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Geo-Strategic Significance of Afghanistan: An Analysis of Indo-Pakistan Rivalry from 2014-2021

Zabiullah Khamosh and Matiullah Aryanpor

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Zabiullah Khamosh
Matiullah Aryanpor

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Abstract

Afghanistan enjoys an important geo-strategic location in its history, so all the superpowers, great powers, and regional powers, especially India and Pakistan, have paid attention to this region. Most importantly, Pakistan has always claimed and pursued its policy of strategic depth in Afghanistan and maintains that the mountainous area on the border between the two countries could be the place where it could defend itself against India in times of armed conflict. On the other hand, India has always tried to marginalize Pakistan from the beginning of their separation. So, the problem is that Pakistan analyzes its relations with Afghanistan from the lens of India and vice versa. It means that none of them wants the existence of the other in Afghanistan. Both have a common interest in Afghanistan, which is reaching the rich resources of Central Asian Countries. However, their rivalry and ambitious foreign policy in Afghanistan caused them to deprive themselves and Afghanistan of economic and development opportunities. So, this study aims to shed light on the importance of Afghanistan's geo-strategic for India and Pakistan, the main problems between Pakistan and India, and the results and impacts of their rivalry in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Strategic Depth, Politics, Geo-strategic, Geo-economic, Geopolitics

Introduction

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India have not enjoyed a stable and cordial relationship. If the Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship is getting better, India is not feeling well. If the India-Afghanistan relationship improves, Pakistan is not comfortable with it. On the other hand, Afghanistan will not reach peace and prosperity if it does not establish a balance in its friendly relations with India and Pakistan. That is why all three countries' security maintenance and various pursuits of development, such as political and economic, are significantly dependent on cordial and multilateral relations. This is because of the unique geographical location of Afghanistan and the complex regional and global politics. Pakistan and Afghanistan, however, blame each other for the lack of security and poor economic conditions. So, Afghanistan always asks Pakistan to stop the infiltration of alleged extremists into Afghan territory. However, Pakistan always denies such accusations and considers the Afghan government responsible for weak border control as well as nation-state rebuilding. The weaknesses of Afghanistan's political system, the

ineffectiveness of its leadership, and the interference of foreign powers in Afghanistan's internal affairs have had a destructive impact on its relations with Pakistan. Therefore, long-term national interests have suffered dramatically, particularly in the post-9/11 era.

On the other hand, India's improved relationship with Afghanistan has also become a primary concern for the two neighbouring countries. Karzai's and Ghani's governments also focused keenly on building ties with India. So, the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have become important in the current situation because the international community is dealing with terrorism, and their role is essential in this regard. Suppose the current relations between the two countries continue on the same path. In that case, the confusion and chaos caused by terrorism cannot be appropriately dealt with at the regional level and the global level.

2. Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan and Afghanistan are immediate neighbours sharing a 2,240 km border known as the Durand Line. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have never been smooth despite shared geography, ethnicity and religion. It started in the 1947 UN meeting to recognize Pakistan as an independent state, while it received a negative vote from Afghanistan. With the emergence of India's threat from the east, Afghanistan's hostile attitude has exacerbated the fragile security environment that even challenges Pakistan's existence. So, a friendly and safe North West border has always been Pakistan's wish, and due to Afghanistan's hostile attitude, security requirements vis-a-vis India can never be realized.

Without the four years of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (1997-2001), almost all governments in Kabul have shown different degrees of dissatisfaction with Islamabad. Overall, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan is seen as complicated. However, the two countries share some things in common, such as Islam religion, ethnic groups such as Pashtuns and Baluches, and about 2000km of common border. However, no government has had actual control of the border area. Therefore, the foreign powers have used this area for different groups' movements between the two countries since the decade of war against the Soviets. In 2001, when the Taliban regime was overthrown by an international coalition led by the United States and regrouped back in the border areas, they used Pakistani soil as a haven and made the war extremely difficult. However, the chance of cooperation between the two countries remains intact as eliminating terrorism has emerged as a challenge for both governments and may not be tackled alone.

The 9/11 attack forced Pakistan to pursue the anti-Taliban policy that previously supported them politically and diplomatically. Pakistan committed itself to the war against terrorism and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Pakistan committed itself to the war against terrorism and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. So, Pakistan deployed around 80,000 troops to prevent the alleged infiltrators from entering Afghanistan. However, this cooperation on terrorism entered into troubled times, and Afghan authorities have repeatedly pointed fingers at Pakistan and its intelligence agency ISI, accusing them of ignoring cross-border terrorism that NATO and ISAF forces and the Kabul government were targeting. That is why when NATO forces were attacked by militants early on July 13, 2008, as well as the Indian embassy in Kabul was attacked on July 14, 2008, Karzai wasted no time accusing the ISI of being behind the terrorist attacks that rocked Kabul and caused heavy casualties and destructions, killing and insecurity. Pakistan's response to these accusations has been that a prosperous and developed

Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interest, so Pakistan has no role in any destructive activities. Instead, Pakistan believes that Afghanistan itself and the international forces present in Afghanistan were responsible for this predicament.

The India-Pakistan relations with Afghanistan are considered based on a zero-sum game, so India's gains are considered Pakistan's losses and vice versa. In the post-9/11 context, it was India that took full advantage, unlike Pakistan, of the changed circumstances and new realities, and that is because it followed active diplomacy and managed to create pro-India lobbies in Afghanistan. India ran several diplomatic missions in critical and strategic cities of Afghanistan, which Pakistan considers to harm its interests. Therefore, Pakistan officially expressed its serious concerns about India. For example, its allegations against India were the printing of fake Pakistani currency and operations related to acts of sabotage and terrorism on Pakistan soil. So, Pakistan accused India of creating terrorist training networks in various Afghanistan cities. Pakistan believes that Indian consulates in Afghanistan are busy making conspiracy against Pakistan's western provinces of Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and tribal areas to destroy the peace and development process in these areas. As an example, on August 13 2004, the former Chief Minister of Baluchistan, Jam Muhammad Yusuf, proclaimed that Indian intelligence services were maintaining forty terrorist camps across Baluchistan as well as fomented unrest in Waziristan where the Pakistani military faced resistance from al-Qaeda and the local Taliban. Also, Pakistan claims that India fueled the unrest in North and South Waziristan, and its consulate in southern Afghanistan provided money to the militants as well as ammunition to fuel the problems and militancy in the tribal region.

The other issue between Afghanistan and Pakistan is the refugee factor. Due to the security, social and economic challenges, nearly three million Afghans have sought refuge in Pakistan since the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, and Pakistan welcomed and hosted them. However, Afghans had closed their border to aspire Muslims of the subcontinent during their crisis in the early 1920s. The second wave of Afghan refugees swarmed after 2000 due to drought, civil war, and the harsh and strict policies of the Taliban. However, this time, Pakistan denied its territory to refugees. As a result, many militants were crossing the Afghanistan border with the refugees and caused trouble for Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan is also a serious issue in their relationship because Afghanistan voted against Pakistan's membership of the United Nations. So, it made their bilateral relations hostile until the end of the 1970s. However, the influx of approximately 3.15 million Afghan refugees relatively calmed the issue during the 1980s. Also, the post-Soviet withdrawal phase did not experience the revival of the previous tension between the two countries. Afghanistan's foreign policy was radicalized after the 9/11 regime change, and Karzai's government issued a declaration of non-acceptance of the previously resolved borderline between the two countries. Afghanistan claims that the Durand Line is not an international boundary, which was signed between Abdul Rahman Khan and the British-Indian government of Pakistan's predecessor on behalf of Sir Mortimer Durand in 1894 because they exploited this situation for their interests. However, Pakistan has always considered the Durand Line a valid and recognized international border. It rejects the Afghans' claim that it must be signed between representatives of two independent entities as a valid document. She does not even agree with the argument that the treaty is only valid for a hundred years. Therefore, the continued provocation of the Durand Line between Afghanistan and

Pakistan should be resolved sooner because it is a serious obstacle to their friendly relations, which hinders development and prosperity in both countries.

3. Afghanistan-India Relations

India enjoyed substantial political and cultural ties with Afghanistan even during King Zahir Shah's term, and so was its interest in peace and prosperity in war-torn Afghanistan. Although Ghani first tried to build closer ties with Pakistan, a warming of Indo-Afghan relations was seen in later stages. So, the relations between the two countries under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ashraf Ghani's leadership improved. On the other side, initially, Pakistan was not able to convince the Taliban to start peace talks with the Afghan government; instead, it was providing safe havens for them. Therefore, the Ghani government saw India playing a more significant role in Afghanistan's capacity building and reconstruction. The Modi government also supported a negotiated political reconciliation that was Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled. India and Afghanistan have a long social and cultural history, and its engagement with Afghanistan has become multi-dimensional since 2001. From India's point of view, the most essential factor in its relations with Afghanistan is Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan irrevocably considers any Indian interactions in Afghanistan as a threat. The Indo-Afghanistan ties can be analyzed in three phases.

The first one started with India's independence and continued until the end of the Cold War. During this phase, India enjoyed friendly relations with Afghanistan except during the Soviet intervention and territorial disputes such as Pashtunistan and the Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan brought New Delhi and Kabul closer. India's partnership with the Soviet Union, as well as the logic of Cold War politics, caused India to adopt a neutral stance towards Soviet intervention, which adversely affected India's image among Afghans and the West. The second phase began with the end of the Cold War in 1991 and continued until the collapse of the Taliban regime. India did not have good relations with Afghanistan during this phase, which was marked by civil war, Islamic extremism and Jihad. India's influence in Afghanistan fluctuated; it declined with the overthrow of Najibullah's regime and increased with Burhanuddin Rabbani's regime. However, with the rise of the Taliban regime in 1996, New Delhi's influence in Afghanistan was entirely overshadowed by Islamabad. During this period, India supported the Northern Alliance as an anti-Taliban resistance group. Pakistan manipulated the space vacated by India to implement its strategic depth – a concept that led Islamabad to treat Afghanistan as its backyard. In the second phase, India also faced increasing challenges from Pakistan in Kashmir. The third phase began in 2001 – the overthrow of the Taliban regime – when India rebuilt its bilateral ties and influenced again in Afghanistan by providing \$2 billion as economic aid and pledged another \$1 billion over the next few years. Since Afghanistan's stability is essential to both India's and Pakistan's security, New Delhi supported the development of democratic institutions in Afghanistan, unlike Pakistan, which has always supported different non-state actors which have damaged Afghanistan in decades of conflict and instability.

Since the emergence of Pakistan as an independent country, it has been the main factor in India-Afghanistan relations because India's long-standing friendship with Afghanistan has a particular sensitivity for Pakistan. That is why it emphasizes its common historical and religious ties with Afghanistan. Likewise, Pakistani strategists believe the bilateral equation between Pakistan and Afghanistan is logical and reasonable for both. However, Pakistan tried to turn Afghanistan into a client state through strategic

means such as Mujahedeen and Taliban. Despite repeated declarations of friendship and brotherhood, Pakistan's military has never cooperated with Hamid Karzai's government, and that is why Pakistan's security institutions considered it as an anti-Pakistan and pro-India government. When Ashraf Ghani came to power in 2014, Kabul took a big step and changed its policies and trade practices with Pakistan. Ghani avoided any negative comments about Pakistan's intelligence services (ISI) that supported anti-India groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, and it seemed a great hope of facilitating reconciliation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ghani's visit to meet Pakistan's Army General in Rawalpindi in November 2014 surprised India. He also sought the support of China, which has significant influence in Pakistan. During his visit to Beijing, Ghani indicated that he views India's role in Afghanistan as a contributor – but not in the area of security. Over time, Ghani faced significant limitations to change Pakistan's attitude towards Afghanistan as expected. So, the bilateral relations with Pakistan began to sour, and he expressed disappointment over Pakistan's failure to get the Afghan Taliban to agree to the negotiations and considered them responsible for disrupting peace and security in the region. In August 2015, Ghani declared that Pakistan continues to be a venue and a ground for anti-Afghan activities that send us messages of war and bomb-making facilities which target and kill our innocent people. In April 2016, in a speech to the Afghan parliament – after a brutal Taliban attack on Kabul, which killed more than 60 people – Ghani urged Pakistan to fight the Taliban instead of trying to bring them into peace talks. He said that the Taliban leaders who have taken refuge in Peshawar and Quetta are the enemies of Afghanistan who have shed the blood of their fellow citizens.

The previous Taliban regime and its deep ties with Pakistan kept New Delhi away from Kabul. However, after the fall of the Taliban regime, India supported the USA's war on terror to dismantle the Taliban regime and limit Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. India also used its soft power and clarified that it would send no troops to Afghanistan. Pakistan's ideological prerequisite to achieve strategic depth in Afghanistan has permanently shadowed negatively India's reconstruction and development role. So, India's diplomatic missions and even engineers and aid workers have been targeted frequently by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Then New Delhi deployed paramilitary forces to protect the Indian embassy in Kabul and four consulates in Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Herat. Also, fighting terrorism and establishing democratic stability and common interests between the two states ensured their mutual solid relations. For example, Dr. Abdullah, CEO of Afghanistan, visited India in March 2015, called India the most generous supporter of Afghanistan, and added that India should consider Afghanistan a permanent friend. In April 2015, President Ghani visited India for the first time after he visited China in October 2014, Pakistan in November 2014, and then the United States in March 2015. So, the delay was a pretended reprioritization of Afghanistan's foreign policy towards India, contrasting Karzai's warmth towards India.

Finally, During Ghani's interaction with the Indian leadership, cooperation and assistance were discussed in various sectors, including health, education, agriculture, natural disaster management, power sector, and election management. In addition, both sides expressed their desire to work with the international community to defeat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Then, Prime Minister Modi visited Kabul in December 2015 due to the two major Indian initiatives in Afghanistan. One was the Afghan parliament building, and the other was the handover ceremony of four Mi-25 attack helicopters, which showed India's stance on providing offensive military equipment to Afghanistan. India had also begun its earlier non-lethal reservation aid such as vehicles,

transportation and training to Afghans under the leadership of Modi. In early 2016, Dr. Abdullah visited India and discussed bilateral regional and global issues, including Afghanistan's security situation and reconciliation process. Also, an agreement was signed between the two countries to provide visa exemption for diplomatic passport holders. Modi again visited Herat in June 2016 and inaugurated the Friendship Dam, known as the Salma Dam. He emphasized India's commitment to the peace and development of Afghanistan and said that India would not forget or turn away from Afghanistan: "Your friendship is our honour, and your dreams are our duty", he said. Since Pakistan has not allowed Indian goods to travel by land to Afghanistan, New Delhi and Kabul worked together to find and strengthen alternative routes, including the Air Cargo Corridor and the Chabahar Sea Route, launched in 2017. India's influence in Afghanistan was reflected and grew in Modi's announcement of \$1 billion in economic aid to Kabul when President Ghani met him in New Delhi in September 2016. This communicated that Islamabad's false objections against the India-Afghanistan partnership would drive New Delhi and Kabul to deepen their partnership.

Since 2001, India preferred a soft-power approach in various reconstruction and development programs such as the Afghan parliament building, financed the construction of the Afghanistan-India friendship bridge, the Salma Dam and so on. India intended to extend the rebuilding of airline power plants and invest in the health and education sectors. Also, India helped train Afghan civil servants, diplomats, and police personnel. It means that India was open to Afghan people to facilitate cooperation in various fields. Also, thousands of Afghans travel to India annually for tourism, medical care, and education. India has allowed Afghanistan to establish telephone communication through Indian satellites. However, New Delhi maintains economic aid to Kabul for infrastructural development and capacity building, all driven by India's geopolitical interests. It means India has two primary strategic goals in Afghanistan that it wants to achieve through aid.

Firstly, India did not want the re-emergence of the fundamentalist concepts of political Islam. Secondly, India did not want Pakistan to gain strategic-depth in Afghanistan to harm India's security interests. Therefore, both countries have developed strategic and military cooperation against terrorists. India's stance of non-military intervention policy has been a tremendous geo-political benefit for India. The surveys show that Afghans perceive India more positively than any other country. Afghanistan is a landlocked country and depends on the Karachi port of Pakistan for access to the sea. This gave Islamabad considerable leverage over Kabul to pressure the Afghan government. Surprisingly, India completed the construction of a 135-mile road that connects Afghanistan's Nimruz province to Iran's Chabahar port. As a result, the project ended Pakistan's monopoly on maritime transit trade to Afghanistan. The Zaranj-Delaram highway, which is connected to the most significant highway in Afghanistan and connects 16 provinces of Afghanistan from Herat to Kandahar to Ghazni to Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, creates a north-south transportation corridor connecting the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia through its soft- power. In addition, the Modi government decided to implement 116 social developmental projects in 31 provinces of Afghanistan in different fields of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, micro-hydropower, sports, and administrative infrastructure. India wanted to build the capacity of the Afghan government and Afghan security forces to enable them to fight effectively against the terrorist groups by themselves.

Although Pakistan did not want Afghanistan to become a member of the South Asian Association and Regional Cooperation, India helped Afghanistan to become its last member in 2007. The strategic partnership signed between India and Afghanistan in 2011 is historic because this was the first agreement between them after the Soviet invasion. So, such initiatives show India's diplomatic extension to support Afghanistan at all regional and multilateral levels. In the proceedings of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Conference on Afghanistan in Amritsar in December 2016, President Ghani and Prime Minister Modi criticized Pakistan for supporting sanctuaries for terrorists. While opening the meeting, Modi emphasized that terrorism and instability caused by outsiders are the biggest threats to the peace, stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. Modi also supported the Afghan-led and Afghan-controlled peace process. When Secretary of State Tillerson arrived in New Delhi in the last week of October 2017, President Ghani was also hosted by the Modi government. It marked diplomatic coordination between India, the USA and Afghanistan, and the regional equations were changing for Pakistan. When the meeting between Tillerson and Ghani occurred, the Trump administration emphasized India's centrality in the Afghan theatre. Then, Pakistan did not allow any Indian goods to be carried through Afghanistan, and President Ghani was angered and repeatedly said that he would cut off Pakistan's access to Central Asia. Also, to dismiss the suspicions in Islamabad about the joint deal between New Delhi and Kabul against Pakistan, Ghani claimed that there is no secret agreement between Afghanistan and India.

4. Indo-Pakistan Relations

Ganguly argues that since 1947, India and Pakistan have been mostly at odds. One year after their separation, they fought a war and three others in 1965, 1971, and 1999. He adds that India-Pakistan relationships deteriorated significantly in the last decade, especially after the 2014 election of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and that is because of Pakistan's anti-Indian militant groups. Surinder Mohan traces the enmity between India and Pakistan to many factors such as the Partition of India, ideological intensification, shared border, and disputed territory. In 1954, the USA also included and signed a defence pact with Pakistan, which led to the 1965 war and deepened the rivalry. So, the rivalry culminated in the 1971 war, which ragged out regional stability. India and Pakistan both wanted to take control of Kashmir. That is why it led to war between the two states in that time of separation. Then, they had another war in 1956 with no result. Their third war started in 1971, with the most focus on East Pakistan. As a result of this war, Pakistan lost that part as a separate state under the name of Bangladesh.

So, the pertinent question is: Why is Kashmir critical to Pakistan and India? Firstly, besides Kashmir's beauty, it is a mountainous state that cannot be conquered if equipped with military forces, and it becomes a place of resistance. Secondly, Kashmir is a place that can be called a gate of India through which anyone can enter India. On the other hand, its importance has caused it to dominate the most important cities of Pakistan. So, if these countries lose it, they will be vulnerable. Besides, the five rivers of Sind, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, and Sutlej are started from its mountains. So, the water of these rivers is essential for Pakistan's agriculture. If Pakistan loses it, India may cut Pakistan's water flow. Thirdly, the Karakorum Highway is important for Pakistan, which has passed from the Jammu area. Fourthly, if India loses it, it is a Muslim-majority state that Pakistan will get stronger. Fifthly, it is rich with mines of iron ore, coal, copper, milestone, and gold. So, it also helps in the economic improvements of any state that takes its control.

5. Geo-Strategic Importance of Afghanistan

Afghanistan is located in the region's geo-political, cultural, and economically important area. It is a landlocked country surrounded by Pakistan to the south and east, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan to the northwest, Uzbekistan to the north, Tajikistan to the northeast and China to the northeast and east. Afghanistan has common borders of 2087km long with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Also, Afghanistan shares a 936km border with Iran, a 2430km border with Pakistan, and a 76km border with China. The longest distance from Khyber Strait to Zulfiqar Strait is 1240km east to west and 855km north to south. So, Afghanistan functions as a focal point and a hub geographically where South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia meet. Therefore, Afghanistan is the main corridor for all the three regions. Central Asia is rich with natural resources such as gas, oil, and many other mineral materials with a smaller population, while South Asia is overpopulated with fewer natural resources. So, as mentioned before, this is Afghanistan, which functions as a bridge between South and Central Asia; as a result of connectivity between the two sides, many opportunities are provided for both sides in terms of trade and transit for development, construction and prosperity, economic development and so on. However, the lack of safe transportation has deprived all the states in the region of all the opportunities.

Afghanistan can access Iran and Chabahar Port, which provides the potential to connect Afghanistan to the sea waters and could be the substitute for Karachi and Gawader ports for Afghanistan. So, on the one hand, it brings Afghanistan out of Pakistan's influence. Moreover, from the other side, India does not need the permission of Pakistan to have relations with Afghanistan. That is why the Afghanistan and Pakistan trade levels peaked between 2014 and 2015, reaching \$2.7 billion. However, in 2018, the trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan was reduced to \$500 million, and around 80% of that trade was dealt through Bandar-e-Abbas and Chabahar ports instead. This is while Afghanistan functions as a transit hub between Central and South Asia and plays a protagonist role in the region's economic growth. Afghanistan is located among three regional security complexes: Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia. In South Asia, two regional powers, India and Pakistan, compete fiercely. They have had devastating effects on the security and situation in Afghanistan as well as in the region. On the one hand, it is Pakistan's policy to surround India and Indian geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-political interests. On the other hand, India's policy is to surround Pakistan and its strategic depth. So, this rivalry has worsened Afghanistan's position.

Convergence and cooperation basis of human societies' formation in the history of social life is traced in the writings of Aristotle, Plato, Ibn Khaldun, and Hegel. They have stated that cooperation groups, organizations, institutions and countries work together to protect their common good and achieve more benefits. Good examples include the European Union, ASEAN, and so on. So, as the 21st century is considered regional cooperation by governments, Afghanistan's strategic location made it subject to the intervention of great colonial powers such as Sassanids, the British, Russians, and Americans. It means that Afghanistan is not only important for Pakistan in the Indian context and India in the Pakistan context but also strategically for all the regional and global powers. That is because a shift in Pakistan's geo-strategic stance results in a change in the geo-political landscape of the South Asian region, which will revolve around large-scale geo-economic and geo-strategic issues. The geological entity with a long history, now identified as Afghanistan, was the centre of the Silk Road and immigrants' area. It

has been the target of several invading forces to establish their empires. Durrani Empire was the foundation of modern Afghanistan in 1747.

Afghanistan has been a natural corridor for centuries for invaders and traders who have used it to shift military forces for merchandise from western to eastern borders. Afghanistan is more like a corridor and place of intersections of Asian routes. Afghanistan has always remained central to the global political agenda of super and great powers, and that is because of its geo-strategic location. Afghanistan's unique geo-strategic area helps shape its history, economy, ethnic diversity, and political situation. Therefore, Britain was aware of this geo-strategic importance and considered it a keystone in defending the Indian subcontinent. On the other hand, the Soviets also drew the exact opposite conclusion. The tempting recourses of Middle Eastern states, the weakness of Pakistan, and the USA distancing itself from foreign commitments all raised the possibilities of significant and even decisive geo-political gain for the Soviets by utilizing Afghanistan's central position. The economic interests of Afghanistan are not so significant, but its geographical location makes it prominent in the region and the world.

There are many factors behind the Indian motives towards Afghanistan, such as political, strategic and economic. Politically and strategically, India is looking for a significant and prominent role in Afghanistan and the formation of a democratic government there as it influences its domestic and regional politics. Although India is a developing country, it is the second largest donor to Afghanistan, and many political reasons are behind this aid program. One of the reasons is the race between India and China for dominance in the region. Also, India provided assistance in many reconstruction projects in Afghanistan to limit China's utilization of unexploited resources. So, India wants to influence Afghanistan and limit China's influence. Therefore, the 9/11 attacks and the launch of "Operation Enduring Freedom" by the USA enabled India to pursue its foreign policy goals and gain its hegemonic position in the region. Apart from that, it is important to denote that India wants the marginalization of Pakistan. Therefore, India has cooperated with the post-9/11 governments of Afghanistan to stop the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Besides, Afghanistan is a bridge and gateway to oil-rich Central Asian Republics.

So, the penetrating influence of India has deepened in Afghanistan to use it as a bridge and find access to the Central Asian Countries. Since 2002, India has set up a military base in Farkhar of Tajikistan, which is presently used to transport relief assistance as India pledged to Afghanistan. This military base shows India's strong physical presence in the region and keeps check on Pakistan and China. Besides oil and gas, India has other interests in Central Asian countries, such as cotton from Uzbekistan and the trade of arms to undermine Pakistan's and China's influence. However, it is not easy for India to reach its goals because China is closer to Central Asia and has a land border with three of them. All these things are due to the future energy requirements and strategic positioning that has compelled India for its recent diplomatic push into Central Asia. For example, India plans to import gas through TAPI projects for which it needs Afghanistan and Pakistan. Apart from that, India's economic motives are as vital as its political gains. Since 2001, the reconstruction policy emerged as a significant priority. India took part in that reconstruction because even if the pipeline did not come through Afghanistan, only a friendly and stable regime would enhance the flow of oil, which is essential for economic stability. India's efforts to emerge as a regional superpower are to enhance its trade in the region. So, Afghanistan is considered the second largest export market for India. Also,

India invested in Chabahar port to have an alternative option due to Pakistan's refusal to give permission to imports and to reach Afghanistan, as Afghanistan itself is a landlocked country.

6. Indo-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan

Ganguly and Howenstein argue that Afghanistan and Pakistan did not enjoy a cordial relationship due to Pakistan's proxies, although India had good ties with King Zahir Shah from 1933 to 1973. Even after 1973, India maintained close ties with the subsequent communist regime and avoided any public censure of Soviet occupation. However, it chose to work with the Soviets due to \$3.2 billion of US aid to Pakistan and to avoid the Islamist ideological orientation (Mujahedeen) that Pakistan supported on behalf of the US. That is why the Soviet Union was providing advanced weaponry at bargain-basement prices. India also exploited the ethnic rivalry of Pashtuns and Baluches over the Durand Line, and throughout the Cold War, India provided lip services to the idea of Pashtunistan to keep Pakistan's army busy and occupied on its restive western border. When the Taliban came to power in 1996, Pakistan succeeded in establishing politico-military goals. So, India withdrew from Afghanistan. However, it kept its links with the Northern Alliance; before 2001, when the Northern Alliance was in battle with the Taliban, India provided Massoud's forces with high-altitude warfare, treating his forces in a Hospital in Takhar and other side of the border in Tajikistan.

Later on, after 9/11, India supported American-led efforts to dismantle the Taliban regime despite supporting the Northern Alliance. India also tried to secure a place in the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in 2004 as it wanted to have its influence in Afghanistan in any possible way. India was pleased to support Hamid Karzai's candidature for the Afghanistan presidency because he had long lived in India and had finished his undergraduate degree at Himachal Pradesh University of India. So, India was optimistic about Karzai's government. Besides, India had maintained good ties with some familiar faces of Afghanistan, such as Marshal Fahim – the vice president of Afghanistan during Karzai's government – Mohammad Haneef and Younus Qanoni. India built these relations to have a high level of influence in Afghanistan. India's aims from involvement in Afghanistan are, firstly, Pan-Asian influence. It means that India wants to be a significant player in the region and the world in the future. Secondly, India not only wants trade and economic agreements with Central Asian countries but also wants to extend its security horizons.

India's objectives for its involvement in Afghanistan are, firstly, to exert Pan-Asian influence. India wants to be a significant player in the region and the world in the future. Secondly, India not only wants trade and economic agreements with Central Asian countries but also wants to extend its security horizons. Stephen Blank from a strategic studies institute argues that India's involvement has more security dimensions than economic ones. In 2004, India reopened its embassy, its consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad and two new consulates in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. Since 2001, India has funded \$750 million to reconstruct the war-ravaged country and promised \$1.6 billion more, making it the sixth largest donor. It built the Ariana Airlines, restored telecommunication networks, trained 2000 Afghans in India in different fields, dug water wells in 6 provinces, and created solar energy systems in 100 villages.

Why is India's presence in Afghanistan significant? India has a two-fold goal. Firstly, to prevent the re-establishment of any resurgent regime which is hostile towards India and

limit Pakistan's influence. That is why it had built good relations with the Pashtun majority in Afghanistan and established sufficient diplomatic and intelligence networks to monitor Pakistan's activity and, if necessary, curtail it. Secondly, India wants to seek and develop long-term diplomatic ties and economic agreements with a stable, popular, and pro-Indian regime in Afghanistan; this was a dovetail interest of India and the US that seek peaceful, secure, and non-Talibanized Afghanistan.

India's presence in Afghanistan undercuts the Pakistani military establishment (strategic depth) against India, which Pakistan does not want to abandon quickly. So, Pakistan threatened Indian officials and personnel in Afghanistan through the suicide bombing of the Indian embassy in 2008. Pakistan asserted that Delhi's consulates function as the hub for insurgency in Baluchistan. That is why the bilateral rapprochement between Indo-Pakistan is crucial for the development of Afghanistan. That might discontinue their rivalry in Afghanistan, and only then is it beneficial for the development of Afghanistan. If there is another large-scale conflict between India and Pakistan, it will have a two-fold effect, as per Mir Ahmad Joyenda. Firstly, it will lead to a potential drop in foodstuff imports from Pakistan, resulting in famine. Secondly, Pakistan refugees will come across the Durand line, that Afghanistan cannot accommodate. Furthermore, it will have negative security implications in the southern provinces of Afghanistan if Pakistan shifts its forces towards India.

7. Analysis

Afghanistan is a country that connects the three regions geographically: West Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia. It is a focal point where the region and superpowers meet. So, it has attracted the attention of all the great and superpowers to itself. In this study, the rivalry and ambitious intervention and rivalry of two South Asian countries, Pakistan and India, were focused and analyzed. On one side, both India and Pakistan have their conflicts from the beginning of their separation in 1947. The conflict between them could have many reasons, but one prominent reason is the Kashmir issue. That is why both want Kashmir to be part of their country.

On the other hand, both have their own geo-strategic, geo-economic, and geo-political interest in Afghanistan, which is why they are both intervening even in the internal issues of Afghanistan to have more influence than the other. That is because the Indian success in Afghanistan marginalizes Pakistan, and Pakistan's success marginalizes India in the region. For example, Pakistan has always claimed its strategic depth in the soil of Afghanistan if it enters an armed conflict with India. Also, Pakistan does not allow India to reach its pan-Asian influence goal. So, Pakistan has always tried to train and provide safe havens for different non-state actors on its soil and has equipped them against India in Afghanistan as well as in Kashmir. On the other side, India has also used its soft power in Afghanistan by supporting pro-Indian governments to stop the influence as well as the strategic depth of Pakistan in Afghanistan. In addition, both countries have some common interests in Afghanistan, such as reaching the rich natural resources of Central Asian countries. Afghanistan could be the shortest and cheapest way to connect Central Asia to South Asia. However, as a result of the ongoing conflict between the two, not only could Pakistan and India ensure their economic interest, but they have not reached their geo-strategic and geo-political goals. That is why the relations between the three countries – Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India – have seen fluctuations in history. That is because of a succession of different regimes in Afghanistan; either India or Pakistan has had good ties with Afghanistan. For instance, India has had good ties with Afghanistan

from King Zahir Shah's term until 1996. However, during the Taliban government (1996-2001), Pakistan was enjoying good relations with Afghanistan. Then, from 2001 till the collapse of the republic government of Afghanistan, India had good ties to the republic government. However, neither Pakistan nor India has achieved their objectives due to their rivalry in Afghanistan. Instead, they have changed Afghanistan into a battleground, which remained backward, war-torn, undeveloped, and always needy and depended on the help and support of other countries.

Also, as a result of the war, most of the Afghan children could not go to school to continue their education, so one of the reasons that Afghanistan has not developed is the rise of uneducated generations. Apart from that, around five million Afghans have taken refuge in different Asian and European countries – mainly in Iran and Pakistan- who are mistreated and misused and obliged to do any work with less salary as they do not have formal documents. Even some illegal tasks are done by refugees without legal documents. Finally, both Pakistan and India have always claimed that they could be good friends with Afghanistan, but this is not genuine and clear. So, any policy by Pakistan or India, regardless of whether their policies have been good or bad, finally traces back to their national interests. Afghanistan's relations with India and Pakistan have changed in different periods per its national interests, as Afghanistan has chosen either Pakistan or India, considering its national interests. That is why the world system is such that there should be an action-reaction game – in which you either lose, win, or achieve something at the cost of losing something else. However, from the relationship with both India and Pakistan, Afghanistan has always lost, and in return, it has achieved nothing. It was pertinent to mention that the governments of Afghanistan could not analyze the status quo, so they could not prioritize their interests while considering the ongoing situation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be argued that the relations and history between the three countries have reached the level that Pakistan's firm belief in the intertwined Afghan and Indian threats, as well as Afghanistan's power to undermine the Pakistani government, has always been a consistent subject in Pakistan's military discourse. Pakistan has always tried to build its relations with Afghanistan with the consideration of India-Afghanistan relations. Its army cannot bear Afghanistan-India good ties. So, changing this dynamic requires getting rid of the Pakistani military-oriented policies towards India and Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pakistan and Afghanistan are of undeniable importance to each other. Areas such as geo-strategic, geo-political, geo-economic, etc., make it necessary for both countries to establish cordial relations because it can be logical and reasonable for the prosperity of the two South Asian countries. In addition, it can also help to check cross-border infiltrations that damage development and infrastructure in Pakistan's two border provinces, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan.

On the other side, India's foreign policy towards Pakistan is to undermine Pakistan's interests in any possible way. That is why one of India's geo-political goals is the marginalization of Pakistan at the international level. Besides, India wants to have cordial relations with Afghanistan to find access to the Central Asian countries with rich resources. So, India has assisted Afghanistan in infrastructure building and connecting it to the Chabahar port to reduce Pakistan's dependence on trade and transit with Central Asia. However, if the three countries' leadership cannot deal with all the issues in their trilateral relations, foreign powers' intervention and the external elements would jeopardize their short-term and long-term interests. Also, despite the various security

implications, the Afghans must ensure the security of both India and Pakistan to reach the Central Asian countries. Afghanistan must prevent its soil from being used against any other country. Lastly, both Afghanistan and Pakistan must cooperate to fight decisively against drug trafficking, which is one of the common social problems of Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as protect and monitor international borders to prevent illegal trade.

Policy Recommendations

- All three countries need to clear all doubts in their multilateral relations towards each other because they need each other's help for the continuation and success of the fight against the elements that are common enemies of the three countries.
- All three countries should prefer peaceful means – talks, negotiations, and mediation- to solve problems.
- In the case of refugees, all three countries should work for the safe return and rehabilitation of Afghans living abroad, especially in Pakistan and Iran, for decades.
- Both India and Pakistan need Afghanistan to achieve their vital energy needs, and they should not forget that access to the resources of Central Asian countries is possible with the support of Afghanistan.

All three countries should prioritize geo-economic policy as it brings peace, prosperity, and significant development in their economic relations.

Contributions:

Zabiullah Khamosh: Principal Author)

Matiullah Aryanpor: Corresponding author

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About the Author

Mr. Zabiullah Khamosh, Alumni BPS, Member Research Society Kardan University, Kabul, Afghanistan.
<zabihullah.khamosh@gmail.com>

Mr. Matiullah Aryanpor, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardan University, Kabul, Afghanistan. <m.aryanpor@kardan.edu.af>
