



## Developments in Indo-Afghan relations since Post-Taliban Era

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### Abstract

After the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, India came out in a big way and New Delhi reached out to renew ties with Kabul. Many current Afghan leaders including President Hamid Karzai, studied at Indian universities resulted in further boosting the India-Afghanistan relations. Hamid Karzai took the reins of Afghanistan's interim government. Jaswant Singh, then External Affairs Minister, on December 22, 2001 returned to Afghanistan both to observe the inauguration of Hamid Karzai as head of the interim government of Afghanistan and to reopen the Indian embassy, which had closed the day before the Taliban seized Kabul in 1996. The continuous tensed and problematic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan resulted in India's close alliance and strengthened ties with Afghanistan as Afghanistan accusing Pakistan for supporting and sheltering the Taliban outfits. After the fall of Taliban and US invasion in Afghanistan in 2001, India offered Intelligence support and established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and also dynamically contributed in reconstruction and rebuilding efforts there.

**Keywords:** India, Afghanistan, developments, Taliban

### 1. Introduction

India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links. Traditionally, India has enjoyed good relations with Afghanistan. Historians are of the opinion that people of the two countries represent joint cultural relations among the world nations, while describing the long background of their relationship to four thousand years or beyond it<sup>[1]</sup>. After the partition of India, as soon as it becomes clear that Pakistan would have problems with India on one side and with Afghanistan on the other. The creation of Pakistan in 1947 brought conflicts along borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The only troubling point during this phase was the Pastunistan and Kashmir issue<sup>[2]</sup>. The controversy between Afghanistan and Pakistan over the state of the Pushtun regions of Pakistan- mainly the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)- is interrelated with the status of Durand line as an international border has been a topic of academic discussion and a source of friction between the two countries right from the beginning of Pakistan as an independent state<sup>[3]</sup>. There had been hardly any issue on any conflict between India and Afghanistan. In order to provide a basic structure to the bilateral efforts of co-operation, Pandit J.L. Nehru therefore conducted a treaty of friendship in 1950. There had been mutual visits from both the sides by high dignitaries in the decade of 1950's strengthened the blossoming relationship<sup>[4]</sup>.

### 2. Methodology

In the present study mostly secondary data have been used. In addition to this, data have also been collected from various journals, articles, newspaper archives. The research is also

based on the referred sources – published, unpublished and electronic.

### 3. Discussions

#### Support to Democracy

To reduce Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan, India's economic assistance and support to democracy is an important step. For India's point of view a friendly and pro-active democratic regimes in Afghanistan would act as a balancer in the region. If we have a stable Afghanistan, then the stability of the region can be assured would counter the Taliban forces and India has extended its all-out support in this endeavour. Then Indian External Affairs Minister, S.M. Krishna in an interview with the Wall Street Journal on the side-lines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2009, stated India did 'not believe that war can solve any problem and that applies to Afghanistan too.' As such, New Delhi's recognition of the Government of Afghan's efforts to build a comprehensive political order much as the Indian government over the years has been involved in various such negotiations, dialogues, and reintegration mechanisms in dealing with its own insurgencies<sup>[5]</sup>. In September 2011, India condemned the assassination of former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani. India repeated the faithful support of the people and the government of India in Afghanistan's "quest for peace and efforts to strengthen the roots of democracy"<sup>[6]</sup>. Narendra Modi's visit to Afghanistan in December 2015 looked at by Afghans in a favourable manner. A speech was delivered by Indian Prime Minister during the same visit before parliament, encouraging the people to participate in their country's democratic processes and calling on Afghans to vote in the elections. It was a heartening development between the

leaders of both countries that built even greater goodwill. For a stable and democratic Afghanistan, India has sought to show its support with significant investments and financial assistance [7]. India's influence in the country is highly supported by the people of Afghanistan because through most part of Indo-Afghan relations, India has been a true friend. The Afghanistan people also realize the fact that India's support for Afghanistan is very importance and India should keep its assistance support continue until it is able to stand on its own. The former Minister of State for External Affairs Parneet Kaur once said in the national capital that "India believes the cause of democracy and peace in Afghanistan can be best served through development programmes, which the Afghan Government and people need most urgently [8]. Indian Prime minister Narinder Modi along with a high level delegation paid a visit to Afghanistan in 25th December 2016 called on President Ashraf Ghani and met Dr Abdullah (Chief Executive) and Former President Hamid Karzai. During his visit, he inaugurated the newly built Afghan Parliament and announced 500 scholarships for the children of the martyrs of Afghan Security Forces in school and colleges both in Afghanistan and in India. And gifted four Mi25 Attack helicopter to Afghan Air forces [9]. However, India's Afghanistan policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is shifting from a reluctant albeit friendly one, to a more confident and multi-dimensional approach: Strengthening Kabul's defence capability and investing in Afghanistan's nascent democracy and economy; and promoting regional connectivity and integration. India is an inspiration and a model for Afghanistan's aborning democracy, development and its state-building process. India had got a great success in building its state institutions, managing its diverse communities, women's empowerment, nurturing an indigenous democracy, and transitioning from an agrarian society into a developing nation. Afghanistan can learn a great deal from India.

### **Economic Development**

For India's trade and energy security a peaceful Afghanistan is good. A stable and economically integrated Afghanistan is a fundamental interest of India. Since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan's economy has recovered significantly and remains highly dependent on foreign aid and trade with neighbouring countries. Afghanistan Government can retain and enhance its legitimacy by bringing the Afghan economy back on track. In this regard, India is playing an important role. An important part of India's strategy is the Consolidation of bilateral relations through economic and commercial means. Since 2001, India in mainstreaming Afghanistan in world politics has played a significant role through reconstruction and developmental assistance. India's approach to rebuild and reconstruct Afghanistan is based on the assumption that social and economic development is mostly important for maintaining peace, stability, and security in Afghanistan and the region. In 2003, India signed a Preferential Trade Agreement with Afghanistan in order to institutionalize the economic cooperation [10]. The Agreement provides duty-free access to the import of figs dried, mulberries, pistachio, asafoetida, and pine nuts roasted melons fresh, lapis lazuli, ruby and emeralds from Afghanistan. Also

50% concession has been on duty extended on black, green, red raisins, dried apricots, walnuts, dried plums' almonds, cherries sour dried, raisons golden, fresh grapes, apricots, apples, pomegranates, caraway seeds, anise seeds, linseed, sesame seeds, apricot nuts bitter, liquorice roots, and alpha seeds [11]. In terms of Afghan imports, India figured at the third place accounting for eight per cent, whereas Pakistan accounted for 29 per cent followed by Iran at 13 per cent as showed by data available with the Asian Development Bank (ADB). In 2003, India ranked at third place in terms of Afghan exports with 19 per cent imports from Afghanistan as compared to 30 per cent from the US and 22 per cent from Pakistan. During these years India's overall exports have grown robustly in both absolute and percentage terms. In addition, Afghanistan with a rich resource base of unexplored minerals like gold, silver, iron, copper, chrome, sulphur, barite, talc, mica, magnesium, lapis lazuli, marble, asbestos, mercury, nickel, lead, bauxite, zinc, lithium and rubies. India always continued its commitment to the reconstruction and economic development of Afghanistan. During the visit, three important MoUs/Agreements were signed:

1. Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Healthcare and Medicinal Science
2. MOU on Small Developmental Projects
3. MOU on Cooperation in the field of Agricultural Research & Education.

Recently, New Delhi helped Afghanistan airlift fresh fruits to India, when Pakistan closed the only land route for Afghan products destined for India. Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani is reported to have even warned Pakistan that if they do not allow Afghan imports and exports to India to cross their territory, they will close Pakistan's transit route through Afghanistan to Central Asia. The Chabahar port agreement between Afghanistan-India-Iran converting into a transit hub will also help Kabul to reduce its dependence on Karachi port [12].

### **Capacity building measures**

Since the fall of Taliban, India has been investing in the rebuilding of institutional capacity in Afghanistan by providing training to more than 700 Afghans in various professions, including diplomats, judges, lawyers, doctors, women entrepreneurs, paramedics, teachers, public officials, cartographers, and officials in various departments of Afghanistan's government. At the Foreign Service Institution many Afghan diplomats were trained from July- September 2003. At Indian Institute of Mass Communication, 19 Afghan journalists were trained from June-August 2003. At the Indian law Institute, New Delhi 18 Afghan judges and lawyers were trained from February- May 2003. Seven Afghan teachers were provided in service training from the Ministry of education of Afghanistan by Delhi Public School Society from 4 September- 15 October 2003 [13]. India has made a meaningful contribution in capacity building and empowerment of women particularly in terms of skill development. To various sections of Afghan population, New Delhi provides a large number of scholarships; for instance, 2,000 scholarships to Afghans annually for training and schooling in India, including for 500 Afghan civil servants. Near about 68% of Afghan population is below 25 years and

India is focused on tapping the youth potential through capacity building and skill development. India not only assist Afghanistan in its development but also wants to keep the youth engaged in economic activities and away from activities like terrorism, organized crimes and drug trafficking detrimental to the country's security and stability<sup>[14]</sup>.

#### **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) project**

This project implementing vocational training is funded by government of India. Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) provides training in commercial tailoring / garment making to 216 women. Out of them 188 by City and Guilds of the U.K were qualified for being awarded certificates. In addition 973 men were also provided training in construction-related skills such as masonry, carpentry, Welding & plumbing.

#### **The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)**

SEWA in the Indian state of Gujarat achieved great success (and later in other states) started operations in Afghanistan in 2008. The main focus of cooperation in the NGO sector between India and the United States is on agricultural development and women's empowerment: For vocational training USAID is providing up to \$1 million fund to SEWA. A vocational training centre in Kabul was already created by SEWA following a 2007 agreement between the governments of India and Afghanistan. Under the provision of USAID plan 150 Afghan women in India were involved in vocational trainings, and a provision for the SEWA staff to travel to the country to monitor the effectiveness of the training in increasing income levels. So far SEWA has claimed to have trained over 3,000 Afghan women. In spite of two fatal terrorist attacks on its team in Kabul, it continued to operate<sup>[15]</sup>.

#### **Hand in Hand (HH) (Das te Badast)**

This project through microfinance and enterprise development aimed at creating livelihood options. This project has been working in the Badakshan and Balkh provinces of northern Afghanistan. By creating Savings Credit Group, it works towards community participation. This project is highly supported by government of India by providing soft loans without interest to the community complying with the Islamic law.

#### **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC)**

78 women officials working in various government ministries were deputed to India under the ITEC scheme for short term technical training programmes<sup>[16]</sup>.

#### **Capacity Administration for Afghan public (CAP)**

CAP is a nurturing professional skill in Afghanistan public administration and an Afghanistan-India-UNDP programme for Capacity Administration for Afghan public. Currently about 20 Indian CAP officers are in key Afghan ministries to guide and mentor Afghan public servants for developing training modules. Their duty has been positioned to develop Afghan capacity building measures. This unique programme got a great success, with a demand for more such mentors and guides to be brought in.

The other programmes and Schemes under which Afghan

nationals receive training in diverse fields are as under:

- Technical Cooperation Scheme of Colombo Plan.
- Indian Technical and Economic cooperation (ITEC)
- Special training programme for Afghan nationals.
- Training of 20 Afghan diplomats at Foreign Service Institution, New Delhi.
- F&B training at presidential palace.
- Teacher training programme for 15 teachers of Habibia High School at Sanskrit School, New Delhi.
- Training of 20 Baktar News Agency officials at PTI.
- Training of Afghan personals in India.
- Training in Hindi to 32 Afghan students at KHS Agra, India.
- Training of doctors from IGICH, Kabul at AIIMS, and Delhi during 2009 to January 2010.
- Training of parliament officers. Etc.<sup>[17]</sup>.

#### **Public Health**

In the field of health care, India has provided significant assistance. Such as Indira Gandhi Children's hospital located in Kabul is a Children's hospital of Afghanistan. India funded the construction and supplied the hospital's infrastructure and training of its medical personnel along with a telemedicine project that links it with Indian hospitals. Monthly, over 30,000 Afghans through Indian Medical Missions in five Afghan cities are being provided free medical consultation and services. To the Afghan Ministry of Public Health, India also provided ambulances and built numerous basic health clinics in border areas. In December 2001, India sent a team of doctors and technicians to Kabul to set up a camp for fixing artificial limb (Jaipur foot) for Afghan amputees. Since 2001, Afghanistan has received more than 400 tons of medical equipments and instruments<sup>[18]</sup>.

#### **Infrastructure Development**

In order to provide security and economic benefits, India's foreign aid activities are mainly focused on reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. India provides an easy route to Central Asia – the hub of minerals, energy and gas resources and access to markets in the Middle East and Europe, endeavored to strengthen relations with Afghanistan. Various infrastructure projects, including construction of Salma dam – hydropower and irrigation project, construction of the Afghan Parliament, Zaranj-Delaram highway project (linking Delaram road in Afghanistan to Iranian border Zaranj) have been initiated by the Indian government in Afghanistan with an intention of greater access to country's energy markets. In response to Kabul's growing centrality in many energy projects such as Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, and the Central Asia and South Asia 1000 electricity transmission and trade projects have significantly changed India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan<sup>[19]</sup>.

#### **4. Conclusion**

India's support and assistance to Afghanistan has gained memorable and ever honorable reputations from the world developed and developing countries. Its help definitely will yield good pace and economic development in India. India is seen as a positive contributor and well-wisher to Afghanistan's development. It would be in India's long-term

interest to develop positive and friendly relations with all major ethnic groups and factions in Afghanistan. India's policies will have to be in line with the needs and priorities of the Afghan people. India's support and assistance forces the Afghan people to realize about India's humanitarian approach to establish cordial relationship with India instead of using terrorism and it will not support and send its youths to Pakistan to train them for conduct terrorism activities against India in south Asia continent. Actually India would be unaffected hereafter from the terrorism and insurgency if it is having ever continuous relations with Afghanistan than any other country. India has been showing pertinent interest in reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan since 2001.

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