

The Borderland Theory in the Context of Pak-Afghan Border

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Abstract

This paper discusses the Borderland Theory from the perspective of the Pak-Afghan border that gained great momentum in the post-9/11 episode. Borders play the most significant role in determining the relations between the bordering countries. The insurgents use it as a sanctuary after getting their nefarious designs fulfilled. For the very first time in the history of Pak-Afghan relations, Pakistan had to deploy security personnel on its western border in such a great number owing to the greater need for security from this border. Cross border infiltration had a great impact on the security paradigm of Pakistan. Some of the most noteworthy networks that were hotly pursued include the Neo-Taliban, Al-Qaeda and the Haqqani network. Border management, making joint security troops from both the countries for deployment along both sides of the border, while negotiation coupled with diplomacy will do a lot in eradicating terrorism and insurgency across both sides of the border.

Keywords: Borderland, Security, Pak-Afghan, Border Management

Introduction

Borders play an important role in determining the national identity and allocate a specific geostrategic position to a country on the map of the world. Borders shape the politics, economy, strategy, and security paradigm of the country which has a great impact on the internal and foreign policy of the country. They determine the territory and line demarcating them from the rest of the world. Appearing on the map, they replicate the psychological description of the political leaders, lawyers, and intelligent class (Baud & Schendel, 1997). They may either be ignored by the people if they serve their interests or they may better challenge the existing political *status quo* if they go against their interests. The rebellious people take shelter along the border in case of insurgent attacks, looking for the independence of the dominion (Tariq, 2018). The border region, all over the world, has its social dynamics and historical development. The analytical study of borderland has been approached from many angles of legality, geography, and other aspects of the geopolitical strategy up to now (Prescott, 1987). Recent developments in creating transnational migrations are unfolding new dimensions in the current arena leading to the new concept of political cum legal aspects of their creation. The term border is used in many connotations comprising frontiers, boundaries, and borders. Boundary is a very broader term used in many parlances of specifically drawn areas bifurcating usually the neighbouring countries and even used in games denoting a particular line of the restricted area (Barth, 2012). It is mainly used in diplomatic terminology referring to the dividing line between two countries, separated by different traditions, customs, language, race, and culture. Border is favoured in case of discussion when psychosomatic isolation is involved, meaning thereby people separated by psychological differences. It does not refer to the dividing lines sketched on maps rather it refers to the regions on the land. Frontier connotes the prostrate position of land in terms of expansionism of countries by territory or civilizations into uninhabited parts (Turner, 1961).

In the field of security paradigm, the security associated with the border is of great importance since it encompasses air, land, or sea, people or shipment, means of communication, expert know-how, behavioural responses, security parameters, security personnel, business and monetary concentrations. Most of the risks and security concerns to life, liberty, property of the individual, and infrastructure of the state usually emerge out of the treacherous and windy border such as the Pak-Afghan border. Such borders cater to criminality, drug use and abuse coupled with its

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transportation, illegal traffic of arms and ammunition, illegal imports and exports, and human smuggling (Wermuth, 2007.)

The Durand line, separating both Pakistan and Afghanistan is very essential for the security of both the countries. The border area is resided over on both sides by the *Pashtun* brethren having many commonalities of customs and traditions (Tariq, 2018). They have their lifestyle and social norms which they have been following and enforcing within their territory despite coercive force from both India and the Central Asian Republics (Spain, 1957). The tribal belt has a unique feature of being used as a safeguard between the governments of India and Persia. Notwithstanding, the threats from these two sides, the local people have been able to manage their own lives through in the mountains and hillocks (Hayat, 2005). The management of the local affairs as well as the affairs of the government has been run through the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), comprising their *Jirga* system administered by the ‘elders’ of the locality and the *Maliks*. The concept of *Pashtunwali* has played an important role in shaping and de-shaping the entire structure of the society. The FCR has been there in vogue since 1901 when the city, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) was bestowed upon the legal position of a province. The nomenclature of the province was changed to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2010 through the 18th Constitutional Amendment Bill to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.

Several changes have been made from time to time in the administrative structure, customs, and traditions of the local people residing over the tribal belt of the border. At the initial stages of the drastic changes to reform the tribal structure, they were opposed by them (tribal people) but then they had to surrender before the government since they were given many incentives and privileges in various fields of life. The government has also granted them special care in the post-9/11 era since most of the people were displaced from their homes and they were declared as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Tariq, 2018). According to the census of the average per year population of the tribal areas is less than the provincial level of 2.8% while it is 2.7% in the tribal area. Similarly, the average family members in the tribal area are 9 persons while it is 8 persons in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The gender difference is also important where the ratio of male to female is 108 to 100 respectively (Center, 2016).

It is also an un-denying fact that the tribal people look to it as an honour to get married among people of their brethren and community, besides have trades and business enterprises (Sial, 2005). The most significant point of commonality among them is having the same *Sunni* or *Hanafi* school of thought, which keeps them united in their religious matters. It is on account of their close religious affinity that they never disagree on any particular point or issue. An important feature of these people residing across the border is their active participation in the matrimonial and death ceremonies of one another. The border is so important for the survival of the local people that according to Muhammad Sadiq, Ex Pakistan’s ambassador to Afghanistan, round about 52,200 Afghani enter Pakistan through the border on daily basis for different purposes including earning a livelihood, availing the medical facility, and education and visiting their kith and kin (Sadiq, 2010).

The Porous Border

The US presence in Afghanistan has created an era of strained relations between the two neighbouring countries. This can better be ascribed to the unpractical move towards the issue of the border while the unfathomable stubbornness for redressing the complicated issue of border management. President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, is of the view that Pakistan has made a deployment of about 20, 000 (Two Lac) law enforcement personnel across the border (Ashraf Ghani, July 23, 2016). It has only 200 check posts out of which only Torkham, Chaman, Ghulam Khan, and Angorada have inadequate presence of security personnel. Due to a lack of sufficient check posts, checking points, treacherous nature of the border, and some mountainous passes, mass movement can hardly be checked at the porous areas (Safi, 2016). Safi while sharing his personal experience of the past in his frequent visits to Afghanistan was very much embarrassed about the checking of visa and other relevant documents while entering Afghanistan now (Saleem Safi). He further added that during the last few days of the government of President Hamid Karzai, he along with some of the celebrities of Pakistan wanted to go to Afghanistan but they were refused entry and were rather asked to provide legal documents and requirements from the government through Embassy.

According to Safi, it was the first time that they had to follow the routine procedure in their visit to Afghanistan. They were also denied entry into the capital city to meet the president and were advised to follow the routine process of legality and formality while meeting the president. So, they had to obtain a visa from the Afghan Consulate in Peshawar and then had their tour. Safi while describing the strict security measures and surveillance at the border appreciated the legal formality and documentation while moving from one country to another country. Such type of measures can help in averting great incidents and casualties of the nature witnessed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the shape of the attack on the Army Public School Peshawar in December 2014, attacks on Bacha Khan University Charsadda and attack on Badaber Airbase Camp Peshawar where the mastermind of these attacks was allegedly claimed to have taken shelter in the sanctuaries across the border and then fled to Afghanistan (Safi, 2016).

The border has notoriety not only in so far as the illegal transport of goods is concerned but also disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the two countries and consequently of the entire region. Safi supported the moves of the Afghan government on his entry to Afghanistan, He added that he had been reiterating for the last so many years for taking concrete measures for the management of the border but of no avail. In 2013 efforts were made during the government of Pakistan People Party when the Foreign Minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, and Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan, Muhammad Sadiq showed their commitment to border management but it could not be materialized. This move was also backed up by the British Prime Minister David Cameron for finding out a viable solution to the Durand line by playing the role facilitation and providing a guarantee to both the countries regarding the implementation of the decision over the management of the border.

Border Management

The concept of border management carries different connotations to different people. It is usually taken in the negative perspective of closing down the border for the movement of the people. Some are of the view that this refers to the sealing of the border but that again is not a correct explanation of the concept. To others, it refers to the fencing of the border but all these explanations are unjustified for lacking to reach the correct meaning of border management. Border management according to Salim Safi is neither 'close' nor 'seal' the border but rather manage it properly. Referring to Pakistan's border with the neighbouring countries of Iran and China he urges that these borders are well managed and there is neither infiltration from either side nor is there blame game against each other regarding the misuse of it. Pakistan's borders with these countries are based on the doctrine of management and regularization to be used on the mutual consent of both the countries. There are neither proper walls nor barriers but cannot be crossed without having legal documents.

The issue of border management uses different techniques for the movement of the people as per the needs and requirements of the bordering countries. It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan's border management with China, Iran, and India are based on different strategies and techniques. The case of Pakistan's border handling with India is based on the doctrine of Balance of Power Theory; with China, it is based on the doctrine of Theory of Liberalism, with Iran it is based on Non-Zero Sum Game Theory, while with Afghanistan it is based on the concept of Security Dilemma. Management with Afghanistan does not mean constructing a Berlin Wall or put limitations on business activities with Afghanistan or stopping the movement of the people. Some of the moves of this management include the following points;

- i) Manage the border like other borders of the world to avoid infiltration and cross border terrorism.
- ii) Management of the border will be a great step towards the regularization of the border for different commercial, business, financial, and trade activities from both sides.
- iii) Even fencing or sealing the border does not mean the stoppage of the economic and other business activities; this will rather greatly regularize their business enterprises for making more money and creating huge market mechanisms.
- iv) The installation of the Biometric devices at some critical points will be very helpful in improving the relations between the two countries and lead towards the normalization of the relations.
- v) The Biometric devices will serve another purpose of eradicating the hide-outs meant for the terrorists and insurgents from both sides.

- vi) Making a joint security force comprising an equal number of security personnel from both sides will also contribute a lot in reducing the threat of belligerence and rebellion.
- vii) Proper management will serve to normalize relations between the two countries since most of the sanctuaries and hide out will remain under the strict surveillance of the security forces.
- viii) Deploy an equal number of security personnel on both sides of the border from amongst the two countries to create an atmosphere of friendship and harmony by doing away with the issue of vested interests.
- ix) There is a great need to increase the number of security posts on either side of the border to monitor the inflow and outflow of people across the border.
- x) A squad of volunteers from both sides to be enlisted for maintaining peace and stability in the area.
- xi) The International organizations and Security Council can create a force of Para-military to safeguard the border.
- xii) Confidence building measures between the two countries can create an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation.

These are some of the measures that help in creating an amicable atmosphere for the smooth functioning of the activities across the Durand Line. It has been a great economic hub for the people in terms of trade, commerce, and business enterprises. It has also been a site of various socio-economic, socio-religious, and socio-political activities (Tariq, *The Pashtun Tribal System and Issues of Security*, 2018). The border management will automatically resolve.

Many issues of security, instability, smuggling, drug-trafficking, and all other illegal activities that put hurdles in the way of smooth functioning of life. Press and electronic media can also do invaluable output towards the conflict resolution; the issue of border management since many a time the big iron gates installed to control infiltration and illegal movement were removed and damaged by the local people.

The root cause of the issue between the two countries lies over the legal position of the Durand Line. It is this border that has created an atmosphere of mistrust and blame game. There have always been accusations and resultantly counter-accusations from either side concerning direct or indirect interference in the affairs of the other country (Sadiq, 2010,p 2). Afghanistan is not ready to give legal cover to the Durand Line, which is an international border between the two countries. It has been engaged in accusing Pakistan of creating insurgency and perpetrates acts of terrorism for the destabilization of Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pakistan charges Afghanistan with its undue interference in the affairs of Pakistan and particularly flaming the issue of Baloch nationalism, besides supporting the issue of greater *Pashtunistan* across the border; a step towards creating a state within state inhabited by the *Pashtuns* (Sadiq, 2010,p 2). Another grievance of Pakistan against Afghanistan is the increased strategic interest in Afghanistan though both the countries are poles apart (Tariq, *India-Pak Rivalry in Afghanistan*, 2015). Pakistan also contends that Afghanistan is utilizing India in Balochistan the uprising of Baloch Nationalism. A clear example of this is the capture of Kal Boshan Yadew, Indian Raw agent, in Balochistan who is still imprisoned in Pakistan.

Afghanistan's stance over the question of Durand line claiming that it is not an international border, is quite baseless and without any cogent reason. The border agreement owes its origin to 1893 when it was signed between Afghanistan and the British government after fulfilling all the requisite formalities. The government of Afghanistan had on three occasions admitted it to be an international border; in 1905 through the Anglo-Afghan Pact, in 1919 through the Treaty of Rawalpindi and in 1921 through the Anglo-Afghan Treaty (Brasseur, 2011). The agreement of the Durand line had received recognition from three consecutive governments of Afghanistan and had to receive any financial benefits from the British government till 1920. Pakistan, being a successor to the British throne had to abide by the act of recognition of the border since it was signed by their predecessor. Moreover, the contention of the Afghan government that they were forced to sign the border agreement lacks substance (Room, 2004). It is an admitted fact that Afghanistan blames that the agreement was imposed upon them but they have confirmed its legality on many occasions (Hasan, 1962,p 14).

The contention of Afghanistan that border is the main cause of dividing the *Pashtun* brethren is fallacious and baseless. It does not divide them but rather acts as a unifying force between the *Pashtun* communities. The *Pashtuns* are having a population of over forty million people with 60% of

them have their abode in Pakistan (Beg., 2015). History reveals for years the Pashtuns across the border had developed their own identity and supremacy which no power and government in Afghanistan and even Pakistan bothered to bring them under the direct control of the government. This made them bold enough to revolt against the popular decisions of the government. For example the enthronement of Hafeezullah Ameen by the Soviets during the 1970s compelled the Pashtuns to revolt against this enthronement and hence formed their bases in the tribal belt of Pakistan (Beg., 2015). The American and Pakistan provided support to the Pashtun community against the Russians during their invasion of Afghanistan. They fought under the patronage of these two countries with the banner of jihad. It was during this time that they were declared as Mujahideen on account of being attacked by the non-Muslims. They won the war against the Russians and got victorious. Here the great dilemma was at the end of the war, the Americans were not in any way ready to share power with the Mujahideen, who were the real heroes and winners of the war. Denying them share in the sphere of the government created a sense of deprivation among the Pashtuns known as Mujahideen and this resulted in the civil war in Afghanistan which culminated in 1995 with the rise of Taliban to the power of the government. The Taliban remained in power till 2001 when their power was shattered by the US and allied forces consequent upon the attacks on the Twin cities of Pentagon. The Al-Qaeda network was held responsible for the attacks on the Pentagon, which resulted in the elimination of the Al-Qaeda network.

During the years from 2001 to 2020 America has suffered huge losses in finance, security personnel, and infrastructure but could not succeed in subduing the Afghani people. At the time of their arrival in Afghanistan they had to fight against the only network under different names of Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Neo-Taliban, and the Haqqani network. But now they have to fight another network in the name of ISIS, which is rather more dangerous than the Taliban. The US and NATO forces started the process of drawdown in 2014 and now round about 13,000 US troops are deputed on security duty but they have now realized their mistake and are bent upon leaving the country in 14 months. Pakistani Ambassador in Afghanistan Syed Abrar Hussain, that stability and restoration of peace in Afghanistan is a Herculean task and will take some more time (Hussain, 2016).

The challenge posed by the ISIS (Daesh) is very serious. It is not only against the western ideology but also against the ideology of the Taliban. Both the Taliban and ISIS have fought on several occasions in Afghanistan and are even fighting whenever an opportunity arises. So, Afghanistan had to fight against the Taliban but the threat of ISIS can in no case be ignored. Now the greater challenge for the government of Afghanistan is the threat of Taliban and the ISIS. The Americans are also fed up with fighting and are pressing hard the Afghan government to find a viable solution to the Afghan issue by resolving conflict with the Taliban and other insurgent groups. In case they failed to do so, the US would withdraw its troops prematurely from Afghanistan.

It is also alarming for Pakistan since the threat of terrorism may not only come from the Taliban but also from ISIS, which is rather more harmful than the Taliban. So, the network of non-state actors has got more saturated inviting among its ambit more terrorist groups and insurgents. Pakistan has been blaming Afghanistan for its support to the cause of Baloch Nationalism and secessionist move from the parent country though Pakistan has been very sincere towards Afghanistan. It provided them with all logistic and moral support coupled with other resources when it was attacked by the Soviet Union in 1979. Pakistan was also the first country to recognize the regime of the Taliban when they ascended the throne (Bajorai, 2009).

The borderland owing to its strategic significance has presented a bleak picture of Pakistan since it is one of the longest borders in the world having porous and windy nature on most of the points. It is an important trade and commercial route for Pakistan with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Countries. (Hussain, July 24, 2016). Regrettably, it has rather served as the center for many illegal activities of smuggling, drug-trafficking and terrorism and sanctuaries for the terrorists. A few networks have been responsible for the deteriorating law and order situation along the border, which include the Neo-Taliban, the Al-Qaeda network, and the *Haqqani* network. A brief description of each is given in the following lines.

Neo-Taliban

Pakistan's border to the west has great symbolic significance in terms of religion, ideology, and geographic location (Tariq, Dynamics of NATO Drawdown from Afghanistan and Future

Implications, 2015). Its significance lies in the fact that it was the place which was used by the *Mujahidin* against the Russians; it served to be the native land of Al-Qaeda; the emergence of the Taliban in 1994 and now the wholesome place for the Neo-Taliban (White, 2008).

The first and foremost aim of this network is to fuel the on-going inconsistency in Afghanistan by destabilizing the elected government. Its focus of action directed towards the western parts of Afghanistan and western powers. The function of the second objective is of global nature and mainly focus to provide hideout to the Al-Qaeda for conducting acts of terrorism while particularly targeting the interest of the western powers. The third objective of this network is concentrated on the destabilization of Pakistan and particularly the province of Khyber *Pakhtunkhwa* and the tribal areas with the sole purpose of establishing an Islamic government as per their vision. The third objective is directed particularly towards KP, FATA (now merged in KP), and settled districts of the province for creating a disturbance and terrorist attacks. The government of Pakistan should pay proper attention to the activities of this network. The move of the government by bringing in the National Action Plan in 2014 for rejuvenating the defunct national And Counter-Terrorism Act has proved quite fruitful results in curbing insurgency and terrorism from the country (White, 2008). This group is mainly parasitic with its dependence on the sanctuaries of the tribal areas of Pakistan (Tariq, 2015).

Their focal point is not only the tribal belt of the country but also the settled areas of the province of Khyber *Pakhtunkhwa*. It has carried out attacks in Swat, Mardan, Kohat, Charsadda, Peshawar, and other populated cities. Its worst attack was the brutal raid on APS Peshawar on December 16, 2014, and killing them in a barbarous and inhuman way (Yousafzai, 2015). The mastermind of this attack was supposed to be Khalifa Khalid Mansour, who was reported to be hiding in Afghanistan's provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar (Yousafzai, 2015). All the religious parties that are on the same page about the west and *Sharia* are double-minded about the threats posed by it (White, 2008).

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda has been recognized as the most detrimental to the law enforcement agencies of Pakistan as well as the International Assistance Force in Afghanistan. On account of its involvement in most the heinous attacks and insurgencies, it was greatly affected by the military operations of the ISAF and law enforcement agencies. Most of the drone attacks and counter-insurgent initiatives were launched against this group. In the post-9/11 episode, the focus of the US and allied forces were on the obliteration of this organization as it was involved in the terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the United States of America. It has been completely shattered by the military operations of the NATO. Presently, there is a lack of cohesion among the various members to find sanctuaries either in Pakistan or Afghanistan but it has been successful in creating a strategy of symbiosis with other networks such as the *Haqqani* network and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). So, this group is not a monolithic one but rather an amalgam of various networks based upon mutual symbiosis. Some of the members of Al-Qaeda focused their attention on Pakistan while others carried out their activities in Afghanistan. It has also created links with other groups which are creating troubles for the security agencies and have been declared by them to be terrorist groups (Jhones & Fair, 2012). There are great chances of the resurgence of these groups in the post-withdrawal period of the US troops working under the nomenclature of the Resolute Support Mission (Tariq, 2018).

Haqqani Network

This is another network that has carried on its activities in most parts of the world. Some of the prominent leaders of this group include Jalaluddin Haqqani and his son, Sirajuddin *Haqqani*. It has made it clear time and again that it has sanctuaries along both sides of the border and has been instrumental in carrying on activities there in the tribal region (Kronstadt, 2012, pp 29-30). Since it has great involvement against the security forces of the ISAF, it is feared that this may show great intensity in fighting against the law enforcement agencies of both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its center of attention is mainly the eastern side of Afghanistan while the center of attention of the Neo-Taliban was the western side of the country.

This group has been engaged in initiating attacks and acts of terrorism against the government of Afghanistan, the United States and key sectors of both the coalition partners on the war against terrorism. The fact that *Jalaluddin Haqqani* who once used to be the partner of the United States during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has now turned into a bitter enemy of the US. But is also an

important fact that this network greatly suffered as a result of the military operations of the allied forces. Pakistan had to carry on its military operations in the areas where the elements of this group were in saturated form. There are great apprehensions that this may worsen the security situation in both countries after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan specifically within 14 months. The US has made its agenda clear to leave Afghanistan now and leave the security measures to the local security forces of Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The Borderland Theory is one of the most significant theories in determining relations between the bordering countries, particularly between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It provides a theoretical framework to the Pak-Afghan border that became a flashing point in the post-9/11 episode. Keeping in view great security risks emanating from the border, Pakistan had to deploy two lac (200,000) security personnel and had to build 200 security checkpoints. The United States along with NATO started the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, while also urging Pakistan to have strict vigilance over the border. The porous and treacherous nature of the border provides ample space of sanctuaries to the insurgents and terrorists. Another major concern for Pakistan is the excessive engagement of India in Afghanistan by partaking of many projects and various sectors coupled with financial and military training to the Afghan security personnel will add further fuel to the fire. The non-state actors have always been on the lookout for any opportunity to worsen security situation along both sides of the border.

Border management is one of the strategies that may help redress the issue of insurgency and terrorism and may help in improving the relations between the two neighbouring countries. Installation of biometric devices at some of the key security checkpoints would be another contributory point. Increasing the number of security checks posts at the critical areas and deployment of extra-security personnel would also be a great contributory factor. Strict security surveillance across both sides of the border will be a great help for the restoration of normalcy in the region. Implementation of the visa system is another area of great importance in so far strengthening the system of checks and balances. The current US-Taliban Talks and intra-Afghan talks is the whole pivotal around which the peace, stability, and security of Afghanistan centers. This will consequentially be a great step towards bringing peace and stability in the region since every stakeholder in Afghanistan will be in a position to share power in the country. The US has realized this factor very that peace in Afghanistan can only be maintained through the participation of the Taliban in the talks and power-sharing formula of the government. The US is also pressing hard for the Afghan government to resolve all issues with the Taliban through negotiation and peaceful means.

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