

## **India and Pakistan Strategic Influence in Afghanistan: Pros and Cons of Rivalry**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The geo-strategic location of Afghanistan is one of the important factors in its destabilization in post-9/11 era as it was in the late 1970s. The society of Afghanistan is composed of distinct ethnic groups supported by neighbouring states exacerbating instability to promote their interests. The regional powers always tried to influence this state to achieve their strategic objectives. India and Pakistan are involved in different activities to promote their divergent goals in this country for many decades. They supported contrasting regimes in Afghanistan to strengthen their influence and counter their historical rivalry like in other conflicts and institutions. So, far the strategies of both the countries are successful but their goals are counterproductive in bringing normalcy to Afghanistan. This research paper aimed to highlight the strategic battle between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. The theory applied in this research is balance and power with formation of alliances. Afghanistan formed alliance with India in post-9/11 era to outwit the influence of Pakistan. The results concluded from this study primarily entails that the directions of policies of these two rivals could be more productive if reconciliation is embraced instead of conflict.*

**Keywords:** *Afghanistan, strategies, rivalry, alliances, interests.*

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### **Introduction**

The geo-strategic location of Afghanistan remained vital for most of the super powers and regional powers. More importantly, they always tried to hegemonize Afghanistan and remained unsuccessful in their endeavours. Britain, the super power in nineteenth century tried to control it but remained highly unsuccessful as were the Russians during the apex of cold war. Similarly, United States of America (USA) as a result of terrorist attacks on 9/11 waged its war against terrorism and occupied Afghanistan but now after eighteen long years, it is looking for escape strategy. Apart from them, India, Iran and Pakistan are protecting their own strategic interests in Afghanistan. India and Pakistan since their independence from British Empire are trying to influence this volatile state strategically to achieve their respective foreign policy objectives (Sattar, 2017). This research paper is aimed at the strategic battle between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan specifically in the post-9/11 era. This paper also focuses on the ambitions of India in Afghanistan and counter balancing strategies adopted by Pakistan to preserve its interests on Western border.

Indian presence in Afghanistan and growth of their partnership is more complicating for this region. Their stronghold is further enhancing already asymmetric distribution of power in the region, granting a more favorable power balance for India to pursue its objectives of emerging power. Also, the cooperative implementation of Indo-US strategic relations and Indian strategic interests supported by the large amount of Indian financial investment is providing them an opportunity to dominate the matters of regional security (Nazir & Bhat, 2015). Whereas on the other hand, the critical stake of Pakistan in the security of Afghanistan and its likely antagonistic reaction to Indian presence in its influence of sphere might lead towards prolonged insecurity in the region.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

The research methodology used for this research is qualitative with descriptive, explanatory and analytical approaches (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, April 2014) (Williams, 2007). The purpose of using these approaches is to analyze the cause and effect phenomenon as Indian presence in Afghanistan has caused serious policy concerns for Pakistan. Historically, India had exploited conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan like Durand Line and Pushtunistan issue for its own interests (Khan, 2011). So, Pakistan has been beware of these tactics, obviously plying its strategies to counter these threats. Documentary analysis has been applied to analyze policy reports, research papers, and academic books on this subject of importance for this region (Silbergh, 2001). The nature of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan had always been conflicting and struggle to attain more power. This bilateral approach is quite obvious in their presence in Afghanistan so the theoretical framework most suitable in “Balance of Power” to analyze struggle for influence between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan through the lens of this theory.

The theory of “balance of power” is best known theoretical proposition about international relations. It is a concept which the scholars of international relations believe held the key to understand the recurrent patterns of behavior of states living in a condition of ‘international anarchy’ as one of the basic assumption of realism. So, international politics is observed as the power of politics in reality. In order to contain power and limits its potential abusive usage, the balance of power is therefore central to the realist perspective of international relations. This theory posits that states will check dangerous concentration of power by adopting two types of balancing. One is internal balancing that is state’s building their own capabilities and the other is external balancing which is aggregating their capabilities with other states. The major reason behind these tactics is that they are anticipating possible problems in future. Balancing can occur even before even before any one state or alliance has gained an obvious power edge (Wohlforth, 2016).

The balance of power in current study is characterized by at least three competing factors including an asymmetric distribution of power, Indo-Pak rivalry with bipolar nuclear constellation and emerging security complexes determined by the exogenous factors. One of the substantive implications identified in this study is the shifting of conflict from Indo-Pak bilateral issues towards Afghanistan. Any new development in Afghanistan could turn out to be a destabilizing factor for the traditional rivals. India developing strong partnership with Afghanistan is also further antagonizing relations between India and Pakistan, as Pakistan constantly feared Indian encirclement through this policy. Its reactions to the Indian long term

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engagement in Afghanistan are fuelled by its fear of losing “strategic depth” vis-à-vis to India (Rehman & Khan, 2014). Another major concern for Pakistan is the likelihood of Indian involvement in fostering an insurgency inside Baluchistan province bordered with Afghanistan and FATA areas where insurgents are involved in subversive activities (Khetran, 2017).

Pakistan also involved in one of its major project named as China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) linking China with warm waters of Arabian Sea after passing through Pakistan. Kashghar in China is linked with Gwadar Port by this initiative taken by the Governments of China and Pakistan. On the other hand, India is by-passing Pakistan and started trade with Afghanistan through Chahbahar Port of Iran. So, the competition among the two emerging powers in Indian Ocean and Himalayas is now moving towards Arabian Sea (Khetran, 2018). Pakistan not only considers this port of high value but stability in Afghanistan with powerful regime is also important as Pakistan could not afford to allow other countries to threaten its national interest. It also would not like to see its western neighbor Afghanistan may closely have allied with its arch enemy India as this alliance may be challenging Pakistan’s future progress. So, Pakistan would be considering limiting India’s presence and influence in post-US Afghanistan.

Pakistan might try to prevent India from getting land access to the resource rich Central Asian states through Afghanistan, intelligence operations in border areas close to Pakistan and possibility of any military pressure exerted on its Western border by Indo-Afghan alliance. However, this largely depends upon India’s capability to outmaneuver Pakistan in Afghanistan. India could use Afghanistan due to its hegemonic tendencies, to cultivate anti-Pakistan sentiments. Indian policies in post 9/11 era Afghanistan seemed so far that the marginalization of Pakistan would give India a leverage to play more powerfully both in the matters of Afghanistan and region as well. Indian policy of Afghanistan has potential to provide them a long aspired position as an Asian power moving towards status of great power.

### **Afghanistan India Relations and Pakistan: A Historical Perspective**

Afghanistan and India enjoyed cordial relations since independence of India and Pakistan from British in August 1947 (Sattar, 2017). Afghanistan and India had unanimity of views on bilateral, regional and international issues during the Cold War. On the other hand, both the countries had conflicting nature of relations with Pakistan. India and Pakistan had long range of enmity as the roots were sowed in the partition of British India while Afghanistan and Pakistan had divergence on issues of their border boundary line named as Durand Line and Pushtunistan. These two major issues were exploited by India to the uttermost safeguarding of its interests in the region. Also, these disputes among the three nations were also responsible for bringing super powers of that time, United States of America (USA) and Soviet Union (USSR) in this region. Pakistan counter balanced its rivalry with these nations by building strong military and economic relations with USA in 1950s (Sattar, 2017). Pakistan entered into alliances with USA allowed Soviet Union to construct strong relations with Afghanistan and India. Soviet Union supported Afghanistan on Durand Line and Pushtunistan issue and India on Kashmir issue more aggressively.

This enigma remained a vital source of instability in the region during the cold war with its culmination in the occupation of Afghanistan by Soviet Union in early 1980s

(Heller, 1980). Afghanistan turned into a cold war battle ground as a result of this intervention of third world state by one of the Super powers. India did not criticize this act and became the only South Asian country to recognize the puppet regime of Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (Yadav & Barwa, 2011). Pakistan strongly condemned Soviet aggression as other nations of the world did it on each and every organizational platform including United Nations (UN), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Afghans declared Jihad against the communist regime and gave tough resistance to the occupied forces resulting into the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 1989 after signing Geneva Accord in April 1988 (Shahi, 2008). India continued its support to the government of Najibullah and later to the Burhanuddin Rabbani in early 1990s (Yadav & Barwa, 2011). Afghanistan was plunged into civil war during those years due to proxy wars and rivalry among the Mujahideen factions.

Afghanistan remained prone to disturbances and lawlessness in the tenure of Rabbani as the President leading to the emergence of Taliban in 1994. Pakistan remained vigilant to its western border since mid-1970s as growing instability and resistance had started in Afghanistan so the challenging situation of spill-over of those movements countered by Pakistan through supporting different resistance movements. They continued their support to Mujahideens during occupation of Soviet Union in 1980s and early 1990s, and remained active player in the politics of Afghanistan to promote stability or neutralize Indian role in Afghanistan (Baloch & Niazi, 2007). India expanded its development activities in the 1980s despite of the challenges from anti-Soviet Jihad. They continued to recognize and support each and every regime till the consolidation of Taliban in mid-1990s. Taliban were not recognized by the Indians so their presence in Afghanistan remained constrained and modest but they tried to undermine Taliban by supporting the Northern Alliance composed of other forces of Afghanistan in their struggle against the Taliban regime (Baloch & Niazi, 2007).

### **Afghanistan India Relations after 9/11**

The declaration of War on Terror after the attacks on American strategic and economic interests in USA, leads towards the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan and formation of new government after the Bonn Agreement signed in December 2001 (Pant, 2008). India offered all types of support to Coalition forces in Afghanistan including intelligence, air bases, etc. Newly established regime under the leadership of Hamid Karzai as the Head of Interim Setup consists of majority leaders from Northern Alliance. So, India was once again able to establish complete diplomatic relations and returned back overwhelmingly after its constrained presence for almost two decades (Pant, 2008, p. 187). This new and different regional and international framework provided India an opportunity to assert itself in Afghanistan which was utilized by India in assisting reconstruction and rehabilitation process.

India viewed Afghanistan in post-Taliban era as an area of higher regional influence to promote its interest. India is able to muster supports from USA and Iran in pursuance of its policy objectives. India seemed to be applying Gujral Doctrine and Kautilya's military strategy in Afghanistan to counteract the challenges it had faced in 1980s and 1990s. Gujral (2011) had identified two immediate threats to India in the north from China and in the west from Pakistan in his book 'Matters of

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Discretion' that India required complete peace with all other neighbours in order to contain these two countries (Gujral, 2011). Kautilya in his book 'Arthashastra' presented his theory based on realist school of thought summarized as that "Every neighbouring state is an enemy and the enemy's enemy is a friend" (Gulshan, 2014). These theoretical concepts are followed explicitly to derive Indian ambitions in Afghanistan.

### **Indian Strategic Interests in Afghanistan**

Indian vital strategic interests are based on long term engagement and promotion of 'soft power' through investment, cultural contacts and aid for developmental projects in Afghanistan (Ahmad P. T., 2019). One of the more most and key strategic interest of India is to counter the interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan shares porous border of 2430 kilometers consists of Pashtun population living on both sides of the border. They share cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious and tribal ties as they are living in this region for hundreds of years. Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan while they are the second largest ethnicity in Pakistan (Saikal, 2010). India's policy has been derived in post-9/11 on three major objectives such as economic interests, security concerns, regional and global aspirations to strengthen its relations with Afghanistan. So, India is assisting Afghanistan in numerous projects for building human capital, physical infrastructure, and improvement of security and development of sectors important for economy of Afghanistan. Thus they wanted to transform economic relations into powerful political relations to enhance regional influence.

India realized the potential of Afghanistan in regional connectivity with resource rich Central Asian States for the purpose of energy and trade. The achievement of this ambition is hindered by the presence of its arch rival Pakistan between Afghanistan and India. The relations between these two major states are the major obstacle in regional connectivity between the two regions, Central Asia and South Asia (Safi & Alizada, 2019). Two major energy projects such as Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) could not be materialized for this reason. India on the other hand had outscored Pakistan by close collaboration with Iran. It helped Iran in construction of Chahbahar Port and road linking this port with Afghanistan in order to develop alternate route for trade with Afghanistan (Gulshan, 2014). The growing military and economic power enabled India to become a regional hegemon in this region often observed that US supported Indian role in Afghanistan.

### **Indian Policy Implementation in Afghanistan in post-9/11**

India displayed assertive behavior in implementing its policies through establishment of strong economic, political and strategic relations with Afghanistan after 9/11. They immediately opened consulates in cities of Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif apart from its embassy in Kabul after renewing its ties with new government in Afghanistan (Usman, 2012). Most of the political leadership in post-Taliban belonged to Northern Alliance who already had strong relations with India so new setup brought more cordiality among the two nations. Afghanistan and India signed large number of bilateral agreements during the last eighteen years reflecting the optimum level of political engagement between the two states. There are continuous exchanges of high level official visits of the leadership of both the countries. This strong presence is not only encouraging bilateral relations

to a larger extent and building unanimity of views on major challenging issues but this is also creating tensions and instability in the region as Pakistan is looking to counteract on Indian measures in Afghanistan.

India is also providing military training to Afghan forces for operations to counter insurgency in Afghanistan. Afghanistan and India signed a major agreement in 2011 known as Strategic Partnership Agreement (Raiphea, 2013). This agreement was a major milestone in the history of Afghanistan as it was the first such an agreement signed by Afghanistan with any state. India also provided intelligence training to the largest Afghanistan's intelligence agency. According to some estimates, there is large network of Indian intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) operating inside Afghanistan to protect its interests in the region. Indian government had already completed mega projects in Afghanistan. India supported its strategic goals through soft power projection and economic partnership. India completed Salma Dam Project in Heart to produce electricity and irrigation of available agriculture land. India is connecting Chahbahar with Kabul by constructing a road linking capital of Afghanistan with the port city of Iran naming it as International North South Trade Corridor (INSTC). Both the countries collaborated to bring Uzbek electricity to Kabul and also constructed a road along DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri (Pant, 2008, p. 188).

India is also providing training to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANFS) under the Strategic Agreement as it enables India to enter into economic partnership with Afghanistan. And this agreement further allowed India to sign agreements at the socio-economic development levels. It covered not only security cooperation but also cultural exchanges, economic, social and trade relations. India has assisted Afghanistan in different sectors including education, infrastructure development, peace building and many initiatives for rehabilitation. They developed people-to-people contacts for strengthening cultural bonds existed among the two nations historically. India not only built the parliament building of Afghanistan but also was involved in training of the legislators (Price, 2013).

The civil bureaucracy of Afghanistan has been trained in the various institutes of India and more than one thousand Afghan students are studying in different universities of India. India is also working on the capacity building of Afghans through imparting school education and health facilities to them. India understanding the geo-strategic importance of Afghanistan, has been extending its influence by applying soft power diplomacy. India's role in Afghanistan is significant and portrayed by its huge investment in developing close cultural contacts and winning support of local people (Price, 2013). India adoption of soft power helped Afghanistan in nation building and political stability much needed for war torn country. The game of cricket in Afghanistan also promoted by India as they hosted first ever test match of Afghanistan cricket team in India and also declared two of its cricket ground exclusively for their team. Afghanistan is using India as its home ground for hosting other test nations to play home series as internal situation and infrastructure facilities are not inadequate for visiting teams (Wyeth, 2018).

The trade relations become vital in the growth of Afghanistan India relations and development of regional connectivity is the corner stone of this policy adopted by both the states. First, it was Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) which paved the way for the transit of Afghan goods to India but similar

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facility wasn't allowed for Indian goods to pass through Wagah border and cross Pakistan before entering Afghanistan. This was the least distance for both the countries but once again it became victim of India-Pakistan rivalry (Rahim, 2018). So, India decided to maneuver Pakistan by constructing trilateral trade partnership with the inclusion of Iran into its orbit. The development and operationalization of Chabahar Port is considered to be an important element in the implementation of long term objectives of Indian foreign policy goals for regional connectivity and influence in the region. This port will act as a gateway for Afghanistan's transit trade in near future (Safi & Alizada, 2019).

The relations between India and Pakistan restricted development and progress of the region as their conflicts intensified specifically in 2019. This port allowed alternative route for the products of Afghanistan to be transited instead of Pakistan as the relations between the two countries are always victim of security challenges. India may also get an opportunity to get connected with Central Asian states. Afghanistan and India countered the restrictive trade through Pakistan by the development of Air Cargo Corridor for free movement of freight. There are three important Air Corridors inaugurated so far. Delhi-Kabul and Delhi-Kandahar were opened in June 2017 and Kabul-Mumbai was inaugurated in December 2017 (Mohapatra, 2018). India is also working on opening further air corridors by connecting multiple cities of India with major cities of Afghanistan. This helped in boosting bilateral trade between the two countries reached to \$ 1,150 million in 2018-2019 as compared to \$ 684 million in 2014-2015 (Safi & Alizada, 2019).

### **Pakistan's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan**

Pakistan had developed most important doctrine of 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan especially in the post-Cold War era. This doctrine provides Pakistan access to large land area in case of war with India and that access could only be possible if friendly government is installed in Afghanistan (Parkes, 2019). There is always a fear exists in the minds of policy makers of Pakistan and also had been observed since the establishment of an independent India and Pakistan in August 1947 that the alliance between Afghanistan and India had always encircled Pakistan strategically. Pakistan has been facing serious challenges from the alliance formed between the two countries after 9/11 creating a serious threat for Pakistan on its western border as well. Pakistan is always critical of India's expanding role in Afghanistan as India had established four Consulates apart from Embassy in Kabul and their covert intelligence operations are posing serious threat for Pakistan. The convergence of interests had allowed space for Indian intelligence agencies in Afghanistan to work on their clandestine operations focusing mainly on destabilizing Pakistan.

Pakistan had faced numerous terrorist attacks killing thousands of civilians and armed personnels since war on terror initiated after 9/11. Pakistan's perspective endorsed by these activities and blamed Afghan-India nexus for destabilizing Pakistan. Their intelligence cooperation has targeted Baluch nationalists and Pashtun separatist movements, and also providing sanctuaries in Afghanistan with provision of arms to attack Pakistan. India has been transformed into a regional player through its involvement in the affairs of Afghanistan. Their influence is significant on all sectors including economic, investment, political, social and strategic. India had challenged Pakistan not only in terms of security but also economically, politically and socially. So, the earlier criticism of Indian role in

Afghanistan would be destabilizing factor for Pakistan has been strengthened as India continues to marginalize influence of Pakistan not only in Afghanistan but also in the region (Kiran, 2009).

India had tactfully dealt with the Iranian and Afghani leadership, and established a corridor for trade between Afghanistan and India by investing in the construction and operationalization of Chabahar Port of Iran. India also built road linking major cities of Afghanistan with this port and also intended to build a railway network for this purpose. Afghanistan was using Pakistan for transit trade before this alternate route and in this way it was very much beneficiary for the economy of Pakistan (Safi & Alizada, 2019). One of the major reasons is the relations between India and Pakistan that it did not allow Indian goods to transit through Pakistan though it allowed Afghan goods to transit to India using Wagah border. Secondly, the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are not that cordial and often diplomatic relations ceased to exist hampering trade and transit trade due to the closure of borders for numerous days. Once, Pakistan was the largest trading partner of Afghanistan and bulk of transit trade took place through Pakistan but it has also to suffer due to bilateral relations between the two countries. The trade became victim of escalating diplomatic tensions resulted into fall out of Afghan market to Iran and India.

### **Afghanistan Pakistan relations: Major Challenges**

The bilateral relations remained hostile after 9/11 attacks and US launched war on terror in Afghanistan against Al-Qaeda and Taliban. First major challenge for both the countries is the cross border terrorism. Afghanistan along with USA and other stake holders blamed Pakistan for harbouring Taliban involved in insurgency in Afghanistan. They viewed that Pakistan is unable to remove this threat from its land as they are using Pakistan as a base to attack military and civil targets instead of launching operation against them they are providing sanctuary to Taliban. Pakistan on the other hand accusing Afghan government of not controlling attacks from Tehrik-e- Taliban (TTP) on Pakistan's soil and instead nurturing them with the help of Afghan security forces and Indian intelligence network (Rafique & Anwar, 2014). The border management is another important cause of concern for both the countries. It is very difficult for both the states to manage this border due to the nature of border as most of the areas are covered by the mountains and terrorists launching attacks are well trained in those terrains. So this second challenge is closely linked with the first one as terrorist used as proxies could easily cross this border and attack their targets causing suspension of dialogues among the two on numerous occasions.

The governments on both sides are always at loggerheads despite of tribal affiliation among them and existence of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious bonding for centuries. There are estimates that about 50,000 people cross this border on daily basis and most of them return back to their home country (Oztig, 2020). One of the most important challenges for Pakistan is the strong presence of India in its western neighbourhood. Indian ability to exert cultural, economic, political, regional and strategic influence on Afghanistan has its perils in disturbing the equation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Taliban are also a serious challenge for establishment of cordial relations among the two countries. Taliban were neglected in the post 9/11 setup of the interim government in Afghanistan and they were presumably wiped



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out from Afghanistan, emerged once again and challenged the writ of the government of Afghanistan. According to some sources, Taliban used to control lot of Afghan territory and Afghan National Army (ANA) were unable to take back their lost territory.

Drug Trafficking is another important challenge for Pakistan because it is a source for illicit money generation and can be used easily for sponsoring militancy and terrorism. Neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan is unable to control this menace fueling organized crimes in both the countries as it provides nexus between the crimes, drugs and extremists. Afghan refugee's influx in Pakistan for last four decades had impacted the socio-political fabric of Pakistan society. There are numerous refugee camps setup in Pakistan are threat to the security of Pakistan (Borthakur, 2017). After the attack of USA and combat operations in Afghanistan, large number of population took refuge in these camps and terrorists also infiltrated disguised in refugees into Pakistan. This war on terror jolted the economy of Pakistan as instability and insecurity in Afghanistan created security dilemma for Pakistan.

The major challenge for Pakistan is the presence of India in Afghanistan who had encircled Pakistan geo-strategically and politically. India is implementing its strategic objectives through use of soft power has become a daunting task for Pakistan. India is able to contain influence of Pakistan by manoeuvring decision making in Afghanistan as consultants from India controls the ministries of Afghanistan and border security forces. Indian intelligence RAW in collaboration with CIA and NDS using Afghan soil and Pakistani exterminated terrorists to spoil security, stability, economy and infrastructure of Pakistan. India also entered into a trilateral arrangement with Iran for its trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian states, is also another pretext to marginalize influence of Pakistan on the transit trade of Afghanistan. The trade balance is largely in favour of Pakistan and till 2011 Afghanistan was the largest market for Pakistani products but due to mistrust in relations, the trade and transit trade suffered causing losses for economy of Pakistan.

### **Strategies of Pakistan in Afghanistan: Countering Indian policies**

The primary objective of the policies of Pakistan in Afghanistan is based upon the historic analysis of Afghanistan and India in challenging the existence of Pakistan. They strategically poised convergence of interests towards Pakistan especially support of India on two most peculiar issues, Pashtunistan and Durand Line between Afghanistan and Pakistan since independence from British Empire in August 1947. Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan is largely driven on the pretext of its doctrine of 'strategic depth' so that it could not be encircled by the alliance between Afghanistan and India. This was the major reason of the involvement of Pakistan in the affairs of Afghanistan and secures its interests in Afghanistan. The other major concern for Pakistan is the historical claim of its territory by Afghanistan and non-recognition of Durand Line as its border so Pakistan aimed at the formation of such a broad based government which is not intended to claim Pashtoon region once again.

Pakistan intended to establish regional connectivity with Central Asian States through enhancing economic, trade and energy corridor. This strategy once again came in conflict with India who also has the same intentions. India is able to promote its economic, military and political presence in Afghanistan on one hand and curtailed development of any pro-Pakistan sentiments in the eyes of government and

people of Pakistan. On the other hand, India has restricted its relevance in the peace process in Afghanistan as it does not recognize Taliban regime and major insurgent force in Afghanistan after 9/11. Pakistan in this scenario has emerged as a strong contender for peace process due to its recognition of Taliban as a major player in Afghanistan. This concept became reality in late 2018 and 2019 as USA entered into dialogue with Taliban for its safe exit from Afghanistan and allowing Taliban to enter into mainstream politics of Afghanistan so that it may remain stabilized and peaceful in future also. Pakistan is clear in its policy to control the reconciliation process and central role in ending violence in Afghanistan based upon strong promotion of its strategic interests.

Afghanistan and Pakistan revamped older Afghan Transit Trade Agreement signed in 1965 so that they could meet the challenges of emerging regional connectivity in 21<sup>st</sup> century. This new agreement allowed Afghanistan to export its products to India but do not allow the same for Indian exports to Afghanistan. This agreement though when brokered by the United States, intended for connecting Central Asian States with South Asia in the process of reviving old Silk route. Once again these objectives could not be materialized due to antagonistic relations between the two arch-rivals, India and Pakistan. Afghanistan and India chose alternative routes like air-corridors and development of trade routes through Iran resulting into falling volume of transit trade through Pakistan.

### **Indo-Pak Counter Strategies: Challenges and Opportunities for Afghanistan**

Afghanistan remained victim to counter strategies adopted by India and Pakistan so far in enhancing their influence to achieve their long term objectives. Afghanistan, infact had been successful in harnessing balanced approach towards policy objectives of two rivals, India and Pakistan. Afghanistan reacted in its national interests in response to the strategic rivalry and strategies of India and Pakistan. This rivalry has produced mixed results for the Afghanistan. As discussed, Afghanistan relations remained strained with Pakistan due to numerous reasons and even unable to cultivate those relations into cordial, the mistrust among the two nations continued to hamper the growth. Pakistan has disputes not only with India but also long standing ones with Afghanistan. This provided an ample opportunity for India to develop amicable relations with Afghanistan due to convergence of interests. Afghanistan government realized the importance of India in countering influence of Pakistan in its territory. Afghanistan remained victim of security and insecurity aspirations of these two states despite of realization that their territory has been continuously used for proxy war and unconventional warfare tactics.

India faced the challenge of terrorism and insurgency in 1980s and 1990s due to presence of Mujahideens and Taliban in Afghanistan as it fuelled militancy in their country especially in occupied Kashmir. India understands that Pakistan was able to muster support within Afghanistan during that era so India focused mainly on increasing its economic influence and construct public opinion against Pakistan. This approach benefitted Afghanistan to a large extent as India became not only one of the largest donor country but also major development projects helped the war torn country to revamp its devastated infrastructure. However, international approach to establish peace and security in post-9/11 era vanished due to these approaches adopted by three states. India along with Afghanistan and USA created perception that Pakistan is responsible for instability and insecurity in Afghanistan but

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international community also recognized the sacrifices of Pakistan as the large price paid in consequence of war on terror.

The trade and transit trade also suffered due to wariness of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is the reason that Pakistan is not the largest exporting country to Afghanistan and Iran emerged as the largest trading partner with Afghanistan. India used this opportunity and helped Afghanistan develop alternative route through Iran. Afghanistan insisted Pakistan to allow Indian products to transit through Pakistan but its rivalry with India and failures of confidence building measures restricted exports from Afghanistan to India. So, Afghanistan government took calculative decision and signed trilateral agreement with India and Iran for expansion of its trade base. Pakistan wanted that it may use their land for transiting its products to Central Asian States succumbed to the condition applied by them for extension in the APTTA.

### **Conclusion**

Afghanistan has been in state of war for last forty years as the external players using its soil for culmination of their agenda through this war ravaged country. So, is the case of Indian presence in Afghanistan and it remained victim of strategic rivalry between India and Pakistan as it was in the 1990s. India had entered into strategic agreement and used soft power to attain its objectives in the region. Indian policies could be seen as Pakistan-centric but the agenda of strategic objectives is much more than that as it does not want that soil of Afghanistan could be used in the future for terrorist attacks in India. Pakistan viewed Indian policies in Afghanistan as a threat to its national interests and growth of Afghan-India relations as a major challenge for its security interests. Pakistan adopted strategies to counter Indian influence at most as the perception in Pakistan exists that Indian policies goals are always designed to isolate and destabilize Pakistan. Afghanistan knew that balance of power doesn't exist with Pakistan so to counter the involvement of Pakistan it has formed an alliance with India. Both India and Pakistan desire for establishment of friendly government in Afghanistan and in order to fulfill these aspirations, they are engaged in subversive activities as the history of Afghanistan of last forty years' manifest.

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