

Event Transcript

The Road Ahead: U.S.-Pakistan Relations and Regional Dynamics in 2023

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Featuring:

Ambassador Masood Khan, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States

Elizabeth Threlkeld (moderator), Director and Senior Fellow, South Asia Program, Stimson

Event Description

Please join us for a discussion with Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States Masood Khan looking ahead to U.S.-Pakistan relations and broader regional dynamics in 2023. Moderated by South Asia Director Elizabeth Threlkeld, the discussion will focus on areas of opportunity and tension in the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, the impact of economic, security, and climate developments in Pakistan, and the evolving nature of geopolitical competition in the region.

More information and event video available at <https://www.stimson.org/event/the-road-ahead-u-s-pakistan-relations-and-regional-dynamics-in-2023/>

Event Transcript

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Good morning for those of you joining from the US. Good evening to those of you joining from the region. My name is Elizabeth Threlkeld, and I am Director of the South Asia program here at the Stimson Center. It really is a pleasure to welcome you, whether you're joining in person or virtually this morning, for our conversation looking ahead to 2023 in Pakistan and the region, what we can expect for relations with the US, with Pakistan's ambassador here in Washington. It's really a pleasure to have all of you. I think this is a timely discussion, and I look forward to diving in.

I am going to invite to the stage, our President and CEO at the Stimson Center, Brian Finlay, who will set the stage for this event, and introduce the Ambassador. Brian, over to you.

Brian Finlay: Thank you so much, Elizabeth, and thanks to those of you who are joining in the room, and I know the many hundreds that are online. I can't imagine why they're so interested, Ambassador, in hearing what you have to say. I have the easiest job here this morning, in introducing a gentleman that needs no introduction. So I thank you for the light lift this morning, Elizabeth. We're honored of course to be joined by Pakistan's Ambassador, as Elizabeth had mentioned, to the United States. Ambassador Khan, it's a pleasure to have you here at Stimson.

I'm especially pleased as the President of the organization because this affords us the opportunity to do a little bit of bragging about our South Asia program, which

is one of the largest and most important programs here at Stimson. I would also hazard to say, I think one of the largest and longest standing South Asia programs in Washington as well. We're going to celebrate next year, the 30th anniversary of our South Asia program.

It was founded of course by the late, great Michael Krepon, who we lost sadly, earlier this year. But today, our South Asia program, as I mentioned, has grown into quite a sophisticated operation, and one that I think provides quite a unique service not just in this town, but to constituencies and South Asia watchers around the world, including, most significantly, in the region.

I concede to you that I'm paid to say this but I think that it also happens to be true, that our program here at Stimson really is one of the most impactful, and I think practical initiatives on South Asia in the United States. I'm really proud to be associated with it.

I'm especially proud to be associated with the woman that you just heard from, and you are going to hear from again, Elizabeth Threlkeld, who is of course the Senior Fellow and Director of our South Asia program here at the Stimson Center. She is someone who I think not only understands well how this town works, but has a unique and extensive sensitivity and knowledge base derived from her years working in the region as well, including most notably, in Pakistan, during her own government service to this country.

If you don't know Elizabeth, you need to get to know her. She'll change your life, and she's such a great asset to us, and to the broader community of South Asia watchers. Over the last 30 years, our programming in the region has grown considerably. Today, I'm proud to say that we facilitate engagement, dialogue, and research, through initiatives such as our South Asian Voices online policy platform, which I know you are all familiar with. If you're not, you should be. As well as our Strategic Learning online courses and our annual Visiting Fellowship.

A central focus of our South Asia program today is understanding and informing policy makers in this country, and around the world, on key regional developments. Now this event here today, I think is an extension of that remarkable work that Elizabeth oversees. We are privileged, as I mentioned, to be welcoming Ambassador Khan to the stage to help us all look into 2023, and developments in the region.

Over the course of an extremely distinguished diplomatic career, Ambassador Khan has represented Pakistan at the United Nations in New York, in Geneva, in China. All the easy assignments, they seem to give you, Ambassador, as well as on previous postings here in Washington and to The Netherlands. He's served as President of the Conference on Disarmament, as well as the BWC Review Conference, among many other roles.

In Islamabad, he has served in various capacities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman, as well as Director General of East Asia and the Pacific. Ambassador, it is an honor for us to be welcoming you to the stage, which I now yield to you, sir.

Ambassador Masood
Khan:

Good morning, everybody. Mr Brian Finlay, President, Stimson Center, Ms. Elizabeth Threlkeld, South Asia program, and all the participants who are here in person and those listening in virtually. It's a pleasure to talk to you. Stimson Center, thank you so much for inviting me to this discussion, and precisely identifying themes and sub-themes on which we will interact.

I was asked to speak for 10 to 12 minutes, so I'll try to meet the target. Also, I have long association with the Stimson Center. In my previous posting, I used to come here quite often, and I used to attend programs related to Pakistan, South Asia, disarmament, Pakistan-US relations, Pakistan-South Asia relations. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the outstanding contribution made by Mr. Michael Krepon, who I used to meet quite frequently here, and different capitals of the world. Also in New York. My last meeting was in New York in 2014. Since then, we were corresponding, but we could not meet. He was a great person, and he spent years, in fact decades, to build this prestigious institution here in Washington DC. So I convey my deepest condolences to his colleagues here, but also salute his legacy.

Pakistan-United States relations. The foundation of the relations between Pakistan and the United States were laid in good faith and friendship through the exchange of messages between President Truman and Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah immediately after the creation of Pakistan in 1947. These invocations are important. Today the relationship remains strong, reflecting the aspirations and shared values of the people and leadership of the two countries.

The United States helped Pakistan in its formative years to develop its military capabilities and prepare a blueprint for economic development. That sealed the bond between our two nations as we entered into alliances to uphold freedom, peace, security, and prosperity for all. In this journey, both nations have given countless sacrifices in blood and treasure.

At the height of our alliance, doubters would say that our relationship was at best fractional and unequal, with broadly non-congruent security interests. What they failed to gauge was its longevity and resilience. While other nations drifted in and out, Pakistan has remained a steadfast partner of the United States, in war and peace, despite differences between the two countries from time to time. In a sense, all interstate relations are transactional. This too therefore would not capture the evolution and full range of Pakistan-United States relations.

The year 2020 has been a year of opportunity and decreasing tension in Pakistan-United States relations. We started the year with uncertainty. Then we saw a thaw. Now, we have entered into a phase of engagement. After the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan last year, there was bitterness. Pakistan was criticized in the US media at a time when it was helping the United States with massive evacuations from Afghanistan. That trend has receded, giving way to a more sober evaluation of Pakistan-United States relations.

We are relevant to each other, even when we are not in a war. We are recalibrating our relations to incorporate both security and non-security

dimensions. But we will build a realistic and practical relationship that is less susceptible to dissonance of expectations. The United States has de-hyphenated its relationship with Pakistan from any other countries, presumed or prospective. Be it Afghanistan, India, or even China.

There have been warped frameworks misconstrued on both sides. The relationship now stands on its own. Singular, broad based, but integrated into the regional and global spheres. The United States has publicly underscored that it has always viewed a prosperous and democratic Pakistan critical to its interests. We too have reciprocated in full measure.

Pakistan and the United States, as longstanding strategic allies, would continue to advance their shared agenda to counterterrorism, foster regional stability, and strengthen defense ties. The resurgence of ISIS, and the dastardly terrorist attacks launched by the TTP against Pakistan, required security cooperation between Pakistan and the United States, and the removal of barriers that may exist there. We will expand our partnerships in the economic realm, from our trade, investment, and businesses, and enhance cooperation in the energy, health, education, climate change, and agriculture sectors.

I believe that the relationship must have economic signals and currency. The political climate, I would say, is ripe for that kind of broad based cooperation in 2023. The geopolitical situation in 2023 will continue to be complex, without radically undermining existing interdependencies. The developments in and around Ukraine have however increased ambiguities, and disrupted the familiar fault lines in Europe. We hope all nations would use strategic pragmatism to resolve problems, and promote geo-economic connectivity, to spur shared prosperity across the globe. Block politics in this day and age will imperil world peace. Above all, we must continue our quest for international rule of law and justice.

We hope that nations would rather cooperate than compete, and avert conflicts, to fulfill their obligations under the United Nations charter. We attach highest importance to our relationship with the United States. Our ties with China will remain on a steady path. We applaud the statesmanship demonstrated by the United States and China, to engage each other whenever tensions rise. This was manifested recently, when President Biden and President Xi met in Bali. Pakistan would not like to choose between the two countries, but be a bridge if that's feasible.

The growing trade between China and India, its current volume being more than \$115 billion, rules out a war between the two countries, or even a protracted conflict. Economic codependency between the two countries seems to be the norm. Absence of any dialogue or communication between India and Pakistan is hazardous. India should diversify its policies and practices in the Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir. The full spectrum of the outstanding issues between Pakistan and India should be put on the table for dialogue and resolution.

While Pakistan has contributed less than 0.4% to global carbon footprint, it is the 8th most vulnerable country to climate disasters. This year, climate induced

floods inundated one-third of our country, which affected 33 million people, displaced nearly eight million, and spawned myriad food, health, education, and housing crises. Infrastructure was crippled. These epic floods came after forest fires, glacial melts, heatwaves, and torrential rains, and destroyed crops, livestock, and biodiversity.

We thank the United States for its generous humanitarian assistance of \$97 million for flood relief to Pakistan, and deeply appreciate its assurances that it will be a partner in our climate resilient inclusive and people centered post flood recovery and rehabilitation strategy. The floods will cast a shadow in 2023. But they have also opened up an opportunity for creating a better future for Pakistan. The post disaster needs assessment, prepared jointly by Pakistan, United Nations agencies, European Union, and multilateral development banks, has calculated loss and damage of \$31 billion. It is however a cascading catastrophe, and a long haul. There will be more costs, I'm sure.

We would leverage the United States' convening power to mobilize support for Pakistan, in the Donors Conference next month in Geneva. The agreement on the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27, under the leadership of Pakistan, as chairman of a Group of 77, is a positive development. But a fund's chest should not remain empty if we sincerely and seriously want to save the planet from annihilation.

Beyond floods, there is another story about Pakistan, over an emerging economy, with a population of 220 million. Some 80 million to 100 million in the middle class, and 130 million below the age of 30. It's a young nation with an immense potential. Hundreds of thousands of students graduate every year, from universities, R&D organizations, centers of excellence, and science and technology institutes. These include tens of thousands of tech entrepreneurs.

We are investing in science and technology and science and technology led growth. Pakistan's economy is being digitized speedily, as global venture capital and private equity firms, most of them from the United States, are unlocking new business ecosystems in Pakistan. Our tech startups have done well in the past two years, and are poised to grow exponentially. Pakistan is developing an alternative economic hub, extending to east, central, and west Asia.

Nearly 1 million Pakistani-Americans are playing a pivotal role in cementing ties between our two countries. There is sufficient content on both sides to dispel misperceptions about each other. The revision of the United States travel advisory, relaxation of our respective visa regimes, and people to people exchanges, will promote deeper understanding between our peoples.

Eighty American enterprises in Pakistan, comprising conglomerates in front and back offices, are expanding their businesses in and around Pakistan. The United States is the single largest export market for Pakistan. Last year, our exports increased from \$7 billion to \$9 billion. The United States FDI needs to climb back to its previous peaks, when the United States used to be a top foreign direct investor in Pakistan for decades.

These are good foundations to scale up our ties in 2023 and beyond. We would consolidate the processes we have advanced in 2022. We look forward to an early ministerial meeting of the trade and investment framework agreement, further cooperation in the health sector, eventually in the field of disease surveillance, development of weather resistant seeds, under the banner of the Green Alliance, launched by the United States, and joint ventures for renewables and green technologies.

The number of Pakistani students enrolling in universities and colleges this year has increased by 17% to 8000. Still, it's a very small number, compared to the students who are studying here from other countries of the region. We would work to have this number increased, especially in STEM subjects.

Pakistan is a nation with destiny. Given its economic coordinates and cohorts, the World Bank and Goldman Sachs, among others, see Pakistan as one of the top global economies by 2047, when it will turn 100. The World Economic Forum have predicted that it will be one of the top 10 economies by 2030. The Goldman Sachs study, which has been released recently, says that by 2075, Pakistan will be the 6th largest economy in the world. These prospects are good.

We're planning for that future. As we streamline our taxation system, improve ease of doing business, harness our regulatory regimes to attract investments, and empower our citizens, especially women. We are working for political stability, and constitutional democracy. In this journey, we will have friends all over the world. From Europe, to the Middle East, to Africa, to Asia, to the Americas. But the United States will have a special place in the realization of this dream, which will benefit our two nations.

Given the pact regional and global agenda, we need to increase the bandwidth on both sides, to give and develop the right rhythm and frequency to our relationship. I thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. We're going to do a couple of things now. I have a few questions as moderator. But we're also keen to hear from you, our audience who's with us here in person. We're going to have a mic roaming around, as well as online. So please do submit your questions through the Q&A box, and those will come up to me shortly.

Mr. Ambassador, I really appreciate the scope that you covered in your remarks. I think where you ended is something that I've been reflecting on lately: this idea of bandwidth. That especially here in Washington, I think there's the old trope that Washington can focus on exactly one thing at once, and we have two to focus on right now, with Ukraine and with China. That is proving a challenge.

What that creates for countries like Pakistan is bandwidth strain, right? Making a case to not just policy makers here, but to the business community, to all of those other groups that you referenced in your remarks, that Pakistan is worth a look.

I know you mentioned the Goldman Sachs report. I figured you might, so I wanted to drill down on that a little bit, because it was certainly a striking

finding. But I did note that that report, when it's making its projects in terms of economic growth it makes this assumption that, "Appropriate policies and institutions will be in place to facilitate it." It's actually based on the idea of Pakistan's population. That looking at trajectories of population, and what that could amount to in terms of economic growth, if there are these appropriate policies and institutions in place, then Pakistan could well be there by 2075.

I think that raises the question to me, looking at what are, to my mind, some pretty significant economic challenges that Pakistan is facing right now. Just from the Central Bank data, foreign exchange reserves stand at \$7.5 billion. It's not even enough to cover five weeks of imports, and the country faces \$26 billion in debt and debt servicing costs through October of next year. So that feels like a pretty wide gap.

I certainly understand the aspiration, but I do wonder. You mentioned a few other reforms: so tax system, ease of doing business, regulations, investing in women, which I think is critical, but my question is, I think we've known those solutions for a while. That's a list that I've been hearing. We've seen it in reports. What has been preventing those reforms from taking place? Do you have confidence that something material has changed, such that Pakistan can actually get to where it can reap the demographic dividend of its population?

Ambassador Masood
Khan:

Well, you've covered a lot of content in your remarks. But I would say first about the bandwidth. I would say that in fact, we have to work on that. Both in Pakistan, and the United States. We have to unleash those forces which connect Pakistan and the United States in diverse areas, particularly business, that's ripe for more intense relationship on both sides.

Also, I mentioned tech entrepreneurship, or startups. Some of these things are already happening, but they are not on the radar. That's why people think that there is no significant economic activity taking place in Pakistan, or between Pakistan and the United States, and that's not true. This is what I want to say about this bandwidth, it has to be a conscious effort. For that, we have to establish a threshold of mutuality of interest.

Washington should feel that Pakistan is relevant. That it's profitable. That it's lucrative to go there. That it's a very reliable partner in the region for stabilization of Afghanistan, the stability of the entire region, because I referred to the extended neighborhood that we have.

As I mentioned, there were these questions raised last year, particularly in the months of August, September, and October, as to whether there's any relevance of Pakistan to Washington, or whether Pakistan-US relationship has any future after Afghanistan. I think that the two sides have demonstrated that yes, there is relevance, and that there would be engagement, and the engagement is taking place as we speak, as a matter of fact. So this is one thing. No relationship should be taken for granted. You have to work on it. Whether it is between two human beings, two individuals, or two communities or nations.

Second, I'll move to the economic reform part. This is also taking place. Before coming here, I met the governor of a state bank, SSEP chair, the finance minister, and all the other relevant ministries. They're conscious that if you want to attract investment from abroad, we must liberalize these regimes. This is happening. There are many businessmen from here who invest in Pakistan. They are reaping good dividends from those businesses.

I referred to those 80 enterprises, which are already there for decades, American enterprises. Despite the residual regulatory challenges, they find the Pakistani market very lucrative. They are employing the population. These include some very, very renowned conglomerates, or MNCs, like Pepsi and Coca Cola, or Procter & Gamble, or Cargill, or Abbott. They are there doing business in Pakistan. They employ 150,000 people. They're supporting 1 million households. They are a catalyst in Pakistan's economy. America's economic footprint is there. It has to be expanded. It has to be scaled up.

Then your last question, or the nuance in your question, was that yes, of course all these projections by World Economic Forum, or the World Bank, or Goldman Sachs, they would not materialize if we do not simultaneously, as we develop, as we grow economically, if we do not pursue, refine, and finesse all these reforms which are required. Because they will create the enabling environment.

I've seen many governments in Pakistan in the recent past. Irrespective of their political identities and inclinations, there is this consensus developing, that we have to focus on these reforms to make Pakistan successful, economically and technologically in the region, the region that I identified.

It would be ideal if Pakistan and India could resolve all their differences and move ahead. Well, until that happens, there is also an alternative neighborhood, the extended neighborhood of Pakistan I mentioned. East Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia, extending to North Africa, or probably Central Africa. So I think that your premise is absolutely correct. That we'll have to speed up our economic reforms to realize the goal of becoming one of the top 10 countries by 2030, or 2050, or 2075.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Again on US-Pakistan relations and where we're going, you painted a broad picture. Not just of the G to G level, the government level of the relationship, but also private sector investment, as you've detailed. But with that, with those bandwidth strains I talked about, thinking about investing in this relationship from Washington's standpoint, there are a lot of other factors. There are a lot of competing contenders for that limited attention, limited funds these days.

I think we can't forget the domestic political situation in Pakistan. Where we have Pakistan's former, and perhaps future Prime Minister, who repeatedly makes claims that the US played an instrumental role in ousting his government from power. I heard that from a number of PTI supporters when I was in Pakistan back in September, and I think that narrative has really taken hold. This idea of the imported government.

I recognize domestic politics are messy. Not just in Pakistan, here in the US as well. But within that environment, within that sense of anti-Americanism, and the role the US is portrayed as having played, with no grounds in reality, how is it possible for us to try to work towards the relationship that you suggest? What can incentivize policy makers here to engage when that is the feedback that's coming from a key political leader?

Ambassador Masood Khan:

In my opening remarks, I said that we are working for political stability. That's our goal. We are working out all these dynamics, within the constitutional framework. That has been the endeavor in the past several years. All of the developments that have taken place in the past year or so are also within the bounds of the constitution. It has created uncertainty from time to time, but it hasn't affected our transactions, I would like to say with other governments. Our external policy has not been affected by that.

Now you say about Washington, you said that there are competitors. Of course, Washington has its own preoccupations. Not just with Ukraine, or let's say with the Indo-Pacific region, we call it Asia-Pacific region. What we need is to realize the importance that Pakistan has for the United States.

I remember in the late 1980s, the Americans withdrew from the region, from Pakistan, from Afghanistan, and there were very serious consequences later on in the early 2000s. This time, one lesson that we have learned is that we must remain engaged because Pakistan is a significant country, not only because of the economic potential that I was referring to, but also because of its role in regional stability.

Therefore, regular contact between the two nations, and joint efforts to create an enabling environment for strengthening our relations, is very, very important. It is imperative, as a matter of fact. Otherwise we will develop a blind spot, and pay the price for it. We should not be accident prone because of any degree of disengagement, or inattention.

Elizabeth Threlkeld:

Yeah, I certainly agree on that front. I think the challenge though, hearing that sort of rhetoric out of Pakistan, it makes it a little bit challenging to figure out where it is possible to work together, and to make the case for that value proposition. So I think going forward, realistically that's likely to be a dynamic that just needs to be managed.

Ambassador Masood Khan:

We can never have perfect coordinates. You have to create a solitary environment. That's what the two sides are trying to do. You can't control the future. There will be unanticipated developments in the future as well. There will be more variables than constants probably. But within these uncertainties, we must try to develop closer ties between Pakistan and the United States.

What I said is that in the past one year, our two countries are working together crafting a post-Afghanistan, post-war relationship. Of course there would be objectors or doubters or naysayers that would say that it would not work, but let's

look at the ground realities. I think there's a lot that connects us. I referred to the diaspora community. They're investing back in Pakistan.

What I want to say is that, first we should determine that is a good thing to do, for both countries, for Pakistan and the United States. It has been stated by Secretary Blinken, our leadership frequently, our Foreign Minister, Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, was here. There were public pronouncements, and there have been of course talks, or communications, between the two foreign ministers. They have come to the conclusion that this relationship is valuable for both countries, for the region. We would contribute to global commons and therefore it must be nurtured and sustained.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Staying a bit on this question of, I think the economic situation in Pakistan runs through so many of the issues, that you mentioned that we focus on here at Stimson. I want to turn specifically to something that we work on, as Brian mentioned, on the nuclear side, but also broadly defense and security issues. This idea of the guns versus butter debate. It's a classic. This is a balance that governments around the world have to strike, in terms of prioritization, in terms of trade-offs.

At a time when Pakistan is facing an increasingly acute economic crisis, when you look at foreign exchange, when you look at what's happening with inflation, this is something that's also hitting people in the pocketbook. It's being felt quite acutely across Pakistan. The rupee's declining value as well. Meanwhile, we're seeing these trendlines across South Asia, in the security space, in the nuclear space. Where we have modernization. We have building up of arsenals. We have nuclearization of the Indian Ocean region, pursuing advanced capabilities like hypersonics. That's a pressure, and those things are really expensive too.

So I just wonder how Pakistan is thinking about that balance, between guns and butter, in this current climate. Would you say Pakistan's current level of defense spending is sustainable, giving these economic challenges that it's facing?

Ambassador Masood Khan:

Well you don't throw the guns for the butter. There has to be a balanced approach. As a matter of fact, security is imperative for Pakistan in the kind of neighborhood that it is living. Therefore this is a requirement. In fact, if we invest in economic development, and if we have faster economic growth, our bigger GDP, probably this problem of the allocation of funds for defense would also not make much of a challenge because then the percentage allocations for the defense would decrease.

It is important, you understand the defense perspective, or the security perspective of Pakistan. We need conventional and strategic capabilities to ensure and safeguard territorial integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan. There are many perils. There are asymmetric threats. But there are conventional threats too. Strategic ones. So we have to be prepared.

Then I would say that we should together look at the full picture of Pakistan. Yes, there are economic problems there. But I believe firmly that these are

transient. That they will go away. That as we speak, we're trying to resolve them. We are talking to the IMF, the World Bank. They are partners in Pakistan's economic development. Also, the United States, other nations, they're helping Pakistan. So I think we would negotiate this difficult transition, to a period of economic viability.

I feel very confident that this can happen in the next one to two to three years. We would be back on the launching pad. We would be back to take off from a higher platform.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Interesting choice of terms. I think one that can be used in multiple ways but thank you for that. I want to turn to audience questions here. Do we have any questions from our in person audience first? Anyone who wants to jump in? Mark, feel free. We have a microphone coming around. It'll be just one minute.

Mark Nichols: Mark Nichols. I'm on the Board here at Stimson. I want to ask about the floods, which have been just devastating for Pakistan. What were some of the lessons that you've learned about that experience? Because it's likely to happen again. What can the government of Pakistan do to mitigate the damage in the future?

Ambassador Masood Khan: After the two disasters, one of the 2005 earthquake and then 2010 floods. We had developed preparedness and response mechanisms. We have institutions there. They've worked at the level of the federation, or at the center. Also in the provinces. They went down to the districts, as a matter of fact. The mechanism probably was not ideal, but we were prepared for normal disasters. But this disaster this year of floods, this was epic. People have used many terms, biblical, that kind of apocalypse. These terms have been used, not just by Pakistan, but also by the international community, and climate scientists. Because this was a climate induced disaster. You're right that this may reoccur, and we have to be prepared for that.

There are four or five decisions that we have taken. One is that we should be better prepared, and therefore we have to invest in a climate resilient infrastructure, whether it is roads, or bridges, or housing, housing schemes near the river lined regions and so on. So we have to be very clear headed in what we ought to do, because of this massive feedback that we have received from these floods.

The second conclusion was that we can't do it alone. That the international community has to be involved. That's why at the United Nations, at COP27, bilaterally when we were talking to Washington or other capitals around the world, we said, "Please help us," to supplement our own national resources. We mobilized all our national resources, but there has to be a long term strategy. We have to work on our river systems, glacial melt for instance. There has to be a strategy.

Other countries who are contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions, they have to collaborate. Pakistan has nearly 7000 glaciers outside the polar region, and this is the largest number of glaciers anywhere in the world, in any country.

We need that strategy, a grand strategy, for mitigation and adaptation all around the world, not just in Pakistan. Because sometimes, countries like Pakistan, they become victims, without having contributed to these global catastrophes, or cascading catastrophes that I mentioned.

These are two lessons that we have learned. I think in Pakistan, we will have to create awareness. All our policies, for instance, when we are doing economic planning, or when we are investing in our agriculture, or other areas. Energy for instance, shifting, transitioning to renewables. We will have these floods and disasters at the center, we'll put them at the center. But these transitions cannot be made instantly.

For instance, if we were to discard fossil fuels and go straight to renewables, 100%, we would need \$100 billion. We don't have that kind of money. So while we will have an incremental approach, we would also have this general awareness, and specific interventions for addressing possible future disasters.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: All right. Mr Ambassador, I want to turn to a couple of questions that I've gotten from the audience. We have a long line here, so I want to make sure we can get to as many of these as possible. I want to turn to Afghanistan, and first acknowledge the attack on Pakistan's mission in Kabul, which was so unfortunate and a concerning sign of, I think, some trends that we've been seeing in Afghanistan. A far cry, I would imagine, from where many in Pakistan hoped the situation between the two countries would be over a year out from the Taliban takeover.

We've seen cross-border firing incidents. We've seen clashes along the border fence. We've seen of course TTP attacks, originating from Afghanistan, across the border into Pakistan. This as well. So I think, fair to say that things are not all good in the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship.

The question is your impression of why. So is this an issue of capacity of the Taliban government? Or is it an issue of their will to take the measures that are needed to prevent these sort of attacks, as they had agreed in Doha, for example?

Ambassador Masood Khan:

It's very difficult to figure that out very precisely. Whether it is political will that is lacking, or whether it is lack of capacity. But I would say that, in this past year, there was this apprehension that after the withdrawal of US troops, and its allies troops, from Afghanistan, there would be a vacuum. There were forces waiting to fill up that vacuum. ISIS, TTP, and others.

They have done precisely that. They have moved forward. They have become more assertive, aggressive, in their operations. They have developed these asymmetric capabilities, more lethal than in fact the capabilities of the terrorist groups and entities in the past. That's why, between Pakistan and the United States, there were three objectives. The three shared objectives. One was of course counterterrorism, on top of the list. Then you had inclusive governance. Last but not least, promotion and protection of rights of women. Promotion and

protection of human rights of all Afghans, but particularly of women and girls. These were the three objectives.

I think in this, Pakistan is a direct victim of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan after August 15th last year. So I think we condemned this attack on head of mission, and also his bodyguard was injured. This was a dastardly attack and we condemned it in the strongest terms. Also, these attacks across the border, they have claimed many lives. This past year, more than 300 people in these terrorist attacks have been killed. Either they were armed personnel, or they were civilians. I think that there was a mediating process, facilitated by the Taliban. By Taliban, I mean the Taliban of Afghanistan. But it did not succeed.

We think, "What do we do?" These are some of the things that we have encountered. But what we need to do is, we need a coordinated approach, a cohesive approach. A multi-targeted approach to counter the threat. As I was mentioning a little earlier, that's why Pakistan is important to the United States. You don't have to figure out why Pakistan's relevance remains as pressing as it was before, let's say August the 15th last year.

Let me also tell you that I'm in the leadership, the military leadership, civilian leadership. I've talked about civilian leadership earlier. But we're also investing in military to military, intel to intel cooperation to ensure that the unfinished business of eliminating terrorism doesn't suffer from lack of attention, or lack of energy.

Polly Nayak:

I was pondering the Ambassador's comments about political stability. I certainly recognize that that's an important outcome of whatever reforms or liberal regimes are adopted, economically and otherwise. But there's another piece of that puzzle, which is the quality of governance. That extends to the bureaucracy, and its capabilities to meet these challenges. I wonder what your thoughts are on this question and if you think there are steps, if you were in charge of everything, that could be taken to enhance Pakistan's internal governance capability? The quality of bureaucracies?

Ambassador Masood Khan:

Our civil servants are one of the best in the region. They're very competent. They enter into the civil service through a competitive process. These are civil service offices. But then you have millions of others, who entered into the structure of governance and influence not only decision making, but implementation of decisions. Every institution needs reforms. So do the civil services of Pakistan. I think that their record and delivery in the past has not been bad. Most of the projects that have been completed, the public sector projects, have been steered by these civil servants successfully.

Now the point here is that we have a representative system. You have the provincial assemblies. You also have the provincial administrations, and the national assembly, or the national parliament, and the national administration of the government at the national level. There, law makers and the government are the bosses. They give the direction. Parliaments make laws, and these, our leaders, they give direction. So it's a joint responsibility, and we have to develop a

model, in which there's harmony between the political direction, and the implementation of the decisions by civil servants.

This is, I'm talking in generalizations, but word is that we do need to make our system more representative. For instance, if we transfer lots of responsibilities to local governments. Probably the quality of service to people would increase. Similarly, I would say that we are invested in accountability. But some of the process has backfired, because the accountability was so intrusive that some of the civil servants just became immobilized, and they won't move. So they need to be freed up a bit, so that they can feel confident in making proposals and implementing the decisions of their political bosses with a bit of certainty and security.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Mr. Ambassador, another question from a viewer online. Taking our theme of looking forward, the India-Pakistan relationship is obviously of interest. You mentioned this briefly in your remarks upfront. I think from my perspective, there have been a number of, limited certainly, but some encouraging signs in that relationship that we've seen over the course of this year, and a bit about the year before. So we've seen the renewed ceasefire on the Line of Control that's held. The Kartarpur Corridor remains open. We saw the cooperation this spring on wheat shipments into Afghanistan, which was significant. I think the rhetoric has maybe cooled off a little bit as well.

But we're also heading into election season in both countries, which is always a challenging time in bilateral relations. We have general elections in Pakistan in 2023, and India in 2024. Some state elections sprinkled in there as well. I wonder, looking forward to that landscape, help us anticipate what the year ahead is likely to look like in India-Pakistan relations. If there's anything that can be done bilaterally between the two sides, to try to hold onto some of those limited gains that we've seen, and prevent things from deteriorating?

Ambassador Masood Khan:

If you deconstruct India's foreign policy towards Pakistan, it has two or three elements. One is that they continue to do whatever they want to do in Kashmir, which means they're making demographic changes illegally, with impunity. They are doing these electoral changes, to reduce the Muslim majority in the state. This doesn't go down well with the people in Pakistan and Kashmir, as a matter of fact, Kashmir can't be forgotten, can't be swept under the carpet. So this is their first element, "Just ignore Pakistan." Keep doing what they're doing in India.

Now that's not going to work now, or in the long run. Because after rescinding Articles 370 and 35-A, they're trying to amalgamate this territory, which is a disputed territory, into the Indian union. That's not going to work.

But the second thing is that, do not engage Pakistan, or engage it selectively. For instance, if it is wheat shipments to Afghanistan, yes that becomes a priority for India. But when it comes to other questions, whether these are related to the Indus Water Treaty, or Kashmir, or the strategic stability talks that we used to have, or the conventional balance, then just discard them. Ignore them. Remove

them from your bilateral conversation. By the way, no significant conversations are taking place at all.

I think that we've been looking for peace and security in South Asia for the past 75 years. We've made many attempts. As far as Pakistan is concerned, it's still ready to talk to India, and engage it. As I said, on the full spectrum of the issues that have divided us. Now here, I would say that's very interesting. That yes, you are absolutely right, that empirically it has been proved that if we talk behind the scenes, if there's some level of communication, we can build confidence. We can resolve problems. For instance, there is no hot war going on there. The exchanges are not so angry as they were, let's say in the immediate aftermath of 2019.

But then you would come to, for instance, we've managed the ceasefire. This has saved many lives across the Line of Control. These are good steps. Which means, it proves the point that we should have more communication, more dialogue with India. Our suggestion is that some of those measures that were taken in 2019 need to be revisited, and channels of communication have to be opened.

Interestingly, you alluded to elections. I would say that in Pakistan, India is never an issue in the elections. When parties are contesting elections, of course India or Kashmir, or our general policies toward the neighborhood, are mentioned in their party platforms. But they do not become electoral issues in the constituencies. Most of the issues are local or national. On the other hand, in India, Pakistan is a hot issue, particularly for the main parties. For the main political parties. They whip up that sentiment against Pakistan before elections, to garner support.

The last one that I would say, is that the world has been ignoring this drift towards discrimination of Muslims in India. Therefore, these things take some time to do the cumulative damage. Before that, I think that as I suggested earlier, we should have talks between the two countries, and we should have some confidence building measures. We should explore avenues for resolving the conflicts that are there, and we should identify areas where we have some convergences, however small they are.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Very quickly, because we are unfortunately running near the end of time, any ideas on what those areas of convergence are? What some of those confidence building measures should be, that are low hanging fruit?

Ambassador Masood Khan:

You'd recall that from 2003 to 2008, there was this full cycle of dialogue between the two countries. There was this investment in confidence building measures. Elaboration of these confidence building measures. Now there are two areas. One of people to people, and then of course you have addressing perceptions about each other, lowering hostility between the two countries. But not at the expense of the resolution, of the key, core questions. This is very important to understand.

Similarly, I think that it is in the interest of both countries, that there should be responsible nuclear stewardship. That there should be a restraint and responsibility when it comes to nuclear weapons. I think that nuclear security

over weapon systems is very, very important. We have some minimal CBMs in this regard. But most of these conversations are stalled.

The last point is that, when it comes to India-Pakistan questions, Pakistan is always keener to talk. India has this dismissive, condescending attitude bordering on supremacy, or superciliousness. I think that kind of posture needs to be revised in Delhi, if they really want genuine talks with Pakistan.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Well, I'm afraid we will have to leave it there, in the interest of time. Mr. Ambassador, thank-you very much for joining us. On just a personal note, it happens to be my father's birthday today, and I promised him I would say happy birthday, so happy birthday Dad. Thank-you for taking some of your morning to tune in. But Ambassador Masood Khan, it was really a pleasure to have you, and look forward to continuing this conversation.

Ambassador Masood Khan: Thank you so much.

Elizabeth Threlkeld: Thank you.