

# Regional Rapport



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The benefits of globalisation have clearly multiplied around the world. At the same time, security threats have also mushroomed, along with the efforts of states to reap speedy economic gains. These factors are pushing regions to bank on 'collective connectivity' to achieve their common goals of economic development and security. In South Asia, Pakistan's strategic and geographical position and vitality impress proponents of regional integration, but unfortunately, we are yet to solve the dominating conundrums being posed by our neighbours. Take, for instance, the case of Afghanistan. It has long been clear to policy practitioners that peace in both countries is primarily connected with Afghan stability. Unrest on both sides of the frontier has undoubtedly put both our economies in tatters, and peace remains a distant dream. A flashback to the Cold War era is sufficient to remind us that Afghanistan and Pakistan became breeding grounds for extremist ideologies and groups spawned by US policies. After the USSR's defeat, these extremists clothed their ideologies with new brands of terrorist thought, and sporadically threatened a -new Pak-Afghan security, as well as that of other countries in the region. The US has been justifying its deceptive relations by insisting

that Pakistan needs to wipe out both the 'good and the bad Taliban'. It is high time the Americans started acting fairly when it comes to their relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Otherwise, blowbacks like those experienced in the Middle East could crop up in this region as well.

The Afghans, instead of realising the benefits ensuing from peace and security, continue to blame Pakistan for all terrorist attacks within their territory. These accusations serve to conceal their own inability and lack of will to tackle their own terrorist problem. For its part, Pakistan has been badly jolted by a series of recent lethal terrorist attacks planned on Afghan soil. One recalls that President Ashraf Ghani, on his visit to Pakistan in 2014, announced that "we want to bolster security and defence ties with Pakistan including cooperation in training and border management". Nonetheless, he now wants to "isolate" Pakistan under immense domestic pressure.

Within the region, as horrific and even far-fetched as this may sound, there is always the possibility of India and Pakistan sliding into a nuclear war. This is especially possible if India continues using double standards at the international level and continues to label Pakistan a safe haven for terrorists. In reality, India itself has been spending huge sums to support extremist elements on Afghan soil that work to de-stabilise Pakistan.

As far as Pakistani security is concerned, there are two contesting schools of thought in opposition to each other. Or put differently, the realists and liberals are both striving to ensure their own power positions. As a result, the state's security is not being pursued to its logical conclusion. Like all other realists, ours too believe that the instruments of violence, defence and deterrence define the directions of state relationships. Our liberals, like others elsewhere, firmly believe in soft power tools like economic cooperation, people-to-people contacts and cultural exchange, but resolutely reject violence as an instrument in state affairs. Both schools of thought are to some extent justified, but the nub of the problem is that the manoeuvres for power on the part of both schools on the political, foreign, domestic, diplomatic and institutional fronts, do not permit a breathing space that will allow our state to grow in the right direction. Institutional harmony can strengthen us at home, and that can pave the way for better relationships in the region.

As a leader in the region, China has been far-sighted in its foreign policy. What we need to be wary of is that the completion of the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor may become a Herculean task in view of the ongoing uncertain regional rivalries. We should seriously turn our minds towards pondering on how to improve our relations with Afghanistan. Without this, peace and economic prosperity in Pakistan will remain an elusive mirage. What we need are better relations with Afghanistan, India, Iran, Russia and the US. This will allow us to move towards achieving stability, security and a strong economy.