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Indo-Afghan Relations: Major Concern for Pakistan.

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Abstract

India and Afghanistan have had a strong relationship based on historical links. The role of India in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan has tightened their ties furthermore. The relationship between both the countries remained strong even during the war between India and Pakistan in 1965. However, with the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the role of India in Afghanistan was affected. The close relationship of the Taliban with Pakistan further worsened the role of India in Afghanistan. Later in 2001, with the emergence of the Karzai regime once again India renewed her ties with Afghanistan and set up new interest for herself in the country. The regime promised India a stable relation with Afghanistan and the fall of Taliban worked to India's advantage. The Strategic Partnership Agreement between India and Afghanistan gave new promises to their relationship. However, the close ties between these two countries was of a great concern for Pakistan. This article tries to answer certain questions related to India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Why India shows great interest in Afghanistan? Is India's interest in Afghanistan purely economic in nature? How does India's role in Afghanistan concern Pakistan?

Keyword: India, Afghanistan, Taliban, SPA, ICCF, Pakistan, first use,

Introduction

In order to understand the relationship between India and Afghanistan in the contemporary world one must understand the history behind the relationship. Even during the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965, India maintained a great relationship with Afghanistan. The conflict between India and Pakistan happened during the reign of King Zahir Shah (1933-1973). After the overthrow of the king, India still managed an excellent relationship with the communist regimes. The collapse of the Soviet Regime led by Mohammed Najibullah and the civil war within the country disrupted the influence of India in Afghanistan. Later during the Burhanuddin Rabbani (1992-1996) regime too India did not have much role to play in Afghanistan.

In 1996, the Taliban's seizure of power in Afghanistan made the relationship between India and Afghanistan worse. The Taliban's close relationship with Pakistan, its hatred towards religious minorities within the country resulted in the complete falling-out of the Indo-Afghan relations. It was at this point India worked out a relation with the Tajik dominated Northern Alliance of Ahmed Shah Massoud. This agreement was formed to oppose the Taliban.

With already relations strained between India and Afghanistan in 1999 an Indian aircraft was hijacked on Indian airspace and landed in Kandahar, Afghanistan. At this point when India tried to use force against the hijackers the Taliban refused to allow India to use force. After days of negotiating India had to release three imprisoned terrorist which the Taliban let free along with the hijackers. India was also forced to release Maulana Masood Azhar, head of the terrorist organization Jaish-e-Mohammed.

However, in 2001, the emergence of the Hamid Karzai regime gave an opportunity for India to develop her relations with Afghanistan. The downfall of the Taliban too exactly at this time was to India's Advantage.

The new regime in Afghanistan was promising for India. However, the United States was keen on restricting India to form any security related relations, India could have development related activities in Afghanistan but nothing related to security. The UPA led government in New Delhi too did not want to spoil its relations with the United States. Thus, did not challenge the United States on expanding its relations with Afghanistan.

Role of India in Afghanistan

It was in 2011, the Strategic partnership between New Delhi and Kabul made it clear that India has long term plan in Afghanistan. The partnership also reflects the strategic plan of India for the region. The partnership reflects on the idea that India will be involved in Afghanistan, their governance, development even though international forces withdraw in 2014. The Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) promises to assist rebuild the infrastructure of Afghanistan. India according to the SPA also provided assistance to build institutions and education in Afghanistan. India under the Strategic Partnership Agreement also promised to provide technical assistance to rebuild indigenous Afghan capacity in various areas. It also encourages investment in Afghanistan's natural resources. The agreement also provided duty free access to the Indian market where Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan based get export support. This agreement is a signal to our commitment towards peace and security in Afghanistan during its years of governmental transition. India stood as Afghanistan's fifth largest donor as of 2007 with \$US 2 billion.

India and Afghanistan are also engaged in high level political engagements. India and Afghanistan enjoyed high level bilateral visits since 2011. The External Affairs minister and National security Advisor visited in January and March 2011. The Prime Minister visited in May 2011. The same year Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited India in February 2011. The Defense Minister Wardak visited in June 2011. Their first Vice-President Marshal Fahim visited in June 2011, along with various other delegates.

There is no doubt that India has shown immense interest in developing her ties with Afghanistan over the years. Although the Taliban's role in Afghanistan disrupted India's relations with the country, India has continued to strengthen the relations between both the countries through various means. India being Afghanistan's fifth largest donor has helped the country in terms of infrastructure development, health and education. India built the Afghanistan Parliament in the year 2015 as a part of rebuilding Afghanistan. India along with building the Parliament of Afghanistan also provided training for their legislators. Another huge project is the Border Roads Organization that constructed a 218-kilometer-long highway. This highway links the town of Zaranj near the Iranian border to Delaram. India also helped build a power transmission line to Kabul. India also developed a hydroelectric project at the Salma dam in Herat. This Project cost \$180 million. Apart from these projects India has also extended

humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. India has shipped food to Afghanistan, sent doctors along with setting up camps for the provision of Artificial limbs and for amputees. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) granted about 500 scholarships for Students from Afghanistan on annual basis. India also agreed to train the Afghan National Army.

However, India's interest in Afghanistan is not only cultural and humanitarian. India has a specific interest in Afghanistan as it is also one of Pakistan's neighbors. India has been quietly working towards strengthening the security capabilities of Afghanistan. Along with developmental projects India has also been providing Afghanistan with high altitude warfare equipment. According to an analysis India has provided Afghanistan with warfare equipment, has shared military advisors of high ranking and helicopter technicians. All these are said to have been provided from their clandestine foreign intelligence, and counter espionage organizations, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).

However, all these efforts of India in Afghanistan were possible due to the presence of US and International Security Assistance force (ISAF) military presence. The presence of US and the ISAF provided an atmosphere of security for India in Afghanistan. It should also be noted that the involvement of India in Afghanistan has been silent. Having said that why does India show interest in Afghanistan? How has this relation between India and Afghanistan been received in Pakistan?

Pakistan's Concerns

Although India's presence in Afghanistan is highly non-threatening in nature, it has not been well received in Pakistan. In spite of India's relation with Afghanistan being completely development oriented, the role of India in Afghanistan has been a source of misgivings withing Pakistan. In order to understand the concern of Pakistan with respect to Indo-Afghan relations it is essential to understand the History. It was believed that, when Pakistan was defeated by India in 1971, Pakistan turned the attention towards Afghanistan. Pakistan aimed at forming a military back up in Afghanistan. A military regime in Afghanistan that will provide Pakistan the necessary backup if needed in the future. This assumption later lost its momentum when Pakistan acquired its nuclear weapons capability. Once Pakistan acquired its own nuclear deterrent capability, it could counter India. The presence of nuclear weapons in Pakistan made it clear that India cannot mount an attack of full vigor on Pakistan as Pakistan can use the first use of nuclear weapons. There has been enough evidence to substantiate that Pakistan has declaratory as well as operational doctrines that support the first use of nuclear weapons by Pakistan.

Apart from Strategic interest in Afghanistan there are others reasons for Pakistan to be worried about India's presence in Afghanistan. India's presence in Afghanistan could provide a gateway to the resourceful Central Asia. The presence of India in Afghanistan is also viewed as a problem in Pakistan as the presence of India in Afghanistan can provide intelligence on the western parts of Pakistan. Another important aspect that cautions Pakistan is that if the future Regime in Afghanistan and India share mutual interest it could become a huge problem for Pakistan. This will also disrupt the interest of Pakistan to use Afghan territory to organize and train their proxy terrorist groups against India. Considering the above reasons, it can be justified why Pakistan wants to block the ties between India and Afghanistan. Until late 2011, it should be noted that policy makers in the United States too supported the claims

of Pakistan. It was viewed by many US policy makers that although India provided a lot of developmental projects in Afghanistan it was also provoking Pakistan with fear. Later with the shake in the relations between United States and Pakistan post Osama bin Laden's killing the stand taken by United States has changed considerably. It was when key policy makers in the US suggested that authorities in Pakistan were aware of the whereabouts of bin Laden and the uncooperative nature of Pakistan to help US dismantle terrorist organizations within their territory the attitude of US changed. Later in 2011, when a statement was made on the Haqqani network by a US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Indo-Pak relations faced a rift.

India's decision to expand her ties with Afghanistan immediately created a hostile reaction in Pakistan. However, Afghanistan did not want to spoil their relations with Pakistan over their wider ties with India. In order to make sure of the fact that the relation between India and Afghanistan will not disrupt the relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Afghan ambassador to Pakistan met with both General Ashfaq Parvez Kiyani and foreign Secretary Salman Bashir and assured that the Indo-Afghan relations will not affect their relations.

The relation between India and Afghanistan has been a topic of concern for Pakistan over the years. Whether these three countries can work together and co-exist peacefully is for the future to tell but the developments in Indo-Pak relations has shown a promising sign towards this. One of the instances when India and Pakistan had a breakthrough in trade relations in 2011. After years of dragging around the issue Pakistan's Cabinet finally granted India with the Most Favored Nation (MFN). Although this is a very minor step it shows potential towards reducing the long-standing hostile relation between both the countries. Another event that supports the peaceful coexistence of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan is the meeting that was held in Istanbul in 2011 with representatives from Afghanistan, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and The United States along with observers from the NATO, the EU and the UN. The meeting brought the states together towards regional cooperation and support. However, one of the issues addressed at the meeting was the future of Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations.

However, India's interest in Afghanistan has been made clear. India is clearly going to pursue her policy of development and assistance in Afghanistan as India refuses to see Afghanistan become an Islamist Haven which might have disastrous effect on India. It has also been made clear that irrespective of the change in Government in New Delhi their interest in Afghanistan has not changed. Thus, India will continue to fight against the re emergence of elements that cause problems for India in Afghanistan. Along with this India will also try to maintain a substantial diplomatic and economic relation with Afghanistan that can help India with her relations in Central Asia.

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