

Afghan Reconstruction: Impact of Indian Contribution on Pak-Afghan Relations

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Abstract: Afghanistan holds a special geographical placement in the region and has been endowed with lots of natural sources. However, most of these resources are not readily available for consumption and need exploration and the level of processing which is beyond the capacity of a country devastated by decades of war. Dedicated and serious support is needed to enable Afghanistan to connect within the region and beyond in terms of economics, politics, and security.

This research has probed into complex dynamics of reconstruction efforts underway in Afghanistan. India had gained influence up until the 2021 when the US withdrew from Afghanistan, that led to the establishment of Taliban and a decline in Indian dominance and interests. However, due to its long-time rivalry with Pakistan, India had somewhat reestablished these relations with the strategy to encircle Pakistan and to establish dominance in the area, while the other regional powers were assessing it as India's adherence to American aims and part of prospective U.S. strategic actions toward Afghanistan. This research also examines Pakistan's viewpoint and sheds light on the steps Pakistan might take to weaken the Indo-Afghan connection.

The increased engagement of India and Afghanistan on economic and security issues was viewed politically and with skepticism and as an anti-Pakistan agenda by Pakistan as it has a. Also, due to, India was not viewed amongst core participants by the regional powers. As Afghanistan underwent reconstruction, India surfaced as a prominent participant and invested extensively in multiple development projects. Indian proactive engagement had led to deeper Indo-Afghan ties, leading to economic and political restructuring in the region. With a historical perspective of tensions between India and Pakistan, this article has examined how this elevation in relations between the two would impact Pakistan. It explores economic influences, geopolitical implications that tend to cause a reshuffle in regional power balances, and security concerns for Pakistan. The article provides an understanding of the three-sided connection between India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan from the perspective of Afghan reconstruction, where the situation direly demands proactive assistance for Afghanistan, with a clear approach above and beyond any advantageous adventure, for the long-term stability of Afghanistan and the region.

Keywords: Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Investments, Projects, Infrastructure, Objectives, Peace, Region.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, India had decided to move into the situation, with its peculiar political intentions, and taking advantage of American adherence due to matching geo-political aims, calling it the participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan devastated by the long war stretched over generations. However, looking at the level and nature of this engagement was not appreciated by Pakistan.

Outline of Indian Initiatives in Afghan Development

The first country to sign an official aid agreement for rebuilding and security with Afghanistan was India. An India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership was initiated, which was created on October 4, 2011. The reduction of the US military

presence in Afghanistan was strongly linked to this collaboration, as Americans would trust India more than any country in the region when it is meant to safeguard American interests (Raipeha, 2013).

A secure, prosperous, and democratic Afghanistan was beneficial to India's strategic goals, and India recognized that its engagement was critical to the long-term stability of Afghanistan, and it was the time to play an effective role in the region. (As stated by Pant in 2010).

Over the last decade, India has primarily taken advantage of its privileged connections with President Hamid Karzai and the security guarantees provided by the United States and NATO. By virtue of the above quoted relations, India had manipulated the scenario to accomplish its varied objectives in Afghanistan. But with the ISAF's withdrawal scheduled for 2014, India must formulate its future policies in the face of several unknowns (Fair, 2014).

There was a clear indication of India's engagement in Afghan development projects. India ranked as the sixth-largest supplier of assistance to Afghanistan in the years after 9/11, ranking behind the US, UK, Japan, Canada, and Germany. Till 2011, India had given over \$1.5 billion in assistance to Afghanistan. Approximately 4,000 Indians have contributed to 34 different Afghan development initiatives (Kugiel, 2011).

There were many projects funded by India. The Border Road Organization of the Indian Army constructed a 218-kilometer route to connect the towns of Zaranj on the Iran–Afghanistan border and Delaram on the Kandahar–Heart highway in Heart province. This road connects Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar. Both projects were to benefit India economically and politically, parallel to Afghanistan and Iran. A 202-kilometer electricity communication cable begins from Pul-e-Khumri and connects Kabul. Substations go via the 4,400-meter-high Salang series. In November 2004, construction began on the Salma Dam on the Huri-Rud River, which was located 164 kilometers east of the Heart province in Afghanistan. With the 42 MW of electricity generated by this dam, 75,000 hectares of land could be irrigated. With facilities in Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Mazare-Sharif, and Kandahar, the Indian Medical Missions had the capacity to treat 360,000 patients each year (Choudhary, 2001).

A new parliament building was constructed, along with the donation of 400 buses, 200 minibusses, and 105 service cars, the training of diplomats and police officials, the provision of three planes to Ariana Airlines – Afghanistan's national airline, and the provision of 300 vehicles to the Afghan army. They also came with a TV up and down function and a telecommunications setup. Protein crackers weighing 100 g were given to two million youngsters every day. The Afghan people had spoken highly of the atmosphere that India helped to establish via its long-term investments (Majeed & Bashir, 2023).

Impact Evaluation of Indian Engagement on Pak-Afghan Affairs

The lack of trust between Pakistan and India was exacerbated by India's extensive financial and crucial engagement in Afghanistan, leading to a new wave of animosity. To sow seeds of distrust between the two Muslim nations, India was engaged in widespread media campaigns tying terrorist incidents in Afghanistan to Pakistan. In the cover of rehabilitation support, India politically created a wedge between Pakistan and the Taliban and undermined Pakistan's influence in the country. On the other hand, the Taliban government was now open to collaborating within the region and beyond to manage the affairs. Indian strategists had begun engaging the Taliban administration on multiple fronts, leading to a drift with Pakistan. To create an impression that Pakistan was incapable of supporting security issues, India was believed to be funding Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which would weaken Pakistan's political and economic foundations and affect its capability to deal externally. To accomplish the strategic goals, India trained and infiltrated anti-Pakistan rebel and terrorist forces on Afghan territory for covert operations within Pakistan under the coalition administration.

For greater influence, India could serve as a bridge between the Taliban government and the US-led Western community. An embassy in Kabul was established with a limited staff. This platform could present India as an arbitrator to initiate negotiations with the US and help realign Afghan policies to match the global demands. If India could reach this point in time, it might implement its policies and begin sharing information with the Taliban to increase security (Farooq, 2022).

On the other hand, Pakistan was trying to put an end to India's influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan has always pursued to use the Afghan territory in its favor, particularly concerning India, which she had successfully done in the past. Before the Taliban's overthrow in Afghanistan, Pakistan's official policy was to forge a lasting alliance with Afghanistan. Reengaging Pakistan in Afghanistan was something India wanted to avoid, as Pakistan's involvement there would affect India's strategic depth. It was clear from India's engagement in Kabul that the country hoped Afghanistan would never again face the kind

of challenges that may spark a conflict. However, Indian supplies to Afghanistan with cutting-edge weaponry and military hardware had occurred without considering the possibility that they may be used against other states in the event of a conflict and could threaten the regional security (Mustafa et al., 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study has extracted data from secondary sources, specifically the recently published research. The article has presented the following information presented by researchers to formulate the conclusion.

Historical Perspective

The relations between India and Afghanistan have been cordial ever since 1947. A friendship treaty signed in 1950 marked a formal diplomatic beginning of the relationship. The first bitter instance was the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which went unopposed by Indira Gandhi because of the strong strategic links she had developed with the Soviet Union (Fair, 2010).

However, the Indian officials voiced through private forums their disapproval of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. The Indian government was worried that the Cold War was spreading to their country's borders. While all this was going on, economic and cultural interaction between the two countries continued even after the Indian stance on the Soviet invasion. At the start of 1984, the trade contacts were revisited and expanded by the two by signing a deal. A cultural exchange program was set up in New Delhi in August 1985 and was operated from 1985 to 1987. By virtue of this agreement, India had approved 10 scholarships for Afghanistan, a bunch of fellowships, and training in areas like community outreach and child care and development (D'Souza, 2011).

However, India's role in Afghanistan remained at a minimum in the 1980s due to the US-backed jihad against Russia that was put into action through Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf nations and was meant to push the Soviet Union back to its borders. Funds were being provided through Pakistan to Pashtun Islamist armed groups via seven Sunni organizations. (Rubin, 2002).

India found it challenging to advance its interests in this environment. Between 1979 and 1989, it continued concentrating on projects like irrigation, hydroelectric power, and industry in Afghanistan. In 1987, it decided to strengthen economic cooperation and agreed to increase communication in commerce and industry and create connected banking channels.

In September 1989, they signed to establish a Joint Business Council to improve commerce. Multiple agricultural, telecommunications, and cultural exchange agreements were established during the 1990s. This period was full of frequent high-ranking engagements between the two countries. The construction of a gynecological hospital and cooperation in the fields of agronomy, cartography, metrology, and tourism were among the many new areas where India had pledged to Afghan rehabilitation. After the Taliban gained power in 1996, India's influence was affected. Not acknowledging the Taliban administration in September 1996 had led to the closure of the Indian embassy in Kabul. The only nations who recognized the authority of the Taliban were Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. The Taliban government preferred Pakistan. To counter Pakistan's influence and preserve its own sway in Afghanistan, India established relations with the Northern Alliance and reinforced their military with a \$10 million donation of high-altitude war equipment via RAW. The Indian security experts were indeed fully supporting the Northern Alliance and were ensuring their technical perfection (Majeed & Bashir, 2023).

While rebuilding Indo-Afghan Relations in the Wake of 9/11, India made serious efforts to reassert its influence in Afghanistan post-9/11 era. The American goals for Afghanistan were crystal clear to the pro-Indian elements in Kabul at this time. Throughout the Northern Alliance's rise to power, India remained steadfast in its support (Baloch & Niazi, 2008).

Expanding its influence throughout South Asia was one of India's long-term goals. India sought to use Afghanistan as a conduit to connect Central Asia and South Asia. India had expanded its economic connectivity with Afghanistan via the SAARC platform as well (D'Souza, 2011).

Indian diplomatic relations with Afghanistan were furthered with the opening of four new consulates at Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Herat. It also altered its diplomatic ties with Afghanistan (Fair, 2010).

Hamid Karzai became president of Afghanistan's interim government after the Bonn Conference in December 2001. The control of the Northern Alliance over the Afghan government allowed India to take advantage of the situation and establish

several development initiatives in the country to expand its strategic interests. India had invested in Afghanistan's economics, infrastructure, healthcare, training in different sectors, institutional restructuring, and development and had given \$100 million for such projects. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Afghanistan twice after the September 11 attacks, whereas President Karzai visited India nine times. In May 2011, soon after Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan, Manmohan Singh pledged an extra \$500 million in developmental assistance for Afghanistan during his subsequent visit. A strategic agreement was reached between Afghanistan and India during Karzai's October 2011 visit (Kugiel, 2011).

Pakistan had already been participating in Afghanistan's rehabilitation and rebuilding efforts, and its leadership had acknowledged the new Afghan setup. The strategic importance of Afghanistan could be judged by looking at how strong nations had taken use of its location as a gateway to Central Asian Republics in the name of the war on terror. During the visit to Islamabad in February 2002, Afghan President Hamid Karzai reviewed bilateral ties with Pakistan. In all key respects, Pakistan had reiterated its intention to support the recently elected Afghan government (Durani & Khan, 2002).

While visiting Kabul in April 2002, President Musharraf promised \$100 million in funding to help rebuild Afghanistan. Pakistan also organized the Multi-Donor Conference to solicit financial and political support for rebuilding Afghanistan. Pakistan sealed the Pak-Afghan border in 2004 and 2005 to further reassure Kabul and allay their fears. The Afghan president's accusations that Pakistan was aiding the Taliban and funding terrorism in Afghanistan had worsened the relations between the two countries.

While visiting Karzai in March 2006, the interior minister of Pakistan offered to fence the border and install mines to block the influx of terrorists on both sides, but Karzai turned down the idea. Pakistan sent 80,000 active-duty and paramilitary soldiers to reinforce the security along its western border. Pakistan would prefer a peaceful and affluent neighborhood over an unstable one in Afghanistan. Border battles between Pakistan and Afghanistan lasted for a long period, and Afghan security forces crossed into Pakistani territory hundreds of times. A new problem had emerged for Pakistan in the form of India's growing attention to meddle in Afghan affairs. Since 2001, Overseas Indians have grown into significant investors in Afghanistan, added by disrupting Pakistan with Indian spies and funding terrorism inside Pakistan. Turkey had been attempting to smooth up tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan for quite some time. The two nations' heads of state and ministers met in meetings set up by Turkey. Musharraf and Karzai established a CBM working group during their 2007 meeting. The Pakistan People's Party had provided services at national meetings after the 2008 Pakistani general election. Bringing the two neighbors' ties back to normal was a top priority for the PPP. President Karzai of Afghanistan attended Pakistan President Asif Zardari's swearing ceremony. During their meeting, the leaders pledged to back each other up in the fight against terrorism. Both nations struck an agreement to combat terrorism and increased their cooperation during Zardari's 2009 reciprocal visit to Kabul. There was a conference of foreign ministers in September 2010 to discuss anti-terrorism agendas, following the promises. There was an increase in distrust and an ongoing game of finger-pointing under the presidency of Hamid Karzai (Idrees & Naazer, 2022).

Afghan Development Projects Introduced by India

Infrastructure Improvements

Regarding the humanitarian aid given to Afghanistan by many countries, India was the leading non-Western contributor. From 2001 to 2021, the average was at least \$81 million yearly. Due to factors such as the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and Ghani's foreign policy, the amount has decreased since 2015, when it reached US \$152 million a year. Afghanistan was the second most important recipient of Indian development aid. Consistent throughout the time, India's policy was built on implementing projects in four complementing pillars: infrastructure development, education, state building, and humanitarian aid. This strategy has been unaffected by changes in the value of money.

India entered an agreement with Afghanistan in 2019 to modernize the infrastructure and to construct a logistical network that would allow products to be transported between Afghanistan and India—the so-called India-Iran-Afghanistan corridor aimed to enhance commerce between the three nations and push the Afghan economy up. Islamabad had blocked, for political reasons, the quickest route between India and Afghanistan, which was passing through Pakistan; their focus was shifted to the Iranian port of Chabahar. Indian investments in Chabahar facilitated the delivery of products from Indian ports to Zaranj, a border town in Afghanistan, via Iran. The next step was transportation to the Herat-Kandahar highway. India had funded a 124-mile route. Building this road had cut travel time on this route from thirteen hours to two, allowing

commodities to reach almost every part of Afghanistan. This resulted in a tenfold increase in the amount of trade. The expansion of businesses and export output were aided by India's technological infrastructure and transport infrastructure. Examples of such infrastructure projects include the 126-mile power line to transmit energy from power plants in northern Afghanistan to Kabul and the reconstruction of one of the biggest dams in Afghanistan, named the Afghan-India Friendship Dam. It had a cost of \$275 million. This allowed for an increase in agricultural production over an additional area of more than 70,000 hectares. The majority of India's infrastructure projects were executed by state-owned organizations. Afghanistan's exports to India jumped from \$12.2 million in 2001 to \$499 million in 2020, mostly due to the sale of agricultural goods. This aligned with India's policy, as it aimed to meet the needs of its fast-expanding population. India was the leading provider of medications to Afghanistan, and its imports into the country rose from \$21 million in 2001 to \$855 million in 2020.

Investment in Education and Healthcare

Education included initiatives that amplified infrastructure development. Providing scholarships for Afghan youngsters to attend colleges in the sponsoring nation was the most essential instrument in establishing social capital. Donors were able to boost their soft power via this program since the scholarship beneficiaries eventually became part of Afghanistan's elite. India was first among emerging contributors in scholarship awards, with up to 1,500 given annually. The School Feeding Program, through which India supplied bakery goods to 2 million students as an incentive to study, was another example of typical donor activity and invoked society's adherence. Another example was the creation of technical and agricultural universities, like the Kandahar Agricultural University funded by India. Compared to other rising contributors, India stood out for its unwavering backing of vocational education, particularly for women. The Indian government and the non-governmental organization known as the Self-Employed Women's Association had worked together to educate over three thousand women in fields such as food processing, garment sewing, jewelry manufacturing, and sales. Donors had to hire foreign labor to finish assistance projects. Therefore, the shortage of skilled artisans seemed to be a huge issue with development. These initiatives prepared individuals to work in the private sector or the other humanitarian programs, both of which positively impacted Afghanistan's development.

India sent humanitarian help, mostly medical supplies. Numerous Afghans went to India for medical care every year. Regarding healthcare, India was becoming one of Afghanistan's most valuable allies. India had helped build medical facilities in Afghanistan and had a policy of facilitating visas for Afghan medical tourists so that they may get treatment in Indian hospitals. In large Afghan cities, health clinics and medical missions were established, and thousands of patients were supplied with medical supplies.

Administrative and Law Enforcement Training

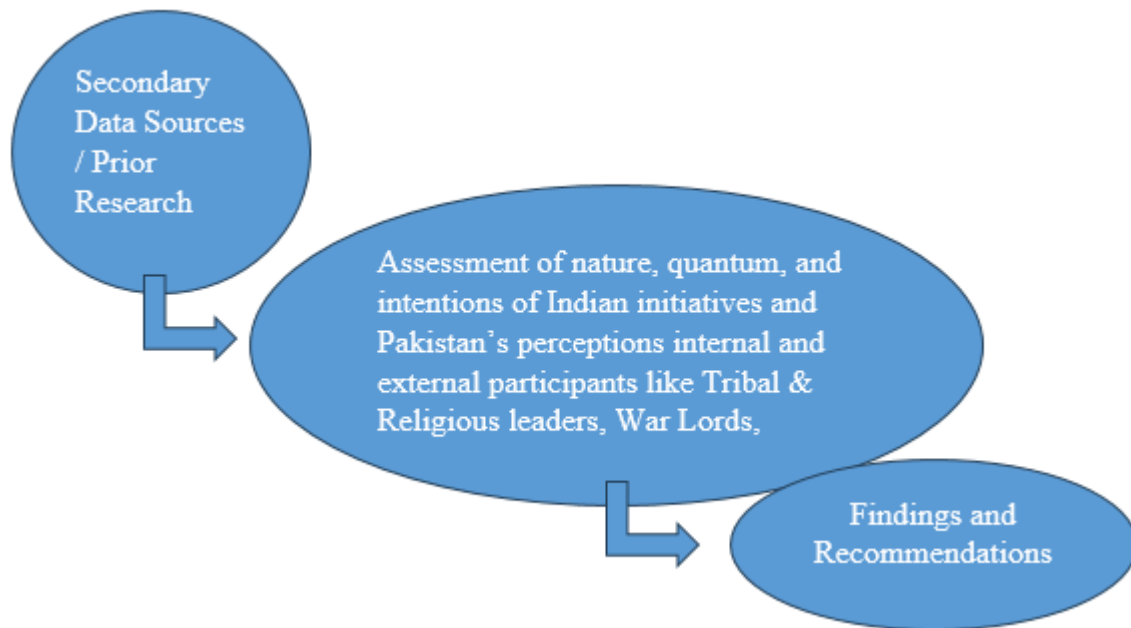
Promoting the establishment of secular state institutions was the third tenet of India's development policy for Afghanistan from 2001 to 2021, which was centered on state building. Training Afghan ministerial-level officials, attorneys, physicians, judges, businesspeople, and military officers, including women, has been an area of concentration for India's training programs. India also funded projects associated with Afghan national symbols, such as a parliament building complex, the restoration of the Stor Palace, a symbol of Afghan statehood, and the restoration of Kabul's historic district, in addition to elite training in Afghanistan.

Commercial Trade

A preferential trade agreement was signed between Afghanistan and India in 2003, lowering tariffs and other commercial obstacles. Afghanistan's exports to India jumped mostly due to the sale of agricultural goods, as detailed earlier, and how it was meant to meet Indian needs for her growing population, which had a considerable boost for Afghan exports. Also, India was the leading provider of medications to Afghanistan. The most prominent growth elements were textiles, processed goods, stimulants like coffee or tobacco, and medicines. India was now one of Afghanistan's most important commercial partners. Thanks to a 40-fold rise in trade between 2001 and 2021 made possible by such programs and the lowering of administrative hurdles to commerce. From 2001 to 2021, roughly 100 firms, mostly from the service sector, invested in Afghanistan, with an estimated worth of around \$25 million. The state-owned Steel Authority of India Limited was in charge of a partnership to build the Bamyán iron ore mine, the biggest investment by India. However, the project never materialized (Dalek, 2023)

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach has been applied to process this research. As against the quantitative method, qualitative research is the one associated with subjective phenomena of social sciences and is predominantly based on norms and opinions not assessable numerically. This study was conducted using the deductive method to explore the impact of Indian contribution on Pak-Afghan relations during the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. The study is comprised of probing into available research followed by analysis of the situation. It has been intended to comprehend the balance of economic and political impacts perceived by the concerned parties.



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4. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Geopolitical Dynamics – Indian Objectives and Conduct in the Region

When it comes to politics, India has two goals. Firstly, to stop Pakistan from using the ISI to undermine Indian influence. A prime example was the bombing of the Indian mission in Kabul, which was reportedly carried out at the request of the ISI. Secondly, to protect regional security from extremist organizations like al Qaeda and the Taliban by denying them political space. India intended to engage Afghanistan to link with energy-rich Central Asia. The Afghan people reflected support for Indian-aided rehabilitation programs that sought to develop the nation. New Delhi has been working hard to achieve its strategic goals in the country. On the eve of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's visit to New Delhi in August 2008, the Indian government announced a US\$450 million assistance package, further reiterating their commitment. This was on top of the US\$750 million previously committed, putting India among the top five donor nations. Such endeavors got even more importance considering the resurgent Taliban, who hold up to 54 percent of Afghan land, according to US and British estimates. Given this scenario, it was critical to redouble the efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.

The apparent objective of India in Afghanistan was to counter the influence of the Taliban, establish a transportation and energy corridor to Central Asia, and stop the spreading of drugs and weapons. New Delhi must have coordinated its efforts with different ethnic groups and other countries to stop the Taliban from seizing power again. Particularly the Pushtuns, who predominantly make up the Taliban, but their efforts to assist the Bonn process after the Taliban's collapse were warmly appreciated and helped bring about some political stability. The long-term development projects in Afghanistan, supported by Indian aid programs, had won the hearts of the Afghan people and further efforts to stabilize the country. These programs cover a wide range of areas, including telecommunications, electricity generation, construction of crucial road links, and training educators, diplomats, military, and police officers. The health, education, and agricultural sectors. However, all this

¹ Diagram by the Author of this article to display the methodological process.

needs India's full attention. Giving Afghans a stake in the development process and increasing India's own status among the public, rebuilding activities funded by India enabled appropriate local engagement. India had to do a better job of leveraging the goodwill it had received by strengthening its soft power.

If Afghanistan gets stabilized via investment, it could provide a pathway for energy resources from Central Asia to reach the Indian market. That would give stability to the energy market in the Middle East by displacing some of the current suppliers. If the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India project had been considered, gas from Turkmenistan's Daulatabad reserves could have been piped to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan. The operations of radical Islamist terrorist groups with the means to cause problems for India had access to a large portion of the funds obtained from underground commerce. As part of its strategy to combat drug trafficking, India should have funded widespread farmer education programs on the dangers of growing opium, which included the loss of soil and minerals as well. On the other hand, raising awareness and educating the public isn't enough; farmers also need access to high-quality inputs, such as machinery and other high-value crops (Sharma, 2022).

Concerns and Strategic Reactions of Pakistan

Common challenges faced by Pakistan and Afghanistan include debasement, terrorist organizations, radicalism, fear-based tyranny, a laid-back economy, human rights abuses, and socio-fiscal imbalances. In the fight against terrorism, it was important to address the most frequent threats first. These initiatives would aid in addressing concerns about internal soundness. Both countries' financial and social indicators would benefit from an entity focusing on multinational super projects. The fundamental problem, finally linked to internal factors, was the doubt between the two countries. Concerning externalization, the worst security and money-related advice was often given. The temptation to blame foreign forces for a country's problems was strong, but doing so invites internal and external spoilers that only worsen matters. Naturally, a stable neighborhood has positive effects and encourages personal growth. A stable Afghanistan would bolster Pakistan's geo-fiscal priorities. On the other hand, Pakistan must prioritize investments in Afghanistan in terms of both security and money. Pakistan sought balance in its ties with major powers and was instead motivated by national zeal. It might be able to combine the best features of both worlds if that's the case.

Pakistan may choose to strengthen its relationship with the United States and every key influence on the world by having money securely tucked away and granting substantial market opportunities. Pakistan could meet its expectations if the current Afghan government continues its pursuit of peaceful ties with all neighbors, an impartial policy in interstate relations, and useful employment in regional security. To destabilize Pakistan indirectly via its western borders, India relied on Kautilya's Doctrine to strengthen cooperation with the Afghan government, gain confidence, and keep this trust alive and healthy through military and money-related exchanges. Pakistan must make genuine efforts to contribute to the peace process in Afghanistan to restore the bilateral relationship. Being the only Muslim nation with nuclear weapons gives it considerable influence over Muslim choices and assessments of peace (Faheem et al., 2022).

Afghan Diplomatic Engagements in the Region

Despite the global condemnation of human rights abuses against women and children, the Afghanistan neighbors have willingly engaged with the Taliban government to solve its security and economic stability concerns. Taliban have realized the value of bilateral and multilateral relations and have responded with political maturity this time. They intend to extend diplomatic relations beyond the immediate neighboring nations. Although all neighbors look at Afghanistan according to their respective peculiar circumstances, however, everyone acknowledges the need to maintain connections with the sitting government, although not with considerable success so far.

Regional players wanted deeper interactions with Kabul, even when Western officials canceled talks with the Taliban. Also, contrary to the West, the regional nations generally do not prioritize the same topics of criticism of the Taliban. They understand that dialogue is how to moderate the Taliban's behavior and protect their national and regional interests rather than having an isolated neighbor. It seems to be a great chance for Kabul to join back the normal operational flows and actively participate in external affairs. It leads to a more positive scenario, as speculated. As the Taliban strengthened their grip on the country, the neighbors were worried about a replay of what was going on during the last Taliban regime. One notable exception was Pakistan, where the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan assaults intensified during the first two years of the Taliban's rule, considerably intensifying relations with Islamabad.

Internally, the Taliban have followed a tried-and-true tactic for addressing regional concerns over almost all terrorist groups. They restrained from killing or capturing anybody they suspected of being militant and assisted them instead in starting new lives to limit their aspirations and dismantle their hierarchies.

A possible starting point for improved regional security cooperation would be for all parties to tone down their rhetoric and reach an agreement on the facts, regardless of their agendas. The Taliban haven't established enough trust yet with regional allies to openly exchange intelligence. A significant factor is the difference in approach between Kabul and the area toward Islamist terrorist organizations. To bridge this gap, a shared forum is needed to debate and resolve issues associated with regional security. Better customs integration and effective control of Afghanistan's rough borders would benefit all parties.

The economy was the other big concern regarding regional relations. Projects related to trade were put on hold during Afghanistan's decades-long civil war. However, commercial opportunities began to appear in regional capitals recently. Plans to facilitate the international transportation of trucks, railcars, gas, and electricity have been revived. Even though there would be certain obstacles that the Taliban could not overcome, they seemed eager to begin work on such projects.

Enhanced regional economic connection was highly justified, particularly in the energy sector, where South Asia needed new sources of power, gas, and oil, and Central Asian nations were seeking new markets. Additionally, the region has strategic motives to support Afghanistan for economic integration and to attain stability. It would appease the Taliban's critics and establish a more stable de facto rule. The Taliban leadership sees this kind of integration as a way to ensure their rule in Afghanistan continues for the foreseeable future.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite continued efforts, regular trade ties, and a long-shared history, Pakistan never gained Afghanistan's confidence and status as a trusted neighbor. Afghanistan must realize that its internal peace and development have always been highly dependent on political, geographical, and economic collaboration with Pakistan, and a strong bilateral relationship with Pakistan is required to eradicate terrorism in the area. One step is to resolve the issue of Afghan refugees having more border control for greater security and peace and an environment adherent to increased diplomatic relations, trade and commerce, and cultural exchanges.

Pakistan believes that Indian plans to stay in Afghanistan are meant for dominance in the region and aimed at alleged covert operations against Pakistan. Apparently, Indian policies about Afghanistan align more with countries unrelated to the region, like the US and Europe, which leads to further tensions between the two countries.

In view of Afghan adherence and eagerness towards India and Indian response in recent years, Pakistan needs to reassess its policies with both Afghanistan and India to maintain balance in relations and for the long-term betterment of the region. To maintain the level of involvement in Afghan affairs, Pakistan must also work on developing better relations with the Afghan public, parallel to the Afghan government and the power centers.

Taking a regional strategy to Afghanistan makes perfect sense in theory. The chances of success would be greatly enhanced if Afghanistan's bordering neighbors could work together to achieve the primary goals of domestic and international participants. Without a unified approach, achieving the effective consensus needed to support development objectives would be impossible.

So, even when there was a desire for collaboration, many actions were viewed negatively to intensify the already existing regional rivalries, and these bilateral conflicts always overcame the goal of Afghan rehabilitation.

Implications

The complex and developing dynamics of India-Afghanistan relations have significant implications for Pakistan that could affect its geopolitical and strategic position. Strong recent ties emerging out of a historically complex relationship between India and Afghanistan were seen by Pakistan as a strategic competition and security concern due to strong geopolitical rivalry with India.

An unparalleled boost in the India-Afghanistan relationship, featuring enhanced economic cooperation, infrastructure support, and diplomatic ties, intensified Pakistan's strategic worries. Pakistan fears the encirclement of increased Indian influence around its borders, which could challenge Pakistan's position and influence in Afghanistan and give India an upper hand in further anti-Pakistan activities.

Pakistan considers Indian support for Afghanistan detrimental to its interests, especially the backing of different kinds of movements within Pakistan. Moreover, any instability in Afghanistan could spill into Pakistan and lead to internal unrest. Resolving this trilateral complexity in the region is of the utmost importance. At the same time, this interdependence of regional stability leads to prospective cooperation.

6. CONCLUSION

Any stability attempts for Afghan rehabilitation depend on the shared efforts of Afghanistan and its neighbors. Through mutual collaboration regarding the Afghan situation, hostile Indo-Pak relations could also be moderated, leading to regional trust and growth. Sincere efforts to build Afghanistan would lead to joint trilateral projects for economic uplift, manage the security situation, and help create a better picture of South Asia.

India has emerged as a consistent and dedicated rehabilitation partner for Afghanistan. It has left a legacy that is evidenced by thoughtfully implemented support. During two decades of active participation in infrastructure, security, health, education, and administrative training. The development works faced suspension when the Taliban took over in August 2021 despite requests by the Afghan government for continuity. India intends to play a major role in the region due to its massive geographical and demographic strength, which requires internal strength and a strong and growing neighborhood. This inconsistency in regional policies and matching the strategic decision with international powers leads to skepticism, especially when such steps clearly point towards India's neighboring rivalries.

Pakistan views this whole scenario as negative political intentions on the part of India. India needs to reassess its position in a long-term perspective and must not let its efforts in Afghanistan go to waste and strive not to be viewed as a proxy of international political players.

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