

## **Great Power Perspective towards Afghanistan: India China Creeping Competition in the Heart of Asia**

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### **Abstract**

Afghanistan; the Heart of Asia, being located at the cross-roads of tri-regional junction offers a buffer as well as a test case for the Great Powers to showcase & prove their potential. India and China both aspiring for change in their global status positioning, practicing policy of non-interference are having high-stakes in Afghanistan. Although economically engaged both have high considerations for Afghanistan. International community is looking for new stakeholders to assume more responsible role in Afghanistan, how China and India deal with such pressure and foreign policy principles will determine their power status in international system. This paper seeks to locate Afghanistan in India and China's domestic and foreign policy. China's security reason and its commercial engagement with Afghanistan and India's bridge to access and Connect Central Asia policy pave the way towards such understanding. Management of their mutual relation is very crucial for peace in Afghanistan as well as for the entire region.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, China, India, Rising Power Perspective

### **Introduction**

The objective of this paper is to analyze and evaluate the policies of India and China towards Afghanistan from the lens of their great power perspectives and to prove their status in Afghanistan. Both India and China have become major players in Afghanistan, as both linked their security with regional security and stability and later with the situation in Afghanistan. Both are emerging power, aspiring for bigger role in global arena; share the identity of third world powers, observing principle of non-interference in their foreign policy.

China and India, aspire for the position of major regional powers, therefore overlapping their areas of interest. Although, India and China due to their particular reasons are wary of US presence in Afghanistan yet India offered more support to the US invasion of Afghanistan and moved closer to US for cooperation over the issue of terrorism in the wake of post 9/11 scenario. Since the inception of India-US strategic dialogue, the two countries came closer and urged to cooperate more on security and anti-terrorism issues. India is being considered an important element in the US' 'Pivot to Asia'<sup>1</sup> (Lieberthal, 2011) policy. Hence India and China who are already entangled

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<sup>1</sup>The So-called Pivot to Asia policy is combination of three key elements - diplomatic, economic, and military- the Pivot, is designed to bolster the The U.S. position in the Asia-

in border dispute with each other, have several overlapping areas of conflict as well as the mistrust over their perceived areas of influence created more friction between the two neighbors.

China on the other hand has always been cautious of direct engagement in any country's internal affairs and has refused to provide its land to be used by the US for NATO supply in the wake of post 9/11 scenario. China has also been alleged by the west to be a free-rider in Afghanistan, however with the US announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan China has changed its posture and assumed more responsibility in the field of peaceful transition, to work for amicable solution to Afghan problem, train police and to engage with all the stakeholder in order to evade Afghanistan to be used by any other regional or global player that can harm China's interests in the region.

This paper looks into detailed position of Afghanistan in the concentric circles of both India and China and its significance to prove their regional status. The chapter then evaluates their policies and its impacts on Afghanistan viz-a-viz on the region. Finally the chapter concludes that the growing uncertainty in the region has bring both the states to closer to accommodate each other's interest in Afghanistan and to work for a viable solution yet the divergence over the means to achieve this end goal creates rift between the two.

Baisali Mohantay, (2017) attributes the diversion over peace building in Afghanistan during six party meeting in Moscow, beyond geopolitical interest and about status. She defined status "as a set of collective beliefs about a state's standing. Paradoxically, it is only revealed to a state through acts by other parties, which either recognize or fail to recognize status". She is of the view that Afghanistan is another theater of confrontation between the two countries and both are competing for their respective status as 'responsible'. China has opted to initiate talks with the Taliban as a precursor to peacekeeping; while India opted for developmental support while refraining from partaking military in the conflict (Mohantay, 2017).

Indian scholars also view the massive Chinese investment in Pakistan under the flagship project of BRI i.e. CPEC is threatened by the contemporary security situation

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Pacific and enhance ties with key friends and allies. The U.S administration is of the view that Pivot is not directed at China. But the policy took on added urgency and much greater visibility in the past two years, against the backdrop of a series of increasingly assertive Chinese foreign policy moves. Meanwhile, many in Beijing have complained that the policy is actually designed to contain and block the rise of China. For more on Pivot read, Lieberthal, (2011).

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in Afghanistan and can be proved counterproductive if the instability in the region prevails. The Chinese government has planned to invest around US\$ 61 billion in different projects in Pakistan, however the instability is adding to the worries of China. The increasing Indian role in Central Asia through Iran and Afghanistan is another factor that China considers against its interests (Kumar, 2017).

According to a report by China Institute of International Studies as the two globally emerging countries, Sino-Indian relations are strategically more important for the entire region and the rest of the world. Currently these relations are in transition period featuring “rebalancing” and ‘repositioning’. The report further noted that in the post-cold war period, India has adjusted its foreign strategy in order to pursue these two grand objectives i.e. (i) to develop close relations with those countries from which India can benefit for high economic growth (ii) and to set its diplomatic agenda from the perspective of a global power and a major power in Asia instead of a regional power in South Asia (Jianxue, 2015). In order to achieve these core objectives India has adopted a mechanism which follows the given steps. Firstly, India has taken an active part in big-power diplomacy by enhancing bilateral relations with the major powers in order to create room for its rise. Secondly, took initiatives to gradually improve relations with neighbors in South Asia through economic integration in order to maintain its dominance in the region. Thirdly, India has pursued a diplomatic strategy of extended neighborhood as a priority. Fourthly, India has attempted to strengthen its military deterrence through having coercive influence over its neighbors. Fifthly, through putting economic interests as important foreign policy objectives, India has enhanced the position of economic interest in its diplomatic agenda (Jianxue, 2015).

### **Afghanistan in concentric security circles of China**

One of the Chinese foreign policy’s prime and core objectives is domestic and external security of the country. Geographically China is uniquely positioned with the 20 neighboring countries which forms different sub-regions of Asia, hence China’s security concerns affect and are affected by the situation in region. China’s security concerns emerge from the four concentric circles or rings. The first ring consisting of the entire territory under Chinese administration or which China claims, according to Chinese security interest the circle is of prime importance and the domestic stability is linked with it. The second ring of security involves relations with immediate neighborhood which can pose direct security threat to Chinese interest. The third ring consists of China’s periphery and the politics of six multi-state regional systems including South East Asia, North East Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East and overall Asia. Whereas the fourth ring consist of the world beyond Asia. (Nathan & Andrew, 2012:3-36).

Afghanistan lies in the second and third security rings of China, which has direct impact on the security of China. In the contemporary circumstance and China's position in international system as the largest economy (in terms of Purchasing Power Parity PPP) having huge investment in the largest connectivity project i.e. Belt & Road Initiative whose success partially depends on the regional stability, faces threat of uncertainty due to the situation in Afghanistan. The overall global image of China has been positive due to its non-interference policy as well as due to its contrast policies compared with that of the US pre-emption. The US invasion in Iraq and Afghanistan, and China's 'harmonious world policy' paved the way for China to emerge as an alternate center of power in Asia. Hu Jintao's policy was so compelling that he convinced the world to support multilateralism, international law and the United Nations while criticizing 'hegemonism' and 'power politics' (Callahan, 2013:49). The world observed the peace-loving face of China and partially embraced greater role of China to build harmonious order. With Xi Jinping assuming office China moved one step ahead as his signature policy of OBOR opened new avenues to showcase China's soft face to the world. Since then China has been actively involved in the peaceful settlement of many hotspot issues including Afghanistan as of 2014 China successfully hosted HoA-IP (Zheng, 2016:349-374).

Year 2016 has been a witness of China's years' long great efforts into addressing the Afghan issue. As in 2016 China supplied first batch of military aid to its neighbor and war-torn country ("China Plays Major role", 2016). China's active role in Heart of Asia conference, 2016 to achieve its goals of promoting peace, prosperity and security in Afghanistan has made her a major stakeholder. According to Clarke (2013) and several other scholars (Li, 2016., Huasheng, 2012., and Scobell, Ely & Michael, 2014) China's interests were defined by the focus on insulating its over-sensitive (with regards to extremism) province of Xinjiang from the domino effect of the instability and growing extremism in Afghanistan. Though the argument have sound basis yet the border between the said areas is non-porous and security is manageable with the contemporary Chinese policies. Although the factor remains of high priority in Chinese officials' priorities thus far the US reduction of military made China more vulnerable to the threat from this end. Secondly the Chinese workers' security at risk in Afghanistan paved the way for China to commit training of Afghan police and supply of 'non-lethal' weapons to Afghanistan. Thirdly, to manage its security at home, the security is interconnected with the situation in its neighbors. The instability effects are shared by the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan as well as the amicable solution lies in including the consultation with the neighboring countries hence China played constructive role in reducing the frictions between Afghanistan and Pakistan and towards reconciliation process within Afghanistan too. As the Global Times (2014) cautioned China of the huge risks attached with China's greater involvement in

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Afghanistan, and noted that Beijing's choice but to "be there" and "bear the cost of being a major power."

Pakistan's decision makers welcomed China's constructive political and economic engagement. Khan and Ishtiaq (2017) mentioned the view of Mushahid Hussain (Senator and Chairman of Pakistan's Senate Defense Committee) that China's exceptional role of staying out of internal civil strife in Afghanistan, maintains the confidence of all stakeholders including Afghan Govt. Taliban, Pakistan and the US. Policy Analyst Ishaq Ahmad Khattak attributed China's southward economic expansion, particularly the CPEC as impacted by the situation in Afghanistan, due to the investment China has made in Afghanistan, it has to play a "predominant role in bringing peace through economic development and negotiations,"(Khan and Ishtiaq, 2017).

China took further step to tie Afghanistan and Pakistan together in more brotherly relationship by extending Economic Corridor to Afghanistan. Wang Yi, foreign minister of China, held a trilateral meeting with his counterparts from Afghanistan and Pakistan and unveiled the proposal to extend the connectivity project to Afghanistan, shared willingness of the two countries to include Afghanistan in CPEC on the principles of win-win and mutually beneficial cooperation ("China, Pakistan to look at including Afghanistan", 2017 & "Afghanistan Hosts...", 2018). Afghanistan which was once the shining pearl of Ancient Silk Road became prominent for its prosperity which was brought through trade. The Chinese officials have considered the historical importance of Afghanistan in her trade with other regions. According to Li Yuanchao "In the 1950s and 60s, the peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan was known as "Switzerland of Asia". The splendid culture created by the Afghan people made a unique contribution to the civilizations of Asia and beyond. This is also a great nation of fortitude and perseverance. It's struggle against foreign aggressions in defense of national independence and freedom has left a moving chapter in human history and won the admiration and respect of people of the world" (Yuanchao, 2016). Afghanistan occupies priority in China's neighborhood diplomacy as Li Keqiang stated that "China and Afghanistan are close neighbors with long historical course of friendly exchanges. China is committed to consolidating and developing China-Afghanistan strategic cooperative partnership and supporting Afghanistan's efforts in safeguarding its national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security" (Keqiang,2016).

### **Afghanistan in India's 'Connect Central Asia' Policy**

India places Afghanistan within the circle of its 'extended neighborhood policy'. The Indian extended neighborhood includes Central Asia, Southeast Asia, West Asia and Gulf Countries (Mohan, 2003:209-210 & Jha, 2016). As a priority in Indian's foreign

policy the ‘extended neighborhood policy’ or ‘New Forward Policy’ contains the elements of (i) revival of commercial cooperation (ii) improving institutional and political links within and among regions (iii) focusing inter and intra-regional connectivity (iv) pursuing mega-energy projects to have access to energy resources (whereas India’s energy expansion is accustomed with armed export This new “weapon-for-energy” strategy has been pursued in such regions as Central Asia, Myanmar and Africa) (Jianxue, 2015:10); (v) Initiation of defense contacts with key nations in the extended neighborhood as well as the major powers; (vi) Unstated strategic competition with China and Pakistan (Mohan, 2003:209-210). Afghanistan provides India the accessibility to the Central Asia states viz-a-viz its energy resources, resulting in active involvement of the later on the territory of the former state. Indian policy makers have been considering Iran as an alternate source to have access to Central Asia through Afghanistan with growing suspicion over Pakistan’s role as transit route, as both India and Pakistan do not enjoy good friendly neighborhood relation due to historical socio-political and territorial strife over Kashmir. That also affects Indian policy towards China when it comes to deal with the situation in Afghanistan, there is always overlapping in their areas of interest and influence as former Indian Ambassador to China and India’s Foreign Secretary Nirpama Rao (2009) once noted that India-China relations are complex and multi-layered, patterned with overlapping competition and cooperation, yet we encourage healthy competition i.e. not necessarily bad but can lead to more meaningful cooperation. Historically, India as any other state in this realistically woven world always pursued its core interest under the concept of Mandala in Arthashastra by the ancient Indian statesman Kautilya, “the world is like a series of circles within which the most immediate neighbors of a state are always deemed enemy and the enemy’s neighbors are its friends” (Mishra, 2012). In his opinion, dynasties should pursue interests first rather than glory, and wise rulers should seek allies from neighbors’ neighbors and build ultimately an alliance system with the conqueror at the center. This line of fixed thought on neighboring countries has exerted profound influence on contemporary Indian decision makers (Jianxue, 2015:22).

Christine Fair (2010:7) in a report argues that India’s interests in Afghanistan are not only Pakistan-centric but motivated by her desire to be and to be seen as an extra-regional power moving towards great power status. It was evident since 9/11 when India offered full-fledged support to the US in its war against terrorism. Within Indian policy makers there has always been debate about using military means to showcase its potential, strength and military might. It has also pursued such policy in its immediate neighborhood e.g. Sikkim annexation, interference in former East Pakistan which resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and sending military troops in Sri-Lanka. Even with the inception of US led war against terrorism; The-then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) not only offered military bases to Washington to launch operations

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in Afghanistan (Pant, 2016:40 & Iraq Pie, 2003) but also contemplated over offering the Indian military for peacekeeping operations in Iraq, as part of US-led Coalition but not under the UN mandate (Pant, 2016:49).

In the wake of post 9/11 scenario India increased its footprint on the soil of Afghanistan keeping in view not only the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance rather geo-political situation in Afghanistan as well. Under the slogan of 'Connect Central Asia Policy' (CCAP) India further enhanced its relation with the Republic of Central Asia. The Connect Central Asia policy was first unveiled in 2012 by the India's Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahmad during India-Central Asia Dialogue held in Kyrgyzstan as a Track II initiative (India's 'Connect Central Asia Policy', 2012 & Siddiqui, 2017). The policy highlighted the increasing role of Afghanistan's place in the eyes of Indian policy makers, that the way to implement the policy is by transforming Afghanistan into a center of trade and energy, connecting to Central and South Asia. India in this policy uses the leverage of her non-prescriptive policy approach, and liberal democratic values. The policy based on political, security, economic and cultural connections hold few elements as constant i.e. political interaction on bilateral and multilateral basis, security and strategic cooperation through military training, coordination and consultation over counter-terrorism, joint research, integration and unification of markets through an Indian proposed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement, and cooperation in the fields of medical, education, IT, construction and tourism through increasing people-to-people interaction, reactivation of International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC<sup>2</sup>).

Not only the energy resources and other major powers' mounting presence in the region urges India to get involved in the region rather getting recognized as a major power in international politics is also at the back of mind concept in Indian policy makers. As the last decade has witnessed the region becoming the site of great power tussles over energy resources and in the same time frame India also emerged as a

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<sup>2</sup> INSTC ; The 7,200 km International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a multi-mode transport network linking Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea via Iran, and onward to northern Europe via St. Petersburg, Russia. Throughout this network, freight between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia will move through sea, rail, and road. This route is very different from much longer and costlier Suez Canal that India used earlier to transport goods to Russia. This new route will help connect India with Russia within 16-21 days at competitive freight rates leading to development of trade on the INSTC. See more at <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/instc-india-russia-s-trade-to-get-a-major-boost/> .

regional economic power compelling India not to afford overlooking Central Asia if it has to emerge as a 'rising power'. China's west-ward economic expansion also created fear among India of losing its immediate neighborhood which can result into encirclement as well (Jha, 2016).

Afghanistan's strategic location is of utmost importance in the connectivity plans of India to access and ensure not only the energy supply but trading goods as well. Afghanistan's importance as land bridge of trade can be gauged from Indian PM's Special envoy's statement, "historically, Afghanistan has prospered when it has served as the trade and transportation hub between Central Asia and South Asia. If we were to implement the projects and activities on the anvil, which allow greater commercial and economic exchanges by removing barriers to investment, trade and transit, this would transform not just Afghanistan but other regional countries as well" (S.L Lambah's statement, 2009). Hence Afghanistan occupies high central value in India's strategic calculus (Roy, 2010:68) as a land bridge; therefore India has been involved in major reconstruction and development projects carried out by hundreds of Indian workers ("India Condemns Kabul Attacks", 2010) despite deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

India's engagement with the US in the whole scenario and re-utterance of Indian officials that the west is ignoring India as a major stakeholder in Afghanistan provided impetus to India's self-assumed selective responsibility in Afghanistan. In a question answer session in Rajya Sabha of India the Minister of External Affairs Shri Anil Desai on question of Indian Involvement in Afghanistan replied that during the speech US president states that "We appreciate India's important contributions to stability in Afghanistan" (Question No.1452, 2018). He further added that the United States would want India to assist Afghanistan, specifically for economic assistance and development. This was reaffirmed by the US Secretary of State in his remarks at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington on October 18, when he said, "India is a partner for peace in Afghanistan", and US welcomed "India's assistance efforts" (Tillerson, 2017:6). However on the question of increasing military role of India in Afghanistan his answer was vague and he mentioned India's commitment to support and stand with the Government and the people in their struggle to bring peace, and prosperity and ensure security and stability in Afghanistan. He reiterated the role of India's considerable reconstruction and development assistance to Afghanistan (Question No. 1452, 2018).

### **Evaluation of Policies: India and China's continuity and Change**

Both India and China have been engaged in Afghanistan's reconstruction process, peace building, humanitarian assistance and political reconciliation. India's policies have been on the same pace since 9/11 when the western countries took lead in the post-war reconstruction; India followed the suit and became 5<sup>th</sup> largest donor in



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Afghanistan. Its policies were in alignment with that of the US its allies, it considered to have direct military presence in order to support the US invasion, promote selective democracy (Shalendra, 2009:202) and work for elimination of terrorist and extremist forces from the Afghan soil.

However China's policies approach has been gradually evolving from mere observer to vigorous partner with massive economic support. The Chinese policy evolved gradually with several domestic, regional and international changing landscapes which posed direct and indirect implications and acted as driving forces to step up its presence in Afghanistan.

### **Impact on Afghanistan's Stability**

China's inclusive approach towards Afghanistan have broader sense and covers all aspects of stability including development, improving people's living standard, long-term stability not only economic stability but social and political stability as well. China's approach of considering the concern of all the stakeholders offers viable solution to the problem. China's Mess Aynak project provides direct investment in Afghanistan and expected to provide employment to Afghan people. Not only this but with the successful implantation of several projects it has also won the hearts of Afghan people. With Afghanistan becoming the 80<sup>th</sup> member of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) ("Afghanistan becomes full AIIB member", 2017) which provides funds for the construction of several infrastructure projects Afghanistan will be integrated into cohesive economic and social development. AIIB funds provide support for the implementation of the projects which creates solar energy and railway links between Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Iran and China (Lo, 2017).

China and Afghanistan's mutual projects of connectivity are becoming operational with their mutual cooperation and the support from other partners. One such project was materialized in 2016 on arrival of a train in two weeks from east coast of China to Hairatan, northern Afghanistan. The train transported commercial goods including fabric, clothes and construction material, worth \$4 million. China who is already the leading investor in the war-torn country and the No. 5 trading partner is taking lead in connectivity projects and dispatching goods as well ("China opens Silk Road Train to Afghanistan", 2016). The successful shipment not only marked the initiation of the first step towards converting land-locked Afghanistan into a transit hub of Asia but also marked another advance in President Xi Jinping's Silk Road project to deepen his nation's influence along old trade routes ("China opens Silk Road Train to Afghanistan", 2016).

India though the largest supporter of Afghanistan's infrastructure, engineering, training and humanitarian needs (Arni & Pranay, 2016) yet its selective approach

towards peace building and conditioned with international community to press hard over Pakistan for amicable solution to the problem is flawed and non-inclusive. Only economic support and government-to-government relations cannot bring long-term stability in Afghanistan. As the problem involves number of stakeholders so should the solution be. However undermining other states' concerns and stakes can create more hurdles and make the consensus impossible. Being obsessed with the spread of extremism and increasing the rift with its neighboring alleging for jeopardizing its interest through subversion has complicated the process. Although India's infrastructure projects contributes to the development of Afghanistan, contribution and cooperation in field of education, health, power generation, humanitarian assistance favored gaining positive view from the Afghan problem, yet lack of politically inclusive approach hinders the way forward.

### **Overall impacts on the regional politics**

The situation in Afghanistan on the one hand created suspicious between and among all the regional states on the other hand these developments also brought them somehow closer. Major regional countries have changed their stance from rigid on the selective approach for the solution towards inclusive political approach.

One major development that took place was that bringing the states closer to cooperation over curbing the menace of terrorism despite their differences in their approaches. India and China in the same manner to combat against terrorism led them to cooperate with each other. Beginning in 2002 through the dialogue at director level, the dialogue resulted into successful conduction of five-day antiterrorism training exercise in Yunan province of China in December 2007 (Holslag, 2010:152-153). The mechanism later included Russia as well when they endorsed joint communiqué and agreed to take action against comprehensive factors of breeding terrorism including its financing, illegal drug trafficking and trans-national organized crime (Holslag, 2010:152-153). The-then Indian PM Manmohan Singh emphasized on the need of collaboration to fight terrorism and extremism, and to address the developments in the neighborhood (Holslag, 2010:152-153).

Yet the regional countries could do nothing except declarative commitments. The divergence lies over the partnership rather than developing operational synergies, consequently, resulting into failure of reaching any concrete decision. The Indian side wanted to use all the platforms to mobilize China to urge Pakistan to withdraw her support for terrorism in Kashmir and the entire region while China had her own view of emphasizing on the important role of Pakistan. As an Indian official mentioned "We tabled this couple of times, and the Chinese took note, but no action followed" (Holslag, 2010:152). India also linked the issue with the situation in its neighboring at various regional and international agendas, whereas Beijing opposed to the internationalization of such problems. Although both countries had expectation of the

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joint exercise in Yunnan, but these were mere expectations and no further cooperation was explored. Lack of virtual links between the intelligence agencies or specialized offices in ministries, and exchange of information can be mentioned as the background or hurdles in cooperation (Holslag, 2010:152-153).

China as committed toward stability, having comprehensive inclusive strategy have taken steps at home as well as abroad through domestic stability and at multilateral forums. Having prominent role in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and its increasing focus on security issue and initiative for peace in Afghanistan shows China's commitment towards regional peace. SCO member countries conducted joint military exercises in 2007 shows such deliberations and commitment for peace in the entire region (Scott, 2008:41). India due to its lack of geographical connectivity with Central Asia lacks the ability to have direct influence and need strong, firm and stable link that can only be possible with cooperation either with China or Iran.

### **Learning from the impacts**

The regional stability is the ultimate desire of the states pursuing different policies, whether it be connectivity, development or the showcase of their regional or global status. The economic development can offer partial solution yet political stability depends on the socio-political, economic and security all-inclusive approach. As long as the regional states diverge over peace building in Afghanistan no one can bear the fruit of their investments and influx of their trading goods and their efforts.

Cooperation and competition are both on the rise between the two countries. At present, China and India have already enjoyed good cooperation in the G20, BRICS, energy security, climate change, trade negotiations, the Afghanistan issue, counter-terrorism, as well as other global and regional issues (Jianxue, 2015:20). Anti-terrorism drill and dialogue on national defense are making steady progress, and fruitful consultations have been held over issues relating to Afghanistan, West Asia, Africa and Central Asia (Jianxue, 2015:27). Yet for the stable region their mutual understanding and convergence of approach is required. Without considering all parties stakes no one can reach to the possible deal. The region observed the rift between India-Pakistan and China-India resulting into delaying the process of negotiations on Afghanistan. The former dyed on blaming each other for plotting and supporting instability in other's domestic affairs and the latter having other venues of confrontation i.e. East Asia, where India and China are already showing their potential and competing for influence, this might have considerable impact on the rest of the region (Naidu & Mumin, 2015:2).

### **Conclusion**

Afghanistan though the victim of long-stayed instability (due to both internal and external factors), being buffer state whose neutrality has always been challenged by the external powers is persistently proving the might of the powerful as in their favor or downplaying their role as a great power. It is also providing venue for new rivalries and chance to the emerging actors to prove their potential. Although motivated by number of internal and external factors both India and China are engaged in Afghanistan, economically and for humanitarian assistance, both being reluctant to change policy of non-interference are aspiring for greater role in Asia. In such a scenario both observe the patterns of competition and cooperation in Afghanistan as well as on other venues of their interaction. Yet peace in Afghanistan is in paramount interest of all the stakeholders however the divergence over considering the stakeholder and their inclusion in peace process hinders cooperation. Hence peace and stability in Afghanistan does not only depend on Afghanistan's dealing with stakeholders rather the relationship between and among the stakeholders as well. Mere economic presence, humanitarian assistance, training, aid and infrastructure development would not solve the problem rather a comprehensive strategy is required where neighbors' concerns should be addressed and external involvement should be prevented. The distrust between and among the stakeholders should be minimized through confidence building measures, and States will have to change their rigid stance over certain issues.

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