

OBJECTIVES OF INDIAN ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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Introduction

In order to understand the Indian engagement and policies in Afghanistan, it is important to consider some recent elements of regional political history of the recent past.

Relations between India and Afghanistan can be traced back to over 2000 years ago. But since 1947, India is always striving to maintain its influence in Afghanistan. India was the only South Asian state to recognize the Communist regime of Afghanistan (CRA) and possessed good relations with this regime from 1979 to 1989. The relations got badly affected due to the outbreak of civil war in Afghanistan and the rise of Taliban in power, due to which India underwent many security threats during this period, like hijacking Indian Airlines flight in 1999. But India supports Afghanistan's membership in South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Afghanistan became the SAARC member in 2008.¹

The objectives of India's engagement in Afghanistan are guided by the proper analysis of its domestic, regional and global interests.

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Combating Terrorism

The basic objective underlying the Indian engagement in Afghanistan is to prevent Afghanistan from being used for launching terrorist attacks against India or against the Indian diplomatic missions in Afghanistan. As Indian permanent representative to the United Nations stated in July 2008 that, “security within Afghanistan and coordinated efforts to stop terrorists from operating with impunity beyond Afghanistan’s border must be the paramount priority of our collective efforts in Afghanistan.”² Just after four months in November 2008, attacks on multiple sites in Mumbai by the terrorists strengthened Indian resolve to prevent future attacks, even though military means if necessary.³

Checking the Pakistan and Taliban Influences in Afghanistan

A great fear in the Indian society in general and Indian thinkers in particular has been that after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, Pakistan will move to dominate Afghanistan’s political landscape to enable Pakistan to use the country as the safe base and training ground for anti-Indian activities. As the editorial page of the Indian newspaper Mint in January 2010 observed that “once Pakistan is assured of a friendly government in Kabul, it will unleash all the terrorists at its disposal on India. This will only mean more trouble in Jammu and Kashmir, and it will embolden extremist groups to attack our cities with greater frequency.”⁴

In order to check this development, India seeks a stable, democratic and multi-ethnic Afghan government which can establish control over the whole country to maintain peace, prevent return of Taliban and mitigate anti-Indian activities.⁵ To achieve such an establishment, India needs to counter Pakistani political influence in Afghanistan. As the retired Indian Brigadier, who once led the Indian military’s long-range strategic planning staff writes that “the most important issue is to prevent Pakistan from becoming the sole arbitrator of the Afghan political and strategic discourse, as this would reinforce the proxy war against India.”⁶

Increase Access to Central Asia

India is in a desperate need of new energy sources to fulfill the growing and modernizing economy. India’s extraordinary economic growth of more than seven percent annually has

made it one of the world's fastest growing energy markets, with estimates that the country need to import more than 80 percent of its fuel by 2030.⁷

The proposed 1000 mile, \$7.6 billion Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan and India (TAPI) gas pipeline which is expected to carry 33 billion cubic meters per year (bcm/y) of gas generating a much needed \$1.4 billion per year in transit fee for Afghanistan.⁸ India and Pakistan would receive 14 billion cubic meters per year each, representing 1.5 percent of India's total annual energy consumption a 15 percent of Pakistan's consumption.⁹ The transport of Central Asian energy resources to both India and Pakistan requires stability in Afghanistan, where from the TAPI pipeline has to cross, which gives both countries strong incentives to promote security in Afghanistan.¹⁰

Highlight Power and Exhibit Global Interests

India's growth and integration into the global economy has increased the importance of commercial and trade objectives into the Indian foreign policy. Perhaps more important is the fact that these trends have created a perception among Indians that the country is a global power and should seek to shape the world around it.

India has used its military as a tool for projecting its influence around the world. More than 100,000 Indian troops have participated in 40 UN peace keeping mission since the 1950s.¹¹ The Indian Navy has deployed ships on counter piracy missions off the coast of Somalia, though these vessels were not formally part of the multinational Naval Task Force.¹² Even with the South and Central Asian regions, Indian military has taken an increasingly proactive role. It built an air force base in Tajikistan, from which it transports humanitarian assistance, construction material and other goods into Afghanistan. The base also enables India to project its military power into Central Asia.¹³ India trained Kyrgyz forces in peace keeping skills and established a framework for bilateral counter terrorism cooperation in 2011 and in 2012, India resumed military cooperation in Nepal that had stalled during the Nepal's Turmoil.¹⁴

Despite these moves, many Indians think that India must exert more influence in South Asia as a whole if it is to be counted seriously as a world power. Harsh V Pant writes that,

“Afghanistan is a litmus test for India’s ascendance as a regional and global power and India’s capacity to deal with instability in its own backyard will determine its rise as a global power of major import.”¹⁵ Former Indian Army Deputy Chief of Staff R K Swahney writes, “India cannot afford to beat a retreat from Afghanistan if it wants to remain a major regional player.”¹⁶

Aid for Development

The afghan government has been in desperate need to improve economy and create jobs to further marginalize the Taliban and improve the security situation. In a poll released by Asia Foundation in November 2011, 45 percent of Afghans surveyed cited one of the three economic issues (Unemployment, poverty and Poor Economy) as the greatest problem facing the country.¹⁷ Asserting that social and economic development is a key to ensuring that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability,¹⁸ the Indian government has used a range of economic policy tools including development assistance, trade promotion and private investment to promote stability and increase Indian influence in the country.

End notes

¹Prof. Ambreen Javaid and Rameesha Javaid, India’s influence in Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan, JRSP, Vol.53, No.1, January-June, 2016.

² Nirupam Sen, Permanent Representative from India to the United Nations, statement on the situation in Afghanistan to the United Nation’s Security Council, July, 9, 2008, in Avtar Singh Bhasin, ed.,India’s Foreign Relations, 2008: Part 1, New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs and Geetika Publishers, 2009, p. 2534.

³Angel Rabasa, Robert D. Blackwill, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, C. Christine Fair, Brian A. Jackson, Brian MichaelJenkins, Seth G. Jones, Nathaniel Shestak, and Ashley J. Tellis, *The Lessons of Mumbai*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation,OP-249-RC, 2009, p. 14.

⁴“Clueless in Afghanistan,” *LiveMint*, January 27, 2010.

⁵Gautam Mukhopadhaya, “India,” in Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji, eds., *Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010, p. 28. See also Vishal Chandra, “The AfghanMaze and India’s Options,” seminar, New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, September 4, 2009.

⁶Arun Sahgal, “U.S. Af-Pak Strategy and Afghanistan’s Alternative Futures: Options for India,” in R. K. Sawhney, ArunSahgal, and Gurmeet Kanwal, eds., *Afghanistan: A Role for India*, New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2011,p. 134.

⁷“India,” *World Factbook*, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, updated November 8, 2011; Vibhuti Hate, “India’s Energy Dilemma,” *South Asia Monitor*, No. 98, September 7, 2006. With India’s growing middle class seeking car ownership and consumer goods, sales of passenger and commercial vehicles grew 31 percent and 47 percent, respectively, in 2010 alone. Furthermore, 400 million people—one-third of the population—have yet to gain access to electricity. See “Indian Car Market Growth Second Fastest Globally,” *Times of India*, January 12, 2011. See also U.S. Energy InformationAdministration, “India: Country Analysis Brief,” August 2010b; and Raghav Sharma, *India and Afghanistan: Charting theFuture*, New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Special Report 69, April 2009, p. 2.

⁸“Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India Gas Pipeline: South Asia’s Key Project,” *PetroMin Pipeliner*, April–June 2011, pp. 7–8.

⁹India’s share of the pipeline’s capacity is equivalent to approximately one-fifth (22 percent) of India’s 2010 natural gasconsumption, or roughly 1.5 percent of its total energy use. Pakistan’s share is more than one-third (35 percent) of its 2010natural gas consumption, or roughly 15 percent of its total energy use (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2010b). See also “Natural Gas Consumption Declines,” *Pakistan Observer*, c. 2011; and Sajid Chaudhry, “\$7.6 Billion TAPI GasPipeline Project,” *Daily Times*, November 13, 2011.

¹⁰ Sharma, 2009, p. 2. S

¹¹Tadzbakhsh, 2011, p. 33.

¹²The Combined Maritime Forces—often referred to by the names of its constituent Combined Task Forces (CTFs),CTF-150, CTF-151, and CTF-152—operate in the Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean(Lauren Ploch, Christopher M. Blanchard, Ronald O’Rourke, R. Chuck Mason, and Rawle O. King, *Piracy Off the Hornof Africa*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R40528, April 27, 2011, p. 25). See also Combined MaritimeForces, undated web page.

¹³Pant, 2010a, p. 145.

¹⁴“India to Train Kyrgyz Armed Forces, Establish Military Ties in Central Asia,” *Defence Now*, July 19, 2011; “India GreenLights Military Assistance to Nepal,” *Himalayan*, January 18, 2012.

¹⁵Harsh V. Pant, “India’s Changing Role: The Afghanistan Conflict,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Spring 2011,pp. 31–39.

¹⁶R. K. Sawhney, “Afghanistan Today,” in R. K. Sawhney, Arun Sahgal, and Gurmeet Kanwal, eds., *Afghanistan: A Rolefor India*, New Delhi: Centre for Land Warfare Studies, 2011, p. 12.

¹⁷Mohammed Osman Tariq, Najla Ayoubi, and Fazel Rabi Haqbeen, *Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People*,Kabul: Asia Foundation, 2011, pp. 23–26.

¹⁸ External Publicity Division, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, *India and Afghanistan: A DevelopmentPartnership*, c. 2009, p. 8.