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**THE FACTOR OF PAKISTAN IN THE SETTLEMENT OF
THE AFGHAN CONFLICT**

Ramatullaev Muhammad Rozimbetovich,

Independent applicant of the University of World Economy and
Diplomacy



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Abstract: Conflict resolution in Afghanistan is not only a problem of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRA) and neighboring states, but also a challenge that involves the main global centers of power. Among the neighboring countries, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (PRI) plays a key role in this process. In this regard, the author attempts to analyze the Pakistani-Afghan relations, as well as the factors shaping Islamabad's approach to a settlement in Afghanistan, trends and prospects for the peace process.

Key words: Afghan conflict, Pakistan.

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The settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan is not only a problem of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRA) and neighboring countries, but also a task in which the main global centers of power are involved. Among the neighboring countries, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (IRP) plays a key role in this process. In this regard, the author makes an attempt to analyze the Pakistani-Afghan relations, as well as the factors shaping Islamabad's approach to the settlement in Afghanistan, the trends and prospects of the peace process.

The conflict in Afghanistan, which lasts for about 40 years, has

a great influence both on the Middle East, and on South and Central Asia. The conflict in this country is closely connected with the problems of international terrorism, the production and illegal trafficking of narcotic substances and threatens the security of most of the states of the meso-regions of Asia. The current specific vacuum in Afghanistan affects not only the relations between Kabul and the armed opposition, but also the role of the so-called "external forces".

The most important role here is played by Pakistan and its relations with Afghanistan. The security and stability of the countries of the region

largely depends on these factors. Pakistan and Afghanistan are located in a strategically important region that divides South and Central Asia, their relationship is of particular interest, since the security and stability of the countries of the region largely depend on them. Despite the complexity of the situation in and around Afghanistan, including the deterioration of the security situation and the growing doubts about the government's ability to survive in Kabul, the refugee problem, the growing role of India, the gradual weakening of the United States, the further Pakistani-Chinese rapprochement, signs of activity in the region of Russia, Pakistan remains a key factor affecting security in Afghanistan, South and Central Asia.

Pakistani-Afghan relations have a complex history and are characterized mainly by the state of "tension" . The border problem occupies a special place. The unresolved border issue - Afghanistan's non-recognition of the existing border (Durand Line) - and the problem of controlling the IRP and the IRA over the territory in a strategically important region forms a permanently unstable situation. Regardless of the political system or government, the non-recognition of Durand's line was and remains the principled position of Kabul.

Tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan reached a new level after the failure of the talks in the Pakistani city of Marrey, when it was discovered that the official Kabul entered into a dialogue with representatives of the late leader of the Taliban, Mullah M. Omar . The behavior of Islamabad was even called a "tragic mistake" by the Pakistani media. Also, Pakistan links the growth of terrorism within its country to the activities of groups operating from Afghanistan and demands the cessation of such activities and the extradition of suspects. Similar accusations against Islamabad are heard from Kabul. A series of terrorist acts in Pakistan in February 2017 led to an unprecedented increase in tension, the closure of the border by the IRP and the bombardment of Afghan territory .

Since then, the negotiation process has not really moved from the point of discussion between Kabul and its allies about possible contacts with the Taliban, and the refusal of Taliban representatives to negotiate any peace talks before the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan makes the prospects for the peace agreement vague. Under these conditions, much pressure is exerted on Pakistan. Contacts with the Taliban in Doha and Islamabad in the autumn of 2016 demonstrated that the IDP still has influence over the Taliban and is able to force its leadership to act desirable for itself. However, Pakistan fears "too much" pressure on the Taliban because of its own vulnerability to the threat of terrorism.

Demonstrating its ability to influence the Taliban and the whole of Afghanistan, Islamabad seeks to retain the informal status of a key "player", without which in principle any settlement of the situation is impossible. This position contradicts the policy of Washington, which criticizes

Islamabad for the policy of dividing the militants into "good" and "bad", giving its territory for action against Kabul and Delhi . The inconsistency of Washington has a negative impact on Pakistani-Afghan relations .

Currently, the IRA and the IRP are directly opposed to what country is a "source" and which is a "victim" of terrorism. If the border problem is related to bilateral relations, the approaches of Pakistan and Afghanistan to the solution of unconventional security threats and their role in relations between the two countries are factors that influence security far beyond the borders of the two countries.

Despite the whole complex of contradictions, the IRP and the IRA have good prerequisites for the normalization of relations. First of all, Islamabad tries to demonstrate "good intentions" by opening borders and again allowing the use of its territory for transit to Afghanistan, including the supply of international forces. A bilateral agreement on transit and trade allows imports of goods without customs duties. The territory of Pakistan serves as the main transit corridor for the supply of Afghanistan and the international forces operating within the framework of the mission "Strong Support". Close economic relations, the unresolved problem of borders and the fight against terrorism create a backdrop on which the Afghan policy of Islamabad is characterized by incomprehensible and inconsistent solutions, at first glance, which are ultimately detrimental to Pakistan. However, these decisions look absolutely logical if we take into account the determinants that determine its foreign policy course.

The foreign policy of the IRP is largely determined by the balance of forces within the country. The Pakistani army plays a fundamental role in the political life of the country, regardless of whether the military or "civil government" rules in Islamabad. Its role is determined by the peculiarities of the emergence of Pakistan and in conflict with the superior forces of India. According to the expert of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences N.Zamaraeva, in addition to constitutional tasks to protect territorial integrity, the armed forces counteract centrifugal forces within the country, in particular: "interfaith conflicts, attempts to split the country on a national basis, localize separatist movements, fight against local insurgents and foreign militants in the interior of the country, etc."; support "a balance of power/responsibility between the army and the civil administration at the present stage"; "The army is a powerful business corporation" which has its own interests .

The armed forces effectively oppose the weakening of their positions in the political life of the country, opposing each other to the political forces of Pakistan . It seems that the army as the center of decision-making in the IRP is not interested in a radical easing of tension and conflict, since this would lead to a reduction in military spending and, in the long run, would reduce its role.

The federal government is another power center in Pakistan. At the same time, despite the constitutional powers, its influence is limited and basically not comparable to the influence of the armed forces. In addition, the civil government is in a state of almost permanent struggle with other political parties, the contradictions with other branches of government, as well as non-state actors, including radical Islamist groups, are periodically exacerbated.

The Islamic factor is the basic ideological determinant, guided by Islamabad in its foreign policy strategy. This is also connected with the peculiarities of the emergence of Pakistan. From history, the division of British India in 1947 was carried out on a religious basis. As experts emphasize, the special role of Islam was noted by all political leaders of the country, beginning with the founder of the Pakistani statehood Muhammad Ali Jinnah .

Another fundamental aspect is closely connected with the Islamic factor and the formation of Pakistan - relations with India. Until recently India in the Military Doctrine of the IRP was designated as the main threat to national security . Islamabad also tends to accuse India of trying to "strategically surround" Pakistan and supporting terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan against the IRP . The assessments of Kabul usually find support in Delhi.

Apparently, Islamabad already understands the impossibility of implementing the concept of

"strategic depth" in the new situation and is more concerned about the growth of anti-Pakistan sentiments in Afghanistan and the strengthening of India's positions there. If the "pro-Indian" government was strengthened in Kabul, Pakistan faced a hostile neighborhood in the face of India and Afghanistan. Geostrategic considerations force Islamabad to "defend" its influence in Afghanistan, including supporting the armed opposition. The reverse side of the process was the radicalization of society and the spread of extremist ideology and movements in Pakistan itself.

As you know, new opportunities for Islamabad opened after the introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. Having received resources and international support, Pakistan actively involved one of the key determinants - the Islamic factor, which allowed not only to actively implement the concept of "strategic depth", but also in the future to "tie" conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir in the eyes of the Pakistani society. This connection is also traced in the use of radical Islamist movements in both conflicts.

Currently, Pakistani officials note that "the road to peace in Kabul lies through Kashmir" . Many observers acknowledge that the success of the international community in Afghanistan largely depends on the improvement of relations between Pakistan and India .

Thus, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is one of the permanently

key actors of the Afghan conflict. In more than three decades of the war in Afghanistan, the alignment of forces within and around the country has changed many times, but under any development of the situation, some of the factors have remained and remain constant, one of them is Pakistan.

Despite the persistent "military and political stalemate" in Afghanistan and the increasingly obvious impossibility of achieving "strategic depth" by Islamabad, the Afghan policy of the IRP is not able to go beyond the traditional geopolitical perception, without which a qualitative change in the situation is virtually impossible. It seems that the leading political forces of Pakistan realize the actual unattainability of goals and the hopelessness of the course, but they can not find a solution to the dilemma

that has arisen. The dilemma faced by Islamabad lies in the contradiction between the need to counter the terrorist threat emanating from the radical groups and the avoidance of a "strategic environment".

In conditions of a lack of confidence in relations with Kabul, refusing to support the armed opposition for the IRP can mean a loss of its influence on the situation. At the same time, the problem of terrorism has reached a level where it is designated in the military doctrine of the IRP as the main threat to national security. Without Islamabad, it is difficult to imagine a solution to the Afghanistan problem, but internal factors require policy from within the framework of the dilemma that no decision-making center in the IRP can resolve.

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The Durand Line is the 2,430-kilometre (1,510 mi) international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was established in 1896 between Sir Mortimer Durand, a British diplomat and civil servant of the British Raj, and Abdur Rahman Khan, the Afghan Amir, to fix the limit of their respective spheres of influence and improve diplomatic relations and trade. Afghanistan was considered by the British as an independent state at the time, although the British controlled its foreign affairs and diplomatic relations.

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