

Growing Geo-economic and Geo-strategic Interests of India in Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

The tragic event of 9/11 changed not only the global political environment of the world but also altered the security and political environment of South Asian region. A change in Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan was witnessed. Since Pakistan's emergence as a separate independent state, its dispute with Afghanistan on Durand Line has substantially influenced the course of its foreign policy towards Afghanistan. The issues in Afghanistan directly affect Pakistan in the domain of politics, economics and society. The troubled relations between the two states gave a chance to India to win the sympathies of Afghans after 9/11. India emerged as a strong regional player and established good relations with Afghanistan by helping them. To secure its interests in Afghanistan India also established good relations with Iran. They share some common motives. Both the countries abominate the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and feared of the exportation of militants to their own soil. So far friendly ties between India and Afghanistan always remain as a source of anxiety for Pakistan. India participated in Bonn Conference 2001 which underlined the base of political and constitutional structure for Afghanistan. India is regarded as a positive actor by most of Afghans contrary to Pakistan. The paper examines the strategic interests of India in Afghanistan and its subsequent impacts on Pakistan.

Key Words: Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, South Asia, interests, role, influence

Introduction

India's strategic environment is often described in relation to the entire Indian Ocean basin. For this purpose the strategic importance of Afghanistan for India increases manifold. To secure its interests in Afghanistan, India has also established good relations with Iran. Both India and Iran share some common motives. The two countries have abominated the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and have shared feelings of fear of the exportation of militants to their own soil from this trouble land (Fair, 2010). So far friendly ties between India and Afghanistan always remain as a source of anxiety for Pakistan. India participated in Bonn conference 2001 which underlined the base of political and constitutional structure for Afghanistan. India is regarded as a positive actor by most Afghans as is evident from the fact that Bollywood music, soap, opera and films are getting widely popular in the country. Both countries have

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cordial diplomatic relation. Most Afghanis are educated in India including the former President Hamid Karzai (Verma, August 01, 2010).

When the Taliban regime collapsed in 2001 India quickly established relations with Afghanistan. India supported Afghanistan by providing economic aid. Afghanistan received a special attention from Indian policy makers. As a result both countries established bilateral relations resulting in increased support for Afghanistan's nascent Government. Strategically Afghanistan is seen as an important link to Central Asia. India is a growing energy hungry country, for this purpose it intends to get linked with Central Asia through Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkmenistan by a pipeline named as TAPI (Chandran, Jan 2014)

Indian Interests in Afghanistan

Historically, India had cordial relations with different governments in Afghanistan except the Taliban government between the years 1996 to 2001. India reestablished its ties with Afghanistan as the Taliban government brought to an end. In Afghanistan's city Kabul has an Indian embassy and various consulates in Kandahar, Haerat, and Jalalabad. India supported The Bonn process by providing diplomatic, political and financial aid. India is becoming the member of the list of world's largest international donor to Afghanistan and it is 5th in hierarchy (Sharma, 2009) India's interests in Afghanistan can be categorized under the following sub headings.

Security Interests

As discussed earlier India denied support for Taliban regime in 1996. It is evident that India's primary security interests in Afghanistan revolve around denying any political, military regime backed by Pakistan, Taliban or any other fundamentalist groups. India has had to counter with such security challenges which are the product of Taliban or other militants groups in Afghanistan. India wanted Afghanistan as a friendly state with a purpose to keep an eye on Pakistan and to monitor activities in Pakistan. Pakistan sought to influence Afghanistan since very long but failed to do so, on contrary Kabul always welcomed India more than Islamabad. Security issues in Afghanistan have always been a concern for India and Pakistan as it has long lasting effects on the social fabric (Fair, 2010) of both countries(Sharma, 2009).

Drug trafficking

In the absence of proper political setup and poor law and order situation in Afghanistan, it becomes a hub of drugs trafficking which results in black

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money and illegal drugs markets. Poppy from Afghanistan is smuggled into India through Pakistan. However the supply of narcotics has reduced from 64% in 1996-1997 to 5% in 2002. The credit goes largely to the measures like higher border vigilance, fencing and electrification along the borders. India is taking some other measures with in Afghanistan to combat the menace of drug trafficking. As India denied the rule of Taliban, another reason behind was that most of the drugs trafficking money was a source of income for Taliban. This is evident from the fact that the Taliban soldiers received an estimated US 300 dollars as compare to the salary US 40 dollars paid to the soldiers of Afghanistan force (Sharma, September, 2008).

Beside these interests India also has other multifaceted interests in Afghanistan. India is still investing a huge amount in Afghanistan in mega and mini projects in order to sustain her positive image as well as to meet her interests too. There are as many challenges as many there are India's interests. India is helping out Afghanistan to sort out all the challenges to make Afghanistan stable because in one or other way a stable Afghanistan is a sure guarantee for India's interests in Afghanistan.

Manifestation of Indian Ambitions in Afghanistan

The dynamics and objectives of foreign policy of the states in 21st century are distinct from the ones prevailed in the previous centuries. South Asian region is economically, strategically and politically an important region. The antagonism of states in this region particularly neighboring two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan has emerged in the shape of cold war; Afghanistan has become the epicenter of this rivalry. Manifestations of Indian ambitions in Afghanistan are based on four aspects. First is of political/diplomatic ambitions. Indian consulates established in Afghanistan near to Pakistani border such as Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad are the precedents of objectives behind them. It is a set reality that Northern Alliance (NA) group in Afghanistan has cordial ties with India and these ties or not of today. The political leadership of NA has vivid relationship with its counterparts of Delhi. Indian role in building infrastructure in Afghanistan and other development works make it as the fifth largest donor of Afghanistan like the other largest donor countries i.e, USA, UK and Germany. The bilateral ties between India and Afghanistan have paved the way for high level agreements which is a corrosive message for Pakistan with its vested interests in Afghanistan. Indian bilateral deal for the development work in Iran's Chahabar port and connecting it through Hajigak road in Afghanistan is meant to aggrandize her strategic sway over the region and to diminish the influence and role of Pakistan one way or the other. As an addition, an Indian company built a new parliament building of Afghanistan in Kabul is the

obvious vindication of its long term interests in Afghan territory. The pervasive reserves of iron, copper, cobalt and gold are the targets India is eying on.

Second is objective a military manifestation. Indian national army trains Afghan troops and provides them sophisticated techniques particularly of guerrilla warfare. Indian spy agency played a significant role in the formation of Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS). An agreement of strategic partnership between India and Afghanistan is also signed in year 2011. The cardinal objective was to provide ample training to Afghan forces to conduct counterinsurgency operations. India trained approximately 350 Afghan armed persons, on annual basis since 2003. Recently, another agreement between these two states has been enacted and now every year some 1,000 ANSF members will get training in India; it also includes military facilities of India who will give training to sixty special officers of Afghan in Rajasthan desert. Pakistan accuses Indian secret agency RAW for its presence on Afghan soil and its inimical activities in Baluchistan and Fata. The troops deployment at consulates of India in Herat is another alarming cause for Pakistan. Third is the economic exposure. In the area of Herat an amount of \$300 million invested by Indian government in a project named as Salma Dam project. Like other projects hydroelectric dam will serve as main source of irrigation for agricultural area and as a power generator for this region.

India is investing billions of dollars on Iranian Chabhar port which is away to Gwadar port for less than 70km. India invested a huge amount on a 218 km Delaram -Zaranj road project to establish an economic alliance among India, Iran and Afghanistan. India invested \$136 million in Helmand's province to construct a road named as Ring Road Highway which will link Iranian Chahbahar port with Kabul and this link is known as International North South Trade Corridor (INSTC). Kabul has earlier invited the Indian companies to exploit the minerals which are worth of \$1 trillion. Along DC transmission line, India and Afghanistan constructed 202 km road from Pul-e-Khumri to Afghanistan's city, Kabul and an important electricity substation at the location of Chimtala, bringing the Uzbekistan's electricity and illuminating Kabul for the whole year. Indians are the part of the assertive \$7,500m TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) gas pipeline scheme, which was anticipated to transport 30,000m cubic feet of natural gas from the Daulatabad field in Turkmenistan by the agency of Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. The commitment to make Afghanistan the part of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) at its 14th summit in New Delhi in April was an essential and productive. In 2006, South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) provided many opportunities by removing tariff barriers and enhanced the sub-continent trade.

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Final authority estimate exposures

India is providing many facilities like free medical and medicine in Afghanistan. Under the administration of world food programme, India provides 100gms fortified biscuits to 2 million school going children in 33 provinces of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan to overcome the problem of food shortage, India announced 2, 50,000 metric tons wheat as a gift for Afghan people. In addition to above, India is also providing free medical consultancy to 30,000 Afghans in five major cities. An initiative step to focusing societal based forming project with minimum time period and having close effect on the life of community was revealed. So far 101 such projects have been introduced. To promote education in Afghani students, India is giving the offer of scholarships which are supported by ICCR for under graduate and post-graduate programmes for students of Afghanistan in India. With the collaboration of UNDP, Indian and Afghanistan's government more than twenty Indian civil servant worked as public administration programme instructors in Afghanistan. Indian-Afghanistan vocational training center is built by Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) to train the Afghan youth. For women vocational training a center is also built in Bagh-e-Zanana in Kabul by Indian NGO, named SEWA. Besides all above Indian has helped in promoting Afghan TV network and communication. India has supported Afghanistan's effort on having unique geographical location in Asia by encouraging regional strategies like Regional Economic Cooperation Conference (RECCA) that help to accommodate Afghanistan's prosperity through coordination in different field of economy. Emigration procedure is safe for Afghan refugees. Bollywood enlightenment is developing in Afghan in the area of Afghan cities. Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) are signed between Afghan National Standardization Authority (ANSA) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) restructuring of air links, power plants and hydro-electric power projects.

So, Indo-Afghan ties are getting stronger with the passing day and there is no merely one field where cooperation is being carried out rather numerous micro and macro fields are being installed to augment the ties. Here it is pertinent to mention that India, Pakistan and Afghanistan have much potential to convert their hostile tactics and policies into regional integration. Europe, once the epicenter of chaos and bloodshed got rid of these curses through regional cooperation and integration. It depends upon the policy makers of these states how they avail opportunities.

India's Policy towards Afghanistan

Currently, Indian focus on its neighborhood has fluctuated. In the era of 1990s a framework of non-reciprocity, the 'Gujral doctrine', showed that India,

being influential power had an obligation to motivate and provide facilities to its neighborhoods without any hope for mutual benefits. This strategy holds back from 1990s as the government runs by the Bharatiya Janata Party described Indian's global significance. Since the alteration to a Congress Party-govern government in 2004, India has displayed transformed promises towards its role in region, and its strategy on Afghan is frequently accounted for in these terms. Indian role in Afghan's territory on social and economic sector is pivotal to the stability of the region in Afghanistan.

The earlier commitment of India with post-Taliban Afghanistan was assessed to be a strategy to weaken Pakistan by USA, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It may have been correct at first, currently India has understood that due to "specific interest" Pakistan is engaged with Afghanistan. India has changed her strategy towards Afghanistan and trying to pose as a well-wisher, working for peace in Afghanistan rather than having an approach of an anti-Pakistan which has been contested by Pakistan. In recent year the Hajigak mining rights had been won by an Indian consortium and Afghanistan can act as agent between Pakistan and India to develop confidence between these countries. All three countries would get advantage financially if Pakistan agrees to the transit of iron ore. This developed link could itself work to make better relations between Pakistan and India. The trade process between Afghan-Pakistan is being increased and perhaps making an example for Afghanistan-Pakistan-India trade.

Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh has spent substantial political investment in developing good relations with Pakistan, and with the countries which are facing challenges of economy and security. Though, competition of economy is limited between Pakistan and India. Pakistan has been considering conferring the status of "Most Favoured Nation" to India. Indian policy framers now generally admit the inexorability of a de-stable and economically uncertain Pakistan, and note the threats of security posed by it to Indian strategy towards Afghanistan.

In the early years of post 9/11, the western were connected with Afghanistan bilaterally. Since 2007 it was the general perception that Pakistan was actively involved in the affairs of Afghanistan and the 'threat of war' mounted the Durand Line. This acceptance in 2009 appointed a number of 'Special Envoys to Afghanistan and Pakistan'. India rejected the struggle to add Kashmir in this framework. Simultaneously, western countries were laying emphasis on their long-time engagement to Afghanistan. In August 2009, General Sir David Richards, Chief of the UK General Staff said that 'the Army's role might evolve, but the whole process might take as long as 30 to 40 years. But there is not a single option of NATO pulling out (Rashid, 2002).

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The amalgamation of a long-time of the west engagement towards Afghanistan added with an enhancing approach on Pakistan gave the latter leverage against India; in 2010, under the influence of Pakistani, India was kept out from the International Conference on Afghanistan held in Istanbul. But within 18 months, in June 2011, USA President Barack Obama declared that Western soldiers would transfer responsibility for security to Afghan forces by 2014. Such strategy alterations have led think-tanks in India to end that their simultaneous engagement both at societal-and government level has been justified.

Indian Objectives in Afghanistan

India has many objectives in Afghanistan which are relevant in India's positioning itself as a vital power irrespective of the boundaries of South Asia, India has many objectives that are basically limited to Afghanistan as well as Pakistan:

- India's first and primary objective is to make sure that Afghanistan is not becoming a safe territory for Taliban. From India's perspective, dealing with the camps in Pakistan is an unrestrained challenge.
- India's objective is retaining Afghanistan as a friendly state so that India can have the ability to watch Pakistan and even, where possible, raise assets to access activities in Pakistan.
- Indian objective in raising an important partnership with Afghanistan are only slightly matched by Pakistan's interests in rejecting India such chances and raising Afghanistan as a client state, or at least as a state that is responsive to entertaining Pakistan's regional concerns.

Indian concerns in post-9/11 in Afghanistan have centered on three broad objectives in order to strengthen its economic and political standing in Afghanistan: security, economic interests, regional concerns and global objectives.

To get approval to CARs for the route of energy and trade: India considered Afghanistan's route important to approach the Central Asian energy. India, being an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), has been pursuing better relations with CARs for energy cooperation. It gave a seventeen million dollars grant for the modernization of a hydropower plant in Tajikistan, and has signed a memorandum of understanding with Turkmenistan for a natural gas pipeline (TAPI) that will pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan.

- An equally important objective is that progress in Afghanistan and Pakistan has significant and usually detrimental impact upon Indian domestic social fabric as well as its internal security irrespective of the commonly known matters in and over Kashmir. Indian interlocutors have explained to this author that Islamist militancy coexists with a burgeoning Hindu nationalist movement that seeks to re-craft India as a Hindu state. Hindu nationalists and their militant counterparts live in a violent symbiosis with Islamist militant groups operating in and around India. Islamist terrorism in India and the region provides grist for the mill of Hindu nationalism and its violent offshoots (Fahmida Ashraf, 2007)

Implications for Pakistan

- **Security Dilemma**

From the very first day of independence, Pakistan faces serious threats to its national solidarity and national integration from the eastern border. But with the passage of time and as we saw shift in the balance of power on global level, Delhi also has changed its warrior tactics and adopted new techniques to destabilize Islamabad internally, on eastern border and most important on western border. Due to the porous border with Kabul, Pakistan is facing serious security issues especially in KPK and FATA. Whole of Pakistan is affected economically and psychologically from the cross border terrorist attacks backed by the India. But the people of FATA and KPK are directly affected by the terrorist activities of non-state actors. For instance, the attacks on APS and Bacha Khan University were allegedly guided by the cross-border terrorists backed by RAW. On several occasion the Pakistani establishment has disclosed the fact that currently Islamabad is facing serious threats from western border as compare to eastern border. Moreover, the “**Pentagonal Strategic Partnership**” of US-India, US-Afghanistan, India-Afghanistan, India-Iran and Iran-Afghanistan poses a huge threat to Pakistan’s national solidarity and integration.

- **Diplomatic Maneuvering**

India has also its strong footed hold in the soil of Afghanistan through diplomatic channels for advocating its national interests and to destabilize the Islamabad diplomatically. Soon after the downfall of Taliban regime, India revisited her foreign policy towards Afghanistan and adopted such a strategic policy to confine Pakistan from every side likewise by opening the consulates in the western and northern parts of Afghanistan. No doubt India has an advantage over Pakistan by using the “Northern Card” to cash its national interests but remember that to counter it, Pakistan is

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keeping “Two Cards; Pashtun and Islam” in the back pocket and can use it in an effective manner at any time to secure its national goals.

Economic Enfeeblement

Afghanistan acts as a bridge for both India and Pakistan to reach the energy rich areas of CARs. For this purpose, comparatively India has taken two steps forward from Pakistan by launching different developmental projects in Afghanistan through her soft power and technological advancement. India is forming a large number of dams on Kabul River. Moreover, India is also investing money on the Hajigak Iron Ore deposits. Delhi is using so cleverly and strategically the Chabahar port for her own cause and in this way the Zaranj-Delaram Highway plays a very strategic role to cover the Indian cause. These projects have serious implications for the Pakistan's economy. As Afghanistan is the second biggest export market for Pakistan after the US, so in order to prevent the local industries from destabilization the Indian goods are not allowed to export to the Afghanistan's market but latter can export its goods to India through Pakistan's Wagah border under the “Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement”.

➤ **India Sponsoring Terrorism in Pakistan**

Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad are ostensibly using for the cross-border terrorism in Pakistan. Through these consulates, India is trying to destabilize Pakistan internally and create an unrest situation in FATA and Baluchistan but facing serious loses on these fronts by the counter strategies of Pakistan's government and establishment. Operation Zarb-e-Azb is successfully launched across the board against all kinds of terrorists and their facilitators either they are sponsored by the India, Afghanistan or any other else.

➤ **Indian Intelligence Network**

Due to soft power advantage over Pakistan, India is playing an effective role in securing its strategic goals in Afghanistan. In this regard, it established people to people contact through its consulates in Kandahar, Jalalabad, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharife. These diplomatic posts enable Delhi to build relationships with local leaders, facilitate trade and investment, and increase awareness of regional developments. Moreover, RAW has played an important role in establishing the Central Directorate of Intelligence in Afghanistan. Delhi is providing training to the Afghan military officers under the Strategic Partnership Agreement signed in 2011.

➤ **Recommendations: Countering the Indian Strategies**

In order to protect own cause and interests in Afghanistan and counter the Delhi strategies, Pakistan must adopt the following policies.

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- i. Peaceful Afghanistan is in the favor of Islamabad, so the latter should adopt the pragmatic approach to diminish the conflicts between different ethnic groups within Afghanistan. Islamabad should take two steps backward from supporting one ethnic group against another.
- ii. Pakistan must ensure Afghanistan through diplomatic channels that the latter must take serious actions against those elements which are involved in those activities which pose threats to Pakistan's national interests and security. Moreover, Kabul must ensure Islamabad that her land is not being used for terrorist and unlawful activities against Pakistan.
- iii. The Afghan High Peace Council must take the initiative in holding the "International Ulema Conference" that should sought out the solution to the Afghan peace problem. In this regard, Islamabad must play a role of facilitator and use its all means to ensure a long term peace in Afghanistan.
- iv. Pakistan should revisit her foreign policy towards Afghanistan; by evolving the farsighted rather than an old-fashioned and conventional policy.
- v. Pakistan must convince the US and Afghan government through diplomatic channels on India's role and policies in Afghanistan that pose direct threat to Pakistan's interests.
- vi. Islamabad must take into confidence, to ensure the long term peace and prosperity, all the stake holders of FATA in the development and dialogue process.
- vii. Pakistan must accept this reality that Afghanistan is her second biggest export market. For this purpose, Islamabad should take serious steps to enhance its trade volume with Afghanistan.
- viii. Pakistan should improve its bilateral relations with Russia to secure its strategic goals in Afghanistan and must abandon its isolation policy towards the Russia.
- ix. Pakistan must focus largely on using the soft power because it's an economic era and for this purpose Islamabad should liberalize its economic policy towards Afghanistan.
- x. Pakistan must improve its relations with Iran and take China in confidence to launch the development projects jointly to minimize the Delhi influence in Afghanistan.
- xi. Pakistan has the green card in the form of Pushtun link through which the former can cash its interests any time. But Islamabad must ensure pragmatically on Pushtuns across the border that she is serious about securing their interests across the board.
- xii. Last but not the least that Pakistan must work to evade the negative perception that leads to the unfounded assumption that it considers Afghanistan as its 5th province and interferes in Afghanistan's internal

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affairs. This can be done through devising a comprehensive strategy of confidence building measures. Islamabad must ensure and take into confidence the Afghan policy makers and scholars that it respects the sovereignty and solidarity of Kabul and aspires to play a role of true facilitator to ensure a long term peace in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The relationship of India with Afghanistan is complicated; there's a security and military angle, under which India seeks stability in Afghanistan while also hanging over the shadow of its connection with Pakistan. Regardless of the fact that it has the ability to be significant upraised based upon both the actions taken by Pakistan and developments in Afghanistan, the growing relationship with Afghanistan remains low-key.

More confidently, there is the presence of economic and social engagement that includes the financing by the Indian corporations and development projects that are commenced by the Government of India. The country's prime role in Istanbul efforts of regional cooperation reflects India's struggle to stabilize Afghanistan in the Asian region. Certainly, this arrangement is depending on Afghanistan's stability. While India is helping to facilitate the trading links of Afghanistan through Iran (whose objective is to diminish Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan), we are aware that the trading connections that transit Pakistan makes sense and would develop trust between India and Pakistan. Last but not least are the softer cultural links. Afghanistan remains the largest scholarships' recipient (given the existence of Western Troops in Afghanistan) that is issued by the India Council for Cultural Relations, while in India has thousands of Afghan students. Afghanistan is watched by the Western public through the military spectrum. India, however, holds different historical views of Afghanistan. In addition to the to-date military presence in Afghanistan, west Afghanistan is very frequently contextualized through a number of Anglo-Afghan combats of the 19th and 20th century (including the Soviet Invasion of 1979-1989). The narrative of 'graveyard of empires' becomes lurid as the presence of Western Military comes to an end in Afghanistan. India however, encompassed hefty measures of the Afghanistan that we know now, for most of the Mughal time period (that was from 16th to 19th century). By the end, Mughal Empire was limited to Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi). Subsequently, there's the shared history and even a more predominant sense that Afghanistan isn't essentially anarchic and can be easily incorporated into the stream of peaceful progressive comity of states.

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