



**WEBINAR**

# **RETHINKING REGIONAL COLLABORATION: PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, AND BEYOND**

 **3PM**

 **Mon, 18th Aug, 2025**

## **BRIEF REPORT**

# Conceptual Framework

Pakistan and Afghanistan occupy a pivotal geopolitical position at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. Their shared history, cultural linkages, and geographic proximity present opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation, particularly in the fields of trade, connectivity, and security. Yet, political mistrust, cross-border threats, and economic limitations continue to hinder the full realization of this potential. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan has further reshaped regional dynamics, creating both challenges and opportunities. While instability remains a concern, the new landscape also offers opportunities for dialogue, confidence-building, and enhanced regional integration. The webinar identified strategic avenues for advancing Pakistan–Afghanistan cooperation within a regional framework. Discussions focused on enhancing bilateral trade and economic integration through transit corridors and connectivity projects. Participants emphasized the need to address the Afghan refugee challenge through sustainable and rights-based approaches. Strengthening the regional security architecture was highlighted as vital to counter terrorism and cross-border militancy. The dialogue further underlined the strategic trajectory of Pakistan–Afghanistan relations, stressing policy alignment, institutional collaboration, and long-term diplomatic frameworks as pillars for stability and shared prosperity.

## Moderator



Ms. Hiba Amjad, who moderated the session, steered the discussion by raising key questions on the implications of regional cooperation, migration challenges, and the role of external actors in Afghanistan. Her interventions ensured a balanced and engaging dialogue between the panelists and participants.

## Discussion Points



### Usama Khan

Director, South Asia Times

- Present challenges were framed within the centuries-old cultural and historical interconnectedness between the two nations.
- Periods of shared governance, particularly during the **Mughal era**, were cited as evidence of enduring political and cultural linkages.
- Historical interdependence in trade, security, and cultural exchanges was underscored as a driver of regional connectivity.
- Such legacies were positioned as strategic foundations for modern **reconciliation and cooperative policymaking**.
- Drawing on shared history was highlighted as a means to **foster mutual trust, mitigate political mistrust, and advance sustainable regional cooperation**.



# Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan

Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan

- After the Soviet invasion (1979–80), Pakistan hosted 4–5 million Afghan refugees, becoming the world's largest host. Early reception was positive due to shared history, culture, geography, and religion.
- Post-2001, Pakistan faced accusations of supporting insurgents while struggling to manage millions of refugees. Indian influence in Afghanistan fueled anti-Pakistan propaganda.
- The Taliban's return in 2021 did not bring stability. TTP, Daesh, and BLA continue crossborder attacks. Border fencing has not fully resolved security concerns and often affects civilians.
- **Pakistan–Afghanistan ties face a dual dilemma: ongoing security threats versus opportunities for trade and regional connectivity. Both must advance together.**
- People-to-people ties remain essential for rebuilding trust.
- Stronger border management is needed through visas, documentation, and technology.
- Afghan graduates of Pakistani institutions are a key asset and should be engaged in cooperation.
- Health collaboration should expand, as many Afghans rely on Pakistan for treatment.
- **Trade potential remains underutilized. Current volume is \$3 billion, but could reach \$10 billion. Afghan investors and refugee communities can contribute productively.**
- Border regions require socio-economic uplift to counter militancy and instability.
- **Geo-economics** should guide policy, as influence today depends more on economic integration than geopolitics.
- Zero refugee presence is unrealistic; policy should focus on making Afghans contributors to Pakistan's economy, security, and bilateral relations.





## **Dr Asif Amin**

### **Research Fellow at CSSPR**

- **South Asia and Central Asia are mineral-rich yet remain poor. Pakistan has 47% of its population below the poverty line, with terrorism and regional disputes as key obstacles.**
- **From 1996–2021, Pakistan viewed Afghanistan as a close ally under the concept of “strategic depth.” Post-9/11, relations deteriorated, leading to growing animosity and distrust.**
- **Pakistan’s primary security concern remains the use of Afghan soil for terrorism by groups such as TTP. China shares similar concerns regarding Uyghur militant groups. Without peace and security, mineral wealth cannot be harnessed for economic growth.**
- **The solution lies in trust-building and economic integration through transit, railways, CPEC expansion, and regional connectivity projects such as the Wakhan Corridor. Afghanistan’s existing use of Pakistan’s trade routes demonstrates this potential.**
- **Afghanistan holds trillions of dollars’ worth of rare earth minerals, including lithium. China has pledged \$10 billion in investment in Afghan minerals. These resources are critical for the emerging “tech world order” driven by AI, drones, and quantum technologies.**
- **China already supplies 98% of rare earth metals to the EU and 60% to the U.S. Its roadmap is clear: parity in AI and technology by 2030, and global leadership in tech by 2049.**
- **China’s strategy relies on economic partnerships rather than military alliances. By expanding CPEC to Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia, Beijing seeks shared economic stakes that can foster long-term stability.**
- **Peace and security remain a precondition for development. Terrorist groups such as AlQaeda, ISKP, TTP, and Tajik militants threaten regional stability, making security guarantees indispensable for integration.**
- **Ongoing trilateral dialogues between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China are a step toward building trust and engaging the Taliban regime. The upcoming third round in Kabul is particularly significant for advancing this process.**



**Mr. Ahmad  
Ershad Ahrar**  
Writer in political  
advocate, Afghanistan

- Historical and ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan are not entirely organic but often driven by the strategic interests of global powers.
- International actors deliberately exploit bilateral rifts to advance their agendas, deepening mistrust and instability in the region.
- The issue of Afghan repatriation is more than a migration policy challenge; it directly impacts the socio-political fabric of both countries.
- Sustainable solutions require genuine dialogue and collaborative policymaking between Islamabad and Kabul.
- Acknowledging grievances on both sides and addressing them constructively is essential for long-term stability.
- Mutual understanding and cooperative frameworks remain the only pathway toward sustainable peace between the two neighbors.



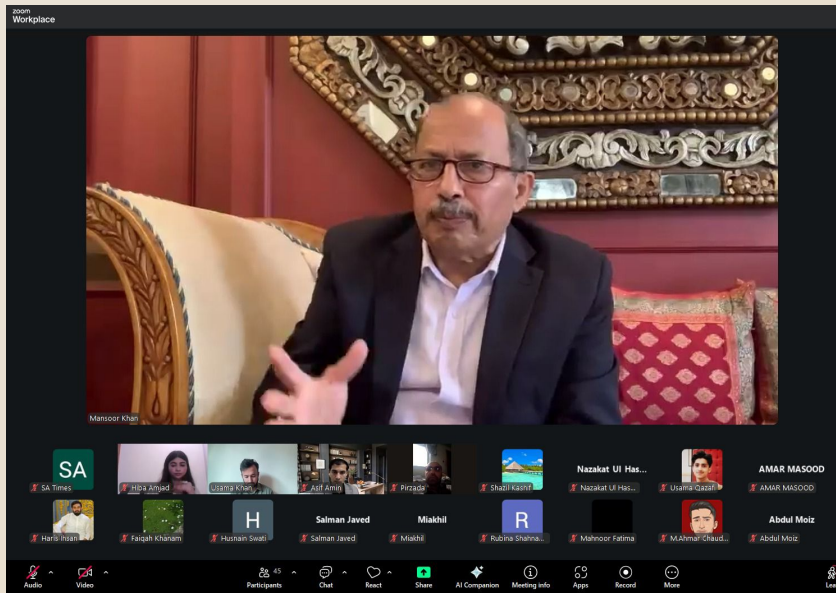
## **Mr. Salman Javed**

**Director General,  
South Asia Times**

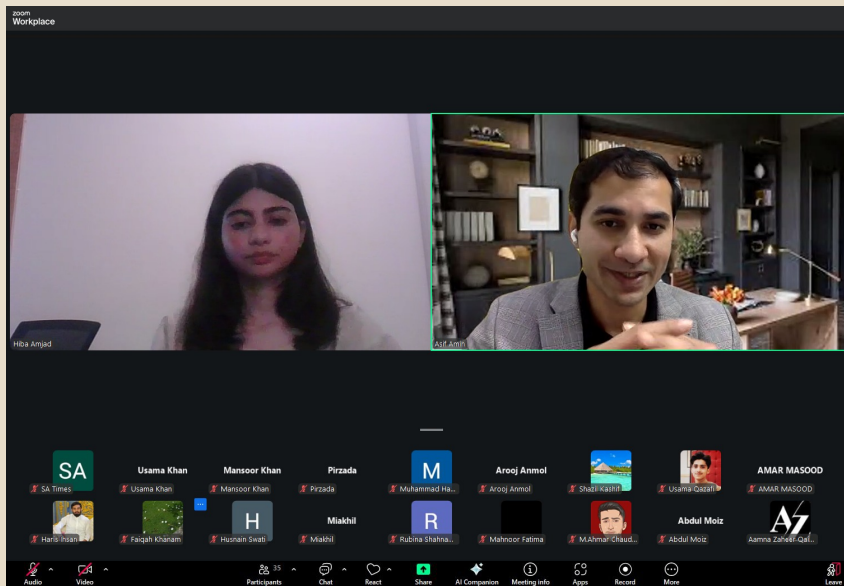
- **Mr. Salman Javed, Director General of SAT, in his closing remarks, reaffirmed the enduring “brotherly ties” between Pakistan and Afghanistan, underscoring that despite recurring mistrust, both nations remain historically and culturally inseparable.**
- **He cautioned against the role of external actors operating from Afghan soil, warning that such destabilizing elements directly undermine Pakistan’s security and regional stability.**
- **Stressing the need for a forward-looking approach, he called for a cooperative vision that prioritizes regional peace, connectivity, and economic integration over external interference.**
- **He concluded by asserting that sustainable stability can only be achieved through collective resolve and regional ownership, ensuring that the region’s destiny is determined by its people rather than outside powers.**



# Webinar Highlights



A	Ayesha (Me)		
	Usama Qazafi (Host)	REC	
H	Hiba Amjad (Co-host)	REC	
P	Pirzada		
SA	SA Times		
AM	AMAR MASOOD		
	Haris Ihsan		
	Faiqah Khanam		
H	Husnain Swati		



M	Miakhil		
R	Rubina Shahnawaz		
	M.Ahmar Chaudhary		
AM	Abdul Moiz		
UK	Usama Khan		
MK	Mansoor Khan		
H	Hamail Tahir		
	TADBEER Academy		
FM	Faiqa Muqem		



SM	syeda mehak zahra		
SJ	Salman Javed		
WU	WAQAS UR REHMAN		
WK	Warda Kalsoom		
UA	Umme Aiman		
I	Iqra		
NH	Naeem Hussain		
	Ashfaq Durrani		
	Ihtesham Khan		

# Policy Recommendations

- **Institutionalize Bilateral Engagement:** Prioritize direct, regular, and continuous engagement at both political and diplomatic levels between Pakistan and Afghanistan to foster trust, address grievances, and discourage exploitation of tensions by external actors.
- **Adopt a Human-Centric Refugee Policy:** Approach Afghan refugee repatriation as a complex socio-political challenge rather than an administrative task, implementing a phased, humane, and coordinated process to minimize humanitarian fallout while safeguarding Pakistan's national interests.
- **Strengthen Border Security Cooperation:** Pursue robust intelligence-sharing, joint border management, and integrated security mechanisms to address concerns over militant sanctuaries, counter terrorism, and reduce cross-border mistrust.
- **Promote Economic Integration:** Expand cross-border trade, transit agreements, and joint infrastructure investments to create mutual economic benefits and leverage interdependence as a stabilizing force in bilateral relations.
- **Engage in Regional Multilateralism:** Integrate actively into platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and trilateral dialogues with China and Central Asia to address shared challenges through collective regional action.
- **Prioritize Regional Ownership:** Reduce dependence on external actors by focusing on indigenous, regional solutions for Pak-Afghan policy, ensuring that both countries retain agency over their bilateral agenda.
- **Build Confidence Through People-to-People Exchanges:** Facilitate trade, educational, and cultural exchanges as confidence-building measures to deepen interpersonal connections and promote enduring understanding.
- **Develop a Long-Term Vision:** Formulate a comprehensive regional roadmap for peace and prosperity that transcends short-term security concerns and addresses underlying socio-economic issues.
- **Modernize Border Governance:** Enhance border management through advanced technologies, streamlined documentation, and integrated monitoring systems for efficient, transparent, and secure cross-border movement.
- **Leverage Afghan Human Capital:** Utilize the talents of Afghan graduates and professionals educated in Pakistan as a bridge for stronger bilateral ties and collaborative development through the use of soft power.
- **Prioritize Socio-Economic Uplift of Border Regions:** Invest in sustainable development and inclusive growth in border areas to reduce instability, marginalization, and the risk of radicalization.
- **Align Security and Economic Policies:** Synchronize security frameworks with geo-economic strategies so that efforts in stability and development reinforce each other for broad-based progress.
- **Promote Political Inclusivity in Afghanistan:** Position Pakistan as a facilitator for dialogue and inclusivity within Afghanistan, supporting political stability that directly benefits and strengthens bilateral relations





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