



Indo-Afghanistan strategic ties and its impact on Kashmir problem

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Abstract

Afghanistan is a landlocked country and located in a strategic location, connecting Central Asia to South Asia and East Asia to West Asia. For centuries, it functioned as the economic corridor for the Silk Route and other ancient trade routes in this region. Due to close borders to Kashmir, Afghanistan's issue directly affect the Indian as well as Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The terrorist groups and radical Jihadi groups concentrate on Kashmir to radicalize the vulnerable Islamic population with the help of separatists. After the American Defence Forces vacated the Afghanistan territory, a huge number of terrorists is supposed to be moved out to its neighboring counties as they are looking towards the new enemies for Jihad. Most favorite/vulnerable place for the same is Indian Occupied Kashmir where they can easily infiltrate through POK being facilitated by ISI as it has established several Launch Pads over there.

Keywords: landlocked, strategic, silk route, radical, vulnerable, separatist, territory, infiltrate, launch pad etc

Introduction

Afghanistan is an important factor which influences the Kashmir Problem since 1947. It is a landlocked country and located in a strategic location, connecting Central Asia to South Asia and East Asia to West Asia. For centuries, it functioned as the economic corridor for the Silk Road and other ancient trade routes in the region. The political rifts and instability in Afghanistan are often attributed to its strategic location, since major powers have always tried to control Afghanistan in the interest of spreading their political, economic, and ideological hegemony in the region. Afghanistan is facing from the losses of long internal conflicts with Taliban. It needs financial and strategic help of its allies and other counties to stand up again. America and India provide all types of required aids to Afghanistan to redevelop its infrastructure. Although Pakistan, itself being dependent on the security and development assistance of the United States and China, had not been in the position to provide substantial contributions to Afghanistan yet it has been wary of India's active role in Afghanistan. Islamabad considers a stable, friendly, and cooperative Afghanistan only beneficial when it is under its influence and with limited Indian ties. Pakistan perceives India's development contributions in Afghanistan as part of New Delhi's strategic encirclement policy, counteracting Islamabad's strategic depth policy.

However, Afghanistan does not expect Pakistan to meet India's development assistance, but to stop harboring and supporting the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other terrorist groups. Time and again, former President Ashraf Ghani, in the strongest words possible, urged Islamabad to put an end to its undeclared war and crack down on the sanctuaries of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network on their soil. Ghani, in an interview, reiterated that Afghanistan is not part of any one country's strategic depth, nor is it going to be anyone's dependency. Whoever has tried this in the past has failed, Ghani warned.

The above mentioned facts are directly or indirectly related to the Kashmir problem. Now several problems have been raised after American Defence Forced has moved out from

Afghanistan. Being close borders to Kashmir, Afghanistan's issue directly affect this issue. The terrorist groups and radical Jihadi groups are now being concentrating on Kashmir to radicalize the vulnerable Islamic population with the help of separatists. There is a strong possibility of infiltration of Hakkani and Al Qaeda terrorists into the Indian occupied Kashmir. It created a strategic and diplomatic burden on Indian Government. After the American Defence Forces moved out from Afghanistan, a huge quantity of terrorists moved out to its neighboring counties. Most favorite place of these terrorists is POK from where they infiltrate into the Indian Occupied Kashmir through various launching established by the Pak ISI. From last few years, it has been noticed that the terrorist's activities in Kashmir are desperately increased. Spreading terrorism and radicalization in Kashmir has been the strategic policy of Pakistan. Hence these groups have support of this country to be active in Kashmir Valley. It is truly said that countries have so many terrorist groups but in Pakistan's prospective, it is said that the terrorist groups (Al Qaeda, Hakkani network, Jaish e mohammad & Harkat ul muzahideen) have a country i.e. Pakistan.

Historical Background

Relations between the people of Afghanistan and India traces to the Indus Valley Civilization. Following Alexander the Great's brief occupation, the successor state of the Seleucid Empire controlled the region known today as Afghanistan. In 305 BCE, they ceded much of it to the Indian Maurya Empire as part of an alliance treaty^[1]. The Mauryans brought Buddhism from India and controlled the area south of the Hindu Kush. Their decline began 60 years after Ashoka's rule ended, leading to the Hellenistic reconquest of the region by the Greco-Bactrians. Much of it soon broke away from the Greco-Bactrians and became part of the Indo-Greek Kingdom. The Indo-Greeks had been defeated and expelled by the Indo-Scythians in the late 2nd century BCE. Much of Afghanistan has been influenced by Buddhist, Hindu and Zoroastrian cultures until the arrival of

Islam in the 7th century. But despite many Afghans accepting the message of Islam, the Muslims and Hindus lived side by side [2].

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Khan Sahib were prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement and active supporters of the Indian National Congress. Although the NWFP became part of Pakistan in 1947, active Pashtun support for the Indian freedom struggle led to great sympathy in India for the cause of Pashtun autonomy and freedom. The Indian government continued to support Pashtun leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in lobbying for greater Pashtun freedom in the NWFP. Indians are working in various construction projects, as part of India's rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan, although the Indian intelligence agency RAW is accused by countries such as Pakistan of working to malign Pakistan and train & support insurgents. These workers are estimated to be anywhere between 3,000 and 4,000. Indian nationals stationed in Afghanistan have often faced continuous security threats in the country, with kidnappings and many attacks (such as the February 2010 Kabul attack) deliberately carried out on them. In January 1950, a five-year Treaty of Friendship was signed between the two countries in New Delhi. Other than affirming "everlasting peace and friendship between the two Governments", the treaty provided for establishment of diplomatic and consular posts in each other's territories [3].

Bilateral relations between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Republic of India have traditionally been strong and friendly. While the Republic of India was the only South Asian country to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s, its relations were diminished during the 1990s Afghan civil war and the Taliban government [4]. India aided the overthrow of the Taliban and became the largest regional provider of humanitarian and reconstruction aid to Afghanistan.[5] Indians are working in various construction projects, as part of India's rebuilding efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan alleges the Indian intelligence agency RAW is working in cover to malign Pakistan and train and support insurgents, a claim rejected strongly by India and the United States, the latter historically being a strong ally of Pakistan [6].

India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has been reviewed time to time keeping in view the Kashmir Problem, as the activities happens in Afghanistan always affect the valley. Pakistan has been using Afghan terror groups like Hakkani Network and Al Qaeda to spread terrorism and Jihad in Kashmir valley. Hence it is a great challenge to deal with Afghanistan and form a foreign policy with them. By the way India and Afghanistan had strong diplomatic and strategic relations since Independence. In the historical prospective we can say that Afghanistan has always been played a key role as far as the Kashmir Problem is concerned.

Afghanistan: A Key Factor to Kashmir Problem.

In recent history Afghanistan has been a spawning ground for Islamic fundamentalism. As far back as the 1970s Pakistan began creating and funding support of Islamic fundamentalist guerillas in Afghanistan. Pakistan initially created the guerilla groups for retaliation of Afghanistan for supporting an insurgency in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan. Over the decades several different groups for different security needs in the region would use these

guerillas as pawns. The Central Intelligence Agency and Saudi Arabia used the guerillas to push the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, Pakistan would routinely draw on the guerillas that fought against the Soviets to wage proxy war against India in Kashmir and conduct terrorist attacks in greater India. Osama bin Laden is known to have grown his Al Qaeda network from the terrorist safe havens that Pakistan helped create. Afghanistan was and continues to be a preferred landscape of spawning Islamic fundamentalism [7].

Afghanistan stands to be an important country for India owing to its strategic location of being a gateway to central Asia and its stability/instability having a direct/indirect impact on India in general and J&K in particular. In this perspective the recent transition on political and security fronts brings new challenges for India and especially for Kashmir Valley. The last elections failed to provide an elected government resulting into power sharing between the two main presidential candidates. With both having ideological differences on various issues, this can lead to differences and instability on political front which can be nurtured by countries like Pakistan and China to reduce India's influence in the country. The multiple visits of ISI chief to Afghanistan is an example towards this. This can create challenges for Indian influence and its efforts of building democratic institutions, deepening democracy etc [8].

A stable and peaceful Afghanistan is needed for the stability of the whole region of South Asia. But the recent peace talks are going on when there are almost daily attacks by the Taliban in its own soil. Moreover, the peace talks, being hosted by the ISI, also raise a question-mark. Also historically the western passes have always been vulnerable to foreign invasion. An alliance between the ISI, Taliban and ISIS may be very much on the cards and if that happens, then India's sovereignty will come under enormous strain considering the recent attacks on Gurdaspur where the terrorists avoided their traditional route through the Kashmir Valley. The Afghan-Taliban, which is backed by Pakistan, can also be a threat for India as a friend of the enemy is an enemy to us. But Pakistan sees a friendly Afghanistan, in which religious extremism continues to flourish, as essential to keep the pressure on India in Kashmir.

Pakistan's Influence in Afghanistan and Kashmir Problem.

Pakistan has worked hard to limit India's involvement in Afghanistan. It made transit rights to Afghanistan conditional upon a resolution of the Kashmir issue. By not allowing India transit rights to Afghanistan through its territory, Pakistan has sought to leverage Afghanistan's reliance on the Karachi port as its only gateway to the world. But Kabul has pushed back and has used Iran and India to find alternative routes, reducing its historic dependence on Pakistan for transit. Despite Pakistan's objections, however, Afghanistan has sought Indian assistance in the defence sector. The Afghan Air Force's fleet of MiG-21 fighters and other defence equipment, mostly of Russian and Soviet origin, has been serviced by Indian technicians. India also played an important role in the reorganisation of the Afghan National Army and hopes that it will help in the long-term evolution of Indo-Afghan military ties. 28 India has stationed the Indo-Tibetan Border Police commandos in Afghanistan for the protection of its

personnel employed by the Border Roads Organisation. This is for the first time since its independence that India has its military personnel deployed in Afghanistan, something that has obviously not gone down well with Pakistan.²⁹ Faced with a resurgent and resilient Taliban aided by Pakistan, India and Afghanistan are also cooperating extensively on intelligence gathering. The Afghan authorities have further hinted at the role of the ISI in the bombing of the Indian Embassy in Kabul which the Pakistan Government was quick to deny. The message of the bombing seemed clear to India: it should get out of Afghanistan^[9].

Islamabad seeks a weak Kabul government dominated by a pliant, supportive Taliban so that Pakistan can maintain 'strategic depth' against an Indian invasion, guarantee safe haven for Islamist proxies. So long as India is viewed as an existential threat, and so long as the military plays a central role in setting Pakistani policy, it is unlikely that there will be a fundamental shift in this policy bias. Pakistan has also been a major victim of terrorism and the instability brought about in its neighboring country by the US invasion. Islamabad also argues its investment and aid in Afghanistan is overlooked. While there has long been tension between Kabul and Islamabad – former President Ashraf Ghani once said “the Taliban would not survive a month without Pakistani support.” This shows Pakistan’s intension to fight against terrorism. Pakistan has always been supportive to the terrorists groups. It always considers itself a victim of terrorism on the other hand provides hospitality to the terrorists like Osama Bin Laden who found residing in a house at Abatabad near Pakistani Military Academy. Kashmir Valley is the vulnerable spot to spread terror activities for Pakistan. Pakistan imports the terrorist from Afghanistan and sends them to Kashmir Valley for carrying out terrorist attacks on innocent civilian, Police Forced and Indian Army camps. These incidents have been increased during last few years. Due to the same the peace talks between India and Pakistan have been stopped. The terrorist groups of Afghanistan are jobless after American Armed Forced entered this country. Most of the terrorists of these groups have been entered in POK and ISI is sending them in Kashmir Valley through their Terrorists Launching Pads^[10].

China’s Influence in Afghanistan and Kashmir Problem.

China has increased its footprint in Afghanistan in recent years along with shoring up relations with Pakistan. Relations between India and China have become strained in recent months amid an ongoing territorial dispute in the Himalayas. Afghanistan shares a border with China and borders of both the countries also touch with Kashmir Valley. China is a strategic ally of Pakistan and always supports them for their anti India agenda. In a statement, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said "the international community should fully recognize Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts" and appreciate its "important contributions to safeguarding regional and global peace and stability." It shows China’s policy to defend the terror state i.e. Pakistan by considering it a victim of terrorism although Pakistan is a safe haven for terrorist organizations.

Beijing-Kabul ties have also increased significantly, with Afghan President Ghani choosing China as his first overseas visit in 2014. China is Afghanistan's third-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching over \$1 billion by 2015, according to the Central Statistics Office of

Afghanistan. Beijing is also investing upwards of \$46 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as part of its One Belt, One Road (OBOR) trading initiative, which China has called on Afghanistan to be a major player in. Some OBOR projects have involved Chinese military deployments to ensure security, though Beijing has denied previous reports of its troops being active in Afghanistan. China has signed major mining and energy deals in Afghanistan, including a \$3 billion deal for a copper mine that involved a separate deal with the Taliban but has nevertheless been stalled by unrest and other issues.

This China’s influence in Afghanistan a very hazardous for Kashmir Valley because China is trying to encircle the Valley from three side. The CPEC is also a part of China’s strategic planning to weaken India’s position in the region specially to encircling the Kashmir Valley^[11].

India’s Aid to Afghanistan to Stop Sino-Pak Influence.

So far India has provided \$2 billion in economic aid and has pledged another \$1 billion over the next few years for the Afghanistan. India is also set to deliver more arms to Afghanistan to help it fight Islamist militants, including more Mi-25 attack helicopters and smaller helicopters used for transporting troops and medical emergencies, and spares for existing Russian-origin aircraft in the Afghan air force fleet among other equipment^[12].

The commander of the US forces in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson, has visited New Delhi a number of times over the past few months to fast track ways in which New Delhi could help the Afghan air force, which is struggling to maintain aging Russian aircraft because of sanctions on Moscow. Although India has assisted in the training, equipping, and capacity building programs for Afghan National Security Forces, official requests from the Afghan government for more tangible military assistance have been met with modest responses over concerns of balancing New Delhi’s relationship with Islamabad. With the weight and support of the President Trump’s call for India to do more, Afghanistan may see more success^[13].

President Trump’s new demands on India in his South Asia strategy centered on Afghanistan lacks appreciation of U.S dependence on Pakistan in any strategy involving the increase of troops in Afghanistan or India restrictions in its engagement with Kabul in the economic realm to avoid any backlash from Pakistan. While Indian analysts may view the Trump’s ultimatum to do more as an opportunity to increase of Indian activity in Afghanistan as an act of compellence vis-à-vis Pakistan, it is fraught with its own risks. Afghanistan needs to be viewed by New Delhi in the wider context of Central Asia, where China has expanded its sphere of influence through the One Belt One Road initiative. Its access to the region is contingent on stability in Afghanistan^[14].

Conclusion and Recommendations.

Given the centrality of the Afghanistan to India’s national security and China’s increasing activity and ambitions in the region, New Delhi must recapitalize and optimize its support to Afghanistan in order to bring strategic and security dividends. However, not losing United States support for its key objectives, especially regarding China and Pakistan will remain a challenge, as New Delhi seeks to balance its relationships in the region. India should be more cautious to deal China and Pakistan as both the countries are

strategic allies and their interests in this reason are hazardous for India specially in Kashmir Valley.

After withdrawal of American Armed Forces the situation is like that of a patient whom the surgeon has left unstitched on the operation table." In this scenario India's security are in peril in the context of infiltration, insurgency and cross-border terrorism and Kashmir will definitely be affected by the same. The execution of offensive realism has created an enormous amount of stress and conflict in the South Asia region. The regional stake holders have poured large amounts of resources in managing this foreign policy strategy. This strategy has resulted in periods of instability and strife in the Kashmir region. The uses of terrorism and the development of terrorist safe havens to have negatively impacted all the stake holders.

India is a country that has the resources to provide regional stability in the region and check the growth of Chinese power. However, a significant portion of Indian resources is tied up in an offensive realism struggle against Pakistan. The security competition between India and Pakistan spills into Afghanistan as both sides try to wield power over the other. Each side is trying to gain an upper hand of influence in Afghanistan either by keeping it open for proxy soldier training grounds in the case of Pakistan or building trade and infrastructure in the case of India. A significant part of this realism play is trying to answer the question of what will be the final status of Kashmir. Both sides have invested heavily in maintaining a claim since 1947. The conflict will continue until the key actors to include the Kashmiris pave a path to the future that will solve the problem. Only by finding a final status on Kashmir with South Asia be able to achieve a real, lasting peace. If peace is achieved, the impacts to the region would be a long-term victory for all stake holders. The Kashmiris would be confident that after decades of war and strife they can finally live in peace with their families.

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