. 186).

Dr. C. Christine Fair's book, "Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War" offers a comprehensive analysis of the strategic culture of the Pakistan Army and its implications for regional stability. Through meticulous research and insightful analysis, Fair delves into the unique characteristics of the Pakistan Army's approach to warfare, shedding light on its decision-making processes, doctrines, and long-standing beliefs. Fair establishes the historical background by documenting the development of the Pakistan Army's role in determining the nation's international and internal policy. In order to grasp the Pakistan Army's strategic culture and evaluate the likelihood of a regional war escalating, Fair emphasises the significance of doing so. The capacity of Fair to combine historical, political, and sociological elements to create a comprehensive insight of the psyche of the Pakistan Army is one of the work's strongest points. She looks at how historical occurrences like the wars with India and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan shaped the strategic culture of the army. Although the book's primary emphasis is the Pakistan Army, Fair concedes that other circumstances, including the US involvement in Afghanistan, have an impact on how the army makes strategic decisions. She emphasises how crucial it is to comprehend external dynamics and the regional environment in order to predict the likelihood of future conflict and instability (Fair, 2014, p. 195).

Christine Fair examines the idea of 'offensive-defense,' which is a key component of the strategic mindset of the Pakistani Army. Fair examines how the army's strategic plans and decision-making have been influenced by this theory, which is based on the idea that Pakistan must actively engage in asymmetric warfare to overcome India's conventional dominance. She looks at how this philosophy may affect regional stability and the likelihood of escalating war. Fair acknowledges an analysis of regional dynamics and external factors, such as the US' engagement in Afghanistan, to provide a broader understanding of the Pakistan Army's strategic behavior. Fair emphasizes the importance of considering the geopolitical context and external influences on the army's decision-making processes (Fair, 2014, p. 166).

Christophe Jaffrelot's "Pakistan Nationalism without a State" examines the significance of Muslim identity and the yearning for a distinct homeland that resulted in the creation of Pakistan. This historical context is crucial because it brings to light the intellectual and theological underpinnings of Pakistani nationalism. In this framework, it is reasonable to comprehend the formation of the Taliban, an extremist Islamist group, as a component of a larger discussion surrounding Islamic identity and philosophy. Jaffrelot inadvertently illuminates the past interactions between Taliban-affiliated individuals and Pakistan's security services. It looks at the idea of strategic depth, which considers Afghanistan to be a key influence and buffer for Pakistan's security objectives (Jaffrelot, 2002, p. 152). Jaffrelot analyses the ways in which Pakistan, in particular the ISI, has traditionally supported Taliban-affiliated armed organisations in Afghanistan in order to promote their own strategic goals there. Among other sorts of help, this support includes shelter, education, finance, and intelligence sharing (Jaffrelot, 2002, p. 170).

D. Research Questions

1. Main Research Question

Why did Pakistan get involved in Afghanistan politics and what was the main purpose behind supporting the Taliban?

2. Research Sub-Questions

- To what extent did the Pakistani government, military, and ISI contribute to the ascent of the Taliban in Afghanistan?
- Why Afghanistan is important for Pakistan?
- How does Pakistan use the Taliban as an instrument to maintain its interests in Afghanistan?
- What impact did Pakistan have on the peace-promoting Doha Agreement in Afghanistan?

E. Hypothesis

Pakistan backed the Taliban in Afghanistan to further its own strategic purposes, such as limiting Indian influence and maintaining a subservient neighbor.

Pakistan's support for the Taliban stemmed from ethnic and religious links with the Pashtun-dominated group, as well as a desire for influence in Afghanistan.

F. Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study is on Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan involves a comprehensive approach. The methodology aims to gather and analyze relevant data, explore historical context, and examine the dynamics and implications of the relationship.

The research methodology involves the collection of various types of data to support Pakistan's support for the Taliban to reduce India's influence in Afghanistan by content analysis of official government documents, diplomatic statements, historical analysis of Pakistan's military doctrines, and statements to identify mentions of strategic interests in Afghanistan. Historical analysis is conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the events, context, and developments leading to Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan and the national and regional factors behind it.

The research methodology examines the support of Pakistan to the Taliban to influence Afghanistan by analyzing statements by Pakistani authorities and experts on Afghanistan to assess the role of ethnic and religious aspects in their Afghan strategy, where Pakistan may have sought influence through support for the Taliban. Secondary sources, including news articles, academic papers, and reports from reputable sources, are collected to gather additional information and context which helps establish the context and informs the broader analysis of the topic. The data collection process ensures a diverse and comprehensive range of sources to support the analysis.

The research will adopt a qualitative research design, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the topic and provides a nuanced understanding of the reasons behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban. The research methodology outlined above will provide a robust and systematic approach to investigate the reasons behind

Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan. It will enable the exploration of multiple perspectives, the identification of key themes, and the generation of meaningful insights to address the research objectives.

G. Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations that the researcher faced in this research is that some of these written materials may be prejudiced and one-sided, making obtaining the complete story subjective. The researcher overcame this limitation by using different sources in order to get an objective view. Outdated data can be another limitation for this study whereby these data may not answer specific research questions which may lead to the researcher not obtaining reliable information. The researcher overcame this limitation by utilizing various sources and writings published over the years, and not over one period of time.

H. Order of the Study

The introduction is the first chapter of the research. The research's background material, which serves to explain what the study is about, is presented in this chapter. Because it helps readers comprehend the study, the background knowledge is crucial to it. Additionally, the first chapter discusses the goal and significance of the study, answering the question "Why is this study important?" and outlining the rationale for doing the research. The research questions and major argument are mentioned in the first chapter, indicating the study's goals and pointing the investigation in the right path. The first chapter consists of Introduction, theoretical framework whereby the theory of Neoclassical Realism in foreign policy is discussed are also covered. The first chapter also includes a literature review, in which the researcher examines earlier studies and published materials regarding the study topic.

The second chapter consists of the historical framework of the study. In this chapter, what major circumstances led to the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the contribution of Pakistan to the growth of the Taliban in Afghanistan are discussed. The researcher explains the rise of the Taliban and Pakistan's attitude from 1994-2001 had a significant impact on Afghanistan. The relationship between

Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Taliban administration was complex and influenced by various factors.

The third chapter consists of Individual and National Level Factors to Support the Taliban including the Durand Line dispute and the role of ethnicity in shaping the dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The fourth chapter is consists of Regional and Global Factors to Support the Taliban and Pakistan's role in the 'War on Terror' following the September 11 attacks that had significant international repercussions. The researcher explains The Pakistan's fallout Afghan policy affected global dynamics and perceptions. Additionally, Pakistan played a crucial role in attempting to reshape the Taliban's image through its assistance. Overall, these factors highlight the complex and influential role Pakistan played in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks and navigating complex relationships with neighboring countries like India and Iran.

The fifth chapter consists of Doha Agreement marked a pivotal moment in Afghanistan's history. This agreement emerged from extensive Doha Peace Talks, where the Taliban showcased a distinct approach. Examining the Taliban's relationship with the Ashraf Ghani administration provides insights into the complex dynamics within Afghanistan. Notably, Pakistan played a significant role in facilitating the Doha Peace Agreement. As the agreement unfolds, its impacts on Afghanistan's political landscape and security situation become increasingly evident. This chapter also consists of the Analysis of Pakistan's support to the Taliban and the analysis of Doha Peace Agreement in different levels.

The final and last chapter consists of the conclusion of the study. In this chapter, the researcher provided a summary of the entire study for the readers to understand properly.

I. Theoretical Framework

The basic tendency of theoretical approaches that provide explanations on foreign policy analysis, one of the most basic application areas of the discipline of International Relations, is to give priority to some elements such as the international system or the general characteristics of states in determining foreign policy. In neoclassical realism, a model is built by evaluating both the international system and the internal factors of the states together. Accordingly, the pressure of the

international system on states is seen as systemic signals, and these signals are transformed into foreign policy outputs by passing through the perception filters of the domestic factors of the relevant state, especially the decision makers. Thus, the international system is accepted as the independent variable of foreign policy, the local dynamics of the states are considered as intermediate variables, and the foreign policy strategy and outputs are considered as dependent variables.

The discipline of International Relations emerged as a result of the new searches of the academy and statesmen who faced the devastating consequences of World War I. At this point, the desire to prevent such a war from happening again has come to the fore at the center of new searches. The foundations of the discipline of International Relations were laid by addressing the issue of preventing wars from an intellectual perspective.

J. Development of Realist Theory in International Relations

International Relations, which find a place within social sciences as a sub-branch of Political Science, have gained its institutionally by applying Political Science theories to the field. The existence of realism as a theory of International Relations is a result of this process. The ideas of realist thinkers from political philosophy were reformulated and realism, the most dominant theoretical approach of the discipline, emerged. At this point, it is not possible to talk about a single realist theory. In its generally accepted form, it is possible to talk about a three-phase transformation. These are classical realism, neorealism and neoclassical realism.

1. Classical Realism

Classical realism emerged as an important side of the initial debate (idealism-realism) in the discipline of International Relations. The foundations of the theory in International Relations were laid by Edward Hallett Carr, who worked as a historian and diplomat (Carr, 1939, pp. 75-76). Carr, who wanted to prepare a work on the philosophy of International Relations, criticized Liberalism, the dominant theoretical approach of the period, and put forward his own realistic theory in his book. With his book, Carr not only contributed to the institutionalization of the discipline of International Relations, but also laid the foundations of the most dominant theory of the discipline. Although Carr's realism is a matter of debate (Kahler, 1997) classical

realism readings mostly begin with Carr. However, the person who is considered the undisputed founding father of classical realism is Hans J. Morgenthau (Morgenthau, 1948, pp. 4-7).

He argues that the stronger state can dominate the weaker state in proportion to its power, and that the standard in matters such as justice can be in line with this balance of power. It is found in the thought of Thucydides that moral principles have no place in relations and that the method of occupation can be used not only to expand territory but also to provide security (Finley, 1972). Machiavelli is examined as another name mentioned by Morgenthau. Explaining his recommendations on how the state should be governed in his work, *The Prince*, Morgenthau highlights Machiavelli's concept of *raison d'etat* and emphasizes that anything can be done for the state. In this case, concepts such as morality cannot be considered together with the state (Machiavelli, 1992).

2. Neorealism (Structural Realism)

The idea that the theory should be based on more scientific hypotheses and the intensified method discussions within the discipline have led to new expansions in the realist tradition. One of these expansions was Kenneth Waltz's neorealism, which became the dominant theory of the discipline after its publication. While explaining his theory, Waltz first stated what he understood from the theory and started a construction process accordingly. According to Waltz, theory is a simplification of reality. According to Waltz, who summarizes his theory in this way, all previous International Relations theories are incomplete. In his book "*Man, the State and War*" published in 1959, he divided the theories dealing with the prevention of war into three categories (Waltz, 1959). Accordingly, the first image explains the cause of the war at the individual level; the second image explains state behavior through internal politics and internal characteristics; the third image offers an explanation at the system level (Waltz, 1959, pp. 1-13).

Waltz, who developed these views with his book "*Theory of International Politics*" published in 1979, put forward his own theory, which combined the first two images, defined them as reductionist theories, and included them in the third image in a systematic integrity. At this point, Waltz develops the concept of 'structure' to explain it at the systemic level. According to Waltz, the system consists

of structures and interacting units. In this case, structure is seen as an abstract concept, while units, that is, states, are concrete and real. According to him, structure is effective throughout the system and is related to how the interaction between units is regulated. However, this regulation is not made through different concrete units such as the United Nations. Waltz mentions that two types of organizing principles of structure are possible: anarchy and hierarchy. These structures are the organizing principles of interaction between units. The absence of a political authority giving orders over states or the existence of a world state indicates an anarchic structure.

In this structure, states are the final decision makers and the interaction between them is a relationship between equals. In the hierarchical structure, relations are in the form of superior-subordinate relations and units can give orders to each other, which is the case in intra-state relations. Based on the difference between these two structures, according to Waltz, domestic and foreign politics are completely independent of each other. Although these structures do not need to be clearly present, this issue is not very important because it is not the duty of the theory to reflect reality as it is and this analysis should only be considered as a guide in international relations (Waltz, 1979, pp. 79-87).

It is explained that Waltz stated three basic features of the structure. Firstly, the ordering principle of the structure could be anarchic or hierarchical (Waltz, 1979, p. 88). As a second feature, the importance of the functional differentiation of the units was mentioned, in this context it was stated that states have common duties such as national security, welfare and development. Waltz explained the similarities between states with the structure of the international system and the socialization process (Waltz, 1979, p. 93). As the third principle, distribution of capabilities across units, emphasis was placed on the distribution of power between units and it was stated that this power should be understood in terms of military power elements. It is emphasized that this principle only examines the distribution of power between units (Waltz, p. 97).

3. Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism emerged as a result of debates within the realist tradition and criticism of neorealist theory regarding its lack of explanatory power. Neoclassical realism is a theory of foreign policy analysis. Waltz's neorealism

explains the results of the interactions of states with each other and, as such, is a theory of international politics. However, foreign policy theories should be used to explain the developments in international relations. The term neoclassical realism was used for the first time in literature by Gideon Rose (Rose, 1998, p. 146).

Rose cites four approaches to foreign policy analysis. First, there are Domestic Policy theories that focus on internal factors. Second, offensive realism argues that systemic factors influence state behavior. Third, defensive realism has a softer perspective but claims that the system has an impact on its behavior. Finally, neoclassical realism addresses foreign policy by redeveloping the perspective of classical realism and systematically examines external and internal variables (Rose, 1998, p. 148)

First of all, Rose touches upon Innenpolitik theories as the most frequently used theoretical framework in foreign policy analysis and states that states have different structures and characteristics from each other in the international environment. According to Innenpolitik theories, how these states will behave in their foreign policies should be explained by various variables such as political and economic ideologies arising from internal structures, national character, political party policies and socio-economic structures (Rose, 1998, p. 149).

Stating that the theories in question do not consist of a single theory, Rose also says that there are different forms of Innenpolitik theories, especially the 'Democratic Peace Theory' (Doyle, 1983, p. 207). Each of these theories gives explanations by prioritizing different internal factors. However, ultimately, each of them analyzes internal factors to understand the foreign policies of states, and this is where their explanatory power comes from. According to Rose, neoclassical realism advocates considering both systemic and internal features together to explain the foreign policies of states. This approach aims to eliminate the shortcomings of Innenpolitik theories and other theoretical approaches.

Neoclassical realism prioritizes systemic elements but emphasizes that these elements must be evaluated by unit-level intervening variables to understand foreign policy. Rose states that neoclassical realism has difficulties in fully understanding security by addressing the difficulty of understanding international anarchy. In neoclassical realism, as in neorealistic approaches, systemic elements are given priority for analysis. However, for these elements, which are accepted to be decisive,

to be meaningful data for foreign policy, it is necessary to evaluate what they mean by filtering them through intervening variables at the unit level. Thus, in neoclassical realism, Waltz's three categories are combined (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

a. Foreign Policy Analysis in Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism, formulated to explain the foreign policies of states, accepts foreign policy as a dependent variable and considers state behavior from this perspective.

i. Independent Variable: International System and Relative Power Distribution

Neoclassical realism accepts decision makers' perceptions of the relative distribution of power in the international system and the limitations resulting from domestic factors as intermediate variables between foreign policy and the pressure of the international system. In foreign policy analysis, systemic elements and the impact of relative power distribution on states are determined as independent variables (Lobell, 2009, p. 29). From this perspective, neoclassical realism explains the international system with the relative distribution of power. However, how relative power is understood in neoclassical realism differs from other realist explanations. Wohlforth, one of the neoclassical writers, explains the concept of 'power' as the capacity or resources to establish influence among states (Wohlforth, 1993, p. 5). In this way, neoclassical realism attributes a comparative importance to power and claims that states act by emphasizing goals and preferences in their foreign policy behavior. In this context, it is emphasized that the perception of the power possessed is decisive in foreign policy (Rose, 1998, p. 151).

In the context of neoclassical realism's foreign policy analysis, the elements that differ from neorealism are explained. Neoclassical realism has a perspective that distinguishes the concept of anarchy from neorealism. Although the uncertainty and potential threats caused by anarchy are also important in neoclassical realism, the way states deal with this situation is different in neoclassical realism (Lobell, 2009, pp. 28-29). In neorealism, states seek security in an anarchic environment, but in neoclassical realism, states try to challenge international anarchy by trying to control their external environment (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

The struggle between states takes place within the framework of power relations, but the focus is not on the current distribution of power, but on how this distribution of power is perceived by state leaders. In foreign policy analysis, power

deals with the information and evaluations that decision makers have. In addition, states' view of the international system is shaped by their existing capacity to influence in order to eliminate the uncertainty of the anarchic environment and shape other states. This assumption leads states to view the international system and the relative distribution of power as limiting factors in foreign policy making. However, this limitation alone is not sufficient and how decision makers evaluate these limitations is also important (Wohlforth, 1993, p. 14). Therefore, decision makers and unit-level variables occupy a central position in neoclassical foreign policy analysis.

According to neoclassical realism, decision makers play a central role in foreign policy analysis because they have all kinds of information that can affect foreign policy decisions and are capable of evaluating this information. This information comes from two main sources: the first is information about intra-state factors, and the second is information about the international system. Evaluations on issues such as the environment of uncertainty created by international anarchy and the relative distribution of power are important elements that decision makers need to understand the international system and use this information. According to neoclassical realism, short- and long-term uncertainties differ. Short-term uncertainties may cause more negative effects than the long-term effects of the situation created by anarchy. However, short-term threats and system-related risks are less uncertain than the long-term perspective. States have multiple foreign policy options when dealing with short-term threats, and these options are not necessarily rational (Lobell, 2009, p. 27).

The role of foreign policy makers is important because they try to determine the most appropriate policies by considering future power distribution changes when dealing with short-term threats. In this process, it is important to keep up-to-date information about the international system and power distribution and to develop analysis skills. Events such as sudden changes and transfers of power are also important because unexpected changes in the foreign policies of allied or rival countries can provide important information about the relative distribution of power (Lobell, 2009, p. 30).

As a result, systemic limitations, that is, the distribution of relative power, which are accepted as independent variables in neoclassical realism, are not seen as

the only variable in the foreign policy behavior of states, unlike neorealism. Since not all states display the same foreign policy behavior in the same international environment, the unique dynamics of each state must also be taken into account. At this point, the information and general evaluations that foreign policy makers have about the distribution of relative power determine how systemic elements and limitations will be included in foreign policy analysis.

ii. Intermediate Variables: Domestic Dynamics of States

Neoclassical realism's foreign policy analysis stands out by differentiating from previous realist ideas by emphasizing factors arising from the internal structures of states. It is stated that although the system is anarchic, it does not force states to exhibit the same behavior and that these behaviors can be explained by the active roles arising from the internal structures of the states. According to neoclassical realism, the internal structures of states are considered intermediate variables that play a key role in determining foreign policy outcome. Relative power distribution is a fundamental factor for neoclassical realism's foreign policy analysis and is a key element in determining a state's foreign policy.

As a general tendency regarding the intermediate variables of neoclassical realism, it is common to emphasize the intermediate variables arising from the individual structures of each state. Intermediate variables frequently addressed in studies include decision-makers perceptions of the relative distribution of power and local/internal factors (Rose, 1998, p. 152).

- **Decision Makers' Perceptions**

Decision makers are also defined as foreign policy makers (Lobell, 2009, p. 43). In the context of foreign policy analysis, the prominent element among the intermediate variables is the state's foreign policy decision makers or foreign policy elites. These people take part in evaluation processes and are authorized to make foreign policy decisions. According to neoclassical realism, these leaders are the main actors who determine the foreign policy of the state. Evaluations of how leaders perceive the structure of the international system and behave as neoclassical realism predicts are important.

The role and importance of leaders is a frequently discussed topic in other approaches to foreign policy analysis that are not pioneered by neoclassical realism. Although neoclassical realism is not a theory that includes leaders and decision-

makers in foreign policy analysis for the first time, it is important to make a general assessment of the role and importance attributed to leaders before examining the impact of leaders on foreign policy. According to the classification made by Max Weber, leaders are divided into three categories: authoritarian/traditional, rational/bureaucratic, and charismatic. As another form of classification, Henry Kissinger's leader types include bureaucratic/pragmatic, ideological, and revolutionary leaders (Ari, 1996, p. 133). Leaders can also be examined in five different categories, such as doctrinaire/opportunist, combative/conciliatory, idealist/cynical, rigid/imaginative, risk-taker/cautious. Leader classifications are important tools used to understand the role of leaders in foreign policy analysis (Demir, 2007, p. 13).

The role of leaders in foreign policy analysis is generally an important issue, and various approaches attribute importance to leaders. In neoclassical realism's foreign policy analysis, the effectiveness and role of leaders are at the forefront. Hans Morgenthau argues that leaders' attitudes and behaviors can be analyzed from the perspective of power and interest. James Rosenau constructs foreign policy as a system and sees leaders as central strategic actors who transform independent variables into foreign policy output (Demir, 2007, p. 16). Robert Putnam and Andrew Moravcsik define foreign policy as a 'two-stage game'. According to this approach, leaders are central strategic actors who establish a link between domestic politics and international bargaining. According to neoclassical realism, leaders are responsible for the national security of the state and make decisions in a position that is open to influences arising from their internal structures (Hermann and Hagan, 1998, pp. 125-126).

It is stated that leaders and foreign policy elites evaluate the signals arising from the relative power concept of the international system and create outputs. The perception systems, political views and ideologies of foreign policy makers are also important in determining foreign policy (Ripsman, 2009, p. 172). In this context, neoclassical realism emphasizes that it is not the power of the leaders and the state that is important, but how this power is perceived by the leaders (Rose, 1998, p. 147). However, although leaders are decisive in neoclassical realism (Lobell, 2009, p. 43), it is stated that it is not right to give determination only to leaders. Factors such as internal dynamics, social structure, bureaucracy, business world and political

parties that affect the behavior of leaders should also be taken into consideration in foreign policy formation. For this reason, factors arising from the internal structures of states should also be examined in terms of foreign policy analysis.

- **Domestic Factors**

In neoclassical realism, an intermediate variable in the foreign policy determination and implementation processes is the domestic factors of the state. However, it is emphasized that these factors are not as decisive as the relative distribution of power or the perceptions of decision makers in neoclassical realism. However, under different circumstances, it is recognized that these elements should be included in the analysis (Ripsman, 2009, p. 171). Domestic factors may include dynamics such as the state's social and cultural structure, historical continuities, institutional structure, interest groups and independent media. The impact of these factors on foreign policy decision makers is considered as an intermediate variable in neoclassical realism (Ripsman, 2009, pp. 180-182).

According to Ripsman, domestic factors, society itself in general, are a determining factor in foreign policy. Domestic factors can be one of the determining factors of foreign policy processes to the extent of their influence on foreign policy decisions and their capacity to influence decisions. For example, issues such as the decision to go to war or the military budget can affect society, and actors such as various institutions of the state, business, ethnic or interest groups and the media can play a role in foreign policy processes (Ripsman, 2009, p. 181). It is not a correct approach to underestimate the impact of domestic factors. Leaders of certain groups have the capacity to influence, and it is necessary to evaluate which groups may be decisive in this analysis. The general structure of the state, its power possibilities and the dynamics in the international environment play a role in this interaction. In democratic countries, rulers' electoral concerns may lead groups with the ability to vote collectively to influence foreign policy. Economic interest groups can influence foreign policy regarding potential markets or jobs.

Countries with a strong military bureaucracy can determine their foreign policies according to military orientations. The media's influence on public opinion by cooperating with interest groups can direct administrators to the desired foreign policy behavior. Additionally, situations under the influence of regional or global ideologies may change the foreign policy options of decision-makers (Ripsman,

2009, pp. 190-191). When a state creates foreign policy, it should take into account domestic factors arising from its internal dynamics. An important change in the explanations of neoclassical realism is the giving of a decisive role to intermediate variables. This approach provides a detailed understanding of the behavior of states with multiple foreign policy options. The arguments of realist theory, such as structural elements and relative distribution of power, are preserved in this approach. It will be treated as an independent variable in the context of international system effects.

iii. Dependent Variable: Foreign Policy Strategies

Neoclassical realism, which aims to explain the foreign policy behavior of states by evaluating the pressure of the international system through factors that are determinant at the local level, unlike neorealism, therefore accepts the foreign policy behavior of the relevant state as the dependent variable (Taliaferro, 2009, p. 19). Taliaferro states that the purpose of neoclassical realism is to explain why different states or the same state follow certain strategies at different times in the international arena and presents state behavior as the aim of the theory. A state's grand strategies, military doctrine, foreign economic policy, alliance preferences and crisis behavior are considered to be within the scope of neoclassical realism (Taliaferro, 2000, pp. 133-134).

While foreign policy behavior is accepted as the dependent variable, at the point of its implementation, Taliaferro states that the dependent variable is various variations in the types and intensity of strategies that states will follow, in the ways of emulation, innovation or preserving the current strategy (Taliaferro, 2009, p. 213). This perspective provides a significant advantage to neoclassical realism in explaining the changes in foreign policies and helps to handle analyzes in a multidimensional way. Examining the relevant foreign policy event to be evaluated in the context of state behavior and strategy and transforming the independent variable (International System) into foreign policy output (dependent variable) through intermediate variables emerges as the method of neoclassical realism.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: TALIBAN'S RISE TO POWER (1994-2001)

This chapter explores the multifaceted evolution and impact of the Taliban, tracing their ideological background, political rise from local resistance to national control, relations with Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the complex transition post-9/11. The ideological foundation of the Taliban is rooted in the Deobandi thought and Pashtun tribal prejudices, nurtured by a Pakistani religious organization. Mullah Mohammad Omar's local resistance grew into a formidable force, capturing significant military bases. Pakistan's support for the Taliban stemmed from geopolitical considerations and the defeat of Hekmatyar. The post-9/11 era saw the fall of the Taliban regime, leading to the Bonn Conference, establishing a temporary administration under Hamid Karzai and initiating a constitutional order in Afghanistan. The chapter delves into the complexities of this transition, addressing the geopolitical, ideological, and social dimensions.

A. The ideological background of the Taliban

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a Pakistani religious organization led by Fazal-ur- Rehman of the Pashtun tribe became responsible for assisting Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Shah B. , 2001, p. 58). In this regard, several Pashtun youths in Afghanistan went to the seminaries of this organization and studied the Qur'an and Islamic rules for free. Moreover, many mothers who lost their husbands sent their children to these religious schools so that they would not be deprived of education. These schools were not subject to the official education system of Pakistan, and the main feature of these schools was the teaching of Deobandi thought with the prejudices of the Pashtun tribes (Shah B. , 2001, p. 51).

Maulvi Samiul Haq, a leader of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), insists that most of the anti-Soviet jihad commanders in Afghanistan's Pashtun areas have attended the Haqqani School he runs (Shah B. , 2001, p. 57). As a result, Mawlawi

Samiul Haq School later became the Taliban's main training center (Kotokey and Borthakur, 2021, p. 208). In 1999, at least eight Taliban government ministers were trained at the Haqqani School of Darul Uloom, owned by Maulvi Samiul Haq. In 1993, a favorable political situation was created for the JUI Scholars who were intellectually Deobandi. For the first time, the party allied with the Pakistan People's Party, led by Benazir Bhutto, and became part of the ruling coalition (Rashid, 2002, p. 139), with Maulvi Fazal ur Rehman, chairman of the JUI, appointed chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs (Bin Mohamed Osman, 2009, p. 240). He visited Washington and European capitals in 1994 to seek their support. He traveled to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states for financial and military assistance. In this regard, the JUI was able to change the attitude of Benazir Bhutto's government towards the Pashtun people and, with the cooperation of the Pakistan Army Intelligence Bureau, established the Afghan Taliban (Roy, 2002, pp. 154-155).

The Taliban are intellectually affiliated with Deobandiyya, which is jurisprudentially a follower of the Hanafi religion. Sufi approaches are also seen in the behavior of some of them. Because most Taliban leaders are educated in Deoband schools and are spreading this thinking in Afghanistan (Berkey, 2007, p. 49).

The origins of the Taliban's ideas go back to the Sunnis and to the Deobandi School in particular (Metcalf, 2002, p. 13), because most of the Taliban and its leaders were educated in the Deobandi schools and are, of course, graduates and supporters of the same school (Metcalf, 2002, p. 1). Meanwhile, the JUI played a key role in leading the Sunni jihadist forces in Afghanistan, as well as mobilizing the Taliban (Ahmar, 2007, pp. 9-10). So much so that even the draft of the Taliban constitution was prepared by JUI Maulana Fazal ur Rehman (Marsden, 1998, p. 153). After the fall of the Taliban, Pakistani parties and groups, mostly Deobandi, prayed for Mullah Omar with special devotion to the Taliban, they were celebrating their fugitives and to the Taliban who were killed during the war on the North front (Sarafraz, 2011, p. 271). Politically, Pashtun elements in the Pakistani government have always sought to strengthen the Taliban (Sarafraz, 2011, p. 279). Meanwhile, Fazal ur Rehman, the Pashtun leader of the JUI, is a prominent figure in Pakistan's past and present governments and, as in the past, is a pro-Taliban leader. With the

announcement of Mullah Omar's death in the summer of 2015 and the announcement of Mullah Akhtar Mansour's successor, Maulana Samiul Haq, the leader of one of the branches of the JUI, officially pledged allegiance to Mullah Akhtar Mansour and supported him as the new Taliban leader (Panda, 2015).

In 1994, a Pakistani trade convoy to Central Asia was passing through Kandahar when Hekmatyar's military group prevented the convoy from entering Kandahar. Pakistan directly sought the help of Taliban leaders, and the Taliban marched on Kandahar City with 3,000 men and many weapons, and Kandahar was captured by the Taliban on November 5, 1994 (Hänni and Hegi, 2013). Following this remarkable success, on October 15, 1994, Taliban leaders announced the formation of the movement and News of the Taliban's formation soon spread from Kandahar around the world (Zaeef, 2010, p. 65), and its appeal led Pakistani students to join the Taliban in Jamiat al-Ulama schools, and by December 1994, about 12,000 students had joined the Taliban (Rashid, 2000, p. 29). The Taliban movement was able to capture 9 of Afghanistan's 30 provinces in just over one year and reach the gates of Kabul in 1996 (Rubin M., 2002, p. 11).

B. The Taliban's Political Evolution: From Local Resistance to National Control

In 1994, Mullah Mohammad Omar, along with 30 of his comrades, became outraged by the extravagance of the aggressors who extorted money from the people of Kandahar and stole and raped them and decided to stand up to them (LLC, 2010). This success brought many Pashtun-speaking people with Mullah Omar. Mullah Omar, with his allies, attacked the military base of Hekmatyar Hezb-e Islami and captured the largest military base in the region (Rashid, 2001, p. 27). A 30-member group called the Taliban briefly emerged in the Kandahar region, becoming a force of several thousand and by the end of 1996, its fighters had grown to about 35,000 (Rashid, 2001, p. 29).

The Taliban continued their advance and captured the city of Herat on September 1995 (Magnus, 1997, p. 114). Iran also saw it as a threat to its security, saying the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had colluded to create the Taliban (Rashid, 1999, p. 24). Herat is one of the city borders with Iran which has strategic importance for Iran. According to Iran, Pakistan is responsible for supplying the Taliban, Saudi Arabia is responsible for financing and the US is responsible for their

political and strategic support (Rashid, 2001, p. 201). The mullahs who had gathered in the courtyard of the building rejoiced and called him Amir al-Mu'minin with cheers and shouts (Rashid, 2000, p. 21).

On September 11, 1996, the city of Jalalabad fell to the Taliban (Qamar, 2014, p. 40). After the Taliban took control of the city, Osama bin Laden pledged allegiance to the Taliban leader Mullah Omar called him Amir al-Mu'minin "The supreme leader of an Islamic community" (Al-Shishani, 2011, p. 7), Saudi company, Delta working on a plan to build a gas pipeline through Afghanistan, pressured Riyadh to accelerate the Taliban's final victory (Rasanayagam, 1999, p. 133). On the night of Tuesday, September 26, 1996, the Taliban entered Kabul (Rubin M., 2002, p. 11). The first and most violent act by the Taliban since its arrival in Kabul is the hanging of former Afghan President Najibullah. After torturing and killing Najibullah and his brother, the Taliban hanged both bodies near the presidential palace, just a few blocks from the United Nations (UN) office. The display of corpses with many signs of torture provoked the hatred of many Kabulis (Marsden, 1998, p. 50).

After capturing Kabul and Herat in 1996, the Taliban closed most public schools, especially girls' schools (Jackson, 2011, p. 4). The girls' schools were closed as soon as they arrived in Kabul (Amnesty International Report 1997- Afghanistan, 1997) in some schools, students were told to say "Death to the school" (Kakar, 2011, p. 78). However, learning Sharia and the Arabic language became mandatory for all students (Kakar, 2011, pp. 78-79). Religious schools received more attention, including in the Khost region, where seven hundred students were educated and welfare facilities were provided the salaries of religious school teachers were more than double those of public school teachers (Kakar M., 2011, p. 80).

The ISI has allocated a budget of Rupee 2 billion (\$ 5 million) to meet the Taliban's logistical needs (Ibrahimi, 2017). The Taliban's conquests in northern Afghanistan in the summer of 1998 allowed them to take control of more than 90% of the country but the Taliban were unable to continue. Ahmad Shah Massoud's forces inflicted the heaviest attacks on the Taliban with the same tactics they used to fight the Soviets. Taliban forces were trapped in the Hindu Kush (Crews and Tarzi, 2009, p. 69).

The conquest of Mazar-e-Sharif, the Taliban began disarming the Hazara and Uzbek armed forces. This led to a popular uprising and the Taliban suffered a severe defeat and about 600 Taliban were killed and more than 1,000 were trapped at the city's airport, the defeat in Mazar-e-Sharif was the worst defeat for the Taliban since their emergence (Rashid, 2000). On August 8, 1998, the Taliban attacked Mazar-e-Sharif again, leaving only 100 of the 1,500 Hazara defenders who fought to the last bullet. In the early hours of the siege of Mazar-e-Sharif, the Taliban announced from the city's mosques that Shiites have no choice but to become Sunnis, go to Iran, or be killed (Rashid, 2000, p. 74). The UN later estimated that 6,000 Shiites had been killed in the worst possible and most vicious manner. According to Ahmad Rashid, a well-known Pakistani journalist, about 400 Hazara women were taken as slaves during the Taliban attack on Mazar-e-Sharif. The Taliban committed another crime in Mazar-e-Sharif that pushed them to the brink of war with Iran. A Taliban unit, along with several Pakistani militiamen under the command of Mullah Dost Mohammad, entered the Iranian consulate in the city, killing 11 Iranian diplomats and a journalist. In response to the Taliban attack, the Islamic Republic of Iran deployed hundreds of thousands of troops along the border, increasing the risk of military conflict between these two countries (Kutty, 2014, p. 143).

Bamyan fell on September 13, 1998 (Qamar, 2014, p. 42). Shiite parties at the time of the rise of the Taliban were the Islamic Unity Party led by Abdul Ali Mazari and the Islamic Movement led by Ayatollah Asef Mohseni. Ayatollah Mohseni's Islamic Movement avoided confronting the Taliban as much as possible and even cooperated with the Taliban in cases where the Taliban did not face serious threats from party leaders and forces (Saikal, 2012). However, the Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan, led by Abdul Ali Mazari, was strongly opposed to the Taliban from the beginning and bloody clashes broke out between them, which eventually led to the arrest and martyrdom of Abdul Ali Mazari and about ten others party leaders in a fraudulent operation by the Taliban (Rashid, 2000, p. 35).

The Taliban in another tragedy blew up the head of a smaller Buddha statue with dynamite, completely destroying its face and targeting the lower part of the statue with rockets. Afghanistan's largest cultural heritage site the two Buddha statues, which has stood for nearly 2,000 years, have now been destroyed by the Taliban (Bouchenaki, 2020). A major catastrophe occurred, which UNESCO

described as a “Cultural horror and attack against all humanity” (Ashworth and J.M. van der Aa, 2002, p. 449)

In Taliban statements, while emphasizing the ‘Islamic government’, special attention is paid to ‘jihad’. Mullah Mohammad Omar told the Taliban in Kandahar: "With holy jihad, we will implement the religion of God in the land of God and cleanse it of corruption and immorality" (Kakar, 2011, p. 294) According to Mullah Mohammad Omar, ‘holy jihad’ is to preserve the ‘territorial integrity of Afghanistan’ and the ‘implementation of Islamic law’ (Kakar, 2011, p. 121) Mullah Mohammad Rabbani, the head of the Council of Ministers, said during a visit to Pakistan that terrorism was against our beliefs and that we rejected it and that the Taliban would not allow terrorists to operate in Afghanistan (Kakar, 2011, p. 257). The London School of Economics claimed in June 2010 that the ISI support for the Taliban in Afghanistan was beyond imagination and that in addition to money, training, and shelter, Pakistani intelligence officials were attending meetings of the Afghan Taliban leadership council (Waldman, 2010, p. 9).

Only three countries, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the UAE, have recognized the Taliban regime (R. Rubin, 2000, p. 1798). Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, in the most explicit action, on 25 May 1997, provided political support to the Taliban and handed over the Afghan embassy in Riyadh to the Taliban (Hussain, 2002, p. 56). Iran never recognized the Taliban government and also considered Burhanuddin Rabbani the head of Afghanistan's legitimate government (Milani, 2010). Moscow believed that the extremist Islamic government in Kabul would strengthen the wave of Islamism in Central Asia. The Russians also believed that the government led by Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud was a strong barrier to the spread of Salafism in Central Asia. Therefore, the country rushed to the aid of anti-Taliban forces by sending weapons (Azizian and Vasilieff, 2003, p. 40).

The Indian government believed that the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI was planning to use the Taliban against the Indian government in the Kashmir issue (Yasmeen, 2002, pp. 612-613). For this reason, India, along with Russia, sought to exert diplomatic pressure on Pakistan and prevent the international community from recognizing the Taliban. Thus, in early 1995, the interests of India and Russia come into, and the two countries supported Rabbani and Massoud against the Taliban (Khalilzad, 1996, pp. 194-195).

Using internal turmoil and foreign aid, the group overthrew the government of Burhanuddin Rabbani in Kabul in 1996 and formed the Taliban government known as the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' led by Mullah Mohammad Omar (Ibrahimi, 2017, p. 947). Some countries in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the UAE, immediately recognized and supported the Taliban government (Barfield, 2012, p. 264). The Taliban deprived girls of education and women of social work (Watch, 1998), massacred Hazara Shiites (Cooper, 1998), and became hostile to Tajik and Uzbek Sunnis. The Taliban ruled more than 90% of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 until 9/11 (Laub, 2014, p. 4).

C. Afghanistan and Pakistan Relations during the Taliban Administration

A group of students representing radical emerged in Afghanistan who identified themselves as students (Taliban). Taliban members are religious students attending schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. During this period, Pakistan can be introduced as the biggest supporter of the Taliban in the relations between the two countries. The period 1994-2001 can be defined as the period in which Pakistan made the easiest intervention in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. During this period, the Taliban in the early years of its emergence especially needed Pakistan's military, political and financial support (Ibrahimi, 2017, p. 960). Pakistan, which supported Hekmatyar from 1992 to 1994 (Khalilzad, 1995, p. 152), did not achieve the success it expected of Hekmatyar and opened all its doors to the Taliban, both materially and spiritually. Among the Taliban militants were fighters from many countries around the world who fought through al-Qaeda in Afghanistan to meet their jihadist demands in Afghanistan. Taliban troops consisted of Afghans as well as American, Arab, and Pakistani militias. Among these fighters were people who converted to Islam and came to earn the reward of jihad (Williams, 2011, p. 239).

The Taliban ruled the people in fear in all areas under their control. Non-Islamic punishments ranged from stoning women in stadiums (Hunt, 2002, p. 119) to hanging young people in the streets by putting televisions around their necks to watch movies at night (Cole, 2003, p. 775). The ideological foundation of Taliban-Pakistan relations was the Ulema community led by Fazal-ur-Rehman. The Ulema community known as JUI represented a sectarian and ideological group active in Pakistan. Fazal Rehman Durrani, the group's leader, has called for an alliance

between Durrani Pashtuns living in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region since he was a member of the Pashtun tribe (Rashid, 2001). The main factor behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban was the defeat of Hekmatyar (Shafqat, 1996, p. 667), whom Pakistan supported between 1992 and 1993. After the overthrow of Dr. Najibullah, Hekmatyar could not even unite the Ghilzai Pashtuns. Hekmatyar also lost Kabul to the interim Mojahedin government (Khalilzad, 1996, p. 191). During this period, the Society of Islamic Scholars, the Ulema community led by Fazal Rehman, and the Benazir Bhutto Party came to power in Pakistan as Pakistanis People Party (PPP) (Khan, Ahmad, and Khan, 2018, p. 123). During this period, the JUI community established contacts with the Taliban and the ISI, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Pakistani Interior Ministry. The Taliban had achieved extraordinary success in a short period of time, occupying 90% of Afghanistan and making a name for themselves in the world media (Thorne and Farrell, 2005, p. 83). The ISI has played a key role in shedding light on the Taliban era in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. In fact, the material and military aid of the West and other countries, especially the US, was provided by the ISI of Pakistan during the years of jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union and the leftist government (Hartman, 2002, p. 478).

General Pervez Musharraf staged a bloodless coup on October 12, 1999, overthrowing Pakistan's legitimate government, and was sworn in as Pakistan's new president on June 20, 2001, by an interim executive order. He pursued a previous policy toward the Taliban and Afghanistan until September 2001 (Khan, 2007, p. 155). But the incident of 9/11 upset all equations and put Pakistan in a new situation. Pakistan officials now had no choice but to side with the Taliban or the US, which wanted the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden. In fact, two years of economic and military sanctions over a nuclear test had made Pakistan so fragile that it could no longer afford to pay more for the Taliban (Rafique, 2011, p. 155).

The then US President George W. Bush's counterterrorism policy of "with us or against us" (Dunn, 2005, p. 16) has led the Pakistani government to fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda to rid itself of US threats (Dunn, 2005, p. 15). Thus, after 9/11, when it became clear that the US was seeking to invade Afghanistan and overthrow the Taliban, Musharraf made a strategic-tactical choice. Musharraf's strategy was chosen for three main reasons: a strategic alliance with the US to have a strong

supporter, an end to India's proximity to the US, and a continued political presence in Afghanistan, as Pakistan supported a global coalition against terrorism it did not mean severing ties with the Taliban and influencing the post-Taliban regime. In order to act as their mainstay, they pursued a policy of introducing and supporting the 'moderate Taliban,' which was initially ignored and rejected by the US (Yusuf, 2009, p. 17). On the other hand, the US invasion of Afghanistan overthrow the Taliban government and placing Pakistan on the US side increased the sense of solidarity between the tribes on both sides of the border. Now not only did the Afghan Taliban and Pashtuns feel betrayed by Pakistan, but Pakistani Pashtuns, influenced by Pashtun ethnic and leftist parties, questioned whether it was better for their Pakistani-dominated territory to be Pashtun and for a very small share in government structure, or unite with your allies across the border to form a single Pashtunistan (Manan, Baloch, Hassan, and Bazai, 2017, p. 385). This dividing line of influence subsequently took on the nature of an international border and effectively divided the large Pashtun area known as 'Pashtunistan' between Afghanistan and British India (Edwards, 2017, p. 347).

Despite initial optimism after the fall of Najibullah's government in Kabul about the softening of Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan, the new situation did not change the atmosphere of bilateral relations and Pakistan's serious desire to establish a Pashtun government in Kabul (Ibrahimi, 2017, p. 951). The inability of Hekmatyar and his allies to overthrow Rabbani's government paves the way for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of independent republics, as well as the Central Asian power line project from Afghanistan and Pakistan and US cooperation with the project. The formation and strengthening of the Taliban by Pakistan to restore calm became a prerequisite for the implementation of the Central Asian energy transfer project (Ewans, Weber, and Carr, 2002, p. 201).

D. Afghanistan and Taliban's Complex Transition Post-9/11

After the 9/11 attacks, the US started Operation against Al Qaeda and the Taliban on October 7, due to the Taliban government's support for Al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden and as a result, the Taliban regime fell (Brigitte, 2003, p. 8). With the support of the US and the international community, the Bonn Conference was held, and in this conference, the foundation of the post-Taliban order was laid. In

the framework of the decisions of the Bonn Conference, a temporary administration was formed for six months and Hamid Karzai was appointed as the head of the government. The main task of the government was to establish political and legal order in Afghanistan for this purpose, elections were held by the constitution, and Hamid Karzai was elected the president of Afghanistan based on the people's vote, and the country's parliament began to function (Fields and Ahmed, 2011, pp. 3-6). In addition, the judiciary, army and police were formed, and as a result, a relative legal-political order based on the constitution was established in Afghanistan.

The US, under the leadership of Bush, called the Taliban a terrorist group and did not allow this group to participate in the Bonn Conference (Fields and Ahmed, 2011, p. 19). With the fall of their regime, the Taliban were silenced but continued their war using different tactics. With the support of the US and the international community, the foundation of the new Afghan National Army was laid (Jalali, 2002, pp. 72-73). Due to the presence of international forces and the US in Afghanistan instead of the forced military system, implemented the military system for money, which prevented the establishment of a strong army in Afghanistan. When Barack Obama became the president of US he promised to withdraw his forces from Afghanistan by 2014 and Obama tried to compensate for the military vacuum created by the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan at first, he decided to increase the number of Afghan security forces and a decision was made to increase the number of Afghan army and in addition to military training, these forces must have access to modern weapons (Gajic and Rajic, 2021, pp. 104-105).

Although the Taliban regime fell in 2001 but this group kept its presence in Afghanistan with its activities and attacking the Afghan army. In this area, due to the mountainous geography of Afghanistan, the Taliban group turned to guerrilla warfare and used the hit-and-run method. At the core of this war tactic, the Taliban used roadside mines, assassinating government officials, carrying out suicide attacks, transferring people affiliated with their group into the Afghan government system, and carrying out operations by these people (Johnson, 2013, pp. 10-12). As a result of this attack, the Taliban caused many casualties to the foreign and Afghan forces. In the spring, summer and fall, the Taliban intensified their wars against the Afghan Army and foreign security forces, and in the winter they trained and equipped their forces. By using the freedom of the media, the Taliban brought their operations to the

attention of the Afghan people and the world as a show of power, and on the other hand, they used the actions that foreign forces committed against innocent people during their operations to challenge the legitimacy of the presence of foreign forces (Bahar, 2020, pp. 35-37).

In addition to the war tactics, the Taliban changed their ethnic politics to spread the war in the regions of the country. In the beginning, the public opinion of the Taliban believed that the Taliban consisted of the Pashtun people because all the leaders and war commanders of this group were Pashtuns. Later, due to the spread of the war in the rest of the country and the transfer of the war from the south to northern Afghanistan, they decided to recruit local people at the leadership level from other ethnic groups. Using this tactic, they recruit the Uzbek, Turkmen and Tajik people as a result of this recruit the Taliban has expanded its area of sovereignty and strengthened its presence. The Taliban continues its existence by carrying out operations in Afghanistan, changing ethnic politics and enforcing laws where they dominate, expanding their area of rule day by day as a result, they made it possible to regain power in Afghanistan (Giustozzi, 2010, pp. 4-6).

The Taliban considered the presence of foreign forces as an occupation and declared their war against foreign forces and the US-backed government as Jihad and some of the people of Afghanistan were influenced by the propaganda of this group and supported them (Gopal and Linschoten, 2017, pp. 32-35). In every negotiation and platform, the Taliban considered the withdrawal of foreign forces and the establishment of a pure Islamic state as their red lines and from the Taliban's point of view, the Afghan government is not capable of making decisions, and for this reason, they never seriously negotiated with the Afghan government (Weigand, 2017, pp. 364-365)

The U.S ended its ground war against the Taliban in 2014 and limited its role to training, equipping and air support of the Afghan forces (McNally and Bucala, 2015, pp. 9-10). With this decision, the US and NATO reduced the number of their soldiers and Afghan security forces were responsible for the security (ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014), 2022). With these decisions, the US left the ground war on Afghan forces, since the entire ground war was put on the shoulders of the Afghan forces, the Afghan government decided to increase the number of local forces. In the framework of the plan to create local forces these forces have been

given military training and they should work under the Ministry of Interior but the Afghan government could not control the local commanders (Ullah and Khan, 2018, pp. 53-55).

When Donald Trump came to power in 2016, he was looking for a solution for the withdrawal of American troops. In this context, Trump's administration decided to enter into negotiations with the Taliban unconditionally (Ullah, Sultana, and Kokab, 2020, pp. 147-148). To prove its seriousness, the US appointed Zalmay Khalilzad, a Pashtun of Afghan origin, as the chief negotiator and special representative of the U.S State Department in the Afghan peace process (Gegen, 2021). After two years of negotiations, US signed the Doha Agreement with the Taliban in 2020, in the absence of the Afghan government. In the Doha agreement, the Taliban pledged to cut ties with terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda. In response, America pledged to withdraw from Afghanistan within 14 months and stop air operations against this group. In the period of 14 months, the inter-Afghan negotiations will start and as a result of the negotiations, the formation of the new government will be formed in Afghanistan.

III. INDIVIDUAL FACTORS AND NATIONAL FACTORS FOR PAKISTAN TO SUPPORT THE TALIBAN

A. Individual Level Factors to Support the Taliban

The individual factors that contributed to Pakistan's historical support for the Taliban the role of key figures, such as former Director of the ISI, General Hamid Gul, who strengthened the Taliban movement and shaped the course of the group during and after the Soviet occupation. Benazir Bhutto's complex relationship with the Taliban, resulting from diplomatic engagement and strategic considerations during her tenure as prime minister, is also examined. The support given by former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan and his party to the Taliban, as well as public sentiment in Pakistan, is examined in light of their impact on the country's stance.

1. Former Director of ISI General Hamid Gul's role in Empowering the Taliban Movement

Hamid Gul from 1987-1989 was the head of Pakistan's intelligence and services the years to the end of the occupation of Afghanistan by the former Soviet Army (Naseem, 2012, pp. 89-90). He was responsible for organizing and training the Afghan Mujahedeen against the Soviet army, and later the Taliban. After the Soviet troops left, Afghanistan descended into chaos, and the Taliban gradually wrested control of the country from the Mujahedeen commanded by Ahmad Shah Massoud; at this time, Hamid Gul served as an informal mediator between the two parties (Gregory, 2007, p. 1019). After leaving the Pakistani army, Hamid Gul has always been very popular among extremist Islamists because of his stance on India and the US. The New Delhi government never had a favorable view of Hamid Gul and considered his relations with the Kashmir separatists a serious threat to India's security (Hussain, 2008, pp. 24-25).

Hamid Gul is a supporter of extremist groups and the armed Taliban. Hamid Gul and other Pakistani government officials from the past to the present in

structuring, training, and equipping the Taliban and other extremists logistically, militarily and promoting extremism and the mentality of murder, as well as fanning the flames of racial, religious and ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan (Gregory, 2007, pp. 1015-1017). There are numerous documents regarding Pakistan's support for terrorist groups. However, the Pakistani government deceived the UN to use millions of US dollars in aid under the pretext of fighting terrorism (Cohen and Chollet, 2007). On the other hand, former Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari has said in his remarks that international forces are incapable of confronting terrorists (Todd, 2010).

Hamid Gul says that for lasting peace in Afghanistan, the US must talk to the armed opposition Taliban (Memri, 2011). The former Pakistani military said in response to the establishment of the High Peace Council in Afghanistan that the Taliban would return to Afghanistan (Times, 2021). He argued that it was not in Pakistan's interest to be part of US efforts for peace talks with the Taliban. "It is good that Pakistan does not participate in the talks with the Taliban because the goals that the US wants to achieve are not in Pakistan's interest. The US wants India to prevail in Afghanistan" (Memri, 2011).

In 1989, as the last Soviet soldier to leave Afghanistan, Hamid Gul wrote a letter to the General Zia-ul-Haq. The letter states that Soviet forces are withdrawing and that Pakistan's strategy from now on should be to establish a joint confederation with Afghanistan in order to control Central Asia. The letter also states that some leaders of the Afghan regime have agreed to establish a joint confederation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. On the eve of the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, one of the leaders of the Afghan regime, held a press conference in Pakistan and supported the plan to establish a joint confederation between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Bakshi, 1997). The creation of a joint confederation meant the annexation of Afghanistan to Pakistan. With the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, Hamid Gul believed that Dr. Najib's government would fall in less than a few months. He was also one of the planners of the Jalalabad War and by capturing Jalalabad, Hamid Gul wanted to pave the way for the fall of Kabul and achieve his long-held dream of annexing Afghanistan to Pakistan (Keleny, 2015). Hamid Gul pursued Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan after being ousted from the ISI with his close friend Hekmatyar another

Afghan warlord among the famous seven warlords and Hekmatyar was number two regarding Hamid Gul (Wright, 2015).

The ISI used its retired officers to organize the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. These officers acted as trainers and advisers to the Taliban, assisting them in inciting insurgency and killing in Afghanistan, and General Hamid Gul was one of these officers (Rediff, 2004). WikiLeaks documents show that Hamid Gul had a deep connection to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and secret military documents released by WikiLeaks provide a true and realistic picture of the war in Afghanistan and some documents show that the Pakistani army and its spy agency have been unspoken allies of the Taliban (The New York Times, 2009). In addition, Hamid Gul played the role of a Taliban propagandist in his media interviews. Hamid Gul, along with Deobandi and Salafi fundamentalists, including Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, Maulana Sami ul Haq, Syed Munawar Hasan and Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi formed an organization called the 'Pakistan Defense Council'. He demonstrated support for the Taliban in Pakistani cities and condemned the Afghan government for its decline (Koster, 2012). When the former Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan, the country witnessed the worst clashes between mujahedeen groups and Hamid Gul was one of the key players in the conflicts. The Pakistani Urdu language newspaper Daily Ummat reports that Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour sent a message of condolences to the family of General Hamid Gul in a message and he said in the message that with the killing of Mullah Omar, one of the Taliban's hands was cut off and they lost their second hand with the death of General Hamid Gul (Khaama Press, 2015).

2. Benazir Bhutto and the Taliban: A Complex Relationship Shaped by Diplomacy and Unintended Consequences

As Pakistan's prime minister (1993–1996), Benazir Bhutto's relationship with the Taliban was characterized by both diplomatic engagement and strategic reasons (Ahmed, 2012, p. 82). Acknowledgment of the Taliban as the government was a very important move and the administration under the Bhutto government played a very important role in making the Taliban official government of Afghanistan. In 1997, Bhutto's administration formally acknowledged the Taliban authority in Afghanistan (Fatima, 2014, p. 10). This decision was motivated by the expectation that the

Taliban would assist in putting a stop to insurgent activity along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, as well as the desire for a friendly and stable neighbor to the West. Given the ongoing civil conflict in Afghanistan and the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of Soviet soldiers, Bhutto's administration considered the Taliban as a possible ally in preserving security in the area. In her book she mentioned that the Taliban was created by the ISI and supported by her government (Bhutto, 2014, p. 14).

Pakistan's backing for the Taliban was just a continuation of the country's policy of siding with Islamist rather than nationalist elements within its neighbor. Moreover, the ISI was not Pakistan's lone sponsor of the Taliban. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Interior Minister Nasrullah Babar also backed the Taliban movement. According to Robert Kaplan, Bhutto and Babar "conceived of the Taliban as the solution to Pakistan's problems" (Kaplan, 2000). Under Bhutto's direction, Pakistan sought to improve its economic relations with Afghanistan. It was thought that acknowledging the Taliban would help to promote commercial and economic relations between the two nations. The convergence of economic prospects with security and strategic objectives in the area occurred as a result of conditions arising from the independence of Central Asian Republics. These states have a wealth of natural resources. Pakistan is strategically located to transmit Central Asian oil and gas riches to the rest of the globe. Pakistan has both sea and land connections (Fatima, 2014, p. 3).

Bhutto's government's acceptance of the Taliban was met with condemnation both domestically and internationally this was mostly because of the Taliban's contentious policies, which included their treatment of women and their stringent interpretation of Islamic law. Pakistan, according to critics, shouldn't be supporting a government whose record on human rights is dubious. (Ahmed, 2012, p. 96). Although Bhutto intended for her acceptance of the Taliban to promote stability, there were unforeseen repercussions. Al-Qaeda and other extremist organizations found refuge in Afghanistan under the Taliban's leadership, and the organization went on to contribute to international terrorism.

The Taliban's rise in Afghanistan was met with early hope, with the assumption that they would bring peace to the war-torn country. However, recognizes this viewpoint as a fundamental and catastrophic error. Bhutto expresses

regret, stating that she would not assist the Taliban for the sake of peace again (Bhutto, 2007). Over time, the relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban changed. Different Pakistani administrations, including those headed by different individuals, have had diverse connections with the Taliban depending on the situation and the geopolitical context. It's critical to recognize that political leaders frequently base their judgments on a variety of local, regional, and global considerations and that their relationships with organizations such as the Taliban may be complicated.

3. Imran Khan: The former Prime Minister of Pakistan

After forming Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (P.T.I.) he began giving more speeches on political and cultural matters. His party started to acquire considerable strength in 2013. The Pakistani army, which maintains de facto authority over the nation, supported Imran Khan's election as Prime Minister later in 2018 and he served from 2018 until 2022 as Prime Minister (Khan I. , 2023). Imran Khan, threatened to cut off NATO supply channels in 2013 as the head of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party in retaliation for US drone operations within Pakistan (Shakil and Yilmaz, 2021, p. 7). His alleged support for the Taliban drew criticism, with some contending that his opinions lacked substance. It should be remembered, too, that there is broad support in Pakistan for the Taliban; a Gallup poll conducted in September found that 55% of Pakistanis were happy with the Islamists seizing power in Afghanistan (Findlay, 2021).

Imran Khan has shown unwavering support for the Taliban, claiming that the US war was 'unwinnable' because Afghans would never accept foreign occupation and that the Islamists had 'broken the shackles of slavery' by overthrowing Ashraf Ghani's administration. Imran Khan said that the world should give the Islamist 'Taliban' more 'time' before evaluating their record on human rights and governance (Findlay, 2021). The former prime minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, urged the international community to engage with the new Afghani government, stating that the Taliban is the only option available to the world. He mentions that Pakistan has had to deal with the refugee issue and terrorist strikes as a result of the unrest in Afghanistan. Millions of inhabitants of Afghanistan are in Pakistan as refugees. The Taliban should eventually be acknowledged as a 'very strong ideological movement'

that is outside of Western civilizations' cultures (Zakaria, 2022). He justified the Taliban as a 'good' and fighting for freedom against the "foreigners" (Shakil and Yilmaz, 2021, p. 7).

Imran Khan had been advocating for peace negotiations even before US President Donald Trump signed a withdrawal agreement with the Taliban. Since 2001, he has continuously criticized the US war on terror and its engagement in Afghanistan, claiming in several interviews that Pakistan's decision to become engaged was one of its 'biggest blunders' and that it cost more than 70,000 Pakistani lives in contrast to less than 2,500 American soldiers. (Findlay, 2021). According to Imran Khan, the West needs to engage the Taliban on human rights after bringing them into the international community. Imran Khan's detractors in Pakistan have dubbed him "Taliban Khan" because he backed the Afghan Taliban and other Islamist organizations (Anderson, Saifi, and Regan, 2021).

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan stated during the 76th UN General Assembly that for the benefit of the Afghan people, the international community should back, bolster, and stabilize the Taliban group's 'government.' He further stated that there is no other option available to the international community than to do just that. The Pakistani prime minister did, however, add that everyone will benefit—including the Taliban—if the international community persuades the Taliban to uphold human rights, establish an inclusive government, and keep terrorists out of Afghanistan. He said that these kinds of incidents are the reason why nations are reluctant to acknowledge the Taliban. Imran Khan has highlighted, nonetheless, that the Taliban have promised to establish an inclusive government, respect (Roanq, 2021).

To bring about stability in the area, Imran Khan advocated for discussion and negotiation and underlined the significance of finding a peaceful resolution to the Afghan issue. However, there has been discussion and controversy on a global scale about claims and suspicions of backing the Taliban.

B. National Level Factors to Support the Taliban

At the National level, the role of ethnicity is a critical factor in shaping the dynamics between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The influence exerted by Pakistan through the Taliban, especially concerning Pashtun ethnicity and strategic objectives,

is investigated. The historical legacy of the Durand Line in terms of its impact on Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. Additionally, Pakistan's economic goals in the region and how these goals affect its support for the Taliban. Pakistan's role in shaping the Taliban's image in the 1990s and the changes that occurred after the September 11 attacks are also discussed. Overall, the various factors that have played a role in Pakistan's long-standing support for the Taliban, combine individual decisions with broader national strategies.

1. The Role of Ethnicity between Pakistan and Afghanistan

In recent years, despite the steps that the Afghan government and society have taken toward political development, Afghanistan faces various obstacles in the path of political development, one of the most important of which is ethnicity in this country. The existence of different ethnicities has made the determining factor in the divergence of Afghan society and the process of nation-building in Afghanistan difficult. After the fall of the Taliban, there was a good opportunity to form a national government and pursue the path of development in this country, but ethnic differences in Afghanistan are still strong and even increasing, and ethnic policies continue.

Pashtuns make up 42% of Afghanistan's total population. They are followed by Tajiks with 27%, Hazaras with 9%, Uzbeks with 9%, Aimaqs with 4%, Turkmen with 3%, Baluchis with 2% and the remaining 4% of other ethnic groups (Nations, 2022). Some of these ethnicities are specific to Afghanistan and some, such as Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Tajiks, are ethnic groups that exist in neighboring countries and sometimes cause problems for both sides. This does not mean that there is no sense of nationality among the people of Afghanistan, but the existence of inter-ethnic relations in Afghanistan and neighboring countries has become a problem for this country. The formation of the Afghan government by Ahmad Shah Durrani Pashtun in 1747 created a historic and difficult link between the Pashtun power and the people of this country, and since then the country has been continuously ruled by the Pashtuns (Rahimi M. , 2017, p. 15).

The historical roots of the politicization of ethnic disputes in Afghanistan date back to the 1880s and 1900s, when Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, based on ethnic polarizations, formed the central government in the country and led the Pashtuns and

mobilized them against non-Pashtuns (Saikal, 2004, p. 25). With the fall of the Afghan communist government, the country entered a new era of civil war based on ethnicity between 1992 and 1996. Hekmatyar's Islamic Party and Sayyaf's Islamic Unity Party, represent the Pashtun people, the Rabbani, and Ahmad Shah Massoud's Jamaat-e-Islami Party, which represents the Tajiks, the Hazara Unity Party, and the National Movement which represents the Uzbek people were at war with each other (Rashid, 2010, p. 83). One of the tragedies that happened during this war was the killing the people of Kabul in 1996. The civil war ended with the victory of the Taliban but with the rise to power of the Taliban with a Pashtun body, the ethnic conflict started again (Rashid, 1999, p. 24). The US invasion in 2001 and the fall of the Taliban provided a good opportunity for elites from different regions and ethnicities to resolve some of the country's political divisions. As a Pashtun Hamid Karzai was elected the president of Afghanistan, his 30-member cabinet consisted of 11 Pashtuns, eight Tajiks, five Hazaras, three Uzbeks, and three other ethnic minorities. The main problem in the new era was that they tried to resolve ethnic conflicts without trying to eradicate ethnicity (Johnson, 2006, p. 4).

Pakistani Pashtuns are divided into Islamists and nationalists. For nationalist Pashtuns, a sense of belonging to Pakistan is far more important than their ethnic affiliation, but for Islamists, on the contrary, ethnicity plays a key role in their identity, and the Pakistani government continues to use them to achieve its goals in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns of Afghanistan and Pakistan both feel threatened by other ethnic groups, which brings them closer together and sets the stage for security and political problems. Pakistani Pashtuns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have problems with Punjab over water, political participation, language and resources and many Karachi Pashtuns clash with the ethnic immigrant movement over land and job opportunities (Ali and Zafar, 2017, p. 189). In Afghanistan, too, there is a struggle for political power between Pashtuns and other ethnic groups, such as the Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. These issues pave the way for violent ethnic behavior among Pashtuns. Naturally, such behaviors also lead to ethnocentric reactions from other ethnicities. Social life and traditional political thinking in Afghanistan have led them to approach the issue of voting in the traditional way (Abdulloev, 2013, pp. 75-76).

Afghanistan is a country where the process of nation-building has not been fully completed and the government still does not have a complete monopoly of

power and a large part of the people do not prefer national feelings to sub-national interests. One of the most important obstacles to Afghanistan's development is ethnicity. Ethnicity and a set of realities in Afghanistan reproduce each other like the involvement of neighboring countries, the traditional view of the Afghan people on elections, pessimism about youth and reliance on traditional elites, the lack of alternative ethnic ideas to mobilize the people, the abuse of political elites and ethnic parties, and the weakness of the central government. Pakistan supports the Pashtuns in Afghanistan because it thinks it shares a common ideology with these people. Pakistan does not want to India get closer to the Pashtun people because Pakistan's interests are at stake. Efforts to establish an independent state among Pakistani Pashtuns have been strong since its emergence in 1947, and its rulers have always viewed Pashtun and Baloch nationalism and separatism as a vital threat (Majeed, 2010, pp. 58-59).

2. Pakistan's Role in Exerting Influence through the Taliban: Pashtun Ethnicity and Strategic Objectives

Longtime regional ally Pakistan has used the Taliban, a violent organization that seized control of Afghanistan in the 1990s. Pakistan continued to assist the organization despite the fact that it was generally ostracized by the international society due to its violent methods and violations of human rights for its own geopolitical reasons. Pakistan has had ties to the Taliban since the 1990s, when Afghan insurgents helped Pakistani intelligence agency ISI build the organization. Pakistan saw the Taliban as a helpful instrument in their attempts to preserve strategic influence in Afghanistan and counterbalance Indian dominance in the area. Pashtuns are an ethnic group that live on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and make up a significant portion of both nations' populations. Pakistan used a predominantly Pashtun organization to exert influence over Pashtun people on both sides of the border. Their common Pashtun heritage is one of the primary reasons Pakistan backs the Taliban (Saikal, 2010, pp. 9-10).

Historically, Pakistan has struggled to maintain authority over the Pashtun community in its northern provinces. The Pashtuns, the country's second biggest ethnic group, have long felt alienated by the state and have frequently defied central government authority. The Taliban, made up primarily of Pashtuns, offer Pakistan

with a way of exerting control over the Pashtun community in Afghanistan and abroad (Borthakur and Kotokey, 2020, p. 817).

Pakistan has utilized the Taliban to exert control over the Pashtun populace by providing safe havens for this organization in Pakistan's tribal territories. Furthermore, the Taliban have long had cultural and historical links with Pakistan, particularly in Pashtun-populated areas bordering Afghanistan and Pakistan (Harrison, 2008, pp. 1-2). These territories, primarily populated by Pashtuns, have historically been a lawless and ungoverned zone outside of Pakistan's sovereignty. Pakistan has been able to strengthen its influence over the Pashtun community and use this group to further its strategic goals by allowing the Taliban to operate freely in these regions. Pakistan's use of the Taliban to govern its Pashtun populace has been a key component of the country's regional strategy (Weinbaum and Harder, 2008, p. 26).

Pakistan was able to increase its influence over the Pashtun population and keep some control over the organization's operations by funding the group (Oztig, 2020, pp. 215-216). However, this policy has resulted to greater regional instability and bloodshed, as well as growing tensions between Pakistan and its neighbors. Pashtuns have long felt marginalized and discriminated against by the government and the majority Punjabi elites. This has contributed to the rise of militant organizations and insurgencies in the region, as well as a sense of anger and alienation. The Taliban have long supported Pakistan's efforts to challenge Indian hegemony in Afghanistan, as a result, Pakistan has found the Taliban a useful ally in its efforts to govern Pashtun-dominated areas and maintain its strategic interests in the region. In Pakistan, Pashtun-dominated areas have long been plagued by insecurity and violence, notably in the northwestern province known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Federal Tribal Areas (FATA) (Humayun, 2011, pp. 7-8).

Pashtuns are the most populous ethnic group in Afghanistan, and they are also found in Pakistan's northwestern regions, notably in the FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Historically, the Taliban have attracted support from Pashtun tribes in these regions who have felt alienated by the central government and have resorted to the Taliban as a means of gaining more political and economic autonomy. The Taliban's philosophy is heavily entrenched in Pashtunwali, the Pashtun people's traditional tribal code (Hawkins, 2009, p. 17).

The Pashtunwali values dignity, hospitality, and vengeance, and the Taliban's interpretation of these precepts have influenced their approach to government and conflict resolution. As a result, the Taliban were able to acquire support among Pashtun people in Afghanistan and Pakistan by using Pashtun cultural and social traditions (Hawkins, 2009, p. 16).

However, not all Pashtuns support the Taliban, and many have been victims of the Taliban's brutality and tyranny. The Taliban's indiscriminate targeting of people, along with its rigid interpretation of Islamic law, has resulted in numerous human rights violations, especially against women and minority groups. The Taliban as a weapon is to keep its Pashtun people under control. Pakistan has always battled to maintain control over its historically marginalized and disenfranchised Pashtun minority. By supporting the Taliban, Pakistan hopes to gain the support of Pashtuns in Afghanistan and within its borders. Pakistan may continue to exert some control over the Pashtun population in Afghanistan by aiding the Taliban. In both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Pashtun ethnic group is the dominant one, and it is from this group that the Taliban receive the majority of their support (Yousaf, 2019, pp. 1-2).

3. Durand Line and Pakistan

Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, who was the king of Afghanistan from 1880 to 1901 (Kakar H. , 2011, p. 258), has a different record in various fields. Generally, he has positive records in the field of security, trade, and industry but in the fields of culture, education, administrative organization, and foreign relations he did not have a good record. Although there is much disagreement among Afghan historians about the deeds of Abdul Rahman Khan, almost all historians agree that he was a tyrannical ruler who ruled Afghanistan vigilantly for twenty-one years (Kakar, 2011, pp. 14-17). Amir Abdul Rahman Khan left a legacy for Afghanistan. One of his legacies is the Durand Line which has had a devastating effect on the situation in Afghanistan since its conclusion. Amir Abdul Rahman signed the Durand Line in 1893 with Sir Mortimer Durand, a British diplomat (Lambah, 2012, p. 45). The Durand Treaty is a supplement to the infamous Treaty of Gandamak, which was signed in 1879 by Amir Mohammad Yaqub Khan with Britain (Lambah, 2012, pp. 43-44).

Both the treaty of Gandamak and the treaty of Durand were to the detriment of Afghanistan and separated parts of Afghanistan from its body. With the signing of the Durand Line, Afghanistan officially lost very important areas such as Kurram, Swat, Chagia, Bajaur, Waziristan, Khyber Valley, Chitral (Sahak, 2021). By signing this treaty, Amir Abdul Rahman Khan sacrificed Afghanistan for his interests and his personal throne. The Amir ratified this treaty to continue his absolute monarchy. After the death of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, his son Amir Habibullah Khan took over the affairs of Afghanistan and became the king of the country. Like his father, he reigned in this land for eighteen years with the help of Britain. To continue his political life, he, like his father, recognized the Durand Line (Qassem and Durand, 2008, pp. 90-91). In 1904, Amir Habibullah Khan signed a Treaty with Britain and in this treaty; Amir Habibullah Khan formally accepted all treaties, including the Durand Line and his father's commitments to Britain, so that the British government could support him (Qassem and Durand, 2008, p. 40). After Amir Habibullah Khan, Shah Amanullah Khan also accepted the treaty in 1921, so that Britain would recognize Afghanistan's independence (Qassem and Durand, 2008, p. 93).

For the first time during the short reign of Shah Shuja, in the mid-19th century, the Lahore Tripartite Treaty 1838 was signed between Shah Shuja and Sir William Macnaghten, the representative of the East India Company, and Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh leader, with which parts of Afghanistan, including Peshawar was separated from Afghanistan (Singh and Waraich, 2020, p. 5). However, these objections have always been in the context of emotional and motivational rhetoric and have not taken any practical action. During the government of Sardar Mohammad Daud Khan, the Afghan army was ordered to be ready to move to the border with Pakistan, which was not implemented. Mohammad Daud Khan was the first Afghan president to oppose the Durand Line as the official border between the two countries, stressing the need for people across the line to join Afghanistan, which led to tensions and even the risk of conflict between the two countries at the time (Mukerjee, 1975, p. 307).

The fact is that the Durand Line has been ratified several times by several Afghan kings and rulers. Because of their continued political power, they accepted the treaty and preferred their individual interests to collective and national interests (Qassem and Durand, 2008, p. 94). Some members of the House of Representatives

believe that the Durand Line is still a point of contention and should be resolved through legal channels and international courts. Other delegates see the Durand Line as a red line, emphasizing that no individual or group has the right to decide on Durand and that it is the right of people on both sides of the line to join Pakistan or Afghanistan. The third faction, including the Afghan National Assembly, including Latif Pedram, considers the Durand Line to be the official border between the country and Pakistan and considers it a finished issue (Khan, 2021, p. 136). The Afghan tribal assembly (Loya Jirga) canceling the Durand Line agreement as an international border with Pakistan, many believe that the only structure that can decide again is the Loya Jirga because the decisions of this traditional parliament in Afghanistan have the support of all ethnic, political, and religious groups and individuals (Poya, 2020, p. 238).

However, the Pakistani government has considered three ways to pave the way for the Afghan government to accept the hypothetical Durand Line as an international border. The first is through US pressure on the Afghan government, the second is condition on its cooperation with the Kabul government to identify it, and the third is the construction of barbed wire and walls along the Durand Line (Koehler, Rasool, and Ibrahimkhel, 2021, p. 5). During the presidencies of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, under the agreements reached, Pakistan, with the support of the UN and the US, fenced off most areas under the pretext of controlling the borders and countering the movement of terrorists, wired and created passport control (Sarwat and Ahmad, 2019, p. 37).

However, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan cannot be reduced to the Durand Line. Pakistan's political hegemony dictates that Afghanistan must have a government that obeys Pakistan. In the regional process, Pakistan wants a government in Afghanistan that is more pro-Pakistan than India and considers India a common enemy (Hussain, Bukhari, and Safdar, 2020, p. 1217). On the other hand, the pristine markets of Central Asia and the vast energy resources in these countries attract Pakistan, and its need for Central Asian energy resources forces it to take control of Afghanistan as a way to achieve Central Asian markets (Rubin and Armstrong, 2003, pp. 37-39). This issue was quite openly raised by General Zia-ul-Haq during his rule over Pakistan by his military advisers, who defined Afghanistan as Pakistan's strategic depth (Hussain, 2002, p. 44).

4. Pakistan's Economic Goals in the Region

Pakistan wants to bring in foreign capital to help the nation's economy flourish. The government has created a number of laws and incentives for foreign investment in order to accomplish bringing in foreign capital. Pakistan is concentrating on enhancing its infrastructure, which includes telecommunications, electricity, and transportation (Youssaf and Erum, 2018, p. 550). To increase commerce within the region, Pakistan works to increase trade with its neighbors, especially China and India, as well as with other nations in the area (Khan, Changgang, Ahmad, and Wenhao, 2018, p. 598).

Pakistan is eager to develop cross-border commerce with Afghanistan since that country serves as a significant market for Pakistani goods and services (Tribune, 2021). One of Pakistan's economic objectives is to cooperate with the Taliban in order to guarantee that the refugee problem is adequately handled and does not put a drain on Pakistan's resources. Pakistan is particularly worried about the potential economic and social effects of the refugee movement from Afghanistan to Pakistan (Shahab Ahmed, 2022, p. 128). This is significant since Afghanistan is a significant export market for goods and services from Pakistan, particularly in the textile, agricultural, and construction industries (Rahimi and Artukoglu, 2021, p. 104).

Maintaining regional economic cooperation is something Pakistan is also interested in doing, particularly with China, India, and other nearby nations. This is significant because regional cooperation may promote commerce, investment, and prospects for economic growth and job creation. While managing the numerous economic and security threats brought on by the Taliban, Pakistan will need to cooperate economic relations continue to expand and flourish (Altaf, Zahid, and Abbas, 2022, p. 53).

Pakistan has several interests in Afghanistan that are of strategic importance. First off, it serves as a point of entry to Central Asia, a region with abundant energy resources (Imran, Mustafa, and Bhatti, 2020, pp. 792-793). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which connects Pakistan and Afghanistan directly, also connects Pakistan and China (Akber, 2016, p. 3). Thirdly, Pakistan's security may be affected by Afghanistan's instability since it serves as a crucial security buffer between Pakistan and India (Borthakur, 2017, p. 489).

Pakistan's Economic Objectives in Central Asia, which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, is crucial to Pakistan's economy. It is an area rich in natural resources, such as oil, gas, and minerals, and it provides tremendous prospects for economic growth and development. Pakistan sees Central Asia as a doorway to new trade routes, energy corridors, and investment possibilities, and has been aggressively attempting to enhance its economic engagement with the region. In addition, oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia travel through Afghanistan, which is a key transit country for energy resources. Working with the Taliban to protect these energy reserves and guarantee their continued flow through the area is Pakistan's economic objective (Farid, Shaharyar, and Shabbir, 2021, p. 626)

The CPEC, a multibillion-dollar infrastructure project aimed at connecting China's western Xinjiang province to Pakistan's Gwadar port, is a primary driver of Pakistan's economic strategy in Central Asia (Rahman and Shurong, 2017, p. 3). The CPEC is also projected to deliver considerable economic advantages to Pakistan, like as more employment opportunities, higher investment, and enhanced infrastructure (Muhammad, Mi, Rafiq, and Ali, 2019, p. 43). While Central Asia offers numerous prospects for economic growth and development, it also faces a number of problems. The region's landlocked nature is one of the region's primary obstacles, making transportation and logistics more complex and expensive. Another issue is the region's political insecurity, with certain nations undergoing wars, coups, and other types of insecurity. Another difficulty is competing with other regional players. China, in particular, is attempting to create commercial links with Central Asia through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Other countries with commercial interests in the region include Russia and Turkey. This rivalry may make Pakistan's economic aspirations in Central Asia more difficult to realize. Pakistan's economic goals in Afghanistan are intricately linked to its goals in Central Asia. Afghanistan is a gateway to Central Asia with great economic and development possibilities (Khan, 2009, p. 8).

5. Pakistan's Help to Change the Taliban's Image

In the 1990s, Pakistan was one of three countries that recognized the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan and provided vital assistance to the

organization while in power (Malejacq, 2017, p. 877). After the September 11 attacks, the US launched a military operation in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban and destroy Al Qaeda (Ismail, 2021, p. 9).

A six-member committee of senior scholars be formed to investigate the reasons for the Taliban's defeat and to address suspicions about the Taliban's actions and behavior, known as the Quetta Shura, after the September 11, the establishment of the Quetta Shura was one of the policies to change the Taliban's image in the region (Magnus, p. 113). The Quetta Shura was formed under the leadership of Mullah Omar, based in Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's Balochistan province (Franco and Giustozzi, 2016, p. 253). Regarding the Afghan government's peace talks with the Taliban, the Quetta Shura was a key player in the talks due to its political legitimacy and high influence among the Taliban (Dressler and Forsberg, 2009, p. 6).

With the fall of the Taliban, the formation of a new group of Taliban and moderate Pashtuns came to the attention of the then Pakistani government led by Pervez Musharraf and the US which was politically pro-Western and ideologically pro-Taliban (Ahmed, 2001, p. 87). Mullah Mohammad Khaksar, the deputy interior minister of the Taliban government, was assassinated for criticizing the Taliban and supporting the Karzai government (Witte, 2006).

With the announcement of Mullah Omar's death after three years of secrecy, in 2015, new divisions arose among the Taliban (Byrne, Khan, and Krzyzaniak, 2015, p. 2). In the first step, Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansour, who was aware of Mullah Omar's death and published letters signed by Mullah Omar and the Taliban with his signature, as Mullah Omar's deputy and spokesman, was the first to take over the Taliban leadership (Ruttig, 2015, p. 5). After hours of debate with the Taliban leadership council, he was able to defeat his main rival, Mawlawi Yaqub, the eldest son of Mullah Omar, and then shown through pictures and videos that a large number of Taliban had officially pledged allegiance to him as the new Taliban leader (Qazi, 2015).

A group called the 'Islami Tehreek-e-Fadaei' of the Taliban, which was formed many years ago, issued a statement in 2015, declaring independence and openly opposing the leadership of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, The group stressed that it would continue to fight the Afghan government independently (Hughes, 2015). In 2015, another important split was created by some members of the Quetta Shura,

during which a new group led by Mawlawi Rasool, Mullah Baz Mohammad Harith, Mullah Mansour Dadullah, Mullah Shir Mohammad Akhundzadeh and Mullah Abdul Manan announced the need for a split (Giustozzi, 2017, p. 17) give priority to qualified people and the main Mujahideen, and leave out the incompetent people (Ahmad, 2015).

Following the assassination of Mullah Akhtar Mansour on June 1, 2016, a Taliban spokesman issued a statement identifying Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzadeh as the new leader of the Afghan Taliban and appointing Mullah Mohammad Yaqub and Sirajuddin Haqqani as his deputies (Kriti, 2016, p. 3). Islamic communities and Muslim mullahs across Pakistan are campaigning to support the Taliban in Afghanistan and raise funds for the group (Judah, 2002, pp. 76-78). The Taliban operate freely in various parts of Pakistan, especially in Quetta (Riedel, 2008, p. 38). Pakistan has not only provided safe haven for Taliban leaders, but also provided medical care to the group's fighters, supported their families and used them as leverage (Riedel, 2008, p. 33). Pakistan has previously said it has used its ties to the Taliban to facilitate the insurgent group's talks with the US and, more recently, the Afghan government. There is widespread support for the Taliban in Pakistan, and Pakistani citizens have been volunteering fighters for the Taliban for many years (Williams, 2011, p. 217).

IV. REGIONAL FACTORS AND GLOBAL FACTORS FOR PAKISTAN TO SUPPORT THE TALIBAN

A. Regional Factors to Support the Taliban

The regional factors influencing Pakistan's support for the Taliban, with a focus on India and Iran. The historical relationship between India and the Taliban back in the 1990s is explored. India's military aid to the Northern Alliance and its suspicions that the Taliban is Pakistan's proxy underscore the current complex regional dynamics. Cooperative and competitive aspects of Pakistan's ties with Iran, examining their cooperation in the fields of trade, energy and counter-terrorism within the framework of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Despite cultural and historical ties, Iran sees the Taliban as a destabilizing force in the region, raising concerns about Pakistan's alleged support.

1. India

The Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan has brought to light India's earlier worries about the organization (Firdous, Nazir, and M. Al, 2015, p. 211). Since the Taliban initially became a major political force in Afghanistan in the 1990s, India and the Taliban have had a troubled and protracted relationship. India provided military assistance and training to the Northern Alliance, a coalition of Afghan anti-Taliban troops, in the 1990s (Fair, 2010, p. 11).

Following the 9/11 attacks, which resulted in the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and the overthrow of the Taliban government, India's worries about the Taliban only deepened. India applauded the action, considering it as a step towards improved regional security and stability. However, in the years that followed, India's dreams of a secure and democratic Afghanistan were crushed. India kept expressing its worries about the Taliban's ties to terrorist groups and their backing for anti-Indian militants (Mashal, 2019). India has grown more concerned about the Taliban in recent years as the organization has expanded its influence in Afghanistan and

taken over important cities and towns. The Taliban's backing from Pakistan has also drawn criticism from India, which charges Pakistan with giving the organization safe havens, training, and access to weapons (Kaura, 2017, p. 38).

The Taliban's tight links to Pakistan have long raised India's suspicions, and many Indian authorities think the organization is essentially acting as a stand-in for the Pakistani government. India has this opinion for a number of reasons. First, Pakistan was one of the few nations to acknowledge the Taliban government in the 1990s, lending the party both diplomatic and military assistance. Pakistan sought to utilize the Taliban to further its objectives in Afghanistan by viewing the organization as a viable partner in its geopolitical conflict with India (Ahmed N. , 2012, p. 97).

Second, many of the Taliban's commanders and combatants received their training in Pakistan and have strong contacts with the military and intelligence services of Pakistan (Jaffrelot, 2002, p. 92). India interprets this as proof of Pakistan's ongoing backing for the organization.

Finally, Pakistan's participation in supporting negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government has drawn criticism from India (Ali, 2022, p. 507). Based on a number of factors, including Pakistan's historical support for the Taliban, the Taliban's close ties to Pakistan's military and intelligence services, and Pakistan's broader strategy of using militant proxies to further its interests in the region, India believes that the Taliban is effectively a proxy of Pakistan (Verma and Schaffer, 2010, pp. 1-3).

India and Pakistan have a long history of war and tension, with Pakistan viewing India as its main strategic foe in the area (Malik, 2019, p. 75). In its geopolitical rivalry with India, Pakistan sees the Taliban as a valuable tool because it can be used to undermine Indian influence in Afghanistan and to sow unrest along India's western border (Hussain, 2007, p. 30). The majority of the Taliban's commanders and warriors received their education at Pakistani madrasas, and when the group ruled Afghanistan, Pakistan supported it diplomatically and militarily (Roy, 2004, pp. 154-155). In addition, the military and intelligence services of Pakistan have long been influenced by Islamist philosophy, and many authorities see the Taliban as a comrade in arms (Behuria, 2007, p. 706). Pakistan aspires to gain

more sway in Afghanistan and establish a friendly government that will act as a barrier against Indian intrusion by aiding the Taliban (Milani, 2010, p. 2).

India has played an important role in Afghanistan's growth by investing extensively in infrastructure projects and assisting the Afghan government (Ashraf, 2007, p. 95). India's expanding influence in Afghanistan has long caused Pakistan to worry since it threatens its regional security interests (Ganguly and Howenstein, 2009, p. 134). India and Pakistan have a long history of hostility and war, with Pakistan viewing India as its main strategic opponent in the area. By increasing influence in Afghanistan and using it as a base to sow trouble in Pakistan's Baluchistan region, India, according to Pakistan, is attempting to surround that country. Since the division of British India in 1947, there has been hostility between India and Pakistan (Ahmed I. , 2002, p. 9).

Afghanistan is well situated at the meeting point of South and Central Asia, and in recent years, its significance as a regional center has only grown. Pakistan is concerned that Indian involvement in Afghanistan may increase India's access to Central Asian markets and energy resources, undermining Pakistan's own strategic position in the area (Blank, 2003, p. 142).

Finally, Pakistan sees its assistance for the Taliban as a way to counterbalance India's influence in Afghanistan (Parkes, 2019, p. 257). The Pakistan-India relationship has been marred by a variety of other issues, such as commercial disputes, border conflicts, and diplomatic difficulties. Both governments accused each other of terrorism and devastation (Hashim, 2016), and they embarked in a series of espionage operations against each other (Jain, 2020). After a terrorist incident in Indian-administered Kashmir in 2019, India conducted airstrikes on what it claimed were terrorist training sites in Pakistan (Bukhari, 2019).

India voiced worry that the Taliban government will lead to an upsurge in terrorist activity in the area, particularly against India. India has also voiced alarm over the Taliban's links to Pakistan, with some officials accusing Pakistan of facilitating the group's rise to power in 1990s. In Pakistan's relations with India, the situation in Afghanistan provides both possibilities and problems. The Taliban's ascension to power might be interpreted as a success for Pakistan, which has long tried to preserve its influence in Afghanistan. The Taliban's reappearance may provide up new economic prospects for Pakistan, particularly in commerce and oil.

Afghanistan's latest changes, notably the Taliban's takeover, have added a new degree of complication to an already tense relationship. Pakistan-India ties have long been difficult, with a history of territorial conflicts and continuing tensions (Ganguly and Bajpai, 1994, p. 402).

2. Iran

Over the years, Pakistan's ties with Iran have been characterized by both collaboration and rivalry. Pakistan and Iran have cooperated on a number of fronts, including trade, energy, and counterterrorism. Both nations have sought to promote regional economic integration and are members of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) (Mujahid, 2015, p. 14032). Iran has attempted to develop economic relations with Afghanistan and has participated in a number of measures to support peace and stability there (Milani, 2010, p. 2).

Despite the fact that the two nations had similar cultural, linguistic, and historical links, there were also notable distinctions between them in terms of regional politics and security. Iran sees the Taliban as a regional destabilizing factor because of the complex role they have played in Pakistan and Iran's ties. Iran voiced worry about the actions of the organization on its borders and accused Pakistan of aiding the Taliban and other regional terrorist organizations (Rashid, 1999, p. 24).

Iran criticizes Pakistan's approach to the Taliban and views the Taliban as a destabilizing force in the region and has expressed concern over the group's extremist ideology and violence (Durrani, 2022, p. 13). The Taliban and other regional extremist organizations are supported by Pakistan, according to Iran, which it views as a breach of its sovereignty and a danger to its security. The Taliban has ties to a number of terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. Iran, which has its own terrorist problems, views the Taliban's ties to these organizations as a direct threat to its national security.

The Taliban oppose Iran's strategic goals in Afghanistan for various reasons. First of all, Iran is a Shiite Muslim nation while the Taliban is an extremist Sunni organization. Iran and Shiite Muslims in Afghanistan have long been targets of the Taliban. Second, Iran is not interested in the Taliban's policies on cross-border terrorism and drug trafficking. Iran has suffered because of the Taliban's involvement in drug trafficking in Afghanistan. Pakistan perceives as a deliberate effort to reduce

Iran's influence in the area, the two countries have long-standing disputes. Iran has had its own problems with Sunni extremist groups and is particularly vulnerable to the threat posed by groups like the Taliban (Barzegar, 2014, p. 124).

Iran is concerned about Afghanistan's stability and sees the Taliban as a possible impediment to its aspirations to create economic and political connections with Afghanistan. Iran has a strong stake in the stability and development of Afghanistan. The nation has a long border with Afghanistan and has worked to foster peace and economic growth in the country. Iran has participated in many measures to support peace and stability in Afghanistan, as well as efforts to create economic relations with the nation (Mustafa, Ahmed, and Junaid, 2020, p. 428). While both nations have cultural and linguistic bonds, disagreements over regional politics and security problems have resulted in a complicated and sometimes contentious relationship.

The Taliban has a history of targeting Iran, including a series of bombings in 1998 that killed numerous Iranian diplomats and officials. These attacks fueled mutual suspicion and hatred between the two countries. Iran has previously been the subject of Taliban attacks, most notably in 1998, when a series of explosives killed a large number of Iranian diplomats and officials (Rashid, 1999, p. 30). The Taliban's radical ideology, history of violence and terrorism, and influence on regional peace and security, Iran sees the organization as a destabilizing factor in the area. Iran chastised Pakistan for its Taliban assistance and attempted to offset Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan with its own diplomatic and economic endeavors. Strategically and economically, Iran is interested in Afghanistan's stability. Iran has a long border with Afghanistan and has long been active in efforts to enhance the country's stability and development (Milani, 2006, p. 241).

The Taliban's resistance to Iran's strategic goals in Afghanistan stems primarily from ideological and geopolitical considerations. The Taliban is a Sunni Islamist organization with historical connections to Iran's regional adversary Pakistan. Iran accused Pakistan of providing material and financial assistance to the Taliban as well as allowing them to use Pakistani territory as a safe haven (Barzegar, 2014, pp. 129-130).

Moreover, Afghanistan has the potential to be a major trading partner for Iran, particularly in energy, transportation, and construction. Iran has participated in

a number of efforts aimed at encouraging Afghan economic growth, including investments in infrastructure projects such as roads and railroads. Iran has been a participant in international attempts to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan, including the Moscow format and Doha peace negotiations. Iran also assisted Afghanistan with economic and humanitarian assistance, including electricity, transportation, and infrastructure projects. Iran has made significant financial investments in Afghanistan's infrastructure, notably in the field of electricity (Mustafa, Ahmed, and Junaid, 2020, p. 428).

Iran views Afghan stability as critical to its national security interests, particularly in respect to drug trafficking and the danger of terrorism. Pakistan has come under fire from Iran for not doing enough to halt the flow of narcotics coming from Afghanistan. One of the primary transit countries for narcotics coming from Afghanistan is Iran, and this drug flow has greatly contributed to Iran's own drug issue. Iran is also concerned that an upsurge in drug trafficking from Afghanistan may result from the Taliban regaining control and Iran already has a significant drug issue, and the major cause of unrest there is drug trafficking (Tellis and Mukharji, 2010, p. 103).

Iran has always had an interest in Afghanistan due to their shared border, cultural, and historical links (Kutty, 2014, pp. 140-142). In addition, Iran has a large Afghan refugee population and has helped to regulate the refugee influx from Afghanistan. The government has participated in measures aimed at facilitating the safe return and reintegration of Afghan refugees. Iran is also attempting to keep its hold on Afghanistan, particularly with the Hazara Shiite group, which has ties to Iran both religiously and culturally (Milani M. , 2006, p. 238). The Taliban's treatment of the Hazara Shiite community in Afghanistan worries Iran and the Hazara community has faced discrimination and persecution under Taliban rule in the past, and Iran fears this could happen again (Solhdoost and Pargoo, 2022, p. 147).

Iran is also concerned that the Taliban's ascent to power will promote the spread of extreme ideas throughout the region, especially among the Sunni population. Given the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan, Iran is worried about the security situation along its eastern borders (Barzegar, 2014, p. 126).

B. Global Factors to Support the Taliban

Global factors influencing Pakistan's support for the Taliban highlight the significant role played by the 9/11 attacks and Pakistan's involvement in the 'War on Terror'. To investigate the impact of the counter-terrorism strategy on local and regional alliances, to reveal the dissatisfaction and resistance it has created in Pakistan. The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban has undergone significant changes after 9/11; This led to the emergence of new extremist groups and a complex network of resistance against the central government. The dynamics of Russia's relationship with the Taliban are shaped by shifting alliances and geopolitical concerns. Russia's concerns about the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic law and potential instability spreading across Central Asia are examined. Additionally, this chapter explores China's relationship with the Taliban, which includes diplomatic meetings, military agreements, and economic cooperation spanning from the mid-1990s to 2021. The global factors shaping Pakistan's support for the Taliban underscore the multifaceted nature of international relations in the context of Afghanistan and its impact on regional stability.

1. September 11 Attacks and Pakistan's Role in the 'War on Terror'

After the events of September 11, 2001, bin Laden and the Taliban were accused of being terrorists and the US took the lead in the fight against terrorism and called for a global coalition against it (Margulies, 2003, p. 4). Meanwhile, Pakistan received the attention of the US more than any other country. In such a way the US asked General Musharraf, the then-President of Pakistan, to join this coalition. By accepting this request, Musharraf joined the united front of the US against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. During this war, although the Taliban regime fell in Afghanistan, but their activities continued so that in the current situation, the land of Pakistan has become extremely insecure due to the Taliban groups (Saikal, 2006, pp. 135-136).

The presence of the Pashtun region between Pakistan and Afghanistan as the main area of activity of the Taliban has increased the intensity of the developments in this country. Pakistan is known as the birthplace of the Taliban's ideology and is considered in political circles as a partner of the US in the fight against terrorism (Rashid, 1999, p. 27). Pakistan's cooperation with the US in the fight against

terrorism (Hadar, 2002, p. 1), which has now been manifested in the confrontation with the Pakistani Taliban, has drawn the attention of political observers to this country. This cooperation has caused the Pakistani Taliban to confront Pakistan and make this country insecure. The joint strategy of the US and Pakistan in the fight against terrorism after the events of September 11 caused a serious change in the local and regional military alliances, whereby the geographical area of the Taliban in the low-intensity war zone and the war with the US and Pakistan increased and Pakistan's internal insecurity was caused by the Taliban (Fani, 2009, pp. 147-148).

With the beginning of the US attack on Afghanistan, the political, military, and security strategy of the US in Pakistan was established in line with the goals of the US in Afghanistan and accordance with it. The existence and nature of Pakistan are considered as a threatening factor, a manifestation of Talibanism, and a negative mentality behind the curtain of these strategies is visible. Therefore, the key points of the US military security strategy after the events of September 11 in Pakistan are as follows:

- South Asia has caused global tremors in terms of security and will probably continue to do so in the future. Currently, Pakistan has become the geopolitics of terrorism in the region, and as long as this threat persists, the presence and control of the US will continue (Luqman, Syed, and Martin, 2014, pp. 210-211).
- Dealing with Talibanism and preventing the Talibanization of Pakistan (Masqood, 2011, pp. 28-29).
- Pakistan must either cooperate with the US to fight terrorism in all its dimensions or bear the direct and indirect military pressure of the US (Zahid, 2008, pp. 36-37).

The terrorist attack of 9/11 and the US decision to punish the perpetrators of these events and revealing the connection of a number of people with Pakistani nationality, including Khaled al-Sheikh Mohammad, General Mahmood Ahmed, Omar Sheikh Saeed with terrorists, the government of Pakistan faced the ultimatum in order to cooperate with US for anti-terrorist cooperation with this country (Komerath, 2002).

On September 15, 2001, George Bush officially identified Osama bin Laden as the perpetrator of this terrorist attack and said that it is time to bring the terrorists

out of their nests and bring them to justice. After bin Laden was announced as the main suspect in the 9/11 attacks, the US began a massive operation on both the military and political fronts, gaining global support and solidarity. However, what was important for the US in the military attack on Afghanistan was the cooperation of the opposition front of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Menon, 2003, p. 194) and more importantly the alignment of the Pakistani government as the main supporter of the Taliban in the fight against terrorism (Menon, 2003, p. 196). By choosing this option, Musharraf decided to cooperate with the US in the anti-terrorism coalition. After Musharraf's decision, the US mentioned Pakistan as a bridge for military operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and in this regard prioritized its foreign policy in relations with Pakistan, which was sanctioned due to nuclear testing and military rule and US abolished all the sanctions and supported this country (Tellis A. , 2008, p. 3).

Hence, the events of 9/11 and the developments that followed led to improved US-Pakistani relations, such that Pakistan was dubbed a 'non-NATO ally of the US' in this struggle, the fight against terrorism (Saikal, 2010, p. 15). By adopting the strategy of alliance with the US in the Afghanistan project, the Pakistan authorities were able to end the amount of sanctions imposed on Pakistan (Mahapatra, 2006, p. 84). In line with the strategy of combating terrorism, General Musharraf announced the banning of some religious organizations and ordered the closure of some religious schools that were training places for extremist groups. He also banned the collection of donations from various organizations to fund the so-called jihadist groups and announced that he would deal decisively with any person, group or organization involved in domestic or foreign terrorism and no organization would be allowed to commit terrorist acts. The value of the US economic and financial aid to Pakistan in terms of Pakistan's cooperation with Washington from 2001 to 2008 reaches a figure of about 19 billion dollars, which was very vital to strengthen the economic and military status of the Pakistani government (Epstein, Susan B, and Kronstadt, 2013).

The government of Pakistan had already given the green light to the US for cooperation. As soon as the US war in Afghanistan started, Musharraf dismissed ISI chief Mahmood Ahmad, who was one of the main supporters of the Taliban, and appointed Lt. Gen. Ehsan-ul-Haq, who was more in line with his views, in his place (Roy Chaudhury, 2003, p. 279). However, there were doubts about the sincerity of

the ISI in the war against terrorism. These doubts were strengthened when Abdul Haq, one of the commanders of the anti-Taliban coalition and one of the key elements of the CIA's war of attrition strategy against the Taliban, was captured and executed by the Taliban (Williams, 2010, p. 873).

The close relations of Pakistan's intelligence and security organizations with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda gave the US the possibility to use the information of this organization to deal major blows to the Taliban. After September 11, cooperation between the two organizations has become stronger (Khan, 2013, p. 47). Pakistan's security and intelligence forces, in cooperation with the US intelligence agency, have succeeded in arresting several members of the Taliban, including Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Mullah Omar's deputy. The governor of Kunduz in the previous government of the Taliban, Mullah Abdul Salam, one of the commanders of the Taliban militants in Afghanistan, and the death of Mohammed Haqqani, the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, in North Waziristan during the US missile attack were reflected in the media more than others (Ruttig, 2009, pp. 5-7).

Pakistan's decisive decision to stand with the US against terrorism due to the fear of the US and US economic incentives made this country a key ally of the US after September 11. Musharraf even provided several air bases in the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan, including Shamsi Base, Dalbandin Base, and Shahbaz Base, to be used to attack the Taliban regime (Hussain, 2008, p. 43). In addition to being stationed at the above air bases, the US military forces also use the ports of Karachi. The framework of Pakistan-US relations was formed during the presidency of Pervez Musharraf (2001-2008) in the framework of the 'strategic alliance' model, taking into account the developments in Afghanistan but on the day after the victory of Asif Ali Zardari as the legal president of Pakistan from the People's Party on September 9, 2008 the framework of the 'strategic alliance' model became more limited and became Pakistan and the US; a conditional strategic ally; Because the US made the continuation of cooperation and interaction with Pakistan conditional on obtaining permission from Pakistan to attack the tribal areas in the north and west of that country (Jan, 2010, p. 249).

After the resignation of General Musharraf from the presidency, the pressure of pro-Taliban groups and parties in Pakistan on the new government intensified. They asked the new government to end Musharraf's way and stop the war against the

Taliban and al-Qaeda. However, the new government of Pakistan actively participated in the coalition against terrorism. In order to fight terrorism, the new government of Pakistan sent its military units to the border areas and carried out several operations against the Taliban in its border areas with Afghanistan. In October 2008, the Pakistani government equipped and armed anti-Taliban military forces in the northern regions of the country (Katzman and Kronstadt, 2008, p. 12). Hence, after 9/11, a security intelligence delegation from the US went to Pakistan to discuss the intelligence and military needs of the US. CIA analysts and experts believed that ISI is the most important organization with deep and continuous involvement in Afghanistan, which can help the US in the war with the Taliban and attack the Al-Qaeda network (Coll, 2005, pp. 63-64).

With the inauguration of Barack Obama, the nature and core of his strategy in South Asia were announced as the victory of the counter-terrorism strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. When the US did not achieve their goals in the region, they concluded that they should design a new strategy for the region. The new strategy did not start when Obama came, but the US had designed it before Obama entered the White House. General Petraeus, the main commander of the US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, two weeks before the presidential election of the US, by visiting this country, opened the work of Afghanistan and raised this issue (Ahmad I. , 2010, p. 196). As a result of this change of attitude, the new US strategy called AFGPAK was announced by Barack Obama on March 27, 2009. This strategy has the following basic clauses.

- The main problem is in Pakistan, so Al-Qaeda and its affiliated networks must be destroyed in Pakistan (Ahmad I. , 2010, p. 204).
- The military forces of the US and the coalition should be strengthened and new forces should be sent to the region (Ahmad I. , 2010, p. 194).
- Increasing the number of troops required by the Afghan army to 134,000 and the police to 82,000 (Mahapatra D. , 2009, p. 1004).
- Trying to separate the moderate forces from the radical forces and negotiate with them (Ahmad I. , 2010, p. 194).
- Strengthening political mechanisms and helping to strengthen Afghan civil institutions (Ahmad, 2010, p. 195).

- Government reforms in Afghanistan and the fight against corruption in the government (Fair, 2010, p. 4).
- Developing regional cooperation and attracting the cooperation of regional countries to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan (Ahmad, 2010, p. 206).

In December 2007, the Pakistani Taliban completely destroyed trucks in Pakistan with more than 5 attacks on trucks carrying US and NATO equipment. Moreover, in 2008, there were more than 25 attacks on NATO fuel tankers (Katzman and Kronstadt, 2008, p. 5). Therefore, the US and Pakistan have acted in a united front against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda during the Obama and Zardari era, in such a way that even the US attacks on Pakistan's tribal areas have reached their peak during this period. These attacks took place in the Sarhad and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan, they have targeted Pakistan Tribal areas (Cole J. , 2009, p. 240).

2. The impact of the War against Terrorism Strategy on Local and Regional Alliances and Coalitions

After the attacks of 9/11 the US formed the 'Anti-Terrorism Front' under the leadership of the American government as a result, the 'Radicalism and Terrorism Front' was introduced under the leadership of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The basic step and infrastructure of creating two opposing fronts were formed. This policy had important consequences for US foreign policy and brought heavy costs to allied countries in the fight against terrorism, of which Pakistan is a clear example. Pakistan's entry into the anti-terrorism coalition and acting in line with the US strategy brought severe dissatisfaction, which was shown by the Taliban's uprising against the central government. The actions of the government of Pakistan and good relations with the US in line with the strategy of the US in the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda led to the formation of a wide range of centers of resistance against Pakistan.

Pakistan's backing for the Taliban has heightened relations with the US and other Western nations, which regard the organization as a serious danger to world security. Due to this, many nations have an unfavorable perception of Pakistan, which has had an adverse effect on its economy and standing internationally. In addition, Pakistan's support for the Taliban has strained relations with other countries, particularly the US. Pakistan's relations with the US worsened and aid to

Pakistan was suspended when the US accused Pakistan of harboring terrorists and supporting the Taliban (Khan S. , 2018, pp. 1-2).

Central Asia Online, quoting sources from the Pakistani Taliban, announced that five Pakistani militant groups joined the Pakistani Taliban movement to counter the attacks of the US Army and the Pakistani Army in the tribal areas, and now continue to work under the umbrella of the Pakistani Taliban movement. The spokesman of the Pakistani Taliban also confirmed that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah Sahaba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Mujahideen movement and Ansar movement have joined the Pakistani Taliban movement and formed a united military front (Siddique, 2010, pp. 25-27).

However, the actions of the US and Pakistan and their other allies after the events of September 11 in the Afghanistan war caused this movement to take root and strengthen, and currently, it is still the main source of radicalism and extremism. In this, the only difference is that the example of Jihad has changed, and it has moved towards the US, England, NATO and even the rulers of Pakistan as the US ally. The continued presence of the US and NATO in the vicinity of Pakistan's borders and their attacks on Pakistan's tribal areas has increased the intensity of Pakistani Taliban's activities and has led to conflicts within Pakistan's borders. This has caused the Pakistani Taliban to start a war with the central government of Pakistan, which holds the title of a non-NATO military ally of the US and fights the Taliban on behalf of the US (White J. , 2012, p. 1).

Due to the Taliban's violent methods and violations of human rights, which have received global criticism, Afghanistan has struggled to maintain stability and security. Pakistan was compelled to switch its support to the US-backed Afghan government, which ousted the Taliban, after 9/11 attacks and the succeeding US-led invasion of Afghanistan (Jamshed, 2021, p. 1102).

The US believe that the Greater Middle East and South Asia and its religious circles are the biggest center of anti-Western terrorism in the world due to the spread of religious rules and the creation of a sense of hatred in their audience. Following the events of September 11, the US government was able to pass Resolution 1368 and then Resolution 1373 from the Security Council (Rosand, 2004, p. 604). The UN Security Council, by issuing Resolution 1368, called such terrorist acts a threat to

international peace and security and gave the US a 'legitimate right' and called for international cooperation in the fight against terrorism (Cassese, 2001, pp. 996-997). The most important legal response of the US to the events of September 11 was the enactment of the anti-terrorism law entitled the 2001 United States Act to provide the necessary tools to stop and prevent terrorism. The US House of Representatives approved this bill, which became law on October 26, 2001. According to this law, executive and judicial institutions have the authority to arrest and interrogate people (Wong, 2006, p. 180).

3. From Allies to Adversaries: Exploring the Shifting Dynamics of Pakistan's Relationship with the Taliban after 9/11

After the events of 9/11 new terrorist groups became active in Pakistan and a new generation of fighters took control of the situation. Groups called 'local Taliban' who have the radical thoughts and policies of religious people, engage in armed actions outside the control of the central government. 'Local Taliban of Pakistan' refers to a group that after the events of September 11, and the beginning of the fight against it, are in different categories and with different names, but with a relatively similar and common intellectual origin and ideological base. They were attacking the forces of the central government of Pakistan. Some of these groups are, Sipah Sahaba (Vick and Khan, 2002), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Punjab Taliban), Lashkar-e-Taiba, Movement for Implementation of Sharia Muhammadi (Swat Taliban) Haqqani Network, and Taliban Tehreek-e-Pakistan (F. Burgess, 2003, pp. 99-100).

The Pakistani Taliban movement is one of the groups that were created by the union of different Taliban parties in the tribal areas and the border province, and it has more cohesion than other groups. According to the official report, terrorist attacks in Pakistan are carried out by this group. The Pakistani Taliban movement consists of groups from different regions of northwest Pakistan (Abbas, 2008, p. 1).

On December 12, 2007, a council of 40 senior leaders of the militant groups, which had about 50,000 fighters, announced the establishment of the movement in Peshawar, Pakistan. The council decided to unite under a single banner. Baitullah Mehsud from South Waziristan region was appointed as the head of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Hafiz Gul Bahadur from North Waziristan as the vice-emir (Burki, 2010, pp. 189-190). Baitullah Mehsud announced in the first position that the aim of

this movement is to confront Pakistan's military operations and if the Pakistani government continues military operations and cooperation with the US, contrary to the Taliban's practice, it would face a harsh response. After Baitullah Mehsud was killed, Hakimullah Mehsud was elected as the leader of the Pakistani Taliban (Burki, 2010, p. 199).

Despite all the efforts of the US to control and integrate the leaders and residents of the tribal areas, the Taliban reproduced in Pakistan and became an undeniable reality in the internal environment of this country. The Pakistani Taliban has called the Pakistani government and army to fight and by expanding the area under its influence in Pakistan, it has created a serious challenge for this country. They also have the ability to expand their sphere of influence and even control other areas of Pakistan, which has scared the US and Pakistani authorities. The expansion of Taliban activities and their actions inside Pakistan has created the ground for security, economic and social crises in this country. The explosions and suicide operations have turned the lives of the residents of the tribal areas. Pakistan's alliance with the US in line with the strategy of fighting against terrorism led to a change in the previous alliances of the Taliban with the government of Pakistan, which resulted in the formation of a coalition and alliance between radical Pashtun groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this regard, even though a group named 'Pakistani Taliban Movement' announced its existence in Pakistan, which various Taliban groups have united with it and have concentrated their power and strength within the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This process has resulted in the expansion and intensification of internal insecurity in Pakistan and territory of Afghanistan (Ghufran, 2009).

During the war against terrorism launched by the US and its allies, the war against the Taliban was not limited to the geographical area of Afghanistan and the operatives were drawn into the borders of Pakistan. Pakistan is also caught in a crisis called 'Taliban'. The activity of the Pakistani Taliban is manifested in a group called 'Tehrik Taliban Pakistan' (Shah, Khalil, and Saima, 2014, p. 240). Pashtuns based in the northwestern regions of Pakistan have challenged this country. The North-West Frontier Province and the tribal areas of Pakistan has been the main site of conflict between the Pakistani Taliban and the Pakistani Army and have been the target of US airstrikes (Zahid, 2012, p. 20).

After the events of September 11 and Pakistan's cooperation with the US and the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the scene of the activities of the Taliban forces changed. Pakistan, which used to be the center of support and logistics for the Taliban, turned into the center of the Taliban's activities and subversive actions. In 2004, Pakistani Taliban militants carried out suicide attacks against government targets in a highly coordinated manner (Fair, 2009, p. 41). The first target of these attacks was Karachi, Pakistan, which took victims with intermittent terrorist operations. Since then, suicide attacks have become a common and everyday thing in different areas of Pakistan, and it is used as a tactic by the Pakistani Taliban, as it has been able to deal heavy blows to the Pakistani government in terms of security and economy (Fair, 2009, pp. 44-46).

4. Russia

Russia and the Taliban's relationship were characterized by a complicated interaction of shifting alliances, geopolitical interests, and strategic calculations. The Taliban's rise in the middle of the 1990s and their subsequent takeover of Afghanistan had a profound effect on regional dynamics, entangling a number of countries—including Russia—in a precarious game of engagement and anxiety. Russia had some suspicions and concerns about the Taliban in the early years of its rise to power. Moscow is alarmed by the Taliban's strict interpretation of Islamic law and ties to extremist ideas. Another concern arising from the Taliban's dominance in Afghanistan was the possibility of instability spreading to Central Asia, a strategically important region for Russia. Relations between Russia and the Taliban underwent a dramatic change after the events of September 11, 2001. Terrorist attacks forced the US and Russia to form a worldwide alliance aimed at eliminating terrorism originating from Afghanistan. Russia, which sees the Taliban as a common enemy, supported the US-led invasion. Russia's promise to cooperate with NATO to oust the Taliban was seen as a result of the weakness and superficiality of the Russian government. The US presence in Central Asia has weakened Russia's security influence. However, the Russian government has viewed this policy positively, calling Russia's cooperation with NATO a means of securing Russia, protecting Central Asia from extremists, establishing ties with international

organizations, strengthening ties with the West, and participating in post-war reconstruction in Afghanistan (Tamanna, 2014, p. 239).

Geographically, Afghanistan has a strategic location for Russia. It connects important regions. Central Asian republics are connected to the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia through this route. Thus, Afghanistan has been a security (buffer zone) or source of threat for Russia for centuries. There are many political and cultural similarities between the people of Afghanistan and the people of Central Asia. The former Soviet Union and the current Russian Federation consider Afghanistan's geography within their social, political and cultural sphere of influence. For this reason, Afghanistan's problems are seen as an internal problem for Russian leaders (Trenin and Malashenko, 2010, p. 13). While creating Russia's new foreign policy in 2008, the important components of its foreign policy towards Afghanistan, regional security, the narcotics issue and the reconstruction of Afghanistan were mentioned. Accordingly, Afghanistan is a key point in Russia's macro policies in Central Asia. In its return to Central Asia, which is seen as one of Russia's biggest claims in the region, the security and development of the Central Asian countries is seen as Russia's responsibility. Therefore, if anyone in the region is threatened, Russia can take action to ensure security. Russia sees this as a necessity (Tamanna, 2014, p. 236).

One of the biggest and most important developments after the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 and the development of a new organization in Afghanistan was the expansion of friendly relations and regional cooperation between Afghanistan and the Russian Federation. Russia has promised to provide military equipment as well as train Afghan security forces. During Karzai's visit, 17 bilateral agreements were signed between the two countries. While there were improvements in relations with Russia within the framework of these agreements, Russia remained cautious in its foreign policy towards Afghanistan, despite Afghanistan's efforts. Russia supported Afghanistan's reconstruction and anti-terrorism policies (Rahmani and Hosseini, 2012, p. 280). Russia and China have started to follow new policies towards Afghanistan to fill the gap between NATO and US forces. The increasing political and economic presence and influence of the two countries has prompted the US to reconsider its support programs for Afghanistan. In this context, the US extended the security agreement with Afghanistan to reduce the Chinese and Russian

influence in Afghanistan. The new US strategy developed during the Trump era aimed to put more pressure on Pakistan and support India's economic investment in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's foreign policy, influenced by this policy, led to Pakistan's rapprochement with China and Russia (Keskin, Alibabalu, and Fatah, 2020, p. 217).

In October 2015, the Taliban tried to take control of Afghanistan's Kunduz province, close to the Tajikistan border, which further worried Russia. Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan have stated that it is concerned about their citizens being in the Taliban's armed group and being infected with radicalism (Brattvoll, 2016). By contacting the Taliban, Russia tried to show the West, and especially the US, that it was not far behind the Afghanistan peace talks. Russia was not invited to the negotiation process with the Taliban, which was initiated by the US in 2016 and strengthened with the participation of China, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Russian politicians interpreted this as the US doing this to marginalize Russia in the region. In response to this meeting, a meeting was held in November 2018 with the participation of Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan. Although Afghanistan was invited to the said meeting, it chose not to officially participate. Russia wanted to strengthen the obstacles to US interests by establishing relations with the Taliban. After Russia officially provided military helicopters to Afghan forces, the Taliban claimed that Russia also provided them with weapons to fight against ISIS (DW, 2016).

Russia's cooperation with Iran, China and even the Taliban and its efforts to establish a political balance within Afghanistan caused bilateral relations to deteriorate both economically and politically (Keskin, Alibabalu, and Fatah, 2020, p. 217). Russia's reactivation in Afghanistan, on the one hand, is aimed at the country's national interests in Afghanistan and the region, and on the other hand, it is influenced by Russia's security concerns about ISIS and the spread of terrorist and extremist movements in Afghanistan. Russia has tried to build a defensive shield against this threat and support some military and paramilitary groups in the country. Unlike President Hamid Karzai, President Ghani criticized Russia's policy and changed the foreign policy balance in favor of greater rapprochement with the West and the US (Sanga, 2016, p. 73).

While the US expressed its concern about Russia's support for the Taliban, it described this issue as weakening national sovereignty and unacceptable in Afghanistan's foreign policy. General Nicholson said Russia's new approach to

legitimizing the Taliban: "This year they tried to show that the Taliban is the only force fighting the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS) group." However, the Afghan government and its international supporters managed to weaken ISIS in Afghanistan, kill its leader, and disrupt its operations (Khan, 2016). With the Taliban taking over power in Afghanistan in August 2021, relations that had almost deteriorated during the Ghani period were revived. Before the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia initiated the process called the 'Moscow Format' and held continuous negotiations with the states of Iran, Pakistan, India, and China in order to contribute to the Afghanistan peace process with the Taliban. Russia's influence on the Central Asian republics, which are Afghanistan's neighbors, is also the intersection point of relations fighting against a common enemy such as the US (Bingöl and Ongun, 2022, pp. 263-265). The rise of religious radicalism in Pakistan is a major concern for Afghanistan and Russia. In this sense, Moscow has repeatedly stated that the main problem of extremism in the Central Asian region and Afghanistan lies in the backwaters of Pakistan (Trenin and Malashenko, 2010, p. 12).

5. China

On February 15, 1989, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan ended and Afghanistan faced a civil war. As a result of this civil war, Afghanistan's political order was completely shaken, and in 1996, a period with an unpredictable end came when the country came under Taliban rule. At that time, Afghanistan, known as the home of terrorism and separatists for many states in Central Asia, was seen as a threat. As a result, considering all these situations, the way was paved for the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Khalil, 2015, p. 6). A combination of diplomatic engagement, cautious engagement, and Chinese worries about regional stability and security has defined the relationship between the Taliban and China from 1994 until 2021. The Taliban grew to power in the mid-1990s, and China did not officially recognize their administration in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. However there have been indications of low-level diplomatic meetings. Therefore, China has developed a political ace of engagement with the Taliban to reduce and control the threat it perceives from the West. In this context, a military agreement was signed between China and the Taliban in December 1998 on the training of Afghan pilots. Then, the Taliban sent a delegation to China to initiate

economic and security relations. As a result of the negotiations of this delegation, an agreement was reached with the Taliban in February 1999 on economic cooperation and training of military forces in Afghanistan (Stone, 2019).

Following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the international community, including China, condemned the Taliban for harboring terrorists. China supported the US-led intervention in Afghanistan and worked with Russia, Central Asian countries, and others in the global war against terrorism. Although China was saved from the Taliban dilemma with the US invasion of Afghanistan, the presence of US soldiers in its immediate vicinity has created a new source of concern (Alperen, 2021, p. 190). China continued to support Afghanistan even when the Taliban lost control and a government headed by Hamid Karzai was established on December 22, 2001. The Chinese Embassy in Kabul, which was closed in 1994 due to security instability, was officially reopened on February 6, 2002. Later, China continued its friendly behavior in rebuilding its friendship and cooperating with the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on various occasions.

On December 22, 2002, the Interim Government of Afghanistan and the government of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Turkmenistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan, and neighboring governments expressed their hope that the Afghan people will enjoy prosperity and integrity after many years of regionalizing their democracy and human rights and signed the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighborly Relations. The most important article of the declaration is to emphasize that peace and stability efforts in the region are a whole. The countries participating in this declaration; stated that they have a common will in the fight against terrorism, fundamentalism and drug trafficking. Following the withdrawal of most NATO forces in 2014 the security situation in Afghanistan changed and the Taliban regained strength. While maintaining its official endorsement of the Afghan government, China began working with the Taliban in a more pragmatic manner. China has been interacting with several Afghan parties, including the Taliban, as a result of its growing economic interests in the region, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Afghanistan is critical to the success of China's regional connectivity initiatives because of its advantageous position. China's most important

strategy in its foreign policy after 2013 has been the Silk Road Economic Belt project connecting Asia, Europe and Africa (Keyvan, 2019, p. 140).

With the belt and road initiative project China wants to create new markets for itself. When both the strategic and geographical location of Afghanistan is examined, it will be understood how vital it is for this project. For this reason, China does not want to exclude Afghanistan, which is considered a third world country right next to it, from this project. The belt and road initiative project is known as a project that covers a large area and involves more than 60 countries. On the other hand, the US's stubbornness towards its containment policy will be remembered as a very important step towards turning to the outside world (Ablet, 2021, p. 42).

Following the US withdrawal the perspectives of a greater role for China as a mediating power in inter-Afghan regional relations. Therefore, on the political and diplomatic fronts, China is particularly involved in peace talks with the Taliban and in reducing tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan aimed to take on more important roles (Dkha, Mohammad Tamim, and Saydi, 2021, p. 171). China tried to get results from the peace talks held between the Afghan government and the Taliban in 2015 through the mediation of Pakistan, which China sees as close. Chinese print media confirmed that the Taliban group led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar held official contacts in China in 2019 (Alperen, 2021, pp. 192-193). After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, China has become one of the most important political actors in the region. China's close contacts with the Taliban and its success in mediating with the former Afghan government have increased China's political prestige and political influence in Afghanistan as an important player. In fact, China has tried to gain a strong sphere of influence with the Taliban in order to use it to its advantage at the right time (Taghizadeh Ansar and Bagherni, 2021, p. 15).

China is worried that terrorism and extremism may spread from Afghanistan into its Xinjiang province. A Uighur separatist organization called the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has been active in the area (Giglio, 2004, p. 4). China has a non-interference policy in other nations' domestic affairs. China has not taken a position on Afghanistan's domestic administration while interacting with the Taliban. China's economic interests, security concerns, and desire for regional peace have all

shaped the pragmatic approach that has defined the relationship between China and the Taliban.

6. The International Fallout of Pakistan's Afghan Policy

In the wake of 9/11 and the collapse of the Twin Towers of World Trade, the UNSC adopted resolution 1368 calling on all member states to bring to justice the perpetrators and supporters of this terrorist operation as soon as possible (White and Myjer, 2002). The then-US Secretary of State Colin Powell pointed the finger at Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda of being the main culprit. At a joint meeting on September 20, the then-US President George W. Bush accused Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda of giving an ultimatum to the Taliban urging them to extradite all al-Qaeda leaders, including Osama bin Laden (Merskin, 2004, pp. 169-170). Otherwise, the Taliban will share in the fate of al-Qaeda (Walt, 2001, p. 56).

NATO announced its readiness to cooperate with the US in the fight against terrorism (Walt, 2001, p. 61). Thus, a US-backed Western coalition was formed under US leadership against the Taliban. British Prime Minister Tony Blair also announced that he was cooperating with the US in military operations and called on Taliban officials to hand over bin Laden, otherwise, they will face war (Azubuike, 2005, p. 131).

Pakistan is the only country in the world where Taliban leaders thought they could rely on supporting the Taliban in the national interest. Pakistan expelled its diplomats from Afghanistan without formal severance, leaving the Taliban alone in the face of a Western coalition. Pervez Musharraf failed to achieve his goal after sending two delegations to Mullah Omar to oust bin Laden, saying nothing was above Pakistan's national interests (Naseem, 2010, p. 108).

Less than a month after 9/11, US bombing of Afghanistan began, and the Taliban resisted for several weeks, but the situation in the north worsened and a number of Pakistani volunteers recently arrived in Afghanistan. US planes collided with Taliban vehicles carrying bombs and rockets from morning until evening and heat-finding rockets targeted Taliban vehicles on the move, effectively landing a very large Taliban force and the situation in Mazar-e-Sharif was such that the Taliban could no longer withstand the intense airstrikes of B-52 aircraft (Grant, 2002, p. 36). The fall of Mazar-e-Sharif marked the beginning of their downfall

throughout Afghanistan. With the fall of Kandahar, the so-called 'Islamic Emirate' established by the Taliban completely collapsed.

After Obama came to power in the US, the strategy of using smart power in Afghanistan and Pakistan was in line with the US plan (Skinner, 2011). It is very likely that the US want to resolve the issue of Afghanistan and the Taliban in a way that maintains US dominance in the region. It also becomes clear that the developments in Pakistan are completely related to the developments in Afghanistan. Ever since Richard Holbrooke was named US Representative to the region, it has become clear that a new strategy is being developed in which the US have the same views on Afghanistan and Pakistan and Pakistanis no longer have a chance to continue their past policies in the area. Pakistan has supported the Taliban since the overthrow of the Taliban regime and the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and has played a key role in the Washington-Taliban negotiations. These efforts have increased Pakistan's influence within the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan's effective role in the US-Taliban negotiations and agreement has given Pakistan a leading role in the Afghan peace process (Khan, Hafeez Ullah, and Ahmad, 2020, p. 69).

Various armed militias affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban often cause problems for the country. However, Pakistan appears to be pursuing a vision such as using the group to counterbalance anti-Pakistan elements, preventing excessive political influence, including from India and Iran, in Afghanistan. The use of Pakistani jihadist groups as a bargaining chip in negotiations with India over Kashmir, India's intervention in Balochistan and northern Pakistan (Radha, 2002, p. 22), and finally the continued weakening of Pashtun nationalism in Pakhtunkhwa will not be neglected. Pakistan, meanwhile, will not give up its long-term interests in Afghanistan and the region and is likely to use the Afghan Taliban as a strategic tool, even if its influence on the group is limited. While the Pakistani Taliban have expanded their influence from tribal areas to some of their country's cities and are not easily defeated, they also welcome the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. Thus, although they may temporarily halt their insurgency as soon as US and international forces withdraw from Afghanistan, they will contribute to the Pakistani government in the long run through politics or violence.

Most Pakistani Taliban militants operate in North and South Waziristan FATA (Rana, 2008, p. 8) and almost half of them are affiliated with the Tehreek-e-

Taliban Pakistan (TTP) led by Hakimullah Mehsud and others have little or no connection to him (Sulaiman, 2008, p. 2). Violence in Pakistan looks set to subside after the withdrawal of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan. Once the justification for the violence is removed, the Pakistani Taliban will have no excuse to continue the 'Jihad' in the country. On the other hand, all factions of the Taliban will strive to gain power in post-war Afghanistan. Pakistan is one of the most important players in the region that has had the greatest impact on the Taliban and has been a key US ally in Afghanistan since 2001. Accordingly, it played a key role in the recent Washington-Taliban peace agreement, which aims to ensure peace and stability by turning the Taliban into a stakeholder in Afghanistan. Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan is likely to increase after the withdrawal of US troops.

V. DOHA AGREEMENT AND THE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN'S SUPPORT FOR THE TALIBAN

Doha Peace Agreement signed in Doha, Qatar, on February 29, 2020 (Farr, 2020, p. 1). The Taliban agreed to break connections with terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda, while the US agreed to remove its forces from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. A condition of the peace accord was the government's release of 5,000 Taliban detainees and the beginning of negotiations with the Taliban three months after the agreement was signed (Ramachandran, 2020, p. 2). The Doha Agreement's significant outcome for the US is the absence of US soldier casualties. The agreement had support from China, Russia, and Pakistan and was unanimously approved by the UNSC. However, the Afghan government, not being a party to the deal, did not endorse it. The agreement mandated the withdrawal of all US and NATO troops from Afghanistan (Sargana, 2021, p. 1639) The Taliban pledged to halt al-Qaeda activities in their areas, and negotiations with the Afghan government are ongoing. Additionally, the US has promised to terminate economic sanctions against the Taliban by August 27, 2020, and to close five military outposts in 135 days. The US will decrease troop numbers from 15,000 to 8,600 by April 2021 assuming the Taliban keep their promises, the US would remove all of its soldiers in 14 months (Tariq, Saira, and Amir, 2021, p. 369).

An Afghan Peace Consultative Loya Jirga was held when the Afghan government came under tremendous pressure from Washington to demand the release of Taliban detainees. The Loya Jirga decided to release 400 alleged 'dangerous' Taliban militants on August 10 following two days of discussion (Analytica, 2020). After the Loya Jirga and the Afghan president's signature, the captives were not immediately freed the procedure took around six months. The rise of violence has been influenced by these freed prisoners' return to the Taliban strongholds.

About six months were spent in negotiations over the release of Taliban detainees and the end of the Afghan Peace Corps. According to a 'list' the Taliban

submitted to the Afghan government, they refused to begin peace negotiations before freeing all 5,000 prisoners (Ullah, Sultana, and Ullah Koka, 2020, pp. 149-150). The Taliban leadership designated a 21-member team for peace negotiations with the Afghan government, led by Sheikh Mawlawi Abdul Hakim, the group's chief justice, and Shir Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, the deputy commander of staff (George, Tassal, and Nawaz Khan, 2020). The Taliban's resolve to insist on religious concerns in the discussions is shown by the presence of Maulvi Abdul Hakim at the head of the Taliban delegation. (Kotokey and Borthakur, 2021).

On September 15, 2020, Masoom Stanekzai led a group of 21 Afghan government representatives, including Abdullah Abdullah, in joining US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other international dignitaries in Doha to launch the Afghan peace negotiations, during which a negotiation agenda was established within the initial three months (Aljazeera, 2020).

The international world also backed the discussions, and nations including the US, Russia, and China backed a peaceful end to the conflict in Afghanistan (Khan, 2020, p. 111). The UN played a critical role in arranging talks and creating a forum for discussion between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The peace negotiations in Doha are a critical step towards ending the violence in Afghanistan, even if there is still a long way to go before a final peace accord can be achieved. The talks increase expectations for a durable peace and the Afghan people's capacity to swiftly put decades of strife and violence behind them.

Amid escalating violence, Afghan-Taliban peace talks in Doha have seen a surge in targeted killings, mainly affecting social activists and journalists. The Afghan government holds the Taliban responsible, while the Taliban accuses the Afghan National Security Agency. The Taliban claims their actions are unrelated to the peace process, emphasizing their reduced violence by refraining from spring operations and territorial seizures. Nevertheless, the UN expressed deep concern over the alarming civilian casualties in 2020, with 3,035 deaths and 5,785 injuries reported (Afghanistan, 2021, p. 12).

A. Doha Peace Talks and Taliban's Approach

The Taliban, a radical group that ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 until it was defeated by a US-led coalition, has since waged a fierce insurgency against the

Afghan government and foreign forces. The Afghan government has agreed to participate in the negotiations, despite not being a party to the agreement, as part of a larger effort to stop the fighting, to establish a lasting peace. The Doha peace talks offer a rare opportunity to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Afghanistan. Negotiations began after a major agreement was signed which allowed the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan (Kissinger, 2021).

Pragmatism and hesitation were used together to characterize the Taliban's attitude to the Doha peace negotiations. The Taliban's representatives stressed their desire to put an end to the conflict and requested that all foreign troops leave Afghanistan. Additionally, they have shown that they are willing to work with the Afghan government to share power and uphold human rights, notably those of women and minorities. However, fundamentalism continues to have a significant effect on the Taliban's vision for the future of the nation. The group vehemently rejected the notion of a secular state and insisted that any next administration be founded on Islamic law. Concerns and worries about a return to the Taliban's oppressive control in the country are widespread.

After months of diplomatic efforts, the Afghan Taliban has finally opened their political office in Doha, Qatar to start peace talks and end the war in Afghanistan. The tripartite talk between the Taliban, Afghanistan and the US has faced significant obstacles. In a clear show of power and refusing to recognize President Karzai's government, the Taliban opened their new office with their white flag and the name 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' (Shah and Wiqar, 2014, p. 30). Karzai felt his government was being sidelined in the process and suspended negotiations on the security agreement. Karzai, who was unhappy with this action of the Taliban, announced that his government did not intend to send High Peace Council representatives to Qatar for talks, but was still interested in pursuing talks inside Afghanistan (Kuehn, 2018, p. 39).

Despite their interest in being at the negotiating table, the Taliban have not accepted and complied with any of the initial conditions of Washington and Kabul, which are the condemnation of violence and the recognition of the Afghan constitution. The reluctance of the Taliban to enter into serious talks shows their strength and reminds that the Taliban insurgency is still strong and has been dishonest in dealings, has not agreed to the terms of negotiations and is not willing to

compromise. The Taliban's approach to deceive the Afghan government and negotiate directly with the US shows that the Karzai government, despite being the main force behind the process, remains the weakest player in the peace talks (Tierney, 2013, p. 185).

Considering the conditions of the operational environment, it seems that the Taliban and their affiliated groups will benefit from the new political office in at least three ways. First, the new office will help the Taliban appear in front of cameras and spread their propaganda through international media (Azami, 2013). This group is also recognized as a political group in Afghanistan and gains international legitimacy. The installation of their symbols and flag means that the Taliban leadership is using the new office as a base for the shadow government, which confirms the worst fears of the Afghan people. If the Taliban pursue their political ambitions within the framework of the Afghan constitution and through the electoral process, Afghans are likely to oppose it. However, if the Taliban were to be brought onto the scene through some sort of power-sharing compromise without elections and perhaps a change in the Afghan constitution that trades on the gains of the past decade, it would certainly be unacceptable to many Afghans (Kane, 2015, p. 6).

The Taliban have already been bold and effective in sending strategic messages to support their military operations in Afghanistan, using the Doha process to their advantage. When the Taliban establish direct access to international organizations such as the UN and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, these efforts will intensify and receive more attention (Rosenberg, 2012). Using the new office as a hub, the Taliban will press for concessions on Washington and Kabul, notably the release of its prisoners from Bagram and Guantanamo detention centers and the lifting of travel bans on its top leadership. Washington and Kabul may give up some of these concessions in exchange for promises that the Taliban later break. The Taliban will have demands in other areas as well, including changing the Afghan constitution in such a way as to increase their influence in the affairs of the country (Renner and Spencer, 2013, p. 491).

However, the Taliban's lack of motivation to negotiate honestly is a sign of major challenges for the effectiveness of peace talks. In addition, the success of these talks is doubtful due to Karzai's occasional anti-Western statements (Burch, 2010), as well as his hasty decisions and stubbornness in reaching a bilateral security agreement

that Afghanistan desperately needs. Although the resumption of peace talks is a good sign, considering the terms and conditions of the negotiations, the opening of the Taliban's political office in Doha seems to have benefited the Taliban more than the US and the Afghan government.

The first move by the US to establish peace talks between the Taliban and Afghan groups took place during the presidency of Barack Obama. Washington officials resorted to this measure several times in 2011, 2012 and 2013, but to no avail (Grossman, 2012, pp. 28-29). The issue of inter-Afghan negotiations was raised again after the election of Donald Trump as the President of the US in 2017 (Farr, 2020, p. 3). On February 25, 2019, representatives of the US and the Taliban met for the first time in Doha for peace talks (Yahaya, 2020, p. 101).

The first meeting of Afghanistan peace talks started on September 12, with the speech of Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, and with the presence of a delegation of government officials and various functions of Afghanistan and the delegation of the Taliban group in Doha, the capital city of Qatar (Furcoi, 2020).

These talks are the next step after the US-Taliban agreement on the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan (Khan, Ahmad, and Ullah, 2020, p. 60). This is a historic moment, because for the first time, the Taliban, despite not recognizing the Afghan government, are negotiating with its representatives on the future of this country. The responsibility of leading the 21-member delegation of the Afghan government in these negotiations will be under the responsibility of Masum Stanekzai, the former head of the national security of this country (Sediqi and Hakimi, 2020), and the 21-member delegation of the Taliban group headed by Sheikh Maulvi Abdul Hakim (Khan T. , 2020). Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad participated in the opening ceremony of this meeting (Reuters Staff, 2020). Abdullah Abdullah, Chairman of the Supreme National Reconciliation Council, Hanif Atmar, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Seyed Sadat Mansour Naderi, Minister of State for Peace Affairs, and Abdul Salam Rahimi, the Special Representative of the President of Afghanistan for Peace Affairs, are present at the opening ceremony of these negotiations (Roehrs, Adili, and Sadat, 2020).

B. The Taliban's Relationship with the Ashraf Ghani Administration

Since taking power in 2014, Ashraf Ghani's administration and the Taliban have been at conflict (Craig, 2014). The Taliban disapproved of Ghani's victory in the 2014 presidential election and steadfastly refused to engage in talks with his administration. The Taliban and the Ghani administration clashed for a number of reasons. The Taliban does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the Ghani administration because it considers it to be the puppet government of the US (Kaura, 2018, p. 11).

The Ghani administration pursued a strategy of military action against the Taliban. This involves escalating airstrikes and ground operations that are displacing and killing more civilians. Attacks by the Taliban in retaliation on civilian and governmental targets severely undermined the legitimacy of the government (Gunasingham, 2021).

There are major ideological and political differences between the Taliban and the Ghani administration, as well as fundamental divisions over the government's legitimacy. Unless these issues are resolved through negotiation, it seems doubtful that the Taliban and the government will cooperate to bring peace and security to Afghanistan. The Ghani government has come under fire for both inefficiency and corruption, and this was exploited by the Taliban to attack the legitimacy and competence of the administration and to erode public support for it (Behuria, Hassan, and Saroha, 2019, p. 135).

The Taliban and the Ghani administration hold fundamentally divergent opinions about the place of religion in politics. The Ghani government takes a more secular stance, in contrast to the Taliban, who seek to build an Islamic state regulated by their own version of sharia law. The support of the international community, especially the US, was very important for the Ghani government. This also undermines the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the Taliban, who see themselves as a puppet of foreign powers (Kerami, 2019, p. 2).

The idea of a provisional government plan was one of the problematic issues between the Taliban and Ashraf Ghani Administration (Wolf, 2021, p. 2). The question of a transitional government and sharing power with the Taliban is one of the most important reasons the Doha Agreement failed. The issue of 'division of power' and the establishment of an authority like the 'interim government' is being

brought up more frequently as discussions on the major agenda of the Afghan peace negotiations get underway (Maley and Jamal, 2022, p. 37). The ranks of temporary government supporters and detractors are being established. US special representative for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad advised delegates that a power-sharing arrangement should be reached between the two parties prior to the full withdrawal of US forces on May 1 (Roehrs, Adili, and Sadat, 2020) Ghani, however, disagreed and referred to the temporary administration as defunct. He emphasizes elections as a legitimate means of transferring power (Al Jazeera, 2021). The Taliban claim Ghani is a major barrier to peace and that they are prepared to cooperate with the new administration if he steps down, despite the fact that the Taliban claim they did not explicitly bring up the idea of an interim government during the negotiations (Gul, 2021).

After seventeen months of negotiations, the US and the Taliban signed an agreement to which the Taliban committed to cut ties with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist networks that are considered enemies of the US, and in return, the US made a commitment to the Taliban group to withdraw all military forces, non-diplomatic employees, personal security contracts, advisors and service employees from Afghanistan within the next 14 months. Amid rising violence and targeted killings, Interior Minister Massoud Andarabi and Afghan National Security Chief Ahmad Zia Siraj testified before the House of Representatives that the Taliban were preparing a spring offensive. Andarabi said to the gathering that despite the fact that the Taliban leadership ordered the country's conflict to end each winter, the group's brutality had continued throughout the season (Alim, 2020). According to the US Secretary of State, no US forces have been killed in Afghanistan in the last year or so (Gul, 2021).

According to that agreement, the US should leave Afghanistan, but the new US administration seems to be ignoring the Doha agreement and calling for a renegotiation or at least a modification of that agreement. The revision of the Doha Agreement, which the new US government is talking about, means new demands of the US from the Taliban group. However, the Taliban group demands the unconditional implementation of the agreement, and this difference of opinion and the difference in the views and demands of both sides has put the health of the Doha agreement at risk of being invalidated. This is something that the Kabul government welcomes and thinks that the agreement is a thing of the past. According to the

Taliban, there is no alternative between the Doha agreement and the current process of talks. From their point of view, the Doha agreement is moving in a positive direction. Shir Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, the deputy chairman of the Taliban mission in Russia, stated that the Taliban is prepared to work with the next administration "if Ashraf Ghani withdraws from the war today and resigns." (Joshi and Cortright, 2021).

About 5,000 fighting forces of the Taliban group released by holding traditional court known as Loya Jirga but later these forces returned to the battlefields. Whatever the outcome of the Doha agreement and the long negotiations between the US and the Taliban, it has been the favor of the Taliban forces. However, with the inauguration of the new government of the US and President Biden's commitment to review the Doha agreement, luck has come to Afghanistan. The Doha agreement gave great concessions to the Taliban and opened the way for them to travel and explore the region. That agreement gave legitimacy to the Taliban and put them in a better position. In addition, under pressure from the US government, the Kabul government released about 6,500 Taliban fighters, 400 of whom had committed war crimes, smuggling, and kidnapping. However, Afghanistan did not get anything important from that agreement and negotiations. Against the will of the Kabul government, the forces that were involved in the killing of civilians in the past 19 years were released. According to the government's repeated announcements, most of the released people of the Taliban group returned to the battlefields. The Doha agreement was an important achievement for the Taliban and the US. However, it did not have a positive and objective effect on the Afghan government and people.

C. Pakistan's Involvement in the Doha Peace Agreement

The Doha Agreement was heavily influenced by Pakistan. The agreement opened the door for the withdrawal of the US military from Afghanistan and set the stage for ongoing peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government (Kiely and Farley, 2021, p. 2). Pakistan's participation in the Doha Agreement can be attributed to several things (Ghulam, Yaseen, and Junaid, 2020, p. 333). Pakistan has maintained ties with the organization since the Taliban came to power in the 1990s. Pakistan was one of the few countries that recognized and

supported the Taliban government when it was in power (Threlkeld and Easterly, 2021, p. 5). Moreover, Pakistan has long regarded Afghanistan as a key strategic defense against India. The country has struggled with militancy and terrorism on its own terms and has worked to utilize its sway over the Taliban to advance stability and security in Afghanistan (Yadav and Barwa, 2011).

Pakistan has also actively promoted communication between the Taliban and the US. The government of the nation has conducted many meetings with Taliban commanders, notably Mullah Baradar, and has used its clout to persuade them to communicate with the US. In addition, Pakistan has consistently urged all sides to strive towards a negotiated peace agreement to end the violence in Afghanistan. However, the US forced Pakistan to use its influence over the Taliban to promote peace and stability in Afghanistan. This strategy includes threats of sanctions and reduced funding. Additionally, the nation has supported the peace negotiations logistically by organizing intra-Afghan dialogue meetings in Pakistan (Ghulam, Yaseen, and Junaid, 2020, p. 324).

At the same time as these issues are raised regarding the intra-Afghan peace talks, Afghanistan and Pakistan have agreed on creating a common vision to support peace and stability between the two countries and the region. Pakistan played an important role in the Doha Agreement and the ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The country's historical ties to the Taliban, strategic goals and diplomatic efforts have had an impact on the peace process thus far. Concerns remain over Pakistan's support for extremist groups and its links with the Taliban, and Pakistan's position in the region remains uncertain.

This document has been finalized in two parts. In the first part of this document, it is stated that the two sides should develop a new common vision to help each other in order to promote peace and establish stability in both countries and beyond (Ghulam, Yaseen, and Junaid, 2020, p. 335). In addition, that both sides welcome the start of intra-Afghan talks and hope that these talks will lead to peace and tranquility in Afghanistan. It has also been stated that the two countries should focus on future relations that are based on trust and have tangible results.

Afghanistan's position in 'multi-alignment' with other countries and pursuing friendly relations with them will provide a real opportunity for both countries to exploit and, on the contrary, will not create any threat. The two sides have further

agreed that without peace and stability in one of these countries, another country cannot achieve lasting peace and stability. The two countries should increase their contacts and communication in various ways, including through people-to-people, business-to-business, government-to-government, and most importantly, by establishing security relations (Arushi, 2017, p. 12).

By January 1, 2021, a joint proposal for the return of refugees and a joint proposal to increase regional connectivity that will strengthen not only Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the wider region (UNHCR, 2021). It is further stated that the leaders of the two countries alternately visit each other's capitals and President Ghani is planning a trip to Pakistan (Azadi, 2019). It is also agreed that the Afghan government will share a summary of the most important issues discussed during the Afghan peace process with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The two sides have agreed to regularly review their common vision, current and past commitments, and thus take concrete, clear and irreversible steps to advance closer and more fruitful relations between the two countries (Azadi, 2019).

The Doha Agreement has significant implications for Afghanistan and the surrounding region. The agreement opened the door to the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, which began in May 2021 (McKinley, 2021, p. 3). The longest war in US history which began in 2001 with the events of September 11, ended (Connah, 2021, p. 71). As part of the agreement, the Taliban and the Afghan government agreed to continue peace talks. In these negotiations held in Doha, the two sides seek a political solution to the crisis. Despite peace talks, violence in Afghanistan continued as both Taliban and government forces launched attacks. Some experts argued that the withdrawal of US forces emboldened the Taliban and led to an escalation of violence (Verma, 2021, p. 173).

There are concerns about the impact of the Doha Agreement on human rights in Afghanistan, particularly women and minorities. The Taliban's track record of human rights, including its treatment of women while in power in the 1990s, has raised fears that rights could be taken away by a Taliban-led government. The Doha Agreement has broader implications for the region, particularly in terms of the role of Pakistan and India. Pakistan has been a key player in facilitating the deal, and while it has long-standing ties to the Taliban, India has been a key supporter of the Afghan government (Verma, 2021, p. 12). While the withdrawal of US forces marks

the end of a long and costly war, ongoing peace talks and escalating violence remain uncertain on the road to lasting peace in Afghanistan. The US did not prioritize a sustained ceasefire, allowing the Taliban to steadily gain strength. Taliban were planning to receive economic support from US after the Doha Agreement (R. Rubin, 2020).

D. The Analysis of Pakistan's Support for The Taliban

The intricate relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban, spanning the years 1994 to 2021, offers a fascinating lens through which to examine the dynamics of international relations. By applying the lens of neoclassical realism theory, unravel the motivations behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban and its implications on the region. The various facets of this relationship, exploring the geopolitical and security considerations that have shaped Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. In recent years, a commonly utilized method in research investigating state foreign policies has been neoclassical realism, which provides an infrastructure for foreign policy analysis as a consequence of discussions within the realist theory tradition. The inclusion of internal state elements in the study, as well as the possibility to examine how states prefer to pursue various policies under identical international situations, play a key part in this direction.

In the analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy during its support of the Taliban, which will be examined in the study, it would be more accurate to make an evaluation based on the international and internal factors. In this context, an examination will be made within the framework of the foreign policy analysis approach put forward by neoclassical realism. This framework appears to be a proper viewpoint, given for analyzing Pakistan's policy to support Taliban and processes advanced by the theory. In this context, the application of neoclassical realism to the analysis of Pakistan's policy to support Taliban will be made through the effects of these variables, in which the impact of the international system and thus the relative power distribution is accepted as the independent variable, and the domestic factors of the state are accepted as intermediate variables between foreign policy (dependent variable) and the international system. As mentioned above, it is very important to determine the intermediate variables of the examined state since there is no set of

intermediate variables that will be accepted as common for all conditions and every state.

The intermediate variables that will be used in the analysis of Pakistan's policy to support Taliban are the basic elements for an analysis from a neoclassical realist framework. In this context, the perceptions and evaluations of foreign policymakers (prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, relevant bureaucracy, etc.) can be considered as primary intermediate variables. When a general analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy is made, it seems that the intermediate variable in question is decisive when examining foreign policy moves such as Pakistan's sometimes problematic relations with neighboring countries, its security dilemma with India, and approaches to Afghanistan and Pests due to cultural, social and historical proximity.

In the study, domestic factors which are also a kind of intermediate variable will be taken into account in Pakistan's approach toward the Taliban. In this sense, Pakistan's foreign policy's intermediate variables may be defined as the country's social and cultural framework as well as other local characteristics. It follows that Pakistan's social and cultural framework plays a particularly important role in maintaining the country's foreign policy continuity.

Another characteristic of Pakistan's social structure that affects foreign policy is the ethnic factor. Since this issue is also seen as a national security issue, it directly affects foreign policy. The roles of the intermediate variables mentioned here in foreign policy generally appear in two ways. The first is at the point of shaping the perceptions of decision makers. Accordingly, since decision makers are not individuals independent of their society and are affected by the developments that occur in the historical process, their perceptions and perspectives on the world are constructed in this manner. The second interaction emerges in the context of decision-makers' need to create inclusive policies by responding to society's demands and expectations. In this case, society as a whole or with certain segments puts pressure on decision makers by creating public opinion.

The relative power distribution in the international system, which is accepted as an independent variable in neoclassical realism, is another variable used in the analysis of the Pakistan's policy to support Taliban. Accordingly, in the anarchic international system, states act according to the relative power distribution and try to

influence the opposing states and realize their interests in proportion to their own power. For this purpose, there are various foreign policy options such as participating in various alliance systems or imitating great powers and states that conduct successful foreign policies.

The most important contribution of neoclassical realism to this approach is that the relative power distribution may not seem sufficient for foreign policy analysis on its own, but instead can be interpreted as a data of foreign policy depending on how it comes to life in the minds of foreign policy elites after being filtered. When the general flow of Pakistani foreign policy is examined, it is observed that decision makers determine their general attitude depending on the results of evaluating the signals coming from the international system.

Neoclassical realism in International Relations focuses on power, state interests, and the pursuit of security and survival. In the context of Pakistan's support for the Taliban, a realist perspective would emphasize how Pakistan's actions are driven by its national interests and the pursuit of strategic advantage. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan provided Pakistan with an opportunity to exert influence over its neighbor and ensure a regime that would be sympathetic to Pakistan's strategic needs. The ideological underpinnings of the Taliban, while relevant, took a back seat to pragmatic considerations of state interests. Pakistan's leadership viewed a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a means to secure its western border, maintain stability, and counter potential threats emanating from the region. From a neoclassical realism perspective, Pakistan's support for the Taliban during their rise to power can be understood as a strategic move to gain influence and ensure a friendly government in Afghanistan. The ideological background of the Taliban, such as their strict interpretation of Islam, was less important to Pakistan than the potential for establishing a government that would align with Pakistan's interests. An analysis would point out that Pakistan's support for the Taliban was motivated by a desire to counter the influence of regional rivals, such as India. Pakistan sought to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a base for Indian activities that could threaten Pakistan's security. The Taliban served as a tool to counter Indian influence in the region. Similarly, Pakistan's relations with Iran were shaped by realist considerations. Pakistan aimed to maintain stability in its western neighbor by supporting the Taliban, which provided a buffer against potential instability spreading into Pakistan.

Pakistan's support for the Taliban might be driven by its desire to secure its borders and exert control over the Pashtun region. This inquiry endeavors to expound upon the manner in which the doctrine of realism can be employed to elucidate Pakistan's endorsement of the Taliban insurgency within the contextual framework of ethnic deliberations and its overarching aspiration for cultivating amicable relations with neighboring states. An assessment will be conducted with a discerning focus on the strategic calculus underpinning Pakistan's patronage of prominent figures, exemplified by General Hamid Gul, and an exploration of his instrumental role in advancing Pakistan's geopolitical interests. National and regional factors for Pakistan's support to the Taliban from the perspective of Pakistan's security and power interests, exploring how neoclassical realism could explain Pakistan's motivations for supporting the Taliban in the context of countering India, securing influence, and using the Taliban as a tool. Pakistan's alignment with the Taliban can be explained by neoclassical realism in the context of the changing dynamics of the 'War on Terror' and its impact on Pakistan's security calculus. Within the context of neoclassical realism theory, the Doha Agreement Consider Pakistan's geopolitical considerations in supporting the peace process, as well as the consequences for regional stability and influence. From a neoclassical realism perspective, Pakistan's support for the Taliban's ascent to national control can be understood as a strategy to establish a stable, friendly government in its neighboring country. The Taliban's transformation from local resistance to a governing power presents an opportunity for Pakistan to secure its interests and exert influence in a tumultuous region.

One of the key drivers of Pakistan's support for the Taliban lies in its geopolitical calculations, particularly in countering India's influence in Afghanistan. Neoclassical realism underscores that states seek to maximize their power and security, often by limiting the influence of rivals. Pakistan's alignment with the Taliban can be interpreted as a strategic move to curtail Indian presence in its immediate neighborhood, further enhancing its own regional influence. The multi-faceted relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban underscores the complexities of international relations. Viewing this relationship through the prism of realism reveals how states' foreign policy decisions are often rooted in security, power, and national interests. From countering rivals to leveraging ethnic ties, Pakistan's support for the Taliban is a product of its strategic calculations in an ever-evolving

geopolitical landscape. As reflect on these dynamics, it becomes clear that neoclassical realism remains a pertinent framework for analyzing state behavior in a complex world.

Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan during this period was influenced by ideological alignment and a desire for regional stability. The rise of the Taliban, which adhered to a conservative interpretation of Islam, resonated with Pakistan's conservative religious elements. From a neoclassical realism standpoint, Pakistan's support for the Taliban's rise to power can be seen as a strategic move to reducing the risk of instability spilling over into its own territory.

Neoclassical realism emphasizes states' pursuit of power and influence. Pakistan's support for the Taliban was partly driven by its desire to counter India's growing influence in Afghanistan. As India increased its engagement in Afghanistan through development projects and diplomatic ties, Pakistan sought to prevent encirclement by its regional rival. Supporting the Taliban, which opposed Indian influence, aligned with Pakistan's strategic interests to maintain a balance of power in the region.

The Pashtun ethnicity shared by Pakistan and Afghanistan played a role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy decisions. The Pashtun population spans both sides of the border, creating an opportunity for Pakistan to leverage ethnic ties for strategic gain. By supporting the Taliban, which drew heavily from the Pashtun community, Pakistan aimed to exert influence over Afghan affairs and secure a friendly government that could align with its interests. Ethnicity has played a pivotal role in shaping Pakistan's attitude towards Afghanistan. The shared Pashtun ethnicity across the border has motivated Pakistan to support the Taliban, considering the potential for ethnic ties to facilitate its foreign policy objectives. Neoclassical realism posits that states prioritize their security and power interests, and Pakistan's strategic calculations with regards to the Pashtun ethnicity highlight its pursuit of a stable and friendly neighbor. Afghanistan's rejection of the Durand Line, and how this prompted Afghan leadership to encourage Pashtun nationalism among Pashtuns in Baluchistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. In response, Pakistan pursued a two-pronged strategy: developing friendly relationships near the Afghan border via commercial infrastructure, and fostering friendships with Pashtun Islamists. The intention was to diminish Pashtun ethnic identification by emphasizing Islamic

identity, in the hope that Pashtun Islamists would be favorable to Pakistan. The presence of Pashtuns at decision-making levels in Pakistan's military reflects the plan, and the Taliban's rise from Pashtun-populated Southern Afghanistan was viewed as a chance to install a pro-Pakistan Pashtun Islamic government in Afghanistan for strategic depth.

From a neoclassical realism perspective, states prioritize security to safeguard their interests. The Durand Line dispute between Pakistan and Afghanistan added a security dimension to their relationship. By supporting the Taliban's control over Afghanistan, Pakistan sought to manage its western border more effectively. A stable and compliant government in Kabul was seen as a way to reduce security challenges emanating from Afghanistan's instability. Neoclassical realism emphasizes the importance of national security. The Durand Line dispute and ongoing security challenges along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border were major factors influencing Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Taliban. By supporting the Taliban's control over Afghanistan, Pakistan aimed to ensure a friendly government in Kabul that could help manage cross-border security concerns. A stable Afghanistan was perceived as crucial for Pakistan's own security.

In terms of national and regional Factors for Pakistan's attitude towards the Taliban, neoclassical realism shines a spotlight on the regional power dynamics that shaped Pakistan's support for the Taliban. The security dilemma posed by India was a driving force behind Pakistan's actions. By supporting the Taliban, Pakistan aimed to curb Indian influence in Afghanistan, thereby reducing the potential for encirclement and safeguarding its security. The Pashtun ethnic ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan provided a leverage point for Pakistan's involvement, emphasizing its role as a protector of Pashtun interests and asserting its regional dominance. Furthermore, neoclassical realism highlights the strategic calculus behind Pakistan's relations with Iran. Both countries aimed to prevent the spread of extremism and ensure stability on their shared border. The Taliban, in this context, served as a mechanism to contain radical elements that could destabilize the region, aligning with the realist pursuit of security and survival.

In terms of the global factors for Pakistan's attitude towards the Taliban, the aftermath of the September 11 attacks underscores the realist challenge that Pakistan faced. The tension between its support for the Taliban and international pressures to

join the 'War on Terror' represented a complex interplay between state interests and external influences. Pakistan's decision to collaborate with the US while managing its ties with the Taliban exemplifies the realist art of balancing conflicting demands to ensure survival and maintain security. The September 11 attacks and Pakistan's role in the 'War on Terror' created a complex dilemma for Pakistan's calculations. While the international pressure to support the US campaign against terrorism was strong, Pakistan's longstanding support for the Taliban posed a challenge. Pakistan's shifting dynamics with the Taliban post-9/11 reflected its need to balance its interests with international pressures. The fact that Pakistan has to support the US on 'War on Terror' is the result of a realistic foreign policy.

The events following the September 11 attacks drastically reshaped Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. The lens reveals that Pakistan's decision to ally with the US and participate in the 'War on Terror' was driven by its own security concerns. While maintaining historical ties with the Taliban, Pakistan's alignment with the US allowed it to manage international pressure and secure economic and military assistance. The events following the September 11 attacks dramatically altered the global landscape and reshaped Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban. From allies to adversaries, the perspective highlights the changing dynamics driven by Pakistan's national security concerns. As the 'War on Terror' unfolded, Pakistan's foreign policy shifted to accommodate both its alliance with the US and its historical support for the Taliban. This complex balancing act illustrates how realpolitik considerations often drive states' actions in international affairs.

Analyzing Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan from a neoclassical realism perspective underscores the primacy of security, power, and national interests in shaping state behavior. The motivations behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban and its strategic maneuvering highlight the complex interplay of regional dynamics, geopolitical considerations, and the pursuit of stability. The insights into how realpolitik influences foreign policy decisions in a volatile and ever-changing global landscape and the desire to counter rival influences, maintain border security, and navigate global alliances. Through these lenses, we gain a deeper understanding of how realpolitik shapes states' foreign policy decisions in complex and dynamic geopolitical environments.

E. The Analysis of Doha Peace Agreement

The Doha Peace Agreement of 2020 serves as a contemporary example of Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. The Imran Khan administration has positioned itself to act as an intermediary and facilitator in the peace process in Afghanistan. Under Imran Khan's rule, Pakistan took an active role in encouraging the Taliban for talks and facilitating communication between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The relationship between Pakistan and the Taliban has always been complicated, and Imran Khan's administration has made efforts to use its power to persuade the Taliban to hold peace talks. Under Imran Khan's direction, Pakistan has supported many rounds of peace negotiations, notably by organizing sessions for intra-Afghan discussions. Discussions between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and other interested parties have taken place throughout the nation. In order to maintain stability and peace in Afghanistan, Imran Khan's administration has attempted to strike a balance with its longstanding connections to the Taliban. Pakistan's regional security and stability depend on striking a balance between these objectives. Not only Imran Khan but many high bureaucrats were trying to meet and persuade Afghan politicians for the Doha peace process, the aim was to seek a political solution to the conflict. Prime Minister Imran Khan's opinions and assessments of foreign policy decision-makers may be viewed in this sense as the main intermediate variables. The motivations behind Imran Khan's support for the Doha Peace Agreement was strategic manoeuvring highlight the complex interplay of regional dynamics, geopolitical considerations, and the pursuit of stability.

From a national perspective, Pakistan's support for the peace process aligns with its interest in achieving regional stability. By contributing to a peaceful Afghanistan, Pakistan aims to reduce the risk of cross-border terrorism and instability that could threaten its security. The Doha Peace Agreement of 2020 marked a shift in Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Taliban. By encouraging a peaceful settlement, Pakistan aimed to mitigate the risk of spill over violence and create a conducive environment for its own security. The Doha Peace Agreement of 2020 provides a contemporary example of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan's stability. Through a neoclassical realism lens, we can interpret Pakistan's support for the peace process as a pragmatic move to secure its interests in a post-conflict Afghanistan. By backing the Doha Agreement, Pakistan can contribute to regional

stability, a key component of its foreign policy goals. Pakistan's involvement in facilitating the peace talks reflects its desire to shape the future political landscape of Afghanistan. By engaging with the Taliban and influencing the negotiation process, Pakistan aimed to secure its interests and prevent a power vacuum in Afghanistan that its rivals could exploit. Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan's affairs will likely continue to be guided by its strategic calculations to safeguard its security and maintain its influence in a neighboring state. Pakistan's support for the Taliban as a strategic pursuit of its national interests, focused on securing its western borders, countering rivals like India, and maintaining regional influence. The analysis would highlight the pragmatic and power-oriented decisions made by Pakistan to shape the outcomes in Afghanistan and ensure its own security and survival.

However, this was a bit complicated for the Afghan people as the Afghan government did not want everything to move so quickly and Pakistan wanted almost everything to proceed quickly and conclude the peace talks. Afghan people were worried, as they could not get a positive result and the US government pressured the Afghan government to release Taliban prisoners, so the country hosted the Afghan Peace Loya Jirga. It took nearly six months for the Loya Jirga to implement its decision to release Taliban members accused of being 'dangerous.' Violence increased as these released convicts were sent back to Taliban areas.

In regional level the Doha Peace Agreement tackles the dynamics of regional security, especially the risk of protracted hostilities and instability in Afghanistan. The choice to seek a peace deal is influenced by systemic forces, such as the security issue faced by regional parties, according to neoclassical realism. The insights into how realpolitik influences foreign policy decisions in a volatile and ever-changing global landscape. Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban was characterized by shifting dynamics, geopolitical considerations, and strategic calculations. The motivations behind Pakistan's support for the Taliban encompassed the desire to wield influence, counter rival influences, maintain border security, and navigate global alliances. Through these lenses, we gain a deeper understanding of how realpolitik shapes states' foreign policy decisions in complex and dynamic geopolitical environments.

The release of Taliban inmates and the engagement of the Afghan government highlight domestic political factors and the response of Afghan officials

to security and political issues at home. The Doha Agreement is a reflection of attempts made by regional players, especially Pakistan, to influence the peace process. It also highlights how the withdrawal of US soldiers and the ensuing discussions affect the balance of power in the area.

In global level the US commitment to military withdrawal and its involvement in directing the peace process are crucial elements on a worldwide scale. By 2021, the US promised to remove its troops from Afghanistan. Three months following the deal, the Afghan government started talks with the Taliban and freed 5,000 Taliban prisoners. China, Russia, and Pakistan all endorsed the Doha Agreement, which was also unanimously approved by the UNSC. The US promised to lift the economic penalties imposed on the Taliban. If the Taliban followed through on their pledges, the US agreed to leave the country completely within 14 months. The US, Russia, and China were among the nations who backed the peace negotiations. In order to facilitate talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, the UN was essential. International institutions played crucial roles in the peace process; the UN's engagement and the UNSC's unanimous approval are two examples of these responsibilities.

VI. CONCLUSION

This thesis focuses on examining Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan, considering national, regional, and global factors. The research findings indicate that Pakistan's backing of the Taliban is driven by a combination of its national interests and the dynamics of the region. Within Pakistan, historical, geopolitical, and security factors contribute to its alignment with the Taliban. These factors include the strategic depth doctrine, concerns about Indian influence, and the desire for a friendly government on its western border. Regionally, Pakistan perceives the Taliban as a potential ally to maintain influence, safeguard its security, and counterbalance other regional powers.

The enduring support provided by Pakistan to the Taliban has undergone intense scrutiny and debate, leading to questions about the underlying motives and strategic calculations involved. Pakistan's perception of Afghanistan as a strategic buffer against India and its efforts to safeguard its own interests in the region play a significant role in its support for the Taliban. The thesis also explores the role of Pakistan's military establishment, particularly the ISI, in strengthening and maintaining ties with the Taliban.

The study demonstrated the significance of Pakistan which played a significant role in supporting the Taliban during its early years, providing military, political, and financial aid. The Taliban's rule in Afghanistan from 1994 to 2001 was marked by a combination of religious extremism and oppressive practices. The relationship between the Taliban and Pakistan was heavily influenced by the Ulema community led by Fazal-ur-Rehman, representing a sectarian and ideological group active in Pakistan. The ISI of Pakistan played a crucial role in supporting the Taliban, particularly during the years of the Afghan-Soviet conflict. Pakistan's policy of creating and backing the Taliban had severe consequences, leading to security threats and ultimately prompting significant action from the US.

Although Pakistan successfully facilitated the rise of the Taliban and its control over Afghanistan, their attempts to resolve border issues and gain formal

acceptance of the Durand Line by the Taliban government were unsuccessful. Pakistan's enduring support for the Taliban, despite the presence of a large US military force, has contributed to ongoing instability and insecurity in many parts of Afghanistan. Pakistan's supports for the Taliban, the oppressive rule of the Taliban regime, and the ISI's significant role have had far-reaching implications for Afghanistan's history, security, and regional stability.

The study demonstrated the significance of ethnicity which plays a significant role in shaping the political landscape of Afghanistan and presents challenges to the country's path toward political development and nation-building. The presence of diverse ethnicities in Afghanistan has hindered the coordination and reconciliation of transnational identities, leading to a lack of unity and a sense of national identity. This has impeded the formation of an integrated government and hindered the development process, despite the opportunity that arose after the fall of the Taliban. The historical links between Pashtuns and the Afghan government have shaped the political landscape, with Pashtun rulers dominating the country since its formation. The politicization of ethnic disputes can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when ethnic polarizations were used to form the central government, leading to violence and deepening divisions among tribes.

The research findings indicate ethnicity in Afghanistan is intertwined with various other factors, such as the involvement of neighboring countries, Pakistan, in particular, supports the Pashtuns in Afghanistan due to a shared ideology and ethnic ties. Pakistan's concerns about India's influence in the region further motivate its support for the Pashtun people. The role of ethnicity in Afghanistan remains a significant challenge to political development, as it influences power dynamics, national unity, and external influences. Addressing these ethnic complexities and fostering a sense of national identity are crucial steps towards achieving long-term stability and progress in Afghanistan.

The study demonstrated that India has had a troubled relationship with the Taliban since the organization's rise in the 1990s. India provided military support to anti-Taliban forces during that time due to concerns over the Taliban's close ties with Pakistan and their support for anti-Indian militants. The 9/11 attacks and subsequent events further heightened India's worries about the Taliban, as they regrouped and waged a guerrilla war against the Afghan government and foreign troops. India

expressed concerns about the Taliban's association with terrorist groups and their potential to destabilize the region. India has provided financial support, military supplies, and assistance to the Afghan government in an effort to counter the Taliban's influence.

India's concerns about the Taliban have intensified in recent years as the group has expanded its control in Afghanistan and seized important territories. India fears that the Taliban's ability to provide safe havens for terrorists and disrupt the region could have negative consequences for its security interests. India has criticized Pakistan for supporting the Taliban, providing them with safe havens, training, and access to weapons. The historical and geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan have contributed to India's suspicions of the Taliban, as Pakistan has been seen as a supporter and ally of the group. The ongoing violence and conflicts between India and Pakistan, along with their accusations of sponsoring terrorism and separatist activities, have further strained their relationship. Overall, India's concerns about the Taliban stem from their potential threat to regional security, their connections to Pakistan, and their history of supporting terrorist organizations. India's engagement in Afghanistan, through support for the Afghan government and efforts to counter the Taliban's influence, reflects its desire for a stable and secure region that aligns with its own security interests.

Pakistan has utilized the Taliban as a tool to advance its geopolitical interests in the region, particularly in Afghanistan. The long-standing ties between Pakistan and the Taliban, as well as their shared Pashtun heritage, have contributed to this relationship. Pakistan sees the Taliban as a means to counterbalance Indian influence in Afghanistan and maintain strategic control in the region. By providing support to the Taliban, including safe havens, training, and weapons, Pakistan has been able to exert influence over the group's actions and use it as a proxy force in its conflicts with India. However, this approach has come at a cost, straining Pakistan's relations with the international community and causing instability in the region.

One of the primary reasons for Pakistan's support for the Taliban is its desire to challenge Indian dominance in Afghanistan. The Taliban's attacks on Indian targets in Afghanistan and their history of animosity towards India make them an attractive ally for Pakistan in countering Indian influence. By supporting the Taliban, Pakistan aims to undermine India's efforts to gain influence in Afghanistan and

protect its own security interests. However, Pakistan's support for the Taliban has had severe consequences. The Taliban's violent methods, human rights violations, and involvement in terrorism have attracted widespread condemnation and led to strained relations between Pakistan and other nations, notably the US. Pakistan's backing for the Taliban has also contributed to instability in Afghanistan, hindering efforts to establish peace and security in the country.

The study demonstrated that the Doha Peace Agreement aimed to bring peace to Afghanistan. Under the agreement, the Taliban agreed to sever ties with terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, while the US agreed to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. The accord also included the release of 5,000 Taliban detainees by the Afghan government and the initiation of negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

The Doha Agreement had international support from China, Russia, and Pakistan, and it was unanimously approved by the UNSC. While the agreement aimed to end the conflict in Afghanistan, the Afghan government and the Taliban held divergent views and clashed over issues such as power-sharing and the establishment of an interim government. The Taliban insisted on their interpretation of Islamic law and the withdrawal of all foreign troops, while the Afghan government pursued military actions against the Taliban. The talks faced challenges due to ideological differences, lack of trust, and disagreements over the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

The strained relationship between the Taliban and the Ashraf Ghani administration added to the challenges in the peace process. The Taliban viewed Ghani's government as a US puppet and refused to engage in talks with his administration. The Ghani government pursued a military strategy against the Taliban, but faced criticism for inefficiency and corruption, which the Taliban exploited to undermine its legitimacy. Additionally, there were fundamental differences in the vision for the role of religion in politics, with the Ghani administration adopting a more secular stance. While the Doha Agreement represented a significant step towards peace in Afghanistan, numerous challenges persisted, including ideological differences, lack of trust, power-sharing disputes, and violence on the ground. The achievement of a durable and comprehensive peace accord remained a complex and ongoing process for Afghanistan. The Doha

Agreement and subsequent peace talks between the US and the Taliban took place without the full involvement of the Afghan government, raising concerns about its marginalization in the process. The fate of the agreement became uncertain with the change in the US administration and calls for its renegotiation or modification. However, the Taliban insisted on the unconditional implementation of the agreement, while the Afghan government sought revisions and emphasized the importance of elections as a means of transferring power. The peace talks faced deadlock, and the future of the Doha Agreement remained uncertain.

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