



The Evolution of Afghanistan's Borders throughout History and Its Geopolitical Impacts

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<p>Abstract: This research explores the historical evolution of Afghanistan's borders and their geopolitical impacts. The main goal of the study is to analyze how changes in Afghanistan's borders have influenced its security, economy, international relations, and domestic politics, as well as its role in regional and global power dynamics. The research uses a systematic review of historical sources, geopolitical analyses, and both qualitative and quantitative data. The sources include historical treaties, diplomatic documents, reports from international organizations, and academic studies published. The findings reveal that Afghanistan's borders have undergone significant changes throughout history, largely influenced by colonial powers and regional rivalries. These border changes have had profound effects on Afghanistan's national and regional security, contributing to issues such as drug trafficking, terrorism, and illegal migration. Additionally, Afghanistan's economy has been heavily impacted by unstable borders and political tensions with neighboring countries. The creation of artificial borders, such as the Durand Line, has also led to ethnic and identity challenges within the country. Due to its strategic location, Afghanistan plays a crucial role in regional and global power dynamics. The country's borders have not only shaped its internal structure but have also had significant implications for international relations and regional security. To stabilize its borders and enhance overall stability, Afghanistan must engage in active diplomacy, foster regional economic cooperation, and implement effective border management strategies. These measures can help strengthen Afghanistan's position in regional and global power dynamics, contributing to long-term peace and development.</p> <p>Keywords: Afghanistan's Border Evolution, Geopolitical Impacts, Durand Line, Border Security, Border Economy, Regional Rivalries.</p> <p>Copyright © 2025 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p>	<p>Research Paper</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan, with its sensitive geopolitical position, has consistently been influenced by border changes and the rivalries of regional and global powers (Barfield, 2021). The country's borders have not only impacted its internal structure but have also affected foreign policy, regional security, and trade (Rashid, 2020). This article aims to examine the historical evolution of Afghanistan's borders and analyze the geopolitical, security, and economic consequences of these changes (Baidar & Yar, 2025). As one of the most strategically important countries in Central and South Asia, Afghanistan has played a pivotal role in regional and global geopolitical developments (Maley, 2021). Its geographical position as a bridge between East and West has made it a focal point for global and regional powers (Giustozzi, 2020). Throughout history, Afghanistan's borders have undergone numerous changes, which have

profoundly impacted not only its internal structure but also its international relations and regional security (Bajoria, 2021). Specifically, the evolution of Afghanistan's borders has influenced its relations with neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, China, and Central Asian states (Grare, 2021). Border changes in Afghanistan have consistently been accompanied by security, economic, and political challenges. On one hand, these changes have led to border tensions and military conflicts with neighboring countries (Saikal, 2020). On the other hand, border changes have significantly impacted Afghanistan's economy, particularly in terms of trade and the transit of goods (Newman, 2022). Additionally, border evolution has influenced Afghanistan's domestic politics, contributing to ethnic and religious divisions within the country (Wafa & Yar, 2024; Grare, 2022).

The primary objective of this article is to examine the historical evolution of Afghanistan's borders and analyze the impacts of these changes on the country's security, economy, and politics. In this regard, the article seeks to provide a comprehensive analytical framework to better understand these developments and their consequences. The article also aims to explore the geopolitical impacts of these changes on the region and the world (Spykman, 1944).

The article is structured as follows: The first section provides an introduction to the importance of the topic and the research problem. The second section examines the historical evolution of Afghanistan's borders from ancient times to the modern era. The third section analyzes the impacts of these changes on Afghanistan's security, economy, and politics. The fourth section explores the geopolitical impacts of these changes on the region and the world. Finally, the fifth section presents conclusions and suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Afghanistan, as a country situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, has historically played a vital role in the geopolitical dynamics of the region and the world (Barfield, 2021). The borders of Afghanistan, which have taken shape over the past two centuries, have been influenced by colonial rivalries and international developments (Grare, 2022). The aim of this section is to review studies that have analyzed the historical, political, security, and economic aspects of Afghanistan's border evolution (Yar *et al.*, 2022).

1. The Formation of Afghanistan's Borders in the 19th Century: The Legacy of the Great Game:

In the 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer zone between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia, embroiled in colonial rivalries known as the "Great Game" (Bajoria, 2022). This competition led to the demarcation of Afghanistan's borders based on political treaties, without consideration for the region's ethnic and historical identities (Maley, 2021). The most significant agreements that shaped Afghanistan's current borders include:

- The Treaty of Gandamak (1879): This treaty resulted in the cession of eastern regions of Afghanistan to Britain.
- The Durand Line (1893): This line demarcated the border between Afghanistan and British India (present-day Pakistan) and remains a source of border tensions (Grare, 2022).
- The Treaty of Rawalpindi (1919): This treaty recognized Afghanistan's independence in foreign policy but did not significantly alter its borders (Newman, 2022).

Many studies indicate that the establishment of Afghanistan's borders in this manner created social and

ethnic divisions that continue to impact the country's security and stability (Rashid, 2020).

2. Border Impacts on Ethnic Groups and National Identity

- Division of the Pashtuns between Afghanistan and Pakistan: This division has led to identity crises and security tensions (Saikal, 2023).
- Separation of Tajiks and Uzbeks in the North: This has had social and cultural impacts on Afghanistan's relations with Central Asia (Barfield, 2021).
- The Baloch People: Their division between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan has fueled separatist movements (Maley, 2021).

Recent studies show that the lack of border stabilization continues to fuel ethnic tensions and regional nationalism in Afghanistan (Giustozzi, 2020).

The artificial borders established by colonial powers have had profound effects on Afghanistan's social cohesion, ethnic identity, and national crises (Barfield, 2021). The Durand Line, for instance, divided the Pashtuns between two countries, exacerbating identity crises and fostering extreme nationalism and political dissatisfaction on both sides of the border (Rashid, 2020). Similarly, Afghanistan's northern borders, which connect Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara ethnic groups to Central Asian countries and Iran, have created a rift in the country's national identity (Maley, 2021). The Baloch ethnic group faces a similar situation, which has consistently led to security challenges and separatist movements in the region (Giustozzi, 2020).

3. The Geopolitical Role of Afghanistan's Borders

Afghanistan's borders have played a significant role in the regional policies of global powers and neighboring countries (Newman, 2022). The most influential geopolitical actors related to Afghanistan's borders include:

- Pakistan: It has used the Durand Line as a tool to influence Afghanistan's politics (Grare, 2022).
- Iran: It plays a significant role in trade, border security, and energy supply for Afghanistan (Saikal, 2023).
- China: Due to security concerns in Xinjiang, China views Afghanistan as strategically important (Bajoria, 2022).
- Russia and the United States: Afghanistan remains a theater of geopolitical competition between global powers (Rashid, 2020).

Studies have shown that Afghanistan's borders have not only influenced the country's domestic politics but have also played a key role in shaping international policies and regional power dynamics (Maley, 2021).

4. The Economic Impacts of Afghanistan's Borders on National Development and Regional Trade:

Afghanistan's borders have significantly impacted its economy, particularly in terms of trade and the country's reliance on neighboring states for access to international ports (Newman, 2022). Some key economic issues include:

- Transit Trade: Due to its lack of direct access to the sea, Afghanistan depends on neighboring countries for its exports and imports (Bajoria, 2022).
- Economic Dependence on Iran and Pakistan: These countries have often used border control as a means to exert economic pressure on Afghanistan (Saikal, 2023).
- Challenges of Smuggling and Drug Trafficking: Weak border management has made drug trafficking and illegal trade major obstacles to Afghanistan's economic development (Grare, 2022).

According to the World Bank (2022), border instability has caused a 35% decline in Afghanistan's trade in recent years.

The studies conducted on Afghanistan's border evolution reveal the following:

- Afghanistan's borders were shaped by colonial rivalries and continue to act as a source of instability (Barfield, 2021).
- Ethnic divisions along Afghanistan's borders have led to social tensions and regional nationalism (Saikal, 2023).
- The country's borders are central to the geopolitical calculations of global and regional powers (Grare, 2022).
- Poor border management has resulted in economic, security, and social challenges (Newman, 2022).

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Framework The Rimland Theory and Afghanistan's Importance as a Buffer Zone:

The Rimland Theory, proposed by Nicholas Spykman, emphasizes the significance of buffer zones in global geopolitics (Spykman, 1944). Due to its geographical location, Afghanistan has historically served as a buffer zone between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, attracting the attention of global powers (Barfield, 2021). This strategic position has placed Afghanistan at the center of geopolitical competition among Russia, China, and the United States (Grare, 2021).

The Heartland Theory and Afghanistan's Role:

The Heartland Theory, introduced by Halford Mackinder, highlights the importance of Central Asia and its surrounding regions in controlling global power dynamics (Mackinder, 1904). Afghanistan, located on the fringes of the Heartland, plays a crucial role in this

theory. As a gateway to the Heartland, Afghanistan has consistently been a focal point for global powers (Saikal, 2020). In the contemporary era, this theory remains relevant, particularly in light of the geopolitical competition between China and the United States in the region (Bajoria, 2021).

The Concept of Artificial and Natural Borders in Geopolitics and Their Impact on Afghanistan:

Artificial and natural borders are two key concepts in geopolitics that have profoundly influenced Afghanistan's border dynamics. Natural borders, such as mountains and rivers, are often considered more stable, while artificial borders, determined by human intervention, have frequently led to border tensions (Newman, 2020). Artificial borders, such as the Durand Line established by Britain in 1893, have been a persistent source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Rashid, 2020). On the other hand, natural borders, such as the Hindu Kush mountains, have played a significant role in defining Afghanistan's northern borders with Central Asian countries (Maley, 2021).

Historical Evolution of Afghanistan's Borders:

Afghanistan's borders have undergone numerous changes throughout history, influenced by various factors, including the rivalries of great powers, internal political shifts, and regional developments (Giustozzi, 2020). In ancient times, Afghanistan's borders were shaped by empires such as the Achaemenid and Macedonian empires (Barfield, 2021). In the modern era, Afghanistan's borders were influenced by colonial rivalries between Britain and Russia, leading to the establishment of artificial borders like the Durand Line (Saikal, 2020).

Classical and Modern Geopolitical Theories on Afghanistan:

Classical geopolitical theories, such as Spykman's Rimland Theory and Mackinder's Heartland Theory, explain Afghanistan's strategic importance in global power dynamics (Spykman, 1944; Mackinder, 1904). However, modern geopolitical theories, such as critical geopolitics and border security in the 21st century, must also be considered. Critical geopolitics emphasizes that borders are not merely geographical lines but tools of power and identity-building for states (Agnew, 2021). This theory demonstrates how Afghanistan's border dynamics are the result of decisions by external powers and internal dynamics. On the other hand, border security in the 21st century highlights the importance of technology, intelligence data, and regional diplomacy in border management (Newman, 2022).

Furthermore, internal political changes in Afghanistan have significantly influenced the country's border dynamics. For example, civil wars and governmental shifts have contributed to border instability (Maley, 2021). Regional developments, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of new

powers in Central Asia, have also impacted Afghanistan's borders (Grare, 2021). In conclusion, Afghanistan's borders have consistently been shaped by both internal and external factors, with profound implications for the country's security, economy, and politics. Analyzing these dynamics from a geopolitical perspective can provide a deeper understanding of Afghanistan's role in the region and the world (Bajoria, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a variety of methods to investigate the evolution of Afghanistan's borders and their geopolitical impacts. The methodology, data sources, and analytical approaches are outlined as follows:

The study adopts a systematic review approach, drawing data from three primary sources: historical sources, academic studies, and quantitative data. Historical sources include border treaties and diplomatic documents that provide insights into the historical context of Afghanistan's border changes. Academic studies, particularly books and articles published after 2020, offer contemporary perspectives and analyses. Quantitative data, such as statistics from the World Bank and the United Nations on trade, security, and migration, are used to support the research with empirical evidence. Analytical methods include historical, geopolitical, qualitative, and quantitative analyses, with statistical data analysis software employed to examine economic and security trends.

The historical analysis focuses on tracing the evolution of Afghanistan's borders from ancient times to the modern era, aiming to understand the trajectory of border changes and their impact on the country's political and social structures. Geopolitical analysis applies theories such as Spykman's Rimland Theory and Mackinder's Heartland Theory to assess the influence of Afghanistan's borders on regional and global power dynamics. Qualitative analysis is used to explore the effects of borders on Afghanistan's security, economy, and national identity, relying on qualitative data from various sources. Quantitative analysis, on the other hand, utilizes data such as border trade statistics and drug trafficking figures to evaluate the economic impacts of border changes.

Despite the comprehensive approach, the research faces certain limitations. Data accessibility is a significant challenge, as insecurity in Afghanistan's border regions has limited access to accurate and up-to-date information in some cases. Additionally, rapid political changes in Afghanistan, especially after 2021, have rendered some data and analyses quickly outdated, posing challenges for maintaining the relevance of the findings. These limitations highlight the complexities of conducting research in a dynamic and unstable geopolitical environment.

4. Historical Evolution of Afghanistan's Borders

Afghanistan's borders have undergone significant transformations throughout history, influenced by both internal and external factors. This section examines the evolution of Afghanistan's borders across different historical periods and analyzes the impacts of these changes on the country's political, security, and economic structures.

4.1. Historical Periods

Pre-Colonial Era (Before the 19th Century): Traditional Borders and Relations with Neighboring Empires

Before the 19th century, Afghanistan's borders were traditionally defined by geographical features such as mountains, rivers, and plains. These borders were often fluid and influenced by regional powers and major empires. As part of the Silk Road, Afghanistan played a crucial role in trade and connectivity between the East and the West (Barfield, 2021).

In ancient times, Afghanistan was part of the Achaemenid Empire and later came under the control of the Macedonian Empire. During the Islamic era, the region was incorporated into the Abbasid Caliphate and subsequently ruled by the Ghaznavid and Timurid Empires. During this period, Afghanistan's borders were primarily shaped by regional powers and inter-empire relations (Saikal, 2020). In the 18th century, the emergence of the Durrani Empire under Ahmad Shah Durrani established Afghanistan as an independent state. The empire's borders included parts of modern-day Iran, Pakistan, and India. However, these borders were constantly shifting due to regional rivalries and internal weaknesses (Maley, 2021).

Colonial Era (19th Century and Colonial Treaties): The Impact of the Treaty of Gandamak (1879), Durand Line (1893), and Treaty of Rawalpindi (1919) on Afghanistan's Borders.

In the 19th century, Afghanistan became a strategic battleground in the rivalry between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia, known as the "Great Game." This competition had profound effects on Afghanistan's borders, as Britain and Russia imposed artificial boundaries that continue to impact the region today (Rashid, 2020).

- **Treaty of Gandamak (1879):** Following the Second Anglo-Afghan War, the Treaty of Gandamak was signed between Amir Abdul Rahman Khan and Britain. This treaty turned Afghanistan into a British protectorate, granting Britain control over Afghanistan's foreign policy. It also influenced the eastern borders of Afghanistan and set the stage for the establishment of artificial borders (Barfield, 2021).
- **Durand Line (1893):** One of the most significant border developments in Afghanistan's history was the demarcation of the Durand Line by British

diplomat Mortimer Durand. This border divided Afghanistan and British India (present-day Pakistan), splitting ethnic Pashtun and Baloch regions between the two countries. This artificial border has remained a source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan to this day (Grare, 2021).

- **Treaty of Rawalpindi (1919):** After the Third Anglo-Afghan War, the Treaty of Rawalpindi was signed, granting Afghanistan full independence in foreign policy. However, the treaty confirmed the borders established by Britain, including the Durand Line. This has led to long-standing tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Saikal, 2020).

Cold War and Post-Cold War Era: Border Changes and Afghanistan's Role in Global Power Rivalries

During the Cold War, Afghanistan became a strategic zone in the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the subsequent civil wars had profound effects on the country's borders. During this period, Afghanistan's borders served as frontlines in the struggle between the Eastern and Western blocs (Giustozzi, 2020).

Following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Afghanistan's borders were reshaped by new developments. The rise of the Taliban in the 1990s and the ensuing civil wars led to instability along the country's borders. During this time, Afghanistan's borders became known as hubs for arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and international terrorism (Maley, 2021).

Post-2001 Developments and the Emergence of New Actors: The Impact of Recent Political Changes on Border Dynamics

After the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the fall of the Taliban, the country's borders underwent further changes. The presence of NATO forces and international efforts to stabilize Afghanistan had positive effects on border control. However, Afghanistan's borders remained unstable and insecure (Bajoria, 2021). In recent years, the emergence of new actors such as China and Russia have influenced Afghanistan's borders. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has sought to expand its influence in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. This has positioned Afghanistan's borders as strategic zones in new geopolitical rivalries (Grare, 2021).

With the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021 and the Taliban's return to power, the country's borders have once again been affected by political changes. The Taliban's control of the borders and its relations with neighboring countries have had profound implications for regional security and stability (Rashid, 2020).

5. Geopolitical Implications of Border Changes

The evolution of Afghanistan's borders has had profound impacts on the country's security, economy, and national identity. This section examines the geopolitical implications of these changes in three key areas: national and regional security, economic relations and border trade, and national identity and social cohesion.

5.1. National and Regional Security: Unstable Borders and Security Challenges (Smuggling, Terrorism, Illegal Migration)

Afghanistan's borders, due to ineffective control and lack of security infrastructure, have long been recognized as unstable and insecure zones. The eastern and southern borders, particularly those shared with Pakistan, have become hubs for drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and international terrorism (Rashid, 2020). Terrorist groups such as the Taliban and the Haqqani Network exploit these borders to transport personnel and equipment, posing a significant threat to Afghanistan's national security and regional stability (Giustozzi, 2020).

- **Drug Trafficking:** According to the UNODC, Afghanistan supplies 65% of the world's opium, which is smuggled through its eastern and western borders.
- **Illegal Migration:** Over 500,000 illegal migrants cross from Afghanistan into neighboring countries annually.
- **Border Conflicts:** In 2022, more than 200 border clashes were recorded between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, Afghanistan's unstable borders have exacerbated illegal migration to neighboring countries. This phenomenon not only places economic and social pressures on host countries but also intensifies political tensions between Afghanistan and its neighbors (Maley, 2021).

5.2. Economic Relations and Border Trade: The Impact of Borders on Afghanistan's Economy

Afghanistan's borders play a critical role in its economy, particularly in terms of trade and transit. However, the lack of effective border management and political tensions with neighboring countries have created significant economic challenges.

- **Transit Trade:** According to the World Bank (2022), Afghanistan conducts approximately \$5 billion in transit trade annually through its borders with neighboring countries. However, due to insecurity and border tensions, this trade volume has decreased by 35% in recent years.
- **Economic Dependence on Neighbors:** Afghanistan relies on Iran for 80% of its oil needs and imports over 60% of its food supplies through Pakistan.
- **Impact of Border Closures:** In 2021, the closure of borders with Iran and Pakistan due to political tensions led to a 40% decline in Afghanistan's border trade.

5.3. National Identity and Social Cohesion: Ethnic Divisions and Border Disputes

Afghanistan's artificial borders, particularly the Durand Line, have exacerbated ethnic divisions and identity crises within the country. The division of ethnic groups such as the Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Baloch across borders has created social and political challenges.

- **Pashtun Division:** The Durand Line split the Pashtun population between Afghanistan and Pakistan, leading to identity crises and fueling extremism and political dissatisfaction on both sides of the border (Rashid, 2020).
- **Northern Ethnic Groups:** The borders with Central Asia and Iran have created divisions among Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara communities, contributing to a fragmented national identity (Maley, 2021).
- **Baloch Separatism:** The division of the Baloch people between Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan has fueled separatist movements and regional instability (Giustozzi, 2020).

Data on Key Border-Related Issues

1. Drug Trafficking Data

- **Volume of Drug Trafficking:** According to UNODC (2023), Afghanistan, as the world's largest opium producer, supplies over 65% of the world's opium. These drugs are primarily smuggled through Afghanistan's eastern and southern borders into Pakistan and Iran.
- **Economic Impact:** Drug trafficking contributes approximately \$2 to \$3 billion annually to Afghanistan's informal economy, equivalent to 10-15% of the country's GDP.
- **Security Impact:** Over 50% of the income of terrorist groups like the Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan is derived from drug trafficking.

2. Border Trade Data

- **Transit Trade Volume:** According to the World Bank (2022), Afghanistan conducts around \$5 billion in transit trade annually through its borders with neighboring countries. However, due to insecurity and border tensions, this trade volume has decreased by 35% in recent years.
- **Economic Dependence on Neighbors:** Afghanistan relies on Iran for 80% of its oil needs and imports over 60% of its food supplies through Pakistan.
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3. Illegal Migration Data

- **Volume of Illegal Migration:** According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2023), over 500,000 people illegally cross Afghanistan's borders into neighboring countries annually. This migration is primarily driven by insecurity and economic hardship.

- **Social Impact:** Illegal migration has increased social and economic pressures on host countries like Iran and Pakistan. For example, Iran hosts over 3 million Afghan migrants, many of whom entered the country illegally.

4. Border Security Data

- **Number of Border Clashes:** According to UN reports (2023), over 200 border clashes occurred between Afghan and Pakistani security forces in 2022. These clashes were primarily concentrated in border regions such as the Durand Line.
- **Security Impact:** Border insecurity has increased the activities of terrorist groups like the Taliban and ISIS-Khorasan. Reports indicate that over 70% of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan are planned and executed from border regions. In conclusion, Afghanistan's border dynamics have far-reaching implications for its security, economy, and social cohesion. Addressing these challenges requires effective border management, regional cooperation, and diplomatic efforts to stabilize the country's borders and enhance its role in regional and global geopolitics.

5. Data Related to Infrastructure Projects

- **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):** This project, which is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, attracts an annual investment of approximately \$62 billion in the region. Due to its proximity to this corridor, Afghanistan stands to gain economic benefits; however, border insecurity has reduced its participation in the project.
- **Regional Railways:** Projects such as the Chabahar-Zahidan railway and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway (TAP) can potentially increase Afghanistan's transit trade volume by up to 50%. Nonetheless, border instability has hindered the progress of these projects.

Afghanistan's Role in Regional Power Dynamics (Competition between India, Pakistan, China, Iran, and Russia) Afghanistan has consistently played a key role in regional power dynamics due to its strategic location. The competition among regional powers such as India, Pakistan, China, Iran, and Russia for influence in Afghanistan has had profound impacts on the security and stability of the country (Grare, 2021).

- **Pakistan:** Sharing a long border with Afghanistan and having common ethnic groups like the Pashtuns, Pakistan has always played a significant role in Afghanistan's developments. It has utilized groups like the Taliban to maintain its influence in Afghanistan, which has exacerbated border tensions and security issues (Saikal, 2020).
- **India:** As Pakistan's traditional rival, India has sought to enhance its influence in Afghanistan through investments in infrastructure and development projects. This competition has led to increased tensions in the region (Bajoria, 2021).

- **China:** Through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has aimed to expand its influence in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. Additionally, due to security concerns in the Xinjiang region, China places great importance on the stability of Afghanistan's borders (Grare, 2021).
- **Iran and Russia:** Iran and Russia have also been actively involved in Afghanistan's developments due to security and economic concerns. Iran, sharing a border with Afghanistan and having a presence of Shia communities, has consistently sought to maintain its influence in the country. Russia, concerned about security issues in Central Asia, also values stability in Afghanistan (Barfield, 2021).

5.2. Economic Relations and Border Trade: Impacts of Borders on Afghanistan's Trade (Transit Trade, Economic Dependence on Neighbors)

Afghanistan's borders play a crucial role in the trade and economy of the country. Being landlocked, Afghanistan is highly dependent on neighboring countries for access to ports and international markets. This dependency has resulted in significant impacts of border developments on Afghanistan's economy (Maley, 2021).

- **Transit Trade:** As a transit country, Afghanistan plays an important role in trade between Central Asian countries, South Asia, and the Middle East. However, insecurity at the borders and political tensions with neighbors have led to a decrease in transit trade volume and an increase in trade costs (Grare, 2021).
- **Economic Dependence on Neighbors:** Afghanistan relies heavily on neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, and Turkmenistan for essential goods like oil, gas, and food. This dependency means that border developments have direct impacts on Afghanistan's economy (Saikal, 2020).

The borders of Afghanistan have a direct impact on foreign investment, economic development, and labor migration (Bajoria, 2021). In border areas such as Spin Boldak, Torkham, and Chabahar, economic development is contingent upon border stability (Maley, 2021). Transit trade between Afghanistan and Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asian countries has been disrupted due to ineffective border management and insecurities stemming from the presence of terrorist groups (Grare, 2021). Furthermore, border restrictions have led to increased prices of essential goods within Afghanistan, as the country is heavily reliant on imports of food, oil, and gas from neighboring countries (Saikal, 2020). Conversely, initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Chabahar-Zaranj railway could enhance Afghanistan's role in regional trade; however, border instability prevents the attraction of investment in these projects (Barfield, 2021).

- **Trade Dependency:** 80% of Afghanistan's oil needs are met by Iran.

- **Transit Trade:** Despite high capacity, border closures have resulted in a 35% reduction in trade volume.
- **Infrastructure Projects:** Participation in initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Chabahar-Zaranj railway could improve Afghanistan's trade.

The Role of Infrastructure Projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Regional Railways

Infrastructure projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and regional railways have had profound impacts on Afghanistan's border developments. These projects not only enhance trade and investment in the region but also create geopolitical competition among regional powers (Bajoria, 2021).

- **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):** This project, part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, extends from the Gwadar region in Pakistan to China. Afghanistan, due to its proximity to this corridor, can benefit economically. However, border insecurity and political tensions with Pakistan have diminished Afghanistan's participation in this project (Grare, 2021).
- **Regional Railways:** Regional railway projects such as the Chabahar-Zahidan railway and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan railway (TAP) play a significant role in enhancing trade and regional connectivity. These projects could reduce Afghanistan's dependence on traditional trade routes and increase the economic stability of the country (Maley, 2021).

5.3. National Identity and Social Cohesion

Ethnic Challenges and Artificial Borders: The Role of Colonial Borders in the Separation of Pashtun, Tajik, and Baloch Ethnic Groups.

The artificial borders established by colonial powers such as Britain have had profound impacts on Afghanistan's national identity and social cohesion. These borders have led to the separation of common ethnic groups, such as Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Baloch, between Afghanistan and neighboring countries, resulting in ethnic and religious tensions in the region (Barfield, 2021). Artificial borders are a primary factor in ethnic divides and extreme nationalism.

- **Durand Line:** The most significant source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which remains unrecognized by Kabul.
- **Pashtuns:** The Durand Line has divided Pashtun areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan, leading to ongoing political and security tensions between the two countries (Rashid, 2020).
- **Tajiks and Baloch:** Artificial borders have also separated Tajik and Baloch communities between Afghanistan and neighboring countries such as

Tajikistan and Iran, creating identity and social challenges in the region (Saikal, 2020).

The Issue of the Durand Line and Border Disputes with Pakistan

The Durand Line, established by Britain in 1893, has always been a primary source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan does not recognize this border and considers it a factor in the separation of Pashtun regions. This situation has led to border disputes and security issues between the two countries (Grare, 2021).

- **Border Disputes:** Ongoing border tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have frequently resulted in military and security conflicts in the region. These tensions not only threaten the national security of both countries but also contribute to regional instability (Maley, 2021).
- **Social Impacts:** The Durand Line has also created social and identity challenges for Pashtun communities on both sides of the border, leading to feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction among these groups (Barfield, 2021).

6. Legal and Diplomatic Aspects of Afghanistan's Borders

Afghanistan's borders are significant not only from a historical and geopolitical perspective but also from a legal and diplomatic standpoint. This section examines the legal foundations of Afghanistan's borders, the role of international organizations in resolving border disputes, and the positions of various Afghan governments regarding the borders.

Legal Foundations of Afghanistan's Borders: Examination of Historical Treaties and International Laws

Afghanistan's borders have been established based on historical treaties and international laws. These treaties, often influenced by colonial powers and regional rivalries, have had profound effects on Afghanistan's border developments.

- **Treaty of Gandamak (1879):** This treaty, signed after the Second Anglo-Afghan War, turned Afghanistan into a British protectorate. Under this treaty, Britain took control of Afghanistan's foreign policy and affected the country's eastern borders (Barfield, 2021).
- **Durand Agreement (1893):** Signed by Mortimer Durand and Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, this agreement established the Durand Line as the border between Afghanistan and British India (now Pakistan). This border, which divided Pashtun areas, has always been a point of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Grare, 2021).
- **Rawalpindi Treaty (1919):** Signed after the Third Anglo-Afghan War, this treaty recognized Afghanistan's full independence in foreign policy. However, it also affirmed the borders established by Britain, including the Durand Line (Saikal, 2020).

- **International Laws:** According to international laws, a country's borders should be determined based on bilateral and multilateral agreements. However, Afghanistan's borders have often been influenced by foreign powers and regional rivalries, leading to legal and diplomatic challenges (Maley, 2021).

The Role of International Organizations in Resolving Border Disputes

International organizations have played a significant role in resolving Afghanistan's border disputes. These organizations have sought to reduce border tensions and enhance regional stability by providing legal and diplomatic frameworks.

- **United Nations:** The UN has attempted to resolve Afghanistan's border disputes through various resolutions and statements. For example, it has called for bilateral dialogues between Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the Durand Line dispute (Bajoria, 2021).
- **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC):** The OIC has also made diplomatic proposals aimed at reducing border tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, emphasizing the importance of peacefully resolving border disputes (Grare, 2021).
- **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE):** Although Afghanistan is not a member of this organization, the OSCE has sought to assist in resolving border disputes in Afghanistan by sharing its experiences in European border conflict resolution (Maley, 2021).

Positions of Various Afghan Governments on Borders (From Amanullah Khan to the Taliban)

The positions of various Afghan governments regarding borders have undergone numerous changes throughout history. These positions have been influenced by internal and external factors and have had profound impacts on Afghanistan's border developments.

- **Amanullah Khan Era (1919-1929):** Amanullah Khan, who came to power after the Third Anglo-Afghan War, recognized Afghanistan's full independence. However, he did not recognize the Durand Line as the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and called for a reevaluation of this border (Saikal, 2020).
- **Zahir Shah Era (1933-1973):** During Zahir Shah's reign, Afghanistan sought to establish diplomatic relations with neighboring countries. However, the Durand Line dispute remained a primary source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan (Barfield, 2021).
- **Communist Era (1978-1992):** During the communist regime, Afghanistan was influenced by the Soviet Union. This government attempted to establish diplomatic relations with Pakistan, but the Durand Line dispute remained unresolved (Giustozzi, 2020).

- **Taliban Era (1996-2001 and Post-2021):** The Taliban adopted different positions regarding Afghanistan's borders during both periods of their rule. In the first period, they recognized the Durand Line, but in the second period, their positions have become more ambiguous, leading to new challenges in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations (Rashid, 2020).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

1. Comparison of Study Results with Previous Research:

This study indicates that border developments in Afghanistan have a direct impact on regional security, international relations, and economic development. The findings align with studies by Barfield (2021) and Maley (2021), which show that Afghanistan's borders are used not only as geographical lines but also as tools for determining the influence of foreign powers in the region. While earlier studies primarily focused on historical analysis, this research has attempted to explore the economic, security, and social dimensions of border developments.

Previous studies, such as Bajoria (2022), focused mainly on the impact of the Durand Line on Afghanistan-Pakistan relations; however, this research demonstrates that all of Afghanistan's borders, including the western border with Iran and the northern border with Central Asia, play significant roles in regional policies. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Grare's (2022) analyses, which state that border insecurities in Afghanistan have heightened geopolitical rivalries among Iran, Pakistan, China, and Russia.

2. Analysis of Border Developments in Afghanistan and Their Impacts

2.1. Geopolitical Impacts:

The research findings suggest that Afghanistan's borders act as a buffer zone between major global and regional powers. This aligns with Saikal's (2023) analysis, which states that regional rivalries between India and Pakistan, China's involvement in economic projects, and Iran's policies towards Afghanistan are all influenced by these borders. Notably, Afghanistan's eastern borders (the Durand Line) remain a primary source of geopolitical tension between Kabul and Islamabad (Rashid, 2020). Studies indicate that Pakistan has consistently used this border to exert pressure on Afghanistan's internal policies, corroborating Maley's (2021) findings. Conversely, while Afghanistan's western borders with Iran have received less attention, they play a crucial role in energy supply and regional trade (Grare, 2022).

2.2. Security Impacts:

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Afghanistan's unstable borders have not only led to internal insecurity but have also threatened regional security. These findings align with Giustozzi's (2020) research, which highlights the key role of

Afghanistan's borders in facilitating drug trafficking, illegal migration, and terrorist activities. Previous studies, such as Bajoria (2022), primarily focused on the Taliban's role in border security; however, this research reveals that other armed groups, such as ISIS-Khorasan, have also utilized eastern borders for terrorist operations (Rashid, 2020). Additionally, according to UNODC data (2023), over 65% of drug trafficking in the region occurs through Afghanistan's borders, underscoring their importance in regional security.

2.3. Economic Impacts:

This study found that Afghanistan's borders play a significant role in transit trade and regional economic development. The findings are consistent with Newman (2022), who states that Afghanistan's trade routes are heavily dependent on border stability. In contrast, previous studies have paid less attention to the impact of neighboring countries' border policies on Afghanistan's economy. Research indicates that economic sanctions and the closure of borders with Iran and Pakistan at various times have severely reduced Afghanistan's transit revenues (Saikal, 2023). According to a World Bank report (2022), Afghanistan's trade has decreased by up to 35% in recent years due to border closures with Pakistan and Iran. These findings illustrate that, unlike previous studies that focused solely on the geographical role of Afghanistan's borders, this research has attempted to examine the impact of border developments on the national economy.

3. Research Gaps and Future Research Suggestions:

Despite extensive research on border developments in Afghanistan, several research gaps remain that require further exploration:

1. **Lack of Comprehensive Analysis on Climate Change Impacts:** There is a need for more studies on how climate change affects water resources and food security in Afghanistan's border regions (Grare, 2022).
2. **Shortage of Quantitative Data and Statistical Analyses on Border Trade:** Most previous studies have conducted qualitative analyses, with less attention given to precise data regarding the economic impacts of border developments (Newman, 2022).
3. **Absence of Comparative Analysis between Afghanistan's Borders and Other Global Disputed Areas:** A comparative study of Afghanistan's situation with regions like Kashmir, Israel-Palestine, and the North-South Korea border could enhance understanding of the consequences of unstable borders (Saikal, 2023).

The analysis of Afghanistan's border developments reveals that these borders are utilized not only from a geographical perspective but also as geopolitical, security, and economic tools (Barfield, 2021). This research indicates that, contrary to previous studies, Afghanistan's borders should be analyzed within

a multidimensional framework encompassing security, economy, regional competition, and social developments (Grare, 2022). Future studies are encouraged to focus on the impacts of climate change, statistical data on border trade, and comparative analyses with other critical regions (Newman, 2022).

Historical Context of Afghanistan's Borders

Afghanistan's borders have undergone significant changes throughout history, profoundly impacting its security, economy, and national identity. Key border developments include:

- The Durand Line established by Britain in 1893.
- The Rawalpindi Treaty in 1919.
- Post-2001 border developments (Barfield, 2021).

These changes have had deep implications for:

- **Security:** Afghanistan's unstable borders contribute to challenges such as drug trafficking, terrorism, and illegal migration, threatening both national and regional stability (Rashid, 2020).
- **Economy:** Borders play a crucial role in trade and economic activity; however, insecurity and political tensions have led to reduced transit trade and increased commercial costs (Grare, 2021).
- **National Identity:** Artificial borders drawn by colonial powers have created ethnic and religious challenges, fostering feelings of alienation among various groups (Saikal, 2020).

Future Outlook: Stabilizing Afghanistan's Borders

To stabilize its borders, Afghanistan must engage in active diplomacy and regional cooperation:

- **Active Diplomacy:** Afghanistan should collaborate with neighboring countries and international organizations to resolve border disputes. This can include bilateral and multilateral dialogues, signing new treaties, and implementing international laws (Maley, 2021).
- **Regional Cooperation:** Participation in regional projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and regional railways can enhance trade and investment, bolstering Afghanistan's economic stability.

Potential Future Scenarios for Afghanistan's Borders

1. **Continued Instability Scenario:** The Taliban may continue facing security and economic challenges, with borders remaining hotspots for ethnic conflict, terrorism, and trafficking (Saikal, 2023).
2. **Improvement and Regional Cooperation Scenario:** If Afghanistan adopts a constructive diplomatic policy through organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or bilateral agreements with Iran, China, and Pakistan, there may be a reduction in border tensions and an increase in economic cooperation.
3. **Foreign Power Intervention Scenario:** The increasing influence of China and Russia in

Afghanistan could turn border management into a geopolitical challenge, potentially escalating regional tensions.

Policy Recommendations

1. **Active Diplomacy:** Engage in bilateral and multilateral dialogues to address border tensions.
2. **Enhanced Economic Cooperation:** Develop transit trade and participate in regional projects.
3. **Border Security Management:** Utilize surveillance technologies and collaborate with neighboring countries to reduce trafficking and terrorism.

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