

# A Study of India's Policy in Afghanistan Since 2001

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Peerzada Tufail Ahmad

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## Abstract

*Following the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2001, India was quick enough to respond to be part of the emerging political structure in Afghanistan. Since 2001, India's engagement with Afghanistan became multi-dimensional. It adopted the soft power approach in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. India's strategy in Afghanistan has centered on supporting the emerging democratic regime thereby denying any space for the return of the Taliban. Its engagement with Afghanistan is motivated by four main considerations: First, India sees Afghanistan as a potential market. Second, to explore Central Asian oil and mineral. The third and important objective has been to contain Pakistan. The fourth objective is to contain anti-India activities in Afghanistan. It is in the backdrop of the above-mentioned interests; a study like this is needed to analyze India's policy towards Afghanistan.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Central Asia, India, 2001

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## Introduction

Afghanistan is a land-locked country. Afghanistan's geographical location makes it prominent in the region and the world. It is mainly its unique geostrategic location that has made it central to the global political agenda of the superpowers. It is situated at the crossroads of Central, South, and West Asia. It shares its borders with Central Asia on the north, China's province Xining in the east, Iran on the west, and the southwest, Pakistan. Afghanistan occupies a unique geostrategic location in the South Asian region, which is an important element that helps to shape its history, economy, ethnic diversity, and political situation in the region. Despite not sharing borders with India, Afghanistan has remained crucial for India's security and power dominance in the region, particularly because Pakistan has played a politically active role in Afghanistan.

During the Taliban rule, India shut down its diplomatic mission in Kabul in September 1996. Like most countries, India also did not recognize the Taliban's regime. Only three countries, which include Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, gave recognition to the Taliban regime. After the Taliban consolidated

its control over most of Afghanistan in 1996, India like many other powers was marginalized and this led it to support the Panjshir-based *Northern Alliance*<sup>1</sup> (the Northern-Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Massoud was the only significant challenge to the Taliban) along with other regional actors such as Iran, Tajikistan, and Russia.<sup>2</sup> India's brief interaction with the Taliban was during the hijacking of the Indian Airlines Flight IC 814 on 24 December 1999, which was forced to land in Kandahar by the Pakistan-based militants. The ensuing eight-day hostage crisis of Indian Airlines ended with Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh personally delivering the three militants held in Indian prisons in exchange for the passengers to the Taliban. Incidentally, one of the released militants, Maulana Masood Azhar, went on to establish the *Jaish-e-Mohammad* (JeM). The JeM is said to be involved in several militant activities in Jammu and Kashmir and beyond, including the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001.<sup>3</sup>

Following the ouster of the Taliban due to the military action initiated by the US-led Coalition forces in response to the 9/11 attacks, an Interim Government was established in Afghanistan under President Hamid Karzai under the Bonn Conference<sup>4</sup> of 2001.<sup>5</sup> After the fall of the Taliban regime, India was quick enough to respond to be part of the emerging political structure in Afghanistan. India did not want to be left out of the affairs of Afghanistan and did not want to be seen as a hesitant regional player. Since then, India's engagement with Afghanistan became multi-dimensional. India renewed its diplomatic ties with Kabul and reopened its mission and the four consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Herat.<sup>6</sup> It adopted the soft power

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<sup>1</sup>Northern Alliance mainly consisted of the forces of general Abdul Rashid Dostum, Ahmad Shah Masu'd and others. The Alliance formally known as the 'National Islamic United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan' was established to fight the communist government led by President Najibullah. The group was successful in bringing down Najibullah's government in 1992. But, shortly after the victory the group disintegrated because of the power struggles within the group which led to the civil war in Afghanistan. However, when the Taliban captured Kabul in September 1996, the group resurrected in opposition to Taliban once again.

<sup>2</sup> Rahul Bedi, "India and Central Asia", *Frontline*, No. 19, September 14-27, 2002.

<sup>3</sup>Peerzada Tufail Ahmad, "*Resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Security Implications for India*" (unpublished MPhil diss., Aligarh Muslim University, 2012), 77-80.

<sup>4</sup>The Bonn Agreement was signed on December 5, 2001 by representatives of several different anti-Taliban factions and political groups after the invasion of US led coalition forces and fall of the Taliban regime.

<sup>5</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "India's Challenge In Afghanistan: With Power Comes Responsibility," (CASI Working Paper Series, Number 10-02, Center For The Advanced Study Of India (CASI), University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, March 2010), 6, <https://casi.sas.upenn.edu/visiting/pant>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>6</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "India in Afghanistan: a test case for a rising power," *Contemporary South Asia* 18, no. 2 (June 2010): 136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584931003674984>; Harsh V. Pant, "India in

approach in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. This included reviving its humanitarian, historical, social, and cultural, and civilization linkages for the long-term stabilization of the war-ravaged country.<sup>7</sup> India's strategy in Afghanistan has centered on supporting the emerging democratic regime thereby denying any space anti-Indian militant groups.<sup>8</sup> Its engagement with Afghanistan is motivated by four main considerations:

First, Pant argues that India sees Afghanistan as a potential market. India has undertaken massive investment in Afghanistan's infrastructure development, intending to fasten the consolidation of an emerging local market, eyeing the 300 million low to middle-income Afghan consumers.<sup>9</sup>

Second, Scott argues that Indian involvement in Afghanistan is marked by its interest in supplementing its energy sources by cultivating Afghanistan's geo-strategic position to explore Central Asian oil and minerals.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, Partha Pratim Basu points out, the great strategic significance attached to Afghanistan as the 'land bridge' between South Asia on the one hand and Central Asia on the other.<sup>11</sup>

The third and important objective has been to contain Pakistan. Pakistan has always looked for strategic depth in Afghanistan vis-a-vis India. According to Barnett Rubin, "Pakistan's military establishment has always approached the various wars in and around Afghanistan as a function of its main institutional and national security interests: first and foremost, balancing India".<sup>12</sup>

The fourth objective is to contain anti-India activities from the extremely volatile Pakistan-Afghanistan border and prevent the Taliban to come to power in Afghanistan. Thus, Pakistan's support to the Taliban, the Taliban's linkages with several Pakistan-based anti-India militant groups, and the danger of its return to power in Afghanistan is a major concern to India.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Scott

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Afghanistan: A Trajectory in Motion," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 1 (June 2013): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598414524121>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Smruti S. Pattanaik, "India in Afghanistan: Engagement without Strategy," (IDSA Comment, January 28, 2011), [https://idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaInAfghanistanEngagementWithoutStrategy\\_sspattanaik\\_28011](https://idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaInAfghanistanEngagementWithoutStrategy_sspattanaik_28011). (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>9</sup> Pant, "India in Afghanistan," 147.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, *Handbook of India's international relations*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Ahmad, 77-80.

<sup>13</sup> Pant, "India in Afghanistan," 143; Pant, "India's Challenge in Afghanistan," 20; Hanauer and Chalk, "India's and Pakistan's Strategies in Afghanistan," 11; Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "India, Afghanistan and the 'End Game'?" (ISAS Working Paper, No. 124, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 14 March 2011), 8.

highlights that India's policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan is underpinned by two key objectives: (i) negating the influence of Pakistan supported groups like Taliban and others which are hostile to Indian interests in the region; and (ii) curtailing the spread of drug-trafficking, which poses a potential threat to India's national security.<sup>14</sup>

It is in the backdrop of the above-mentioned interests this study deals with India's soft power policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

## 2. Soft Power as the Foreign Policy Strategy

Power is the ability to get things done. It is the capacity to influence others to get the desired outcomes.<sup>15</sup> There are two ways to get things done. One way is to force people to move them in your direction. It is called hard power and the currency is the use of force or threat or intimidation or payments. It is based on brute force and can be done through military intervention, coercive diplomacy, and economic sanctions.<sup>16</sup> Another way is to co-opt others in your direction. This indirect way of getting things done is called soft power and it rests on the power of attraction. Soft power is influencing others by attracting them with your values and how you present yourself.<sup>17</sup> However, the concept of soft power has changed over time and now it has become larger in scope. Since Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' academicians and scholars have extended its definition and have included many facets to its scope. For instance, scholars like Kugiel have included foreign aid<sup>18</sup>, while Ragavan<sup>19</sup> has included exchange programs, financial assistance, aid during emergencies, participation in multilateral organizations, and investment as the new sources of soft power. However, it is important to point out that the scholars argue that economic assets can be regarded as soft power if they are used as a means to generate goodwill and

<sup>14</sup> David Scott, ed., *Handbook of India's international relations* (London: Routledge, 2011), 109.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph S Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest J. Wilson III, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>17</sup> Nye, *The Means to Success in World Politics*, 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Patryk Kugiel, "India's soft power in South Asia," *International studies* 49, issue. 3-4 (July 2012): 353, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881714534033> (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>19</sup> Nambee Ragavan, "International Student Exchange Among Muslim Nations; Soft Power and Voting Alliances at the United Nations" (Political Science Senior Thesis, Bemidji State University, 2011), 3, <https://www.bemidjistate.edu/academics/departments/political-science/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/2015/05/nambee-thesis.pdf>; (Accessed on 20-11-20).

long-lasting relationships in other countries.<sup>20</sup> There are three main sources of soft power: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others); its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad); and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).<sup>21</sup>

### **3. Indian Foreign Policy and Soft Power**

The significance of Indian soft power lies in the fact that various security threats like terrorism, China's rising influence in the region, dealing with Pakistan, climate change, life-threatening diseases, external aggression, threats from neighbors', secession movements, insurgency, poverty, pollution, the rise of communalism, extremism, and fundamentalist tendencies need cooperation and support of other countries. The cooperation cannot be obtained through force, threat, or payments. To get cooperation, one needs to be attractive and attraction as Nye argues comes from soft power.<sup>22</sup> Soft power is very important in dealing with these issues that arise from the bottom chessboard of transnational relations.<sup>23</sup>

As far as Indian soft power is concerned, there is a clear division among scholars about the nature of Indian soft power. One group of scholars (like Tharoor<sup>24</sup>, Walker<sup>25</sup>, Purushothaman<sup>26</sup>, Pattannayak<sup>27</sup>, and Pocha<sup>28</sup>) is comprised of those who already recognize India as a major soft power and point out its potential in the field. While the second group (like Wagner<sup>29</sup>, Malone<sup>30</sup>,

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<sup>20</sup> Christian Wagner, "India's soft power: Prospects and limitations," *India Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (December 2010): 335, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492841006600401>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>21</sup> Nye, *The Means to Success in World Politics*, 11; Joseph S Nye, *The future of power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 84, 11, 13-14, 55-62.

<sup>22</sup> Nye, *The Means to Success in World Politics*, 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Kugiel, *India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy*, viii; Joseph S Nye Jr., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 263, Doi: 10.2307/20202345. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>24</sup> Shashi Tharoor, *Pax Indica: India and the world of the twenty-first century* (Delhi: Penguin, 2013), 277-280.

<sup>25</sup> Robin J. Walker, "Awakening Tiger: India's Quest for Expanded Influence in the World," (M.A. Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, California, 2008), 24, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Uma Purushothaman, "Shifting Perceptions of Power: Soft Power and India's Foreign Policy," *Journal of Peace Studies*, 17, issue 2&3 (April-September, 2010): 1-9.

<sup>27</sup> Satya R Pattannayak, "India as an Emerging Power," *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (January 2007): 85

<sup>28</sup> Jehangir Pocha, "The Rising Soft Power of India and China," *New Perspectives, Quarterly*, 20, no. 1 (Winter 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Wagner, "India's soft power: Prospects and limitations," 334, 341.

<sup>30</sup> Malone, "Soft Power in Indian Foreign Policy," 35-36

Kugiel<sup>31</sup>, Mukherjee<sup>32</sup>, Blarel<sup>33</sup>, Thussu<sup>34</sup>, and Gupta<sup>35</sup>) are highly optimistic about India's potential in this area, but they point out that India has not fully utilized its soft power capabilities and have some weaknesses to overcome. Both the groups agree that India's soft power resources are manifold which include sports, music, art, film, literature, and even beauty pageantry, etc. The literature reveals that India possesses plentiful soft power resources which include sports, music, art, film, literature, beauty pageantry, India's anti-colonial history, democratic credentials, free press, an independent judiciary, vibrant civil society, multi-ethnic polity, secularism, pluralism, skilled English-speaking workers, food, handicrafts, yoga, India's status as a responsible nuclear power, the rapid growth of the information technology sector in places such as Bangalore, and the existence of a large Indian Diaspora in certain western countries.<sup>36</sup>

India has been pursuing its foreign policy objectives through various soft power policy means like strengthening the socio-economic infrastructure and capacity building in Asia and Africa. Since 2000, India has been involved in providing scholarships to foreign students and giving training to government officials of other countries. India's soft power policy's primary focus has been social sectors like education and health. Soft power as a foreign policy strategy is an emerging approach in Indian foreign policy. In addition to already existing soft power resources like its democracy, political values like secularism, Bollywood, etc., now India has added Yoga to the tool kit of soft power resources. In addition, India is reaching to its worldwide Diaspora community to promote India's interests.

### 3.1 India's Soft Power Policy in Afghanistan

India's post-2001 Afghan policy is guided by a wide range of interests which include: (i) containing the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and militancy in the region; (ii) a united, independent, multiethnic, and peaceful Afghanistan; (iii) strong economic relations in the region on trade, transit, and energy; and

<sup>31</sup>Kugiel, "India's Soft Power in South Asia," 355-356, 363; Lee, "Unrealized Potential: India's 'Soft Power,'" 8-14; Kugiel, *India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy*, ix, x, 362, 87, 126, 176-186.

<sup>32</sup>Rohan Mukherjee, "The False Promise of India's Soft Power," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 6, no. 1 (2014):47-56

<sup>33</sup>Blarel, "India: the next superpower," 31

<sup>34</sup>Daya Kishan Thussu, *Communicating India's soft power: Buddha to Bollywood* (New Delhi: Sage, 2016), 2, 12-13, 155

<sup>35</sup>Amit Kumar Gupta, "Commentary on India's Soft Power and Diaspora," *International Journal on World Peace* 25, no. 3 (September 2008): 64-65

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

(iv) lasting and long-term international engagement in Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to its 1990's policy of hard power where India was actively involved in supporting the Northern Alliance, it adopted a new and proactive approach through co-optive means. India refused to take part in any military approach and remain aloof from hard power strategy vis-à-vis Afghanistan. The objective of India's soft power approach is to generate political capital that would indirectly strengthen and re-establish India's traditional ties with the Afghan people. Besides, the objective is to strengthen the capacity building of the Afghan society and help in building a stable, democratic and peaceful Afghanistan.

Some of India's Soft Power Projects in Afghanistan are discussed below:

### **3.1.1 Large-Scale Infrastructure Projects**

India has heavily invested in various large-scale high visibility projects including infrastructure development<sup>38</sup>, roads, irrigation, railways, and electricity transmission lines<sup>39</sup>. Some of the prominent large-scale infrastructural projects include Zaranj-Delaram Highway<sup>40</sup> and Salma Dam.<sup>41</sup> Scott argues that with the completion of the Zaranj-Delaram highway, India hopes to achieve two objectives. First, it would provide Afghanistan with a shorter and alternative route to the sea, thus, reducing its dependency on Pakistan. Second, in the case of Pakistan's refusal to grant trade transit rights over land, it enables India by shipping its goods from Mumbai to Chabahar port in Iran and then onwards with the completion of this highway into Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> These large-scale infrastructure projects are based on the priorities laid down by the Afghan government and are demand-driven. These projects aim to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan and provide

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<sup>37</sup>Ashley, Mukharji, "Is a regional strategy viable in Afghanistan," 28.

<sup>38</sup>Abdali, *Afghanistan-Pakistan-India*, 102-103.

<sup>39</sup> Saurabh Kumar, Aparna Sharma, "India's Neighbourhood Aid Policy Opportunities and Challenges" (Discussion Paper, CUTS International, India, September 2015), 11, [https://www.cuts-citee.org/pdf/Indias\\_Neighbourhood\\_Aid\\_Policy-Opportunities\\_and\\_Challenges.pdf](https://www.cuts-citee.org/pdf/Indias_Neighbourhood_Aid_Policy-Opportunities_and_Challenges.pdf). (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>40</sup> D'Souza, "India's role in the economic stabilization Ibid., 8; Thakur, "Beyond 2014: India's Security Concerns," 11; Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "India's Evolving Policy Contours towards Post-2014 Afghanistan," *Journal of South Asian Development* 8, issue. 2 (September 2013): 190; Krishnappa Venkatshamy and Princy George, *Grand Strategy for India 2020 and Beyond* (Delhi: Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, 2012), 221; Pant, "India in Afghanistan," 137; Pant, "India's Changing Afghanistan Policy," 8-9; Pant, "A Trajectory in Motion," 109.

<sup>41</sup> D'Souza, "India's role in the economic stabilization," 8; Ishtiaq and Shah, "India and Afghanistan," 2; Abdali, *Afghanistan-Pakistan-India*, 102.

<sup>42</sup>Scott, *Handbook of India's international relations*, 111.

Afghanistan alternative and viable routes for trade and commerce.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.1.2 Small Developmental Projects (SDPs)

In addition, India has been involved in Small Developmental Projects (SDPs) by providing basic facilities (like building health clinics, schools, livestock, bridges, bore wells, public toilets, etc) to the common Afghan people.<sup>44</sup> The aim is to increase people's participation and help in the reconstruction and infrastructural development of Afghanistan. These SDPs are very useful in bringing a positive change at the grassroots level by creating a sense of partnership and ownership at the grass-root level.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.1.3 Humanitarian Assistance

Similarly, since 2001 India has been providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the areas of health, aviation, education, and food. For example, in the health sector, India has reopened the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul and has been actively involved in sending in medical missions to support humanitarian work in other parts of Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> In addition, India has emerged as an important destination for Afghans seeking medical assistance.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, India has donated aircraft to the state-run *Ariana* Afghan airlines. Likewise, India also donated hundreds of city buses for public transit facilities.<sup>48</sup> Shanthie Mariet observes that to strengthen the political sector of Afghanistan, India has heavily invested in capacity building by providing training and working with diplomats, parliamentarian staff, and legislators of Afghanistan. The aim is to shore up Afghanistan's administrative and governance capacity.<sup>49</sup>

The literature revealed that India has been successful in generating a positive image for itself in Afghanistan. India has been successful in winning the hearts and minds of the Afghans and has been able to generate enormous goodwill.<sup>50</sup> The reconstruction

<sup>43</sup>D'Souza, "India's role in the economic stabilization," 9.

<sup>44</sup> D'Souza, "India's role in the economic stabilization," 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> John Samuel, Abraham George, "Future of Development Cooperation: Policy Priorities for an Emerging India," (Institute for Sustainable Development & Governance (ISDG), OXFAM, Delhi, July 2016), 17; D'Souza, "India's Evolving Policy Contours," 190; Abdali, *Afghanistan-Pakistan-India*, 103-105.

<sup>46</sup> D'Souza, "India's role in the economic stabilization," 7.

<sup>47</sup> Kugiel, *India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy*, 144.

<sup>48</sup> D'Souza, "India's role in the economic stabilization," 7.

<sup>49</sup>D'Souza, "India's Evolving Policy Contours," 189.

<sup>50</sup> Tom A. Peter, "India outdoes US aid efforts in Afghanistan," *Public Radio International*, September 09, 2010, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2010-09-09/india-outdoes-us-aid-efforts-afghanistan>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).; Smruti S. Pattanaik, "India's Afghan Policy: Beyond



efforts and developmental projects have created a positive image for India in Afghanistan and India's policy is well received by Afghans.<sup>51</sup> In addition, because of the soft power policy, Indian Culture and Bollywood movies are loved in Afghanistan. Similarly, the majority of the Afghans respects India's democratic credentials and admires the values of secularism, religious tolerance of India.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, India's Afghan policy is well received by Afghans, and they are appreciating India's positive role towards Afghanistan. Afghanistan is largely supportive of the Indian role and interests in the region. There are multiple fields of engagement, infrastructure, development, aid, economy, trade, and so on. There is a genuine spirit of engagement in, both countries.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Since 2001, India has tried to pursue a proactive policy towards Afghanistan. Being an aspiring and rising power in the region, India seeks to enhance its security and influence by increasing the capabilities of its neighbors especially Afghanistan. In addition, India's Afghan policy in co-optive ways indicates India's ambitions as a rising power to make its presence felt in the region. Being the fifth-largest contributor to the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan, India has worked hard to win the confidence and hearts, and minds of both the Afghan government as well as the common people. India's soft power policy includes reconstruction projects like building roads, highways, parliament building, schools, etc.; humanitarian assistance like providing aid without any strings attached; capacity building like health care, institutional rebuilding, training of diplomats and bureaucrats, etc.; and providing scholarships to the Afghans. As soft power means policy by other means (by winning hearts and minds) other than hard power (sticks and carrots), India's soft power approach by forging

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Bilateralism," *Strategic Analysis* 36, issue. 4 (June 2012): 580, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2012.689527>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>51</sup>Kirit K Nair, "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014 Strategy, Policy and Implementation," (MANEKSHAW PAPER No. 55, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), 2015), 1, [https://www.claws.in/static/MP55\\_Indias-Role-in-Afghanistan-Post-2014-Strategy-Policy-and-Implementation.pdf](https://www.claws.in/static/MP55_Indias-Role-in-Afghanistan-Post-2014-Strategy-Policy-and-Implementation.pdf). (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>52</sup>Gareth Price, "India's Policy towards Afghanistan," (Asia ASP 2013/04, Chatham House, London, August 2013), 3, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/o813pp\\_indiaafghanistan.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Asia/o813pp_indiaafghanistan.pdf). (Accessed on 10-12-20).

<sup>53</sup>Wazhma Frogh, "Afghanistan: Getting closer to India in Neighbourhood Views of India," in "Neighbourhood Views of India," (Gateway House Research Paper No. 7, South Asia Studies, Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations, December 2012), 13, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Neighbourhood-Views-of-India.pdf>. (Accessed on 10-12-20).

economic (aid), humanitarian, capacity building and institutional links vis-à-vis Afghanistan tries to win the hearts and minds of both the Afghan government as well as of the common Afghans. The aim is to cultivate a favourable political atmosphere for India. The literature reveals that generated soft power and multi-faceted ties give India a certain edge that no other regional players can count on in their relations with Afghanistan. In addition, this study argues that India should use its soft power (the amount of support and popularity India has cultivated in Afghanistan) to play a major role in the peace process by providing impetus to the stalled intra-Afghan talks. Despite India's initially cautious approach and apprehension towards peace talks with the Taliban, India has been consistently and actively supporting the "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled" peace process in Afghanistan. This study argues that India should use its cultivated influence to encourage and motivate its Afghan partners to set aside their differences and move forward with the stalled peace process for the lasting peace and prosperity of Afghanistan. India needs to explore a broad-based coalition of all the stakeholders for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. In addition, India can play a major role by supporting and working together with other regional players even with Pakistan for permanent and long-lasting peace in Afghanistan. It is essential for India's regional and global aspirations that the Afghan peace process should move forward and a permanent and lasting peace settlement would emerge where all the stakeholders are satisfied.

### **About the Author**

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**Dr. Peerzada Tufail Ahmad**, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Kardan University, Kabul, Afghanistan. <t.ahmad@kardan.edu.af>