

“Diplomacy, Geopolitics and Development – Strategic Choices in a Volatile Region”

Concept Note

Introduction

In the midst of overlapping 2026 crises, Pakistan has emerged as a pivotal actor at the intersection of two interlocking geopolitical fault lines: its high-stakes mediation in the US-Iran war and its escalating confrontation with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Analytically, these are not parallel developments but mutually reinforcing pressures that expose the limits of Pakistan’s multi-vector diplomacy while underscoring the urgent need to translate geopolitical leverage into development dividends. Pakistan’s shuttle diplomacy—hosting rare direct US-Iran talks in Islamabad, dispatching high-level delegations led by the Army Chief to Tehran, and pushing for renewed ceasefires amid a fragile truce—has positioned Islamabad as a credible intermediary. This role offers diplomatic capital and potential economic openings with Washington, yet it risks entanglement in Middle Eastern volatility, energy shocks, and domestic strain from prolonged conflict near the Strait of Hormuz. At the same time, the post-2021 Taliban regime in Afghanistan—initially viewed by some in Islamabad as a source of strategic depth—has instead enabled a surge in Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attacks, triggering Pakistan’s direct military strikes inside Afghan territory and declarations of “open war.” Facing unrelenting cross-border militancy, refugee pressures, trade disruptions, and border closures, Pakistan has now shifted decisively: it is actively signaling the need for regime change in Kabul, exploring contacts with Taliban opponents and recalibrating its Afghanistan policy to priorities security over past assumptions of ideological alignment. These twin dynamics—diplomatic brokerage with Iran and the US on one hand, and the push for Taliban regime change on the other—directly threaten sustainable development in the Afghanistan-Pakistan corridor, from energy access and trade corridors to humanitarian programming and private-sector recovery. The Webinar will provide an analytical platform to unpack these interconnections and chart pathways where diplomacy serves development rather than perpetual instability.

Rationale for the Seminar

Pakistan’s diplomatic activism in the 2026 US-Iran war and its hardening stance toward the Taliban regime are no longer abstract foreign-policy matters; they define the operational reality for development actors working across borders. Mediation success could unlock renewed US engagement and regional connectivity, but failure risks heightened insecurity in Baluchistan and energy crises. Concurrently, the Taliban regime’s alleged tolerance of TTP sanctuaries has escalated into open conflict, reversing earlier post-2021 optimism and compounding humanitarian, economic, and stability challenges that derail BID’s mandate of inclusive development. Without structured, forward-looking analysis, these pressures risk locking the region into cycles of militarized responses and stalled progress. The Bareen Webinar offers a neutral, evidence-driven forum to examine Pakistan’s evolving choices, moving beyond reactive narratives toward strategies that convert diplomatic agency and regime-pressure tactics into tangible gains for communities on both sides of the Durand Line.

Objectives of the Seminar

- To deliver rigorous analytical insights into how Pakistan’s diplomatic engagements with Iran and the United States, combined with its push for regime change in Afghanistan, shape regional stability and long-term development prospects. Critically evaluate Pakistan’s mediator role in the 2026 US-Iran war, assessing opportunities for economic and security cooperation alongside risks of spillover.
- Analyse Pakistan’s strategic shift toward seeking Taliban regime change in Afghanistan, its drivers (TTP threat, border conflict), and developmental consequences.

- Generate actionable, policy-oriented recommendations for governments, development agencies, and civil society to mitigate risks and leverage diplomatic openings.
- Strengthen networks among Afghan, Pakistani, and international stakeholders focused on evidence-based solutions that link diplomacy with inclusive growth.

Discussion Themes

- Pakistan's Diplomatic Moves Regarding Iran and the United States: Pakistan's mediator role in the ongoing 2026 US-Iran war.
 - The mechanics and impact of shuttle diplomacy, including hosting Islamabad talks, high-level delegations to Tehran, and efforts to extend ceasefires and reopen critical routes.
 - The strategic balancing of deepened US ties (security cooperation, economic frameworks) with sustained neighbourly relations with Iran (border management, potential energy pipelines).
 - Risks of regional spillover (energy shocks, Balochistan instability) versus opportunities for enhanced connectivity, investment, and development gains.
 - How this multi-vector approach can be harnessed to advance broader regional stability without compromising Pakistan's core interests.
- Regime Change in Afghanistan – Pakistan's Shifting Stance and Implications for Regional Dynamics and Development
 - Centered on Pakistan's current position that the Taliban regime must change, examine the drivers and consequences of Islamabad's policy evolution. Discussions will cover:
 - The security-development nexus: how TTP sanctuaries under the Taliban have escalated into open war, Pakistani strikes, border closures, and humanitarian strains.
 - Pakistan's recalibrated approach—signalling regime change, engaging Taliban opponents, and applying coercive pressure—to restore stability and curb militancy.
 - Developmental fallout and entry points: refugee management, trade resumption, inclusive aid delivery, and private-sector engagement under a potential post-Taliban scenario.
 - Forward-looking strategies for constructive regional engagement that convert political transition into opportunities for sustainable development along the Afghanistan-Pakistan corridor.

Key Message

“Diplomacy for development: Pakistan's mediation in the US-Iran war and the imperative of Taliban regime change for stability in Afghanistan.” Pragmatic diplomatic choices and decisive pressure on destabilizing regimes must converge to deliver security, energy access, trade revival, and human development across the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

Target Audience

- Policymakers and diplomats from regional and global countries.
- Researchers, academics, and students in international relations, political science, and regional studies.
- Security analysts and counterterrorism experts.
- Representatives of international and regional organizations.

Expected Outcomes

- Develop a shared analytical understanding of the interconnections between Pakistan's Iran-US mediation and its calls for Taliban regime change, including direct impacts on development programming.
- Receive a post-event “Bareen Policy Note” distilling key insights and practical recommendations.



- Forge or reinforce professional linkages for cross-border peacebuilding, economic recovery, and humanitarian initiatives.
- Contribute to a constructive discourse that frames regime-pressure and diplomatic balancing as tools for sustainable development rather than zero-sum confrontation.
- Equip BID with targeted guidance for programming that integrates geopolitical realities with on-ground impact.

Format

- Duration: 2 hours, comprising a keynote address, a moderated panel discussion, and an interactive Q&A session.
- Platform: Conducted via Zoom, with live streaming on the Bareen Initiative for Development's website and social media channels to ensure global accessibility.
- Moderation: Facilitated by senior experts from the Bareen Initiative for Development to ensure rigorous, inclusive, and constructive dialogue.

Call to Action

The Bareen Initiative for Development (BID) calls on stakeholders to engage in this critical dialogue to reassess past policies and chart a principled path forward for Afghanistan and the region. Through rigorous analysis, collaborative innovation, and a commitment to justice, this seminar aims to contribute to the creation of safer, more equitable, and resilient communities. Join us to shape a future that upholds both strategic imperatives and universal human rights.