

INDIA'S GEO-STRATEGIC MANEUVERS IN AFGHANISTAN: SOFT POWER APPROACH

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Abstract

Keywords:

Afghanistan; Indo-Pak;
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rebuilding.

India's approach towards Afghanistan has been linked to the cementing of Indo-Afghan relations through democratic establishment of Afghanistan. However, Pakistan has played an extensive vigor to effectuate this 'policy' and poor Indo-Afghan relations. The rise of Taliban proved a major breakthrough for Pakistan and India's security policy and security, both seemed to be a failure. However, in the process of India's position with respect to support to Afghanistan historically proved beneficial to India. India's policy towards Afghanistan has been of a 'long-term stability of Afghanistan'. Moreover, reconstruction program of Afghanistan was also aimed to also procure India's strategic interests. India enunciated thus of a 'multi-pronged proactive policy of power configuration which Pakistan was trying to pull in its favor by gaining *strategic depth* in Afghanistan. India, in an environment of instability and crisis in Afghanistan, has been successful to increase significantly to the maintenance of ties between the two countries¹.

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1. Ancient historical Ties between India and Afghanistan

Afghanistan is described a 'cross-roads' of Asiaⁱⁱ. Many great Empires and personalities passed by. From Alexander the Great to Genghis Khan and Timor-e-Lang to Mughals all expanded their sway through Afghanistan. Soviets, Britain and now the US had a great impulse for, owing to the geo-strategic and geo-political position, which has put Afghanistan to a paradoxical situationⁱⁱⁱ. Indo-Afghan relations span over centuries. Racially they are émigré of common race-Aryanism and therefore the ground is Central Asia. Very few people in the world have been so closely related in origin throughout history^{iv}, observed Nehru, that Afghan history is almost part of India's history indeed for long Afghanistan was part of India^v. The earliest inhabitants of Afghanistan were, in fact, Indo-Aryans who settled in Iran before permanently occupying Afghan plateau. Ethnically both the country's people had common stock i.e. Indo-Aryan origin^{vi}. This establishes the fact of their common blood ties, customs and manners. Vedic religion had much in common with Zoroastrianism-Afghanistan's early religion. Before coming of Islam both worshiped common divinities^{vii}. Relations however, soared due to 'external interferences'. The *Great Game* between imperial powers Britain and tsarist Russia and their interference in Afghanistan changed the situation.^{viii} Historical records speak about commercial relations. Overland, a large volume of Indo-Persian trade used to be by way of Kabul and Kandahar. That is both the cities had formed a commercially important position. This signifies that there used to be trade connections between India and Afghanistan.^{ix} There is a mentions that around 6-8 thousand Indians lived in Central Asia as Indians were from Delhi, Allahabad, Bombay, and other places^x

2. Pakistan's Dilemma with neighbourism

If we go by the Kutaliya's paraphrasing of foreign policy concentric circles that the immediate immediate neighbor-a first circle-is a threat signifies Afghanistan neighbourism a threat to Pakistan. By late 1974, the Zulfikar A. Bhutto's *fear of neighbourism* had bottlenecked him. He was extremely perturbed by "Afghanistan's moral and material assistance to Afghan Islamists rebels undermining the territorial integrity of Pakistan^{xi}". The policy to aid Afghan Islamists rebels was to be reversely used against Afghanistan^{xii}. Soviet Union provided a ready-made opportunity^{xiii} of "Communist threat of 'Islam in danger'^{xiv}". Thus Pakistan initiated of a *forward policy* of helping anti-state groups. With the help of American and Arabian aid^{xv} the *ideal*

proxies proved successful eschewing some major concerns of Pakistan. Afghanistan seemed to become *Pak card* in the strategic game of South Asia, against India especially, and reducing vulnerability of Pakistan's western border alarmed with Russian advance. Engaging Indian army in Kashmir insurgency secured Indian threat on eastern borders of Pakistan. The ideal proxies proved ideologically successful only temporarily because strategically it was Pakistan's *amateurisms* and backfired; compromising its own security concerns into terrorism^{xvi}. However, Bhutto's '*forward policy*' to assist anti-Government, anti-Communist Afghans or Islamic groups who envisioned on '*Islamic universalism*^{xvii}' (one brotherhood) and were therefore against Kabul's policy on territorial dispute of cutting Pakistan^{xviii}. The same tactics were used in Punjab and later in Kashmir as it had Taliban backing^{xix}. Taliban also did not support Afghanistan's friendly relations with India and for that purpose made *ideal proxies* for Pakistan to destabilize Indo-Afghanistan Relations^{xx}. In Afghanistan Daoud's policy of '*Bay Tarafi*^{xxi}' literally "*without sides*" (a policy bereft of taking any sides) and Nehru's India with *Non-alignment* (NAM) or *genuine Nonalignment*^{xxii} of Janta government was confronted with Pakistan's '*Bilateral-Nonalignment*^{xxiii}' (A Non-alignment based on bilateral understanding). Pakistan support to Taliban was of a prophesized '*convergence of interests*' that is establishment of a pro-Pakistan Afghanistan^{xxiv}, Punjab insurgency to avenge Bangladesh, segregating Kashmir from India for '*takmeel-e-Pakistan*' (Complete Pakistan) and most importantly outdoing India's claim of big role maker or '*rising power*' of south Asia^{xxv}.

Thus India seemed to lose the ground on its traditional neighbor. Thus Pakistan was successful in reversing the *fear of neighbourism* upon India, Russia (helping US) and Afghanistan. Pakistan went ahead with this advantageous US-Pak-Taliban relationship to secure 'regional balance' in its favor^{xxvi}. Thus within the regional context the three countries of South Asia-India, Pakistan and Afghanistan saw shifting the balance. This shifting of balance also developed a complex called 'a security complex' by Barry Buzan^{xxvii}. India on the other hand channelized its effort to build Russia-Northern Alliance-Iran Relationship to outdo what has happened^{xxviii}. Earlier India had supported Kabul Government as against Mujahedeen. Thus India had to change its foreign policy stance to counter Pakistan's moves in Afghanistan^{xxix}. Thus with South Asia became a *polarized* region on account of Afghanistan.

3. Strategic moves over Afghanistan

Ahmad Rashid in his book Says that Afghanistan has become Kashmir in between India and Pakistan^{xxx}. Modern era of Indo-Afghan relationship (formal diplomatic relations) began by signing the '*first friendship treaty*^{xxxii} on January 04, 1950 in New Delhi^{xxxii}. With the subsequent visits, of king Zahir Shah to India in 1958 and then P.M. Daoud further tightened the noose.^{xxxiii}. However, the Indo-Afghan ties remained largely starved and till 1992 India was normally allied to Geneva accord 1988^{xxxiv} of economic assistances to Afghanistan. Babrak Karmal's replacement with Najibullah's regime was seen as an internal matter. From 1989-1996 Afghanistan ruled by Northern Alliance (Burhanuddin Rabbani) continued to receive economic and humanitarian assistance from India^{xxxv}. The two countries came close however; Rabbani's regime was caught into disorder due to infighting between various mujahedeen factions (especially of Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar backed by Pakistan)^{xxxvi}. By the time the Taliban took hold of Kabul (September, 1996) Indo-Afghan relations came to a standstill up till the overthrow of Taliban regime in 2001 in the US-led war against terror. Owing to Pakistan's active role of regime change i.e. installing pro-Pak Government *Indiabandwagon* to counter Pakistan strategic moves in Afghanistan. India continued to recognize the exiled Government of Rabbani, earlier considered anti-Afghanistan, in anticipation to Pakistan's support to Taliban. Thus Afghanistan became a *buffer*^{xxxvii} between Indo-Pak rivalries.

Within the regional geopolitical framework competition over Afghanistan had increased. Afghanistan during Rabbani Government was seeking close relation with India despite of its Islamic character. Pakistan sought to play a *final arbiter*^{xxxviii} as an *internal balancer*^{xxxix} forging Afghan Islamist reliant on Islamabad's patronage. Thus, Pakistan controlled Afghanistan indirectly through clients and proxies as a final arbiter.

Pakistan's regional policy compartmentalised into Indian *fear-psychosis*^{xl} of cutting Pakistan or reducing Pakistan to a position of weakness-Bangladesh experiment in 1971^{xli} and Soviet move in 1979 had further aggravated Pakistan fears. Pakistan's sense of weakness vis-à-vis India had always led it to seek balancing assistance from the outside. Pakistan's geographical width was considered inadequate for the prolonged defense against India. Post-Soviet Afghanistan was considered an ideal choice for Pakistan to gain *strategic depth*. The concept of strategic depth

stressed the need for a dispersal of Pakistan's military personnel and assets in Afghanistan well beyond the offensive capabilities of the Indian military^{xlii}.

4. Strategic tilt towards India: Soft Power approach

However, by early 1994, it had become obvious that in the continuing years the Pakistani policy in Afghanistan was failing^{xliii}. US war on terror (Operation Enduring Freedom of Afghanistan-OEFA) against Taliban proved to be of a prophesized *convergence of interests*. Pakistan's decision to support US war on terror unwillingly eliminated Indian threats and Pakistan's covert support to terrorist groups ended. This in turn helped India in the minimization of threats and establishment pro-India Afghanistan through Pakistan's joint efforts siding with US *War on terror*. Such a shift nullified India's security threat on North-western borders-Taliban threat^{xliv}. In this way post-9/11 period is categorized of a new strategic scenario i.e. strategic tilt towards India viv-a-viz Afghanistan-India relation. "Operation Enduring Freedom"-US war policy provided India an opportunity to pursue its foreign policy goals of attaining a *hegemonic position*^{xlv} in the emergence of Indo-Afghan relations. The post-Taliban era further provided opportunity for the re-intensification of India's efforts to re-establish its influence in Afghanistan marginalized since 1996. As part of its efforts in Afghanistan and counter Pakistan's strategy India had established links and strengthened the defense of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance by giving technical as well as money help^{xlvi}. Post-Taliban Indian efforts however, did not confine to re-establish its '*influence*' only but are focused on three aspects: (1) a major role in the reconstruction process and economic development, (2) building linkages with the Central Asian States; and an (3) to marginalize Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Thus *soft power approach*^{xlvii} was invoked by the policy-makers of India.

The campaign against Taliban is not only of military operations but is focused on interim political arrangement^{xlviii}. In this respect India played a constructive role in the political arrangement of Afghanistan. India's *multi-dimensional engagement*^{xlix} with Afghanistan was reflected in an immediate up-gradation of Indian Liaison Office to full-fledged Embassy in 2002. India actively participated in the Bonn Conference¹ that proved instrumental in the emergence of post-Taliban political authority. It is also building Parliament building for Afghanistan^{li}. India is utilizing its parliamentary officials and Indian lawmakersto train Afghan Parliamentarians

(ministers) in the Affairs of governance and legislation. India played crucial role during the UN-led talks among diverse Afghan groups (November 27-December, 2001) which led to the beginning of Bonn process. In fact, India put *hand-in-hand* with international community in seeking ways to rebuild Afghanistan-Participated in the UN-sponsored meet Group of 21 countries meet on Afghanistan (New York, 2001); and meeting on reconstruction and Assistance to Afghanistan in (Washington Nov. 2001); also attended conference on “Preparing for Afghanistan’s Reconstruction” in Islamabad (Nov. 21-29, 2001)^{liii}. Since then, India’s main focus has been to support the Afghan Government and the political process underlined through a policy of high-level engagement with Afghanistan through extensive and wide-ranging humanitarian, financial, and project assistance, and participation in international efforts aimed at political reconciliation and economic rebuilding of Afghanistan. Realizing the urgent need for reconstruction and rehabilitation in Afghanistan, India announced its assistance in re-building the Afghan infrastructure, especially in areas of health, education, information technology, public transport, industry^{liiii}.

India is one of the largest providers of economic assistance to Afghanistan, with commitments thus far of US \$ 1.3 billion. Since those early measures in 2001, India committed another US \$ 750 million and having pledged another US \$ 450 million in addition. India constructed *Zeranj-Delaram* 215km highway that connects the Ring Road in Afghanistan to the Iranian port in *Chahbahar* reducing major trade concerns of Afghanistan. India is also a proponent of the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) oil pipeline^{liv}. India also piloted the move in providing membership to Afghanistan in SAARC that can resolve major trade issues of Afghanistan. It has been estimated Afghanistan’s participation in the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) would result in trade gains of US \$ 2 billion (and more) to the region, with as much as US \$ 606 million accruing to Afghanistan^{lv}.

Besides providing material help in Agriculture and allied sectors training programme was launched to train Afghan officials for cooperative farming and marketing. Expertise in sericulture was also taught to the Afghan officials. India also engaged in training of Afghan civilian and military personnel. The presence of Indo-Tibetan Police Force (ITPF), army commandos, Border Roads Organization (BRO) to protect personnel to protect Indian

establishment and The police-training to Afghan police officers and cadets, cooperation in building up Afghan National Army^{lvi}. With the help of US aid and Indian military training an Afghan Army 350000 is being readied to control Afghanistan situation After US exit in 2014.

India's exploration in Afghanistan has long worried Pakistan. For nearly a decade, Pakistan had successfully blocked an Indian presence in Kabul.^{lvii} Now Pakistan's regional policy or a Geo-strategic policy seemed proving a strategic disaster for Pakistan. Pakistan's policy to control Kabul and contain India through *ideal proxies* by using *Jihadi* groups had backfired. The western front Pak-US Axis and Taliban edge in Afghanistan also backfired.^{lviii} Thus Pakistan's Strategic depth proved a strategic blunder for Pakistan. Indian construction of Chabahar seaport facility (Iran) that allows India strategically significant road access into western Afghanistan bypassing the current Karachi–Kandahar route^{lix}. This New Delhi–Tehran–Kabul trade alliance could economically disable or strangulate Pakistan. The building of 350000 Afghan Army consisting mostly of Northern Alliance cadet's anti-Taliban and anti-Pakistan thus proving Pakistan's suspicion that is India's '*strategic encirclement*'^{lx} of Pakistan.

5. CONCLUSION

This is called the development of end Game in South Asia. Pakistan has a situation deeply paradoxical with fear of neighbourism (both India-Afghan) threatening its eastern and western Borders. The ideal proxies it played in Kashmir to face off eastern frontier (Indian) threat and ward of Kabul threat through Taliban has come now with heavyweight danger undermining Pakistan sovereignty. India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan thus, has been linked to the democratic established of Indo-Afghanistan relations; however, Pakistan has played an extensive vigor to effectuate this 'policy' and poor indo-afghan relations. The rise of Taliban and Nixon Administration's "tilt toward Pakistan" proved a major breakthrough for Pakistan disturbing India's' security policy and security-both seemed to be a failure and changing strategic weight in favour of Pakistan in Soviet-Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Taliban Phase in South Asia. However, in the process of India's position with respect to support to Afghanistan historically proved beneficial to India at least till now. India's policy towards Afghanistan of a '*long-term stability of Afghanistan*' thus complements India's national interests. The reconstruction program of Afghanistan is aimed to also procure India's regional and geo-strategic interests. The arms struggle in Kashmir and the Taliban trouble shows decline. India's enunciation thus of a '*multi-*

pronged proactive policy of two-birds with one stone for power configuration which Pakistan is trying to pull by way gaining strategic depth in Afghanistan. India, in an environment of instability and crisis in Afghanistan, has been successful to increase significantly to the maintenance of ties between the two countries.

Conclusion and inferences:

1. Thus post-9/11 period introduced a new strategic scenario i.e. strategic tilt towards India viz-a-viz Afghanistan-India relation.
2. “Operation Enduring Freedom”-US war policy provided India an opportunity to pursue its foreign policy goals of attaining a hegemonic position in the emergence of indo-Afghan relations.
3. Afghanistan has become Kashmir in between India and Pakistan owing to strategic importance of Afghanistan and centric to both the country’s foreign policy-winning over Afghanistan
4. Among Pakistan’s obnoxious fears was fear of neighbourism i.e., contentious neighbourhood of Afghanistan, India and Afghanistan replacing Russia.
5. The ideal proxies of Bhutto’s ‘*forward policy*’ to assist anti- Government, or Islamic groups who visioned on ‘*Islamic (brotherhood of) Universalism*’ strategically proved into a blunder.
6. Daoud’s Afghanistan of *Bay Tarafi*, without sides, (Foreign Policy) and Nehru’s India of *Non-alignment* (NAM) were confronted with Pakistan’s (*limited-nonalignment*)
7. Pakistan support to Taliban was of a prophesized ‘*convergence of interests*’ that is establishment of a pro-Pakistan Afghanistan. *OEFA* however, proved a *threshold of convergence* of Indo-US interests’ viz-a-viz elimination of Taliban terrorism and establishment of a stable Afghanistan
8. US campaign ‘war on terror’ (OEFA) against Taliban proved of a prophesized ‘*convergence of interests*’ in between India and Pakistan that is establishment of a Pro-India Afghanistan through Pakistan’s joint efforts with US siding ‘*War on terror*’.

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