

India's Security Concern's after the Withdrawal of the US-Led Coalition Forces from Afghanistan

**Gaganpal Singh, Senior research fellow,
International Relations, Department of Political Science,
Punjabi University, Patiala**

Introduction

India's relations with Afghanistan are always friendly besides the short period of the Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001. In those years India cut its ties with Taliban ruled Afghanistan, was remaining supporting mujahideen government and its former President Rabbani. However, the situations took a significant turn when September 9/11 attack happened, and USA began 'operation enduring freedom'. The Indian government took the initiative to rebuild Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban Government. Afghanistan, India immediate upgraded of Kabul Embassy in 2002

¹. Both nations have also shared goal and co-operation against Islamic militant. The Islamic militancy and radical Islamic ideology had affected both nations. India chooses a development approach to compete with this radical ideology and terrorism through build people to people relations, provide education, medical facilities, and to develop human resource development activities. India's role in Afghanistan in the last decade focused institution building, which avails the people of the war-torn country.² India's efforts in Afghanistan have acknowledged by the International Community.³ Former US Secretary of defence Leon Panetta was very vocal in his appreciation to Indian efforts in Afghanistan during a visit to New Delhi⁴. The Taliban's also recognised India's effort. Delhi has poured in billions in aid and reconstruction of Afghanistan. India ranked a high spot in the view of ordinary Afghan's. India always considers that both countries have shared interest and need to be fulfilled through co-operation of both countries, to achieve this shared belief India and Afghanistan signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2011. The agreement was the commitment of both countries to fight with radical and extreme powers. Through this

¹ Harsh V.Pant, *India's Afghan Muddle- A Lost Opportunity*, HarperCollins Publishers, New Delhi, 2014, p.57

² <http://www.thehindu.com/indias-afghan-dilemma>

³ <http://www.cfr.org/Why-the-United-States-should-work-India-stabilise-Afghanistan>

⁴ <http://www.afghanistannewscenter.com/news/jun282012>

agreement, India committed to help Afghanistan in all sector, India pledged to train and equip Afghanistan's army and police force.⁵New Delhi and Kabul also admitted, under the framework that the Partnership Council headed by the foreign ministers of the two nations also be set-up. It will involve co-operation in areas of security, law enforcement and justice, including focus on co-operation in the fight against international terrorism, organised crime, illegal trafficking in narcotics and money laundering⁶.India endeavours itself as a regional power beyond South Asia. India is looking, strong, stable, and long-standing relations with the Central Asian Republic (CARs). Afghanistan is a crucial partner to expand its relations with CARs for its economic, and energy security.⁷India and Afghanistan have considered that stable Afghanistan is essential for world and south Asian region. The instability of Afghanistan affects the stability of the whole region, and Indian involvement and investment is crucial to stabilise it. Afghan ambassador referred that India is a prominent player in this region and Indian investment in security and defence sector must need for safety and security of India⁸.

There is no doubt that India has been facing ample security challenges from Pakistan sponsored terrorist organisations, such as Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Haqqani Network, Lashkar-E-Taiba (LET), HizbulMujahideen (HM)⁹, which had used Afghan soil in the Taliban regime, to destabilise Indian tertiary, and it might happen again if the Taliban's resurgence after the withdrawal of the western security forces. The return of the Taliban to Afghanistan would pose a significant threat to the Indian border, and India would bear the brunt of escalating terrorism. As Henry Kissinger has put it, 'in many respects', India will be the most affected country if the jihadist Islamism will gain impetus in Afghanistan.¹⁰

For the US, the ground realities in Afghanistan had been turning from bad to worse, and it has not seemed to any easy resolution. USA has been facing mounting public discontent with military expeditions abroad and steadily diminishing economic resource, after that the US establishment re-evaluate its entire strategy towards Afghanistan. However, their initial goal was not accomplished, which makes Afghanistan a sovereign, independent country and prevents to become a haven of terrorist

⁵ Woodall Gunaratna, (ed), *Afghanistan after Western Drawdown*, Rowman & Littlefield Copyright, London, 2015, p.4

⁶ Harsh V Pant, "India in Afghanistan: A Test Case for A Rising Power", *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 18, no. 2, Sage Publication, India, 2010, pp.133-153

⁷ *Ibid*, p.147

⁸ Lalit K. Jha, "Let Behind Attack on Indian Consulate in Herat", say US, *Indian Express*, 27 June 2014

⁹ Kirit K. Nair, "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014 Strategy, Policy and Implementation", *Manekshaw Paper no. 55*, Kw Publisher Private Limited, New Delhi, 2015

¹⁰ "Fundamentalist regime in Kabul to Affected to Indian Most", *Indian Express*, 13 September 2010

organisations¹¹, the goal was also to enable the Afghan government, security forces to defend the country against the continuing Taliban-led insurgency, govern effectively and transparently. As the US-led coalitions, near-total withdrawal has been already underway the prospects of stability in Afghanistan appear¹². This paper has been examining the present security situations in Afghanistan and assuming the future scenario after withdrawal of the western troops. It also traces India's attempts for rebuilding Afghanistan and India's future interest. In Dec 2001 the German city Bonn hosted a conference to choose the leader of Afghan Interim Authority. It was an instrument to deal with the Post-Taliban scenario and to establish a legitimate governance or political authority in Afghanistan. This Conference is popularly known as the Bonn Conference¹³. The Bonn conference put Hamid Karzai as interim President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, he continues after he elected as President through the election in 2004. India had full support of this new government. It shared relations with these groups. India was one of the countries which were supporting the unity alliance before the collapse of the Taliban. Since then, India has been focusing on supporting the Afghan government for the political process in the country as mandated under the Bonn Agreement of 2001¹⁴.

Political Uncertainty

The delay of the 2014 election result undermined hopes to transfer the power ahead of the withdrawal of the western forces. It also reinforced deep social-political divisions in the country. Violence, in the first phase of the general election, spread political uncertainty and dim the future of Afghanistan, the result of the 2014 election, also posed a threat to political stability in the long run. Afghan people did not give a clear majority to any single party. However, the second phase of election presented some clarity that the Ashraf Ghani could be the next President of Afghanistan, even the credibility of the polls also come under ambiguity with the claims and counter-claims between the two leading contenders, Abdulla and Ashraf Ghani. Dr Abdulla, who was the presidential candidates, raised the number of questions about the election's fraud. After months of deadlock, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah reached on agreement in late September 2014; though, this uncertain alliance only came after US Secretary of State John Kerry warned both them¹⁵. After the standoff, Ashraf

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² restrained. William Dalrymple, *Return of a King: The Battle of Afghanistan*, Alfred a. Knopf Publication, New York, 2013, pp.241-242

¹³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/bonn-agreement>

¹⁴ <http://www.unhcr.org>

¹⁵ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/national> security finessing a power-sharing agreement in Afghanistan 2014

Ghani became the new President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and new non-constitutional post Ceo (Chief Executive officer) created for Abdullah. Therefore, the agreement was unclear about the relative role of Ghani and Abdullah. The power struggle between both endured throughout their presidency. They both want full control, Ghani wanted all the power of the President, and Abdullah wanted to the role of the Prime Minister.¹⁶ The political progress since the Ghani, Abdulla power-sharing agreement of sep-2014 has hindered, the lower house of the parliament approved sixteen ministerial candidates in after many months, the Defence Portfolio ¹⁷.

Security Situations

Despite, the ground realities, which is returning to harsh, the resurgence of the Taliban. The Obama administration had decided that they are going to leave Afghanistan at any cost. The residual force of 9,800 troops in Afghanistan would be ended its mission in 2014, after the NATO-led combat mission in the country in 2014. It presumed that the end of 2016 would go nearly all the troops, the USA wants to leave behind security contingent for the US Embassy in Kabul. The coalition members were also following the order. It pondered the commitment of the international communities and started a new phase of the Afghan civil war. Though it also cleared that the withdrawal would not include trainers, those are assisting Afghan forces. The USA agreed to keep a small contingent of troops with a specific mission to combat the Al- Qaeda through counter-terrorism operations. The US-made clear that it sought 'an enduring partnership with Afghanistan that strengthens Afghan sovereignty, stability and prosperity and that contribute to the shared goal of defeating Al-Qaeda and its extremist affiliates'¹⁸. The SPA (Strategic Partnership Agreement), the final passage of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) defined terms and conditions for the residual military presence in Afghanistan post-2014, and as part of which the US could keep up to 15,000 troops in Afghanistan after 2014 for counter-terrorism and training. However, there were some disagreement and difference between Washington and Karzai. Karzai was not too anxious to have a residual US presence in Afghanistan and tended to postpone a final agreement with the US¹⁹. However, the two countries signed the BSA after the inauguration of the new government. The BSA, as drafted by the US, had outlined that an American Military Mission might remain active

¹⁶ http://www.economist.com/Afghanistan's_disputed_election

¹⁷ has also delayed. http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/middle_east_and_Afghanistan_after_western_withdrawal

¹⁸ Harsh V Pant, *op. cit*, p.156

¹⁹ A. *Ibid*, p.158

'until the end of 2024 and beyond', maintain its troop's presence in the country until at least 2024²⁰. The USA Forces Mission under the BSA will be "enhance the ability of Afghanistan to deter internal and external threats, develop, equip and seek funding to support the ANSF (Afghan National Security Forces), and enhancing information and intelligence sharing with Afghan Security Forces. One of the most notable internal threats for Afghanistan sovereignty is Taliban. Last year, Taliban insurgents had launched its most violent attack on Afghan Security Forces and civilians, according to the UN, the number of civilian casualties in 2014 up by 22 percent (3,699 killed and 6,849 wounded mostly caused by battle) to its highest level since the organisation started keeping records, in 2009²¹. In the first six months of 2015, civilian casualties had also increased as compared to last year, between 1 January and 30 June 2015, approximately 4,921 civilian casualties had recorded. The Haqqani Network is an influential group in the Taliban campaign had become a terrible force in the other Taliban group over the years. Pakistan establishment has been providing support to all these groups; however, the Haqqani group is its closed allies in all these civil war years. The Taliban groups have strengthened their combat capabilities and influence among the Pashtuns, especially in the east and southern parts of the country.²² Taliban had made significant encroachments, including in strategic eastern Provinces like Kapisa and Nangarhar, getting closer to Kabul and strategic transportation infrastructures. As of May 2015, a vital decay of security and massive clashes reported at least ten provinces across the country. The Afghan Minister of Interior portrayed even graver increase insecurity in Afghanistan, indicating 11 provinces as facing the high-security threat and a further nine as experiencing medium-level ones²³.

ISIS (Islamic State of Serbia and Iraq) has also extended its operations in Afghanistan, it has a presence at least eight of Afghanistan's thirty-four Provinces, and the group is actively recruiting fighters from Afghanistan to travel to Iraq and Syria²⁴. President Ashraf Ghani had also expressed concern about the emergence of ISIS and believed as the grave threat for Afghanistan security and stability.

²⁰ Matthew Rosenberg, "Amid drawdown and fears of Taliban resurgence and economic collapse", *international New York Times*, 28 May 2014

²¹ Micheal O' Hanlon and Hassina Sherjan, *Touching it out in Afghanistan*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 2010, p.6

²² Pakistan and Afghanistan shared the Pashtun ethnic population, which has been helped Pakistan to maintain its ties with the Pushtuns dominant Taliban groups. Wilson John, *Future of Afghanistan Post 2014 and Its Implications for India*, *ORF Issue Brief no. 57*, August 2013

²³ [Sudarsan Raghavan](#), "Foreign Fighters are Spilling Into Afghanistan and Helping the Taliban", *Washington Post*, 15 April 2015

²⁴ Dick Cheney, *Exceptional: Why the World Need A Powerful America*, Simon and Schuster Publisher, Washington DC, 2015, p.183

After long war years, the US and its partner countries realised that they could not leave Afghanistan in this situation and the only solution of this problem is a settlement with the insurgent groups and seeks peaceful and political solutions of Afghanistan.

President Ashraf Ghani took the initiative, to start negotiation with the Taliban leadership, in which Pakistan emerged a key player. The military leadership of Pakistan has been pushing the talks. Though, it is not the first time; such efforts had also taken by the passed government. The “Afghan high peace council” (HPC) established on September-5, 2010.²⁵ Former President/ Northern Alliance Leader Burhanuddin Rabbani was appointed to lead peace council; although the Rabbani assassinated by a Taliban infiltrator and spoiled the peace process. In the end, the Taliban’s refused to participate, claiming it wanted to talk only with the American, "who have occupied Afghanistan and are the real power"²⁶.

President Ghani has proceeded the policy of negotiation with the Taliban. For this purpose, he went a state visit to Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and China after taking office, and focused on building support among these regional power, who renewed talks with Taliban, these countries perceived as holding some leverage over the Taliban. The Afghan Unity Government gave unprecedented concessions to Pakistan, such as acted against Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) militants operating from Afghan soil, provide prison access, agreed to send army cadets to Pakistan for training and engaged directly with the Pakistan military.²⁷

Pakistan security establishment is also in chest-thumping mood for being recognised as the central player in the Afghanistan dynamic. Its critical role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table. It does not matter that, for all these years, the Pakistani military had been vehemently denying that it had any leverage over the Taliban.

These are some decision which showed a significant shift towards Pakistan after the new government, Ghani identified that "negotiating a settlement as a key priority of his Government". At the starting point, an informal and indirect Track II meeting was set up by the international NGO Pugwash in Qatar at the beginning of 2014; it was the first such meeting since the suspension of the talks in Qatar almost two years before in June 2013.²⁸ Moreover, the outreach of Pakistan to start negotiations with the Taliban have faced opposition view within Afghanistan. The civil society and among the

²⁵ http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/crisis_prevention_and_recovery

²⁶ http://www.thehindu.com/Afghanistan_new_entente_in_place

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ Michael Semple, “*Rhetoric Ideology and Organizational Structure of the Taliban Movement*”, *United States Institute of Peace*, 5 January 2015

crucial Afghan policymaker were raising a red flag to the talks. The Taliban also faced significant opposition to negotiation among its constituency. Hence, the peace efforts had broken down in July 2015. When the news about the death of Taliban leader Mullah Omer came out, who sanctioned the talks. His death posed challenges to the political stability for the new government. Taliban insurgent groups escalated their attacks, most recently they captured strategically crucial northern city Kunduz, even if the Afghan security forces took control over the city after the help of NATO and US-led combat operation. Indeed the fall of Kunduz had a vital shock to the security forces and the ²⁹. Afghanistan has been 325,000 army and police force. However, it has not adequately prepared for fighting; neither have they proper Air forces, nor independent intelligence and surveillance systems. The ANA (Afghan National Army) operates perhaps a few hundred Russian antiquated T-55, T-62 tanks left over from the Soviet occupations.

Indian Policy Towards Afghanistan After Withdrawal of the ISAF

India's relations with Afghanistan is very cordial since 2001, India has primarily relied on its "Soft Power" in addressing Kabul. It is one of the largest aid donors to Afghanistan and delivering humanitarian assistance, helping nation-building projects³⁰. India has been supporting infrastructural development in Afghanistan since the collapse of the Taliban regime. Public and private sectors of India have been developing major power projects, roads, and bridges, hospitals, communications system³¹. For instance, India has completed the Delaram-Zarang highway, which links Iran to the Garland Ring Road, which connected all the principal city of Afghanistan, a power line connecting Afghanistan to Uzbekistan, along with ongoing projects, such as Salma Dam in Harat region, India was also instrumental in restoring the National TV network in 34 Provinces.³² India has also been helping to develop human resources development; the Indian government has been providing various scholarships for Afghan students, India government announced 500 short-and medium-term training slots annually to Afghan servants and 1000 scholarship to the students for studying at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels³³. Indian Prime Minister Narinder Modi visited Afghanistan and inaugurated the Parliament of Afghanistan. Which built with the help of Indian assistance; he repeated Indian commitment to the peace and independence of Afghanistan, and he announced that the

²⁹ concerned countries. http://www.reuters.com/US_Afghanistan_attack

³⁰ Harsh V. Pant, *op. cit*, p.145

³¹. Rajan Harsh and Dhananjay Tripathi, *Afghanistan Post 2014: Power Configuration and Evolving Trajectories*, Routledge Publications, India, 2015, p.176

³² http://www.mea.gov.in/India's_Foreign_Relations_2009

³³ Harsh V Pant, *op. cit*, p.62

scheme of 1000 ICCSR Scholarship for Afghan student, also add 500 more scholarship for the children of the martyrs of the Afghan Security Forces³⁴. Despite all these efforts, India has some doubt that its interest would marginalise in Afghanistan after the withdrawal. India has a range of investment in Afghanistan that would like to be protected and enhanced. As the western forces prepare to leave Afghanistan, India stands at a crossroads where it remains unattached with the Taliban those might have become the significant force after the withdrawal of the US forces. India would be wary of assuming that its political and economic capital may waste. It is also evident that India does not want to become a regional security provider to fill the vacuum after the withdrawal of western forces. Pakistan policy of Afghanistan has significant importance in India's approach towards Afghanistan. We can not examine India's approach into diverse segments. Pakistan has a vital influence over Afghanistan. Hence historically, India's efforts remain to curb Pakistan dominance over Afghanistan.³⁵ It is also frustrating for the Pakistani establishment to maintain its political influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan has been accusing India's Kabul Embassy to spreading anti-Pakistan propaganda, for Pakistan establishment, the Indian consulates in Afghanistan are the intelligence-gathering machinery.

Indian origin workers and the projects emerged as viable targets of the Pakistan sponsored terrorist groups. Indian continues to remain a high-value target for insurgents in Afghanistan, at least six massive attacks had occurred until now against Indian interest. In July 2008, Indian Embassy in Kabul was struck by a blast that left sixty dead, including an Indian Foreign Service officer. In October 2009, a suicide car bombing outside the Indian Embassy left at least seventeen killed and many other wounded.³⁶ In 2010, two Kabul guesthouse popular among Indians had attacked. In 2013, a botched bombing targeting the Indian consulate in Jalalabad killed nine people. Then in May 2014, the Indian Consulate in Herat Province came under attack, most of these attacks traced to the Haqqani Network and the Lashkar-E-Taiba (LET), with the support of the Pakistan Intelligence³⁷.

Taliban's groups have been getting support from the highest level of Pakistan's military³⁸ establishment, and ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). Taliban fighters are taking training in Pakistan camps. The ISI is not

³⁴ <http://IndiaTimes.com/IndianPMNarinderModiaddressstoAfghanistanparliamentreadfullspeech>

³⁵ Marvin G. Weinbaum, "Pakistan and Afghanistan: The strategic relationship", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 6, Sage Publication, India, 1991, pp.49-99

³⁶ "India Hints at Pak Link to the Kabul Embassy Attack", *Indian Express*, 10 October 2009

³⁷ [services agency http://www.catchnews.com/whyhaveIndianinterestsbeenattackedsixtimesinthelasttenyearsinafghanistan](http://www.catchnews.com/whyhaveIndianinterestsbeenattackedsixtimesinthelasttenyearsinafghanistan)

³⁸

providing only financial, military and logistical support to the insurgency, but it also retained robust strategic and operational control over the Taliban campaign in Afghanistan³⁹.

Though, in recent years India has come to accept that Pakistan has a 'special interest' in Afghanistan that overshadows its own. The main driver of the Indian policy has shifted from an anti-Pakistan strategy toward a desire for stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan and India should turn their competition into co-operation in Afghanistan. Pakistan does not need to look India's presence in Afghanistan with paranoia. The scope of working together and the resulting benefits of the co-operation in Afghanistan for excel to confrontation approach, Indian government willing to join an existing Afghan-Pakistan trade and transit agreement to allow the good to flow by land from Afghanistan to eastern India and back to Central Asia⁴⁰. Some vital project like Tapi gas pipeline between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India might be changed the future scenario and energy needs of the South Asian Countries. It might also boost trade relations with the Land Locked Central Asian Countries. Afghanistan has the potential to become an energy hub of this region. It would be beneficial for India and Pakistan.

³⁹. Miles Amooore, Pakistan puppet Masters Guide the Taliban Killers, *Sunday Times*, 13 June 2010

⁴⁰ Rohan Gunaratna, (ed), *Afghanistan After the Western Drawdown*, Rowman and Littlefield, New York, 2015, p.33