

THE IMPORTANCE OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN'S POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract: This article highlights the importance of Afghan refugees in Pakistan's foreign policy. Also, they are shown as the main factor in the origin of several problems between the two countries. The current situation of Afghan refugees is studied. The article uses monitoring data from foreign sources and international organizations.

Key words: Pashtuns, Baloch, migration, socialism, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Afghan refugees, Durand Line.

Introduction: Political instability in relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan is also related to political refugees and migrants. This problem has been an actual issue since history. The migration process is explained in the scientific literature as a change in the place of residence of the population. But this process affects the social, economic, political and security spheres of the country. In 1893, the treaty signed between Mortimer Durand and the Afghan emir Abdur Rahman separated the Pashtun and Baluch ethnic groups living in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Main part: According to the research of South Asian migration expert and political scientist Sanaa Alimia, between 1947 and 1970, the border was crossed mainly by traders and people with family ties. The movement of Afghanistan to Pakistan began in 1973 when Mohammad Davud Khan came to power with the help of the army. Because as a result of the socialist policy of Muhammad Davud Khan, several thousand Afghans left for Pakistan, and a small number of Afghans left for European countries. The next influx of Afghans to Pakistan occurred as a result of the 1979 Sawr revolution. The government of Afghanistan was ruled by the Soviet Union, and the conflict between the government and the Mujahideen groups caused Afghans to move to Pakistan. In 1979, the United Nations opened a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) office in Pakistan to monitor Afghan refugees. By the end of 1979, there were more than 400,000 Afghans in Pakistan¹.

The government of Islamabad continued to accept Afghan refugees for later use for geopolitical and strategic purposes. Also, Pakistan received financial assistance from the international community in order to create conditions for refugees. Between 1978 and 2001, a third of the population of Afghanistan moved to Pakistan². However, according to the researcher M. B. Fielden, one third of the financial support was spent on supporting opposition groups³. In 1989, Soviet troops left Afghanistan. But the migration of Afghan refugees to the east did not stop. As a result of UN assistance, Pakistan continued to provide asylum to Afghan refugees. Aid to Pakistan has been declining since the 1980s. As a result, the Pakistani government demanded that Afghans join one of the seven Mujahideen parties in order to be granted refugee status. By 2002, this process was stopped by UNHCR. According to Human Rights Watch, he proposed to cancel the refugee status of Afghans who came to Pakistan since the end of 1999. According to the US magazine "Foreign Policy", Pakistan has not registered new refugees since 2007.⁴ Until 2006, Afghan refugees were allowed to

¹ Alimia, S., Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, bpb, 5 June 2019, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration/integration/laenderprofile/english-version-country-profiles/292271/afghan-refugees-in-pakistan/>

² Emery, M., and Ruiz, H., Afghanistan's Refugee Crisis, Middle East Report Online, 24 September 2001, <https://merip.org/2001/09/afghanistans-refugee-crisis/>

³ http://afghandata.org:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/azu/3920/azu_acku_pamphlet_hv385_6_f545_1998_w.pdf?sequence=1

⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/report/2002/02/27/closed-door-policy/afghan-refugees-pakistan-and-iran>

travel without documents in Pakistan. But since 2007, together with the UNHCR and the government of Pakistan, it has launched refugee registration cards. There are 3 categories of Afghans in Pakistan: registered refugees (card holders), unregistered refugees (undocumented Afghans), refugees with Afghan citizenship.

The refugee problem is also forcing reforms in the security sector between Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to the information of the Afghan government, together with the refugees, the members of the terrorist groups have indicated that they can go to the territory of Pakistan and hide among the refugees. According to Harpviken's information, Professor Christian Berg of the Peace Research Institute in Oslo believes that the origin of the Taliban leaders is connected with Afghan refugees.⁵ The Taliban took advantage of Pakistan's support and Afghan refugees.

The overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 caused a wave of refugees to return to Afghanistan. According to UNHCR's monitoring, 1.5 million refugees from Pakistan returned to Afghanistan in 2002, 300,000 in the following years, 133,000 in 2006, and 13,000 in 2014.⁶ Members of the Taliban movement also tried to find safe areas among the refugees. In 2013, a project to dig 1,100 kilometers of border trenches (more than two meters deep and three meters wide) was implemented in the southwestern part of Balochistan in order to control the activities of militants and fight against drug smuggling on the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan completed 480 kilometers in 2014 and half of this project by 2016. In 2017, Pakistan began installing surveillance cameras and chain link fences. As of January 5, 2022, 94 percent of the border area is fenced⁷.

On February 17, 2020, the second vice president of Afghanistan, Sarwar Donish, stated at a conference on Afghan refugees held in Islamabad that militants are hiding among refugees and that there are cases of favoring refugees. According to the Washington Post, 2021 saw an influx of thousands of Taliban supporters after the Taliban came to power. The number of arrivals from Pakistan is estimated to be between 5,000 and 10,000. The Taliban government is hiring ex-Taliban fighters living in Pakistan and Afghan government officials in exile to fill the previous jobs. For example, the founder of the Haqqani network, Sirajuddin Haqqani, was appointed as the minister of security and internal affairs. The main representatives of the Taliban government in Afghanistan graduated from Darul Uloom Haqqaniya madrasa in Pakistan. Abubakr Siddique, the author of many articles on Afghanistan, said that the New Taliban government is under the control of Pakistan despite its current position.⁸

The majority of Afghans in Pakistan were born and raised in Pakistan and have never seen the state of Afghanistan. 65% of 6,062 refugees have been living in Pakistan for more than 10 years, and 32% said they were born. According to the monitoring of the UN Refugee Commission in 2019, the return of Afghans significantly decreased (1092 people in 2020, 437 people in 2021) and reached 35,289 people between February and August 2022. Of course, this indicator is related to the coming to power of the Taliban.

As of January 2022, of the nearly 3 million Afghans living in Pakistan, about 1.4 million are registered refugees, 840,000 are Afghan nationals, and about 775,000 are unregistered (undocumented) refugees. According to Pakistan's report in August 2021, the Ministry of Frontier Regions of Pakistan stated that the number of undocumented Afghans could be between 300,000 and

⁵ Harpviken Berg, K., The Afghan Taliban and Mujahedin: Archetypes of refugee militarization, bpb, 23 January 2019

⁶ Express Tribune (The), Pakistan's Afghan refugees: A timeline, 5 October 2016,

⁷ Associated Press of Pakistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan Border internationally recognized; fencing to be completed at all costs: DG ISPR, 5 January 2022

⁸ New York Times (The), The Taliban Have Staffing Issues. They Are Looking for Help in Pakistan, 13 January 2022

400,000. The Director General of the Pakistan Human Rights Society stated that there is insufficient information on refugees, and that there are currently more than 3 million Afghans in the city of Karachi.

Referring to the number of registered refugees of UNHCR, as of August 31, 2021, 1,435,026 migrants live in Pakistan. According to the regional distribution, the largest number of registered Afghan refugees are located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (834,381 people, approximately 58%), followed by Balochistan province (326,932 people, approximately 23 %) and Punjab region (168,342 people, about 12 %). If we pay attention to the above information, the main part of Afghan migrants moved to the border regions of Pakistan. The reason for the easy and quick migration of Afghans to the territory of Pakistan is the presence of representatives of the same ethnic group on both sides of the country. This, in turn, creates other problems.

It has become evident that the refugee population was instrumentalized for the pursuit of political agendas, which included the US-American objectives of strengthening their own foothold in the region while weakening the USSR, as well as the GOP's objectives of using the Afghan resistance and population to polish its own standing in the international community and, at the same time, to improve the odds of having a more benevolent government of Afghanistan in the future. Most notably, making membership in one of the resistance parties a precondition for refugee assistance, the GOP rallied the refugees around the parties which were both most conducive for the GOP's own political objectives and most effective in its armed resistance against the Afghan and Soviet forces.

Conclusion: In order to solve the refugee problem between Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is necessary to solve the territorial and security problems first. This, in turn, serves the interests of both countries. The political processes that took place from history to the present threw the Afghan people to different countries of the world. Today, Afghan immigrants are an active part of social and economic life in Pakistan. Thus, regional geopolitics is key to understanding the position of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

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