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Management of the Taftan and Chaman Borders: Challenges, Successful Models, and Way Forward

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper examines the challenges and opportunities in managing the Taftan and Chaman borders shared by Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. It identifies key issues like trade irregularities, smuggling, and security concerns while recommending actionable strategies for improvement.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study employs a qualitative approach, using interviews with traders and officials, focus group discussions, and case studies of successful trade models such as barter trade and digitalized border systems. Limitations include restricted access to sensitive security data and reliance on secondary sources for historical analysis.

Findings: The research highlights mismanagement, lack of formal trade mechanisms, and weak governance as major challenges. Implementing regulated barter trade, border digitalization, and cross-border cooperation can transform these borders into hubs of legal commerce and economic integration.

Implications/Originality/Value: The study underscores the socio-economic benefits of improved border management, particularly for marginalized border regions. It introduces the innovative idea of the *Commonwealth of Khorasan*, a regional economic bloc fostering cultural and economic ties, offering a sustainable framework for peace, prosperity, and regional stability.

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1. Introduction

Border management is crucial for easy trade and smooth exchange of goods and trade. It becomes more significant when people on both sides of the border share a common language, culture, and ethnicity. Example of such borders is Durand Line, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and Taftan Border, the border between Pakistan and Iran. Millions of people on both sides depend on these borders for their livelihoods, particularly a large population of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces of Pakistan deal with these borders. However, on account of being porous and not well managed, on-and-off closures of these borders are routine. People across bona fide

border crossing sites often go on strike in great numbers and demand smooth running of the border crossings, especially those who depend on these borders for their bread and butter.

There is a need to understand the challenges that the people of these border areas of Pakistan face and to manage these borders effectively. This paper analyzes these challenges, discusses a few successful models of border management from around the world, and suggests a way forward so that the three states—Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan—and their people can benefit from these borders to the maximum extent while staying within the parameters of the law.

Map 1

Pak Iran Border at Taftan

(Edited by the researcher, the original source is unknown)

1.1 Pak – Iran Bilateral Relations

Iran shares a border of over 500 miles with Pakistan. It was the first Muslim country that recognized Pakistan. Soon after, in 1949, Pakistan's then Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan visited Tehran and the next year, Shah of Iran visited Pakistan. Both nations signed a treaty of Friendship on February 19, 1950. (Yousafzai & Shah, 2022) Both countries became part of the Baghdad Pact in 1955. Iran supported Pakistan politically as well as diplomatically in the Pak-India wars of 1965 and 1971. Tehran also helped Pakistan and Afghanistan restore their diplomatic relations in 1963. (Yousafzai & Shah, 2022)

The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan resulted in significant changes in Pak-Iran ties. Both nations denounced the Soviet Union's intervention and supported opposing Afghan forces. Iran backed the non-Pashtun faction, whereas Pakistan backed the Pashtun *Mujahedeen* (loosely translated as holy warriors). When the Soviets left in 1989, the trust gap widened further; as both the governments continued to fund opposing fighting groups in Afghanistan. When the Taliban took over Kabul and went into Mizar Sharif, they assassinated many Iranian diplomats and Shia Hazaras in the north. This severed ties between the Taliban and Iran and also weakened Pak-Iran relations. (Yousafzai & Shah, 2022) Shia-Sunni conflicts, the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and competing interests in Central Asian Republics between Pakistan and Iran harmed their

relations. (Yousafzai & Shah, 2022) The emergence of Al-Qaeda, the incident of 9/11 leading to America's 'War on Terror', the founding of Jundullah (2002), insurgency in Pakistan's Balochistan province (since 2004) (Kupecz, n.d.) and growing Western sanctions against Iran, made managing their shared border and progressively strained Pak-Iran relationship every year.

1.2 Pak – Afghan Bilateral Relations

The case between Pakistan and Afghanistan is different. Afghanistan shares a border of over 1600 miles with Pakistan. It opposed Pakistan's membership in the United Nations when the latter came into being in 1947 because it did not accept the Durand Line. However, the Durand Line is a functional border and other than sporadic anti-border statements, Afghanistan generally accepts it. This issue, nevertheless continues to be an irritant between the two countries. (Amina Khan, 2017) Sardar Muhammad Daud Khan overthrew King Zahir Shah in 1956 and became the Afghan President. He made a declaration in Islamabad recognizing the Durand Line as the international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1976. (Rasanayagam, 2005, p. 64) Somehow, the slogan of *Pashtunistan* (the land of Pashtuns) though much water downed, is politically still alive in some form in Pakistan as well as on the other side of the border. The demand has now become creation of a separate homeland for the ethnic Pashtuns living on both sides of the border. (Amina Khan, 2017)

The issues of cross-border terrorism; human trafficking across this border, the influx of Afghan refugees in Pakistan since the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan (1979), the incidents of 9/11 (2001), American withdrawal from Afghanistan (August 2021), and smuggling of drugs have been major obstacles in managing the border with Afghanistan. Fencing of this long border which Pakistan started during 2019 is seen with great concern by ethnic Pashtuns on both sides. However, cross-border terrorism has remained the major irritant between Pakistan and Afghanistan for a long time, particularly since 9/11.

Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan have made some noteworthy attempts to boo st trade and manage their shared borders. For example, the Pak-Afghan Transit Trade Agreement of 1965, its redesign in 2010, the formation of the Regional Cooperation Organisation (RCO) of Pakistan, Iran, and Turkiye in 1965, the establishment of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1985 and the recent Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) for barter trade with Iran are a few of such efforts.

Map 2

Pak-Afghan Border, The Durand Line (in Red)

(Edited by the researcher. *Original Source: Weaveravel https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=107817927)*

As a way forward to increase legal trade among the three, curbing cross-border terrorism, and ending smuggling are necessary. The Barter System of Trade (BST), Automated Trade Transaction System (ATTS), the European Union (EU) model of free trade, and the Open Market Trade Model (OMTM) are a few worth considering models to be considered in this regard. Regularizing trade, especially on Taftan and Chaman borders, registration of merchants and goods on these borders, and digitalization of these borders can help the three nations reach a common goal of eventually perhaps evolving into a *Commonwealth of Khorasan* (Agha Gul 2023) on the model of the existing Commonwealth or even more functional, prosperous, and influential troika.

2. Historical Background of the Trade at Borders

2.1 Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) - 1965

With increasing security threats, it has become necessary for the security of states to protect their borders and Pakistan is not unique in this regard. It shares 2,640 kilometers long border called the Durand Line with Afghanistan. This borderline is a bone of contention between both countries. (Umar, 2016) In 2019, Pakistan started fencing its border with Afghanistan. Authorities claim that 90% of the border fence is completed. However, this act was rejected by Afghan authorities. They claimed it to be a violation of international law, also claiming that it is written in the Durand Line agreement that villagers can move freely from one country to another to meet their relatives. However, there is no such clause mentioned in Durand Line documents. (Akram 2017) Afghans are concerned that fencing the border will separate the Pashtuns present in both countries belonging to the same ethnic race. Pakistan's assertion is that its actions are aimed at reducing tensions between the two nations rather than fostering division among the populace. (Akram 2017)

Diplomatic relations between both countries were not very friendly since the beginning but improved during the 1960s when the governments of both countries decided to decrease the tensions by increasing economic relations by signing a trade agreement. Nearly eight legal cross-border locations exist between Pakistan and Afghanistan, three of which—Chaman, Angor-Adda and Torkham, have international recognition. The Chaman and Torkham Borders are used for traffic and passengers' entrance and exit purposes. (Caravanistan, 2023) Afghanistan's lack of direct access to the sea makes it heavily reliant on Pakistan for transit trade. As a result, Pakistan is a crucial channel for Afghanistan's trade with other countries. Despite historical and cultural ties between the two nations, this dependence on Pakistan has created some tensions in their relationship. To promote peaceful economic cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the two countries signed the APTTA in 1965. This agreement allows duty-free trade between the two countries via land, sea, and air, and permits Afghanistan to export its goods to India through Pakistan's Wagah Border. Pakistani trucks can transport products to various regions of Afghanistan. The APTTA also aimed to reduce smuggling along this trade route.

2.2 Redesigned APTTA - 2010

In 2010, this agreement was revised, allowing Afghan exports to go through Pakistan's seaport Karachi. A joint Chamber of Commerce was established in 2012. To create a commercial corridor from north to south, Afghanistan and Pakistan also decided to include Tajikistan in the APTTA the same year. Although the 2012 extension has since expired, the Pakistani government had granted a two-year extension to continue trade activities between the two nations. (Paswan n.d) In November 2014, President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani intended to increase the amount of bilateral trade to $5 billion between Afghanistan and Pakistan by 2017. In exchange, Pakistan pledged to decrease tariffs and costs for seaport and storage services and to initiate efforts to rapidly clear 95% of Afghan imports made under the transit trade agreement. (Husain & Ather Elahi Pakistan, 2015)

Despite existing agreements between both countries, persistent tensions remain. Pakistan is apprehensive and rightly so, about the possibility of goods imported from India to Afghanistan being transshipped through Pakistan, might be unloaded in Pakistan harming its local industries. According to authorities' estimates from 2015, the APTTA is often exploited, with approximately 75% of products being smuggled into Pakistan and subsequently diverted to local markets to evade taxes. This rampant smuggling results in an annual loss of $3 billion for Pakistan. Similarly, Afghan business owners assert that their own products are sold back to them by Pakistan at exorbitant prices. Pakistani customs authorities frequently demand payments for the opening of the border and the acquisition of passes and documents. Afghans are also concerned that competitively priced Pakistani imports may replace their own production of agricultural goods and various other items. (Husain and Elahi n.d) However, it is essential to recognize that increased trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been instrumental in lifting numerous individuals out of extreme poverty. This underscores the importance of preserving and expanding the benefits of bilateral and regional cooperation.

2.3 Economic Relations Between Pakistan and Iran

The relations between Iran and Pakistan are as old as Pakistan's existence as Iran was the first country to recognize it in the UN General Assembly. Before 1965, relations between both countries were political as well as military because both were members of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) led by the US against the USSR. Both countries also signed a treaty called the Friendship Treaty on February 19, 1950. Economic cooperation between the two started in 1965 when the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) was signed between Pakistan, Iran, and Turkiye. (Montazeran and Mumtaz 2004) RCD was a socio-cultural and economic organization and its purpose was to increase cooperation via trade, transportation, industry, communication, culture, insurance and banking between the three countries. (Qureshi, 1968) It remained functional until 1979. Although it had little impact on the growth of trade and economic cooperation, its initiatives in the area of culture significantly boosted cultural cooperation. RCD acted as a predecessor to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), founded in 1985, and permitted an effortless change to the development of the latter's organizational structure and operating pattern. (Montazeran and Mumtaz 2004)

2.4 From Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) to Most Recent Developments

2.4.1 1979-1980s - Strained Relations

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 strained Pak-Iran relations due to ideological differences, as Iran shifted towards an Islamic Republic led by Shia leadership, conflicting with Pakistan's Sunni-majority identity. In terms of geopolitics, both nations had prior good relations with the US, but Iran's revolution caused a shift in their foreign policy. While Pakistan maintained its alignment with the US, Iran adopted an entirely anti-US stance.

2.4.2 1985-1990s - Economic Cooperation

In 1985, economic relations resumed through the ECO, which replaced RCD and included additional nations. The ECO aimed to facilitate trade, develop the energy sector, and improve the transportation system. In 1991, after signing the revised Treaty of Izmir, the ECO became fully functional. A Transit Trade Agreement (TTA) was signed during the third ECO summit, effective in 2004, to facilitate duty-free trade among member states. (Chawla, 2017)

2.4.3 2000s - Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) Gas Pipeline

In the 1990s, the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) Gas Pipeline was conceptually initiated but faced challenges. India withdrew from the project due to cost and security concerns. Iran and Pakistan signed the final deal in 2010. (Munir et al., 2014) However, Pakistan's inability to continue the project due to the US sanctions on Iran led to a stalemate. Periodically, Iran threatens to demand penalties for not completing its part. (George, 2013)

2.4.4 Early 2000s - Improved Relations

Post 9/11, bilateral relations with Iran improved as Pakistan supported the US against the Taliban. Initiatives like importing electricity for Balochistan and the establishment of the Pak-Iran Joint Trade Committee in 2002 contributed to this improvement. Another agreement, the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), was signed in 2004 and implemented in 2006. However, it has not contributed to the anticipated increase in trade due to Iran imposing high import taxes on goods. Exports from Pakistan to Iran witnessed a significant decline, dropping from $219 million in 2011 to $3.2 thousand in 2020. During the same period, Iran's exports to Pakistan fluctuated. In 2018 alone, Iran's exports to Pakistan surpassed $1 billion. (Khalil 2023)

2.4.5 Recent Developments - Strengthening Ties

Efforts to enhance economic ties have continued, with a shift from PTA to a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to reduce trade barriers. In 2023, 39 MoUs were signed during a two-day border trade committee conference, signaling a commitment to strengthen commercial ties. Both countries aimed to eliminate trade obstacles, enhance legal trade, and create a second border crossing point to promote cross-border commerce. (Shahid, 2023) As recently as April 2024, both countries signed eight accords on varying subjects that aimed at enhancing cooperation in different fields including trade, science and technology, agriculture, health, culture, and judicial matters. (Dawn 2024)

In January 2024, both countries planned to place the liaison officers in Turbat and Zahedan to improve security and intelligence cooperation. This pact was signed during the recent Iranian Foreign Minister (Late) Hossein Amir Abdollahian's visit to Islamabad where he met with the Pakistani leadership, including the Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar and Army Chief Gen Asim Munir. There were assurances from both sides of fully implementing security agreements between the two countries as well as handling terrorism threats. They stressed the need to focus on mutually cooperative efforts, economic cooperation, and making the border a 'border of trade and development'. The meetings also emphasized the issue of sovereignty and enhancing intelligence sharing. (Syed, 2024a)

Both nations vowed to increase their trade relations and increase energy cooperation. During the recent three-day visit of Iranian President (Late) Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi in April 2024, it was agreed that the bilateral trade between the two countries would be raised to $10 billion within five years from the existing $2.3 billion. This will be achieved through joint border markets, economic free zones, new border openings, an FTA, and barter trade. They also emphasized cooperation in the energy sector, including electricity trade, power transmission lines, and the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. President Raisi met Pakistani leadership including the current Prime Minister of the country, Shahbaz Sharif. (Syed, 2024b)

The US had cautioned Pakistan against doing business with Iran due to possible sanctions. Nevertheless, Pakistan and Iran intended to convene the early sessions of the Joint Business Trade Committee and the Joint Economic Commission, share information and experiences in economic and technical fields, as well as bolster the transit of goods under the *Transports Internationaux Routiers* (TIR) i.e. International Road Transport Convention to support the improvement of trade. Both countries also committed to strengthening links between Gwadar and Chahbahar ports and enhancing cooperation on issues like terrorism, narcotics, smuggling, and human trafficking in recent interactions. They also called for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute, condemned Israeli violence against Palestinians and emphasized cooperation to counter terrorism threats from Afghanistan. (Syed, 2024b)

3. Volume of Trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan and Iran

3.1 Volume of Trade Between Pakistan and Afghanistan

According to the UN Comtrade Database on international trade, the legal trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan since 2012 had hit its lowest point in 2021, amounting to just US$833.42 million. Among the agricultural products shipped from Pakistan to Afghanistan are wheat, flour, sugar, rice, onions, potatoes, pulses, oils, and textiles. Other

goods such as metals, stones, ceramics products, veterinary medications, insecticides, sporting equipment, surgical tools, and arms and ammunition are also included. The illicit trade volume between Pakistan and Afghanistan annually is estimated 10,830 million Pakistani Rupees. (Trading economics, n.d.) The entire value of products illegally transported into Pakistan from Afghanistan in 2006 was calculated to be 80% of all Afghan imports made through Pakistan. On the other hand, it is claimed by the Afghan Government that Pakistani commodities are also smuggled into Afghanistan. According to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), the periodic closure of the border between the two countries has resulted in an escalation of illicit cross-border movement of goods from Pakistan into Afghanistan. (Jhanmal, 2017)

3.2 Volume of Trade Between Pakistan and Iran

The amount of trade between Iran and Pakistan increased by $2 billion in February 2023 for the first time in history because of the developments and agreements signed between both ministries of the countries. 39 MoUs in January 2023 between Iran and Pakistan have been inked to boost mutual trade, strengthen economic ties, and assure collaboration in several areas, including tourism, travel, mining, minerals, and fisheries, (Shahid 2023) the recent agreements will further trade and cooperation between the two. Pakistani exports consist mostly of grains, animal products, papers and cardboard, chemical compounds, clothing and textiles, vegetables, and fruits. Iranian imports consist primarily of steel metals, cowhide and skins, carpets, and pharmaceutical goods. (Pakistan: Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019) Pakistan is currently importing 144MW of electricity from Iran which is expected to increase by 500MW. (Dunya News, 2023) During a meeting in May 2023, the officials of both countries discussed on Reviving of IP Gas Pipeline considering the energy shortages faced by Pakistan. (Khan 2023) The project was also discussed during the recent visit of the Iranian President and Foreign Minister's visits to Pakistan. (Syed, 2024b) Moreover, the commerce ministries of both states have inked a joint agreement to encourage barter trade (exchanges of goods) because of the lack of official financial ways as a result of the US sanctions against Iran. (Arab News, 2023) The new agreements between the two countries will not only facilitate trade at borders but will also improve inter-state relations. The poor people living astride these borders will get benefits from the barter trade system and the region can potentially benefit from this in terms of development.

4. Challenges While Trading from Iran and Afghanistan Borders

The irregularities and absence of proper management at these borders pose several obstacles to trade. A few major obstacles are security concerns, illegal transport of goods, and no proper regularization of the borders.

4.1 Security Concerns

Since security concerns are high at the Afghan Border because of cross-border terrorism, Pakistan often closes the border for trade and the movement of people. For instance, in November 2022, an Afghan man carrying arms fired at Pakistan border forces, which killed a soldier and injured two others. Consequently, the Pak-Afghan Border at Chaman was closed immediately which resulted in a disruption of commerce activities between both the states, also Afghan transit trade. (Shahid, 2022) Such instances are quite common. The presence of the Tehreek-i- Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Afghanistan and their operations carried out from the Afghan soil are yet another security concern for Pakistan.

The security relations between Iran and Pakistan are not good either because both claim that the other's territory is used against them. Pakistan claims that the Baloch insurgents are working against it from within Iran. Whereas, Iran claims that the anti-Shia groups are operating from Pakistani soil in the shape of Jundullah, Jaish-ul-Adl, and Ansr-al-Furqan. Kulbushan Yadav, an Indian Naval Officer working for the Indian Intelligence, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) had been organizing and fomenting insurgency in Balochistan. He had been entering Balochistan via Pak-Iran border several times, till found and arrested. This harmed the bilateral trust and relations between the neighboring countries. Besides this one, Uzair Baloch, a crime lord operating in Karachi, also claimed that he was working for Iranian agencies in Pakistan. (Karim, 2017) Early 2024, Iran fired missiles into Panjgur,

Pakistani Balochistan, claiming to have targeted members of Jaish Al Adl. Pakistan responded by recalling its ambassador and striking Pakistani Baloch militants hiding in Sarawan, Iran's Seistan-Balochistan Province. Both countries maintained that they targeted their own countrymen's terrorist hideouts working against their security. However, almost immediately the leadership of both the countries agreed to de-escalate tensions. ("Pakistan, Iran Agree to 'De-Escalate' Tensions after Tit-for-Tat Attacks," Dawn 2024) This de-escalation followed some positive progress, already discussed in the "Recent Developments - Strengthening Ties" section of this study.

In May 2023, then-Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in his remarks on welcoming Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif at his visit to Iran said, "Today, both countries see the border as an opportunity and not a threat". This indicates a will of cooperation and not confrontation. Both the leaders jointly inaugurated a marketplace and a power transmission line along the Pak-Iran Border. (Gul, 2023) The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI), in partnership with the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, hosted a unique event commemorating the 76th anniversary of Pakistan-Iran diplomatic relations, facilitated by the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East, and Africa (CAMEA). (Press Release 2023) The purpose of this event was to further enhance the relations and create opportunities for bilateral trade. The Finance Ministry of Pakistan has reported that the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) reviewed a proposal presented by the Ministry of Energy, specifically the power division, concerning a contract with Iran's Tavanir (Iran's Power Generation and Distribution Company) for the acquisition of 104 Megawatts (MW) of electricity. Presently, Iran supplies approximately 100 MW of electricity to regions along the shared border with Pakistan. This arrangement started in January 2022 and is anticipated to extend through December 2024. (Middle East Monitor, August 9, 2023) Mutual cooperation via trade can be beneficial for the people of both countries. Balochistan is an underdeveloped province of Pakistan, but such steps can potentially increase economic development in the region.

4.2 Illegal Transport of Goods

Smuggling and illegal trade significantly disrupt legitimate trade activities. Smugglers move goods across the porous borders. Pakistani consumers prefer to buy high-quality imported products at prices 30 to 40 percent lower than domestic prices because the local market is relatively expensive. (Ali 2023) It negatively impacts Pakistan's local industries. Higher regional and national import duties and tariffs on commodities also encourage the smuggling of these products. Additionally, it encourages smugglers to use illicit methods for transporting these items. Governments occasionally push national interests ahead of regional concerns. The state's strict laws, the complicated regional environment, and the two nations' difficult geographical terrains also help the smugglers to achieve their goals via illegal trade. (Karim, 2022)

Smuggling from the Iranian border is again another issue for Pakistan because it hurts its tax and tariff policy. To avoid smuggling via borders, Pakistan started fencing its border with Iran in 2020. A Pakistani official source said: "The ruling class in Pakistan believes it to be an alternative for illegal trading, but the reality is different. Thousands of individuals have already lost their jobs due to the fencing of the border." He also said that the state of security will worsen if the locals lack access to a range of options for employment and/or trade. (Baloch 2021) However, according to the UN Security Council Resolution 1368 (September 2001), the UN General Assembly Resolution 49/60 (February 1995), the UNSC Resolution 1269 (October 1999), the UNSC Resolution 1373 (September 2001), and the UNGA Resolution 50/53 (January 1996), Pakistan has the legal rights to fence its side of the Pak-Afghan as well as Pak-Iran Border.

4.3 Non-Regularization of the Taftan and Chaman Borders

The persistence of issues at these borders is attributed to the lack of border regularization, officials' failure to effectively target smuggling sources, and their inability to reduce taxes on specific goods. Although both the Chaman and Taftan borders are recognized internationally and are legitimate, but due to a few factors that have already been stated, neither are effectively regularized.

4.4 The Disconnect Between Policy Makers and Grassroots Realities

In the last quarter of 2023, the people of Chaman protested against the new visa policies implemented by the Pakistani government. The protests were driven by genuine concerns, as many people of the same ethnicity live on both sides of the border, with relatives and businesses across the divide. (ANI, 2024) The new policy disrupts their ability to fulfill familial and other duties. The protest, led by a local group, began in response to these restrictive visa policies and a perceived lack of security measures. Previously, Pakistani and Afghan citizens of bordering towns could freely cross the Chaman border using their identity cards and permits. However, the new policy requiring valid passports and visas has sparked significant anger. The protests quickly escalated into widespread demonstrations, including actions like burning tires and blocking the main road linking Quetta to Kandahar. The situation further intensified in June 2024 when protesters attacked government structures and facilities, resulting in over 45 injuries, including 16 police officers. Eight critically injured individuals were taken to the trauma center in Quetta for emergency treatment. The National Assembly has since raised concerns over the border crossing issues at Chaman, highlighting the severe tensions surrounding the new border policies. (Shahid, 2024) The overall situation clearly indicates that the policy-making elite is unaware of the ground realities and there is a visible disconnect between the policymakers and grassroots realities. Similar is the case with Taftan or other borders with Iran and Afghanistan that are often closed for different reasons, many times for reasons that do not take ground realities and local concerns into consideration leading to disruption of the functioning of these borders.

5. Successful Trade Models

5.1 Barter System of Trade (BST)

Barter is a transaction in which two or more people or parties exchange services or goods without exchanging cash or other forms of payment like credit cards. In its simplest form, the barter system implies an exchange of one party offering goods or services in exchange for another party offering something that is comparable in return. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) views the barter system as a revenue source subject to taxation. BST has been successful in countries like Iran and Thailand. The top rice producer in the world is Thailand, while Iran has oil. The two nations have agreed to exchange these products using the barter system since they each require what the other has in excessive amounts. (Kenton 2022)

In-person too, BST requires effective communication, negotiation skills, an-d a clear understanding of the goods or services involved. It is important to ensure that both parties are satisfied with the exchange to maintain a positive trading environment. Therefore, traders often do barter trade with the traders of Iran as well as Afghanistan. (Raheem 2023)

5.2 Automated Trade Transaction System (ATTS)

Automated investment mechanisms allow investors or traders to set up specific rules and regulations for trade entries and departures that, once set up, are often regularly carried out by computers. Investors and traders can create computerized trading platforms that enable computers to execute and monitor deals based on specific entrance, departure, and spending requirements of the goods they are trading or investing in. One of the main benefits of this is that trade is done automatically when specific requirements are satisfied. The system uses easy language to keep it easy for traders to understand how to trade. (Folger, 2021) Also, many applications are made to make trade easy and smooth, for example, Zulu Trade is an app, that as of 2014 had an executing trading volume of some $800 billion and over 1 million users, and it has made trade automated and easy.

5.3 European Union (EU) Model of Free Trade

The EU represents a highly globalized economy. It is a massive market region in the world. One of the basic foundations of the EU was the promotion of free border trade amongst its members, and it is also dedicated to expanding international commerce. To negotiate trade deals, the EU is engaged with nations or regional organizations. When formulating international trade pacts or laws, the EU also seeks feedback from the public,

companies, and non-governmental organizations. (European Union) By adopting the EU's Free Trade Model, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan can streamline trade processes, reduce trade barriers, and catalyze economic growth within the region. The trade agreements should encompass various provisions, including trade facilitation, tariff reductions, and regulatory alignment, copying the EU's commitment to fostering a harmonized trade environment. This strategic alignment with the EU Model ensures that these agreements will be structured to align with the interests and needs of all parties involved, fortifying economic cooperation among Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in the years ahead.

5.4 Open Market Trade Model (OMTM)

An open market, that is open to competition has little to no restrictions on how businesses and trade can operate. Taxes, duties, licensing regulations, assistance, unionization, and other laws or following free-market activity are not present in a market that is free of barriers like an open market. Open markets will have open competition for goods and services, and there are no entry-controlling barriers. Trade hurdles are reduced or eliminated as a result of agreements on free trade, which is the antithesis of trade nationalism and economic isolationist policies. Nations with open markets include the United States, Australia, Canada, and Western European countries. (Segal 2023)

Envisioning a commonwealth of Khorasan on the basis of OMTM, involving Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and potentially other neighboring countries, presents an ambitious and long-term vision. Despite initial challenges, the concept centers on existing historical, cultural, and economic relations. Building on shared heritage, these nations could work towards harmonizing trade policies, enhancing security cooperation, and prioritizing energy and infrastructure development. Diplomatic initiatives, cultural exchanges, and regional stability efforts would further solidify their partnership. Recognizing the gradual nature of such progress, this vision holds the potential to create a more integrated and cooperative regional landscape, fostering prosperity and stability over time.

6. Way Forward

Major trade with Iran and Afghanistan is unlikely in near future due to Pakistan’s capacity as of now. There is a need for a comprehensive plan of action starting with short milestones and at the same time having long-term goals in sight because the achievement of short-term goals can pave the road for long-term expectations.

6.1 Legalization and Regularization of Trade at Taftan Border

With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and the recent China-brokered rapprochement between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran, the atmosphere is set for Islamabad to effectively legalize and regularize trade with Iran. China, unlike the United States, won't mind Pakistan's efforts for the said objective, and KSA is also unlikely to become irritated. However, the US sanctions on Iran cannot be ignored completely.

Smuggled Iranian lassi (flavored iced yogurt drink), cheese, cream, chocolates, sweets, biscuits, cakes, cooking oil, soft drinks, chewing gums, blankets, shampoo, soaps, detergents, saffron, and of course, Iranian petrol, and diesel are commonly available in Pakistan’s districts that have adjoining borders with Iran. These Iranian products can even be found in Quetta, the provincial capital of Pakistan’s Balochistan province, Pakistan’s economic capital Karachi and Rawalpindi in the Punjab. Rawalpindi is 26 hours’ drive and over 1,700 km away from the Pak-Iran Border near Kech. Iranian products are easily available and sold at wholesale rates in these areas. (BBC 2023) The adjoining districts include Chaghi, Washuk, Panjgur, Kech, and Gwadar. Considering these two realities, that is, the US sanctions on Iran and the easy availability of smuggled goods in Balochistan province, there is a need to effectively legalize and regularize trade with Iran starting from the Taftan Border. This will increase tax collection at that border and facilitate the movement of people across the border

Barter trade can be a potential option and Pakistan has intelligently authorized barter trade with Iran, Afghanistan, and Russia on goods that include gas and petroleum to bypass Western and in particular the US sanctions. (Gul,

2023) Millions of people in Balochistan already directly or indirectly depend on Iranian gasoline for their livelihoods, due to which its smuggling cannot possibly be stopped. Therefore, it is wiser to do barter trade with Iran to not rely on the US Dollar for trade to avoid the US sanctions on Iran to a degree they can be avoided. (Ahmad, 2023) The MoUs between Pakistan and Iran that ask for barter trade between the two, need to be implemented and more such MoUs should be concluded to increase the trade volume between them. ("Iran, Pakistan Reach Barter Trade Agreement," Dawn 2021) As there are already such instances where Iran has explored barter trade arrangements with India, Russia, Thailand, and Turkiye. However, the recent developments between Iran and Pakistan are satisfactory. ("Pakistan, Iran Sign Eight Accords to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation in Multiple Sectors," Dawn 2024)

6.2 Registration of Merchants and Goods

Considering the security situation at Taftan as well as the Chaman border, the registration of merchants and goods can minimize the risks of smuggling and terrorism at these borders. It will also ultimately reduce the incidence of corruption and bribery there. (2017) Moreover, increasing a state's ability to establish strong 'identity management frameworks' gives migrants more power and helps reduce unauthorized cross-border movement of people and goods. It also assists in identifying and protecting vulnerable migrants and refugees by enabling border agencies to refer those in need of protection or assistance to the appropriate agencies. This involves ensuring that everyone has access to trustworthy and secure legal identification, implementing security measures for identity and travel papers, and training border officers to recognize forged, fake, or stolen travel documents. (IOM 2017)

Border Management Information Systems (BMIS) can assist in collecting reliable data that is disaggregated by gender, age, migratory status, and geographic location at the border. It will also enhance the state's capacity to develop evidence-based migration policies for better border monitoring. BMIS will reduce security risks by facilitating the identification of suspicious persons and documents at entry points, allowing registered merchants and goods to proceed while others are stopped. (IOM 2017) UN Global Compact offers assistance to states to manage their borders. Pakistan should seek its assistance to effectively implement BMIS for better and safer trade at the Taftan and Chaman borders.

People who have kith and kin and frequently move across these borders should also get registered for identity purposes and to minimize smuggling and exporting and importing terrorism across these borders. Their registration will enable them to:

- Visit their relatives, family members, and dependents.
- Attend social, cultural, and religious events, such as Eid, *Urs, Nowroz,* marriage ceremonies, burials, and naming ceremonies et cetera.
- To carry out trade and business activities.

6.3 Introducing Small Markets

General Secretary Chamber of Commerce, Quetta, Muhammad Ishaq said that there is a need to make *bazarchas* (border terminals) and Zero points (borderless areas of at least 10 kilometers for smooth trade) with Iran and Afghanistan. He affirmed that such facilities exist and more such facilities are in the pipeline to facilitate traders. (Ishaq 2023) It was confirmed by traders who trade on these borders particularly Haji Raheem and Zulfiqar (names withheld) that more Zero points are being made. (Raheem 2023) Such facilities will increase tax collection too, as traders will have to pay taxes for the clearance of their goods. The border gates should also remain open 24/7 for better and more trade. (Ishaq 2023)

When asked about common conflicts among the traders that can interrupt the functioning of the Zero Points, the General Secretary argued that most of the conflicts are linked to the exchange of goods and transactions. To address these conflicts, the Quetta Chamber regularly contacts the State Bank of Pakistan, FBR, and relevant departments to resolve the conflicts either on a local or national level. The establishment of more bank branches in close

proximity to or within the vicinity of Zero Points should also be considered as a measure to mitigate such conflicts, he added. (Ishaq 2023)

However, Haji Raheem argued that the main issue the traders like him face is not the lack of Zero Points or *Bazarchas* but the unnecessary checking of their trawler trucks full of goods time and again by the customs officials, FC, and levies forces. This practice wastes a lot of their time, sometimes even months. He recommends that more checkpoints should be made on these borders and that more personnel should be involved for clearance purposes to facilitate traders and not agitate them. (Raheem 2023) He and another trader Zulfiqar argued, "Even after paying taxes and duties and clearance of documentation, they still face such issues which compels them to smuggle these goods and pay bribes instead of paying taxes and duties as it makes no sense to go the legal way and suffer when you can avoid that suffering." They added that smugglers, not legal traders, should be caught and stopped. (Zulfiqar 2023) The establishment of small markets or *Bazarchas* and Zero Points can eliminate smuggling to a great account. It will also provide opportunities for employment for the people on both sides of the border, (Khan 2021) and will decrease the chances of unnecessary waste of time and efforts of the merchants as well as border officials. The Customs officials in Quetta were contacted multiple times to respond and give their official narrative in this regard but they did not cooperate.

6.4 Digitalization of the Borders

A great number of countries have moved away from manual border operations, but in Pakistan, traditional manual systems are still in place. At Taftan and Chaman borders, people endure long queues, harsh weather, and conditions to complete documentation before entering Iran or Afghanistan, respectively. There is a need for virtual fencing on these borders, particularly to digitize trade and facilitate the transfer of goods and labor. It will also help control smuggling and terrorism on these borders. Virtual fencing can be done in the following ways:

6.4.1 Installing Camera Towers

A Camera Tower is a tall structure outfitted with cameras to watch and record images or videos of a particular region/area. These towers can transmit live images and videos to Command and Control or C2 System. It will reduce the physical presence of the patrolling units. The installation of camera towers in Balochistan, which has been plagued by conflict, can lessen terrorist activity, assaults, and ambushes on security personnel. (Ahmed et al., 2022)

6.4.2 Installing Thermal Imaging Cameras

Such cameras detect naturally occurring heat or radiation produced or emitted from any object. On computers and bigger screens, it may instantly reflect pictures. These cameras may produce images without a light source. It may therefore be utilized secretly in total darkness and in times such as fog, smoke, and dust et cetera. These cameras can detect items even beneath the surface of other objects. These characteristics help border patrol agents effectively protect national borders. Long-range thermal imaging cameras that Pakistani authorities have may readily identify unauthorized movement of people and vehicles under the current conditions. Additionally, a long range of up to 50 km guarantees the protection and safety of patrolling authorities. (Ahmed et al., 2022)

6.4.3 Using Thermal Drone Imaging Cameras

Security personnel in charge of anti-terrorist operations in tribal areas can use drones equipped with long-range thermal imaging cameras. These cameras not only detect threats but also can neutralize them. (Ahmed et al., 2022)

6.4.4 Using Kamikaze Drones

Effective use of low-cost kamikaze drones may be made against terrorists entering Pakistan, hiding to ambush security or paramilitary personnel, and terrorists escaping after attacking security forces checkpoints and forts in

insurgent-hit regions. Under a technology transfer agreement for Kamikaze missions, Turkiye may provide it. (Ahmed et al., 2022)

6.4.5 Deploying Radars

The deployment of ground surveillance radars near or on the border can aid in the detection and reduction of several hazards at the same time. Radar panels with specific designs analyze the nature of prospective threats, specifying speed, course, and precise position. Advanced technology allows operators to monitor possible dangers even beyond the fence line. (Border Surveillance 360, n.d.)

6.4.6 Infrared Cameras

With 90,000 square miles of desert to protect, the US Border Patrol Tucson Sector Headquarters in Arizona mainly depends on technology like Infrared Cameras to stop drug trafficking from Mexico into the US and illegal immigration. (Ahmed et al., 2022) Pakistan can also use this technology to stop smuggling.

6.4.7 Sensors

Ground sensors, radio frequency sensors, seismic sensors, and image sensors installed on borders can play an important role in detecting unlawful movement, tracking, identifying, and killing or apprehending terrorists, and minimizing personal loss. The system can identify subsurface tunnels as well as human and vehicle movement on the ground with or without wireless connectivity. Buried Detectors can run for over a decade without needing to be serviced or maintained. (Ahmed et al., 2022)

X-ray and Computed Topography (CT) scanners, Explosive Trace Detectors (ETD), Radiation detectors, and weight sensors can be used to check luggage and goods in any vehicle on these borders. Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) tags can also be attached to different packages and vehicles to track and monitor them throughout their journey.

6.5 Virtualize Customs Department

Software and mobile phone applications (apps) should be introduced and used to virtualize customs procedures all over the country, particularly at borders prone to smuggling like Chaman and Taftan. This can help control and limit corrupt practices by officials and traders, as every piece of information will be available online to stakeholders on the software and app. One of the former Prime Ministers of Pakistan, Shaukat Aziz, inaugurated such a project on March 23, 2005, which helped decrease Pakistan Customs' dwell time (the time that chassis equipment, cargo containers, or providers spend waiting) from 12 days to just four hours. Almost all customs officials and traders were trained to use the software, which also included a risk management system. A great number of traders expressed satisfaction as the new system brought them huge profits. Later, some corrupt elements prevented its functioning, as it had almost no chance of leaks for corruption. (Azeem, 2017)

Such an application, along with software, should be developed and utilized for people who frequently cross the borders between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Instead of requiring them to provide necessary details whenever they wish to travel to the other side of the border, they should only submit those documents once to obtain a username. This system would enable them to be automatically traced through the application whenever they cross the border or engage in trade activities, eliminating the need for waiting in large queues.

6.6 Cooperation, Not Confrontation

Efforts to address the complexities surrounding the Durand Line, the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, require mature dialogue and confidence-building measures to foster regional peace and stability. Enhancing Pakistan's trade relations with Iran and Afghanistan is imperative to unlock its full economic potential. Combatting the smuggling of vehicles from Afghanistan necessitates comprehensive strategies, including selling confiscated

vehicles at reduced prices to deter illegal activities. Leveraging the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for regional economic integration, inclusive of Iran and Afghanistan, holds promise for sustained growth and development. Smugglers should be categorized based on the scale and nature of their activities, with smaller-scale operators viewed as struggling traders rather than hardened criminals. These measures should collectively aim to promote economic prosperity and regional cooperation while addressing the challenges posed by smuggling and cross-border terrorism and opt for cooperation over confrontation. (BTTN 2022)

6.7 Establishing the Commonwealth of Khorasan

Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan can plan an association on the format of the Commonwealth, (Gul 2022) in the long run, to boost trade among one another, make human movement convenient, and end smuggling, human trafficking, illegal immigration, and cross-border terrorism. They can develop a Commonwealth Charter for this purpose. That charter should also outline the conditions of membership of countries other than Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. They can name it the "Commonwealth of Khorasan" or anything else on which all the three nations agree.

7. Conclusion

Pakistan shares long borders with Iran and Afghanistan. Shared ethnicities on both sides of the borders make effective management challenging. For instance, border fencing on the Pakistani side of the Pak-Afghan Border, aimed at controlling borders and preventing cross-border terrorism, is a matter of great concern for the Afghan Government, Afghan citizens, and Pashtun communities in Pakistan. Fencing of the Pak-Iran Border by Iranian or Pakistani authorities for a similar purpose is viewed with apprehension by ethnic Baloch, who have relatives on the other side of the border. What further complicates border management is the significant profits in smuggling. Chaman and Taftan Borders are particularly concerning regarding smuggling, as claimed by an official of the Chamber of Commerce on the condition of anonymity, stating that smugglers make billions of rupees from these borders. When the potential for earning is in billions, bribing officials becomes normalized, posing another challenge in border management.

Security concerns are yet another challenge in managing these borders effectively. *Jundullah* is alleged to operate from Pakistani Balochistan and carry out terrorist operations in Iran's Seistan Balochistan, while Baloch separatists are accused of hiding in Seistan Balochistan or Afghanistan after conducting operations in Pakistani Balochistan. A similar situation exists on the Pak-Afghan border, where the TTP is blamed for carrying out attacks from across the border. They are accused of receiving help from the current Afghan administration. (Hussain, 2022) Pak-Army has also shown 'serious concerns on the safe havens and liberty of action available' to the TTP in Afghanistan. (Shirazi, 2023) Defense Minister of Pakistan Khawaja Asif stated in an interview that the TTP is still using Afghan soil for attacks in Pakistan. (*TTP Still Using Afghan Soil for Attacks in Pakistan: Khawaja Asif*, 2023) The Foreign Office of Pakistan has repeatedly expressed concerns over the use of Afghan soil for carrying out attacks in Pakistan. This creates a trust deficit between Pakistan and Afghanistan, leading to the intermittent closure of borders between the two, particularly the Chaman-Spin Boldaq Border.

However, efforts such as the APTTA of 1965, its redesigning in 2010, the formation of the Regional Cooperation Organization in 1965 among Pakistan, Iran, and Turkiye, the foundation of the ECO in 1985, and the recent MoUs and accords for trade with Iran have proven to be of great worth to enhance trade among Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan in particular.

The ATTS, the EU Model of Free Trade, and the OMT Model are a few worth considering models regarding maximizing trade among these nations, curbing cross-border terrorism, and ending smuggling. The achievement of any of the successful models mentioned can be facilitated through the legalization and formalization of trade, with a particular focus on the Taftan and Chaman Border. This includes the registration of merchants and goods,

as well as the digitalization of border operations, particularly in Chaman and Taftan, through the virtualization of the Customs Department. By following these recommendations, a long-term vision of a Commonwealth of Khorasan on the model of the existing Commonwealth can also be set as a goal by these three nations. This will ultimately not only benefit these nations but also the entire region.

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