

The Current India-Afghanistan Relationship: Implications for Pakistan (An Analytical Study)

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Abstract

The current study is an analysis of Pak-Afghan relations in the post-Karzai era. Pakistan and Afghanistan are two neighbours, having 2430 km long border and bonded in the same history and religion but have always been found to malign each other's interests. Both have reservations against each other. Afghanistan considers Durand Line to be an imaginary line. Pakistan considers it a capricious idea having no footing. Pakistan's policy of strategic depth to safeguard her stakes in Afghanistan infuriates the latter who condemn this notion altogether and instead, allies herself with India. India invests heavily in Afghanistan and her image in the people of Afghanistan is highly appreciated. The intimacy of the two nations has implications for Pakistan which are explained in the last part of this paper.

Keywords: Durand Line, India, Neighbors, Pak-Afghan Relations, Strategic Depth.

Introduction

The presidential election was held in Afghanistan in June 2014. As a result of that election Ashraf Ghani became president of Afghanistan and, due to the electoral compromise, Abdullah Abdullah became the Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan. Ashraf Ghani was considered to be pro-Pakistan and Abdullah Abdullah pro-India. Relations with Pakistan in Karzai presidency were noted to be cold. Ashraf Ghani visited Pakistan in the first place to seek a settlement to the urgent riddle of insurgency destabilizing Afghanistan. He met the civilian leadership of Pakistan as well as military men in General Head Quarters and sought their assistance in this regard. Both of them pledged to provide the requisite support. In the meanwhile, Ashraf Ghani delayed visiting India and also refused to take heavy weapons from them (Sial, 2016). He struck trade deals with Pakistan to enhance trade relations.

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Ghani allowed investors from Pakistan to the free industrial zones of Afghanistan. Pakistan endeavoured to bring Taliban to the negotiating table and was triumphant by bringing them to the Murree talks in July 2015 (Sial, 2016). After the death of Mullah Umer, the Afghan side thought it to be a treacherous act by Pakistan to derail the reconciliation process (Baqai, 2016). Ashraf Ghani felt sorry for the Pakistani leadership who could not keep their words. At the fifth Heart of Asia Conference held in Islamabad in December 2015, optimism arose that now both sides would come forward and settle this issue once and for all. Afterwards, some prominent incidents, especially the terrorist attacks in which scores of security men and civilians were killed further deteriorated relations which led Ghani to lean towards India and thus Pakistan lost that window of opportunity president Ghani had opened (Khar, 2016). Ghani later accused Pakistan of harbouring terrorists (Conference, 2016). He was also wary of the military operation in the tribal areas which according to him have caused the Taliban fled to Afghanistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, has always been cautious of the Afghan stance on certain issues which the former thought not to be negotiable. Remarkable among them is the border issue (Durand Line) (Kasuri, 2015). Pakistan has also reservations that the Taliban leaders like; Fazlullah and Mangal Bagh are using Afghan soil by creating unrest in Pakistan. Terrorist Attacks on Army Public School in which nearly 140 children were murdered, and on Bacha Khan University Charsadda, where young students were killed, all these activities were managed and controlled from Afghanistan (Reporter, 2016). Prominent terrorist attacks in 2017 include; attack on a shrine in the province of Sind in the February of 2017 where 72 people lost their lives, and another in the University Town of Peshawar where 13 people including students were killed.

The problem of Afghanistan is transnational and should be dealt as such. For this purpose, a Quadrilateral Monitoring Committee was formed to facilitate and support the Afghan reconciliation process. Besides Pakistan and Afghanistan, USA and China comprised that committee. Its first meeting was held in Islamabad on 11th January 2016 and all the four members emphasized on the resumption of direct talks between the Afghan government and Taliban. Both, China and USA declared Taliban to be the principal partner in the reconciliatory process (Iqbal, 2015). China even showed her willingness to play a role in the reconciliation process (Siddiqui, 2015). So far six such meetings have taken place. In the last meeting which was held in Oman on 16 October 2017 Khwaja Asif, the foreign minister of Pakistan said that his country does not have any influence over the Afghan Taliban. After the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour in a US drone strike at Pak-Iran border, Taliban

started an offensive countrywide as a result of which hundreds of people, including the Afghan national army personnel and police, lost their lives. In the first six months of 2015 casualty rate have surged by 50% as compared to the equivalent period of 2014. Almost 4,100 security men were killed (Maley, 2016). It was May 2015 when Park Hotel in Kabul where American, Turkish, Indian, and others were staying, was targeted. The attack came hours after Nawaz Sharif and General Raheel Sharif visited Kabul and said that Afghanistan enemies are Pakistan's enemies. Most of the Afghans believed it to be an indication by the Pakistani agencies that the latter has the ability to control the Afghan Taliban (Felbab-Brown, 2016). It was something that National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz publicly admits at Washington that Taliban leaders and their families are living in Pakistan and receiving medical services (Felbab-Brown, 2016). In June 2015 Afghan parliament was targeted by the militants and Afghan intelligence agencies accused Pakistan's ISI to be behind these attacks (Maqsood, 2016).

In one of such attack in Kabul on August 7, 2015, in which 50 people were killed, Ashraf Ghani was suffered from severe criticism which compelled him to say that he no more wanted Pakistan to play a role in the negotiation process. Ashraf Ghani accused Pakistan that the Taliban have sanctuaries there and after conducting attacks in Afghanistan they flee to Pakistan. He even said that Pakistan should take action against the Quetta Shura and Haqqani network and should abandon the discrimination in good and bad Taliban. The issue of refugees came into the limelight in the middle of this decade. Pakistan has a sizeable number of Afghan refugees and according to the UNHCR, they are more than three million. It was considered a sign of goodwill because Pakistan has spent more than \$100 billion by providing them jobs, and other basic facilities. But now as they were suspected to be found in terrorist activities, the rising unemployment ratio and heavy overload over the educational and health sectors Pakistan is wary of their stay in Pakistan (Reporter, 2016). So the latter is insisting on their peaceful and respectful repatriation to their country. This is a burning issue between the two nations because Pakistan first wanted the Afghan refugees to leave Pakistan by the end of 2016. Later their stay was extended five times and now they are told to leave Pakistan by the end of January 2018. Similarly, Umer Zakhilwal, Afghanistan's ambassador to Pakistan said in an interview to Mashal Radio that Pakistan should change its policy towards Afghanistan (Zahilwal, 2016). Mehmood Khan Achakzai, who is heading Pakistan Mili Awami Party, told Voice of America (Diva Radio) that if Pakistan wanted, peace may come in three months to Afghanistan (Achakzai, 2016). Pakistan foreign secretary Aizaz Chaudhry on the other hand warned that Afghan-India

nexus is harmful for the region. Mr. Aizaz said Afghanistan should stay away from India and should cooperate with Pakistan (Choudhry, 2016). Mr. Ghani at the Heart of Asia Conference on 3-4 Dec 2016 once again accused Pakistan of having safe havens and declined the assistance of \$500 million by Pakistan. He advised Pakistan to spend this amount on containing terrorism (Sridharan, 2016). In a meeting with PM Modi of India, both the leaders discussed future plans to establish an air corridor to strengthen trade between the two countries (Roche, 2016). They criticized Pakistan of creating hurdles for the trade between the two countries. Ghani warned Pakistan to either open Wagah for them or lose transit route.

Talat Masood a retired general wrote in one of his articles that Taliban Shura enjoyed safe havens and free movement in Pakistan (Masood, 2016). Similarly, Afrasiyab Khattak a veteran and retired Senator from Awami National Party criticized government agencies of operating against the constitution of Pakistan. According to him the report on the Quetta terror attack of 8 August 2016, which was prepared by the Justice Qazi Faez Issa led Inquiry Commission has exposed the national institutions of their double game and inaction. He writes further that Interior Minister Choudhry Nisar has met with the heads of three banned terrorist organizations (Milati Islamia, Ahli Sunnat Wal Jamat, and Sipahi Sahaba Pakistan) in Islamabad on October 21 which prove that government of the day has secret contacts with the militants (Khattak, 2016). The perception got stronger when Cyril Almada, a columnist at Dawn newspaper brought world's attention towards an in-camera meeting of the Pakistani civil and military officials. In that meeting, the civilian officials told the military to act against the militants or face isolation (Almieda, 2016). It is something president Ashraf Ghani has told the world media and Indian PM Modi perceived flaws with Pakistan role in this connection. Talat Masood is of the view that Pakistan should shun the policy of appeasement towards Taliban and Haqqanis because it did not work in the past and may not work in the future. He even goes further and assumes that this policy will push Afghanistan towards India, an arch-rival of Pakistan. He says Pakistan should follow 'Afghan-led and Afghan-owned' policy and should ease out the Taliban leadership from Pakistan (Masood, 2016).

Pakistani officials say their country has suffered the most at the hands of terrorism by losing more than seventy thousands people including almost six thousands of their brave soldiers and more than \$120 billion. It is the worst expenditure by any means because Pakistan is not involved in the war against terror directly. But if Pervez Musharraf could follow the actual course of US policy and did not go with his double standards, Pakistan would be a better country today and so is the whole region. He himself has accepted the charges

of having intimate relations with Jama'at ud Dawah and Lashkar I Taiba (Wright, 2011).

Allegations and counter allegations will not work as it did not work and a more realistic approach has to be adopted to seek an acceptable solution to the outstanding issues. National interests of both the nations are at stake and being neighbours both nations should endeavour to alleviate grievances of each other by maintaining good neighbourly relations. Hamid Karzai is of the same opinion (Latif, 2012). Pakistan should end its proxies against Afghanistan and the latter should prefer its neighbour without compromising on its relations with India, who is investing hugely in Afghanistan. Meetings of Russia, China and Pakistan on the issue of Afghanistan without taking on board the respective country are ridiculous (Syed, 2016). It is strange that Afghanistan is not invited to these meetings (Shams, 2016). The three powers should take the war-ridden country into confidence before going ahead. Afghanistan should not turn down such an endeavour outrightly because the country may go further into chaos. Powers like USA, China, Russia and neighbours of the aggrieved country should play their positive role to end the menace of terrorism by mutual efforts. Peace could be restored to Afghanistan only by this way.

The current study is an analysis of Pak-Afghan Relations in the post Karzai presidency, the issues and developments taking place in Af-Pak region especially the safe havens of Taliban in Pakistan and its failure to act against them, the Indian influence on the foreign policy of Afghanistan, Afghanistan choice to choose India as her ally against Pakistan, and its implications for Pakistan.

Historical Background

Due to Afghanistan's important geographical location and strategic position it is called the heart of Asia. It is situated at the cross-road in the North-South and East-West of Asia and is a landlocked country. It connects countries on the four corners of Asia i.e. acts as a bridge between the Central Asian Republics which are full of petro-products, and South Asian States, the Eastern Asia and Western Asia. For centuries it was used as an economic corridor for the Silk Road. Pakistan and Afghanistan share 2,430 km of mutual border known as Durand line. Religion and ethnicity are two powerful common attributes but these have not been fully exploited.

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan were ever hostile, a word that sounds fit for such relations. When Pakistan came into being as a result of two nation theory, Afghanistan did not accept her whole heartily and became the first country to vote against her in the United Nations (Ghani, 1987). The

controversy has its roots in pre-partition British rule in the United India (Rashid, 2001). The Durand Line which is the name of the border between the two countries was demarcated in 1893 by an agreement by the British government in India with the Amir of Afghanistan (Biswas, 2013). It acted as a buffer state between the British government and the Soviet Union. Afghans think it has divided Pashtuns into both sides and so should be repealed. Pakistan is home to Pashtuns which is more than the total population of Afghanistan and so rejects the latter point of view altogether. The second issue was that of Pashtunistan. Pakistan claimed to have ever struggled with having a good working relationship with Afghanistan. They state Jinnah's speeches in this regard who said, "I desired the relationship between the two sister nations may be of the greatest and the most lasting friendship and I hope that the government will soon be able to settle and adjust in a spirit of goodwill for the benefit of both, all those matters which require our immediate attention, and I do trust that the coming negotiation, that may take place, will secure and strengthen all the more goodwill and friendship between our two countries which already exist" (Javed, 2016).

Pakistan says she looked for alliances when the former joined hands with India, the arch-rival of Pakistan, due to security reasons. Similarly, Afghanistan protested when Pakistan combined the four provinces into One Unit and the military alliances with the United States, as a result, Afghanistan came closer to Soviet Russia who heavily invested in Afghanistan (McCain, 1987). The USA, on the other hand, was wary of such developments and started influencing Pakistan's foreign policy towards Afghanistan. The recruitment of Taliban as holy warriors and huge funding for them to Pakistan has made their case stronger against the Soviet. When Soviet Russia invaded Afghanistan, the USA and its allies started funding Pakistan in creating Taliban Mujahids (sacred warriors) who fought against the Soviet (Krickus, 2011). This point of view has been accepted by US Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton. She said, "But the problem we face now to some extent we have to take responsibility for, having contributed to it". She further explained "Let's remember here... the people we are fighting today we funded them twenty years ago... and we did it because we were locked in a struggle with the Soviet Union (Dawn, 2009). After the demise of Soviet Union, a civil war started which shattered the rest of Afghanistan. Taliban got power at the end of the day with Mullah Muhammad Umer as their Ameer and now the world called them terrorists. Afghan Taliban had the backing of Pakistan and people of Afghanistan specifically the Northern Alliance had huge reservations towards this policy of Pakistan. At the onset of the twenty-first century, America was targeted (9/11) by 19 militants associated with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida

by hijacking four US aircrafts killing more than 3000 innocent people (Taylor, 2011). With this US forces entered Afghanistan to oust the terrorists (bin Ladin and his co) and a non-stop war started there which engulfed more than 220,000 Afghans and 80,000 Pakistanis which according to a report by the Physicians for Social Responsibility maybe even more (Ashrraf, 2011).

Pakistan's Pervez Musharraf, a president in uniform, betrayed Americans in the war against terror (Brown, 2011) and the war once started in Afghanistan entered Pakistan where high loss of men and materials took place. People in Afghanistan looked down on Pakistan for her policies. Karzai during his presidency blamed Pakistan for aiding and abetting the terrorists destabilizing their country. When Indian Embassy was attacked in Kabul in the July of 2008, Karzai accused Pakistan's secret agency ISI to be behind these attacks. Relations were at the lowest ebb when Salala incident took place in which 26 Pakistani soldiers were killed. Pakistan warned Afghanistan not to let their soil be used against Pakistan and NATO supply was not allowed to pass through Pakistan soil. In the post-Karzai era situations have been worsened and 2015, 2016 and 2017 have proved to be the deadliest so far. Afghan officials are constantly accusing Pakistan and its agencies for the mayhem.

Afghanistan Leaning towards India

India and Afghanistan has good relations which are based on common history and culture. Indian films are very popular in Afghanistan. Relations date back in 1950 when a Friendship Treaty was signed between two nations. Relations during King Zahir Shah Regime were exemplary. Indra Gandhi had shown her displeasure over Soviet intervention in unsounded words (Baxter, 1987). During Taliban regime India had almost no approach to Kabul. After Karzai occupied presidential office, relations once again improved and both sides signed a mutual agreement called 'India-Afghanistan Strategic Agreement' in October 2011 (Ashrraf, 2011). Afghanistan had to get Indian assistance in the field of trade, security, economic development and in general welfare areas. It was first such step in the post-Taliban era in which two countries entered into a comprehensive agreement. Indian government also made many consulates in Jalalabad, Qandahar, Herat, and Mazar Sharif (Fair, 2010). Afghan president Mr. Karzai said 'this strategic partnership is not directed against any country'. He further said 'Pakistan is our twin brother, India is a great friend. The agreement we signed with our friend will not affect our brother' (Raipeha, 2013). India has given \$2 billion for the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan. This amount was spent on developmental projects like infrastructural projects, education, agriculture, institutional development, health, military training and provision of equipment (Noorzai, 2016). It is a boon for a war-ravaged country like Afghanistan. Hundreds of

military and police personnel have been sent to Indian military training institutions where they are getting training on modern lines. Similarly political and military officials have been frequently visited each other's countries which have taken mutual relations to new heights. Leaders of both sides have shown displeasure of Pakistan protecting the terrorist networks. They came down hard on Pakistani officials in their failure to check terrorists in Kashmir and of discrimination in the case of Afghanistan between good and bad Taliban. According to them the latter raised and supported militant groups like Lashkar-i-Taiba, Harkatul Mujahideen and Harkat ul Jihad al Islami etc (Fair, 2010) Incidents like Pathankot and Uri attacks were condemned by the leaders of both countries. Indian PM Narendra Modi has warned Pakistan of dire consequences and has pledged to isolate Pakistan on every front (Kugelman, 2017). The present BJP government under PM Modi is successful in winning over President Ashraf Ghani to its side. In one of his visits to Afghanistan, New Delhi promised \$1 billion to the latter for developmental purposes (Mandhana, 2016).

According to The Hindu, 'India and Iran struck a deal to develop the Chabahar Port to gain access to the Middle East and Central Asia and to counter Gwadar port in Pakistan'. It was actually a trilateral engagement between Iran, India and Afghanistan to which the three countries agreed upon in May 2016 and India would provide \$500 million for this purpose. PM Modi visit to Afghanistan and his participation in the opening ceremony of Salma Dam which was to irrigate more than 80,000 hectares of land and 50 MW of electricity, was much applauded by the Afghan people across the country. With this Afghan people admonished Pakistan and whole heartily appreciated India against Pakistan, the latter they been thought was responsible for the mayhem in their country (FM 92, 4 June, 2016). So if India and Pakistan solve their outstanding issues, peace may knock the doors of Afghanistan because they are the main contenders in Afghanistan today as Dr Amitai Etzioni opined (Etzioni). Similarly Thomas Ruteg a co-director of Afghanistan Analysts Network, in the same journal says 'Afghanistan is important to India because of Pakistan' (Ruteg).

Implications for Pakistan

Afghanistan's position is very important for Pakistan, strategically as well as politically. Pakistan feels concerned over Indian presence in Afghanistan because the former consider India as its enemy number one. As India has justified her role in Afghanistan and has established her position so Pakistan's anxiety is a natural one.

To begin with, Pakistan has security threats from India and now that India has consolidated her position in Afghanistan Pakistan has to re-align her security apparatus. A little glimpse has been seen when one of Indian spy agency agent, a navy officer, Kulbhushan Jadhav was caught in Balochistan who engulfed that he was to target the officials working on CPEC. Pakistan claims they have handed over another dossier of evidence from captured Indian spy Kulbhushan regarding Indian involvement to unrest Pakistan (Nation, 2017). Moreover, Research & Analysis Wing (Indian spy agency) and National Directorate of Security (Afghanistan intelligence agency) jointly support the separatist elements in Balochistan. India has secret contacts with Pakistani Taliban whose leadership is hiding in Afghanistan (Correspondent, 2015). NDS is providing assistance to them so Pakistani officials think the partnership may prove to be fatal for Pakistan. India also has close contacts with Balochistan separatist elements. In case of Afghanistan going into the lap of India, Pak-Afghan border which is 2,430 km long will get insecure and Pakistan has to deploy more troops there.

According to Pakistani officials, India is getting closer towards Iran and Afghanistan to contain Pakistan. India has never accepted Pakistan's existence from her birth and is using different manoeuvres to destabilize Pakistan. Chabahar port is one of such manoeuvre. Similarly, India has made consulates alongside the Pak-Afghan border to make their way easy into Pakistan's tribal areas and Balochistan. To justify their point of view Pakistani officials present Kulbhushan Jadhav's revelations as evidence. India is investing billions of dollars in Afghanistan for this purpose. In the same way, they have sought assistance from the USA in this regard. The USA has time and again told Pakistan to do more. Now that India has started an undeclared war against Pakistan, US has withdrawn Pakistan military assistance and have made it conditional to the latter action against some banned outfits (Reuters, 2016). Similarly, Iran's vote is also in India's favour. PM Modi has pledged to isolate Pakistan on every front. For this purpose, India refused to participate in SAARC summit took place in Islamabad in November 2016. India's diplomacy was successful to keep Afghanistan and Bangladesh from that summit (Tun, 2016) due to which Pakistan felt ashamed on the diplomatic front. Later in the 6th Heart of Asia Conference Pakistan's de facto Foreign Minister was humiliated which arose anger among the Pakistanis who demanded from their government to change the policy of appeasement towards India and Afghanistan. So, diplomatically India is successful to an extent in declaring Pakistan a terror-sponsoring state, which is why Pakistan is struggling diplomatically.

On the economic front, if India gets triumphant in taking Afghanistan to its side completely, Pakistan may suffer economically. This was noted when Pakistan blocked Indian goods to Afghanistan via Pakistan's Wagah border. Afghanistan warned Pakistan to open Wagah or lose transit route. We can also see a stark decline in Pak-Afghan trade from \$2.5 billion in 2010 to \$1.8 billion in 2016 (Khan, 2016). Similarly, CASA1000 and TAPI are very necessary mega-projects for Pakistan being an energy deficient country. This may not materialize if Afghanistan went totally into India's ambit. Pakistan will automatically endeavour to retaliate and in that case, peace of the region may be endangered. Moreover, if there will be no peace in the region the multi-billion dollar project (CPEC) which Pakistan considers a game changer may also be endangered. Similarly, India will dictate Afghan government not to let Pakistan through its territory to Central Asian Republics. In that case, Pakistan would not be able to have access to such a huge market. The Zarang-Dilaram road constructed by India on Afghan-Iran border is an endeavour to isolate Pakistan economically in the region.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are critically analyzed in the post-Karzai era. Reasons of failure in relations between the two nations are also analyzed and it was noted that Afghanistan has initially adopted a pro-Pakistan approach but, later, Mr Ashraf Ghani, tired of Pakistan double standards, leaned towards India. India fully exploited these situations by investing billions of dollars in Afghanistan in various infrastructural and welfare projects. Pakistan reacted sharply and warned Afghanistan to reconsider their course of action towards India. Pakistan and Afghanistan, being neighbours, should follow a viable approach to solve their most urgent issues. It is up to Pakistan to abandon their policy of good and bad Taliban and work out for a better understanding between the two nations. In the same token India needs to avoid influencing Afghanistan foreign policy but should engage Pakistan through dialogue to settle the outstanding issues.

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