

India'S Relation with Afghanistan: Historical Origins, Policy Considerations and Restriction Factors

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Abstract: Considering the Historical Origin and Reality of Afghanistan, India Has Actively Developed Its Relations with Afghanistan Since 2001. However, That Process is Restricted by Many Factors. This Paper Mainly Discusses India's Relationship with Afghanistan Since 2001 from Three Aspects: Historical Origin, Realistic Consideration and Restriction Factors.

1. Introduction

On August 21, 2017, President Trump of the United States Issued the New Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia, in Which he Specifically Mentioned That, "We Appreciate India's Important Contributions to Stability in Afghanistan... We Want Them to Help Us More with Afghanistan, Especially in the Area of Economic Assistance and Development." the Remark Draws General Attention to the Relations between India and Afghanistan. However, Indian government's Subsequent Response and Attitude Were Relatively Cautious; No Further Positive Responses or Specific Policy Measures Were Issued to Respond to the New Strategy in Afghanistan of the United States. India Has Developed is Relations with Afghanistan Since 2001. What Are the Historical Origins and Policy Considerations Behind the Action? Which Factors Restrict the Relationship? This Paper Will Analyze and Discuss These Problems.

2. Historical Origins of INDIA's Relations with Afghanistan

India and Afghanistan Share the Same Historical Background; the Friendly Relationship between Them is a Strong Tradition in Specific Historical Periods. Nehru, the Founding Prime Minister of India Believes That Many Factors, Including the Common Historical Memory, Are Important Reasons for the Long-Lasting Close Relations between India and Afghanistan. in *Mahabharata*, India's Greatest Epic Written in 3000 B.C., It is Mentioned That the Great Indian Prince Koraf Was Born in Gandhara (Now in Afghanistan). *Ashtadhyayi*, the Greatest Sanskrit Grammar Work in Indian History, Was Written by Panini, an Ancient Indian Grammarian, Who Was Also Born in Gandhara. the Kushan Empire in the History of India (55 to 425 a.d.) Ruled a Large Area Including Afghanistan, Pakistan and Northwest India for a Long Time. It Can Be Seen That India and Afghanistan Have Strong Historical and Cultural Ties.

However, Looking Back on History, the Large-Scale Historical Connection between India and Afghanistan Started from Cruel Wars. in the Heyday of the Timurid Empire (1370-1507 a.d.), Kabul and Delhi Were Both under Its Rule. Zahir-Din Muhammad Babur, a Descendant of Timur the Great, Established His Kingdom in Kabul in 1501 and Then Expanded the Territory Southward. in 1526, he Established the Mughal Empire in Delhi. in the Winter of 1530, Humayun, the Son of Babur, and an Afghan General Named Shir Khan Had a Bloody Battle Near Kanauj. Humayun Was Forced to Flee to Persia after His Defeat. with the Occupation of Delhi and the Establishment of the Suri Dynasty, India Entered a Period of "Subjugation" Ruled by Afghans. in the Autumn of 1545 a.d., Shir Khan Was Killed by Accident during the Expedition. His Son Darhan Succeeded and Continued the Expedition. the Army of Humayun Defeated the Suri Dynasty and Conquered Kabul. in 1555, Humayun Led His Army to Recover the City of Delhi. the Suri Dynasty Lasted Only 15

Years and the Mughal Empire Was Restored. during the Reign of Jalal Din Muhammad Akbar, the Son of Humayun, the Mughal Empire Reached Its Peak, Once Again Covering Afghanistan. in 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani Led the Afghans to Gain Independence from the Control of Persian. from 1748 to 1765, Durrani Led His Army on Eight Expeditions to India, Gained a Lot of Territories and Wealth, and Once Laid the Foundation of Rule in Northwest India. after That, the Western Colonists Came in Drove, and the British Colonists Finally Won the Competition of Conquering India. in 1858, the British India Was Founded and the Mughal Dynasty Was Destroyed. in 1884, Tsarist Russian Forces Pushed South to Kushka, Which Was Not Far from the Afghan Border, and Was Only 70 Miles from Herat, a Key Town in Western Afghanistan. British and Russian Forces Infiltrated into South Asia; the Relationship between India and Afghanistan Went through Ups and Downs.

In 1893, Sir Henry Mortimer Durand, as the Plenipotentiary of the British King, Negotiated with Two Plenipotentiaries of King Abdul Rahman of Afghanistan to Delimit the 2640 Km Long Border between British India and Afghanistan (the Durand Line), But the Successive Rulers of Afghanistan Did Not Recognize It. (after the Partition of India and Pakistan, This Line Became the Border between Afghanistan and Pakistan). from the Late 1930s to the Early 1940s, Due to the Support of Indian People to the Anti Colonization Movement and the Indian Revolutionary Government in Exile, the Relationship between the British Indian Government and Afghanistan Was Not Friendly. after the Partition of India and Pakistan in August 1947, India Believed That Afghanistan Was Still a “Neighbour” Bordering Kashmir. in the First India Pakistan War Ended in January 1949, Pakistan Controlled the Northern Part of Kashmir; the Only Small Territory Which Connects India and Afghanistan Was Cut Off. Based on the Common Position of Anti Pakistan, India and Afghanistan Soon Formed Allies and Signed a Friendly Agreement in 1950. in the Following Two Decades, in Order to Balance the Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Which Traditionally Pursued the Neutral Policy, Also Actively Developed Its Relations with the United States. on the Contrary, India, Which Broke Free from the Shackles of Western Colonists, Pursued the Pro-Soviet Policy. Therefore, Although Both India and Afghanistan Were Important Members of the Non Aligned Movement At That Time, the Progress in Bilateral Relations Was Not Significant. after the Overthrow of the Afghanistan Daoud Government in April 1978 by Left-Wing Organizations Supported by the Soviet Union, Based on the Common Pro-Soviet Standpoint, the Relationship between New Delhi and Kabul Warmed Again. Throughout the 1980s, India Tied with the Soviet Union on Its Position in Afghanistan, and Its Influence on Afghanistan Has Been Expanding. after the Collapse of the Pro-Soviet Regime in Afghanistan in April 1989, in Order to Limit Pakistan’s Influence in Afghanistan, India Began to Support the Northern Alliance Led by Ahmed Shah Masood. in April 1992, Pro-Pakistan Taliban Emerged in Afghanistan, India Continued to Provide Masood with Weapons and Military Advisers, Which Seriously Damaged the Relationship between India and Afghanistan Again. during the Taliban’s Regime, India Was Forced to Close Its Embassies and All Consulates in Afghanistan. Afghanistan Quickly Became a Base for Anti-Indian Groups and Organizations.

3. INDIA’s Policy Considerations on Its Relations with Afghanistan

India’s overall goal in Afghanistan after 2001 is to seek a united, peaceful, secure, stable, inclusive and economically vibrant Afghanistan. Therefore, India advocates the establishment of a secular, free and multi-ethnic Kabul regime. It advocates the national peace and reconciliation “led, owned and controlled by Afghans” in an environment free from terror and violence. As the largest country in South Asia, the development of Afghanistan is closely related to India. Moreover, compared with other NATO member countries, India has been attracting more terrorist attacks from Afghanistan. India locates in the centre of the South Asian subcontinent. Afghanistan, to a large extent, is its “nearest neighbour” (i.e. the extended adjacent area). The strategic position of Afghanistan helps the regional country to attract the special attention of India. It can be seen that India has major interests in Afghanistan.

Based on the overall policy objectives, India has three key strategic interests in Afghanistan. They have guided India’s policy towards Afghanistan in different degrees in the past two decades.

First is to prevent terrorist attacks against India (including training bases and shelters of terrorists) as well as non-traditional security threats such as drug production in Afghanistan. At the same time, the Indian government also needs to curb the growth of Afghanistan as a major illicit drug production center. Second is to support and strengthen Afghanistan as a close neighbour friendly to India. This is mainly due to two considerations. On the one hand, a friendly Afghanistan can prevent Pakistan from obtaining “strategic depth”, so that India can gain an advantage in the geopolitical competition with Pakistan. India’s policy towards Afghanistan has become part of its policy towards Pakistan. On the other hand, a friendly Afghanistan is also conducive to the realization of India’s dream of being a big power. A friendly Afghanistan can extend India’s influence in Central Asia. Third is to access to Central Asia through Afghanistan and access to rich energy there. India has actively responded to or participated in a number of pipeline projects and transportation projects across Central Asia. All these energy transmission routes between India and Central Asia, including land and air transportation routes, must go through Afghanistan.

India believes that its strategic interests in Afghanistan can be protected and realized only through the two-pronged policy strategy: to help Afghanistan restore sovereignty and political stability (including controlling its borders and internal integration), to cooperate with Afghanistan’s neighbours as well as the wider “heart of Asia” regional countries, and to provide necessary support for the economic restoration and reconstruction of Afghanistan. India’s Afghan policy is made based on the idea that, democracy and development are key means which can guarantee Afghanistan to become a source of regional stability instead of regressing to extremism. Therefore, India’s approach is to give up the use of “hard power”, and achieve its own policy objectives and geopolitical advantages by playing an important role in the economic reconstruction and recovery of Afghanistan.

4. Factors Restrict INDIA’s Relations with Afghanistan

First is the withdrawal of Western security forces. Since in 2001, the Western security umbrella has protected parts of India’s interests in Afghanistan, which has greatly promoted India’s political, economic and social status in Afghanistan. The United States and its NATO allies withdrew combat troops from Afghanistan at the end of 2014. India worries about the deterioration of Afghanistan’s security situation after the withdrawal, especially the increasing possibility of attacking Indians who lived in Afghanistan. At the same time, India is concerned about conscious efforts by the west to reintroduce and gradually legitimize the same insurgents who forced India out of Afghanistan throughout the 1990s. Taliban controls about 40% of Afghan territory; terrorist attacks frequently happen. Faced with the severe situation, it is uncertain to what extent the United States and its Western allies can stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. Therefore, India is cautious about further developing its relations with Afghanistan.

Second, India faces the threaten of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. India’s ties with the Northern Alliance of Afghanistan and its support to the Afghan government after 2001 have brought a cost to itself. In addition to the terrorist attacks on their homeland, Indians also become real victims in Afghanistan. As far as New Delhi is concerned, these terrorist attacks convey clear messages: India should stay away from Afghanistan. Growing security risks are bound to jeopardize India’s massive investment in Afghanistan, including the \$10 billion stake in the Hajigak iron ore mine. “Many terrorist organizations have distinctive features of anti-India. If India is encouraged to play a greater role in Afghanistan, terrorist threats in Afghanistan and India are likely to increase,” warned by an U.S. expert.

Third, India queries that various parties hold peace talks with Taliban. As the war on terror has dragged on, the Afghan Taliban has confidently revived. The United States, China, Russia, Iraq, Pakistan and other international and regional powers, as well as the Afghan government itself, support the peace talks with the Taliban. India, however, has long questioned the behaviour. As an Indian defence correspondent points out, “the Taliban have been portrayed as a whole cloned Pakistan.” India believes that peace talks with the Taliban will enable Pakistan to further control the future of Afghanistan at the expense of India’s position. Today, peace talks between other parties

and Taliban are on the table, but India is absent. India is concerned that the process in peace talks will restore the inextricable link between the fundamentalist movement and anti Indian militants activate inside and outside Afghanistan, putting India's long-term interests at risk.

Fourth is to check and balance Pakistan. Relations between India and Pakistan were strained mainly by the Kashmir issue during most of their 70 years of independence. Due to the power asymmetry with India, Pakistan's main strategic interest in Afghanistan has always been to seek "strategic depth" in order to avoid the emergence of two "hot war fronts" or adjacent to two competitors. Pakistan opposes India's opening of four consulates in Afghanistan, arguing that they have no legitimate function and gather intelligence in the areas where they are located. In addition, Pakistan is full of doubts about India's aid projects and reconstruction activities in the rural Pashto area of Afghanistan. As Russian expert pointed out, "India's terrorist threat comes from Afghanistan, which is a headache issue, and Pakistan has a strong leverage to influence the situation in Afghanistan."

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the Indian government under the leadership of prime minister Modi may continue or even increase all kinds of assistance to Afghanistan in the new term due to historical origins, the aspirations of being a great power as well as its major strategic interests and goals in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Manmohan Singh, the former Prime Minister of India expressed, unlike the west, New Delhi has no "exit strategy" in Afghanistan. However, India's statements and actions will be relatively cautious. It is bound to make a rational choice on the basis of comprehensively assessing strategic risks, so as to develop relations with Afghanistan in a way consistent with India's strategic interests. Up to now, the conflict between India and Pakistan has not been fundamentally resolved; the Taliban in Afghanistan have not really returned to the mainstream of society. There will always be complex factors, such as security matters which can restrict India's relationship with Afghanistan. After all, both the Afghan government and the Taliban have been the main actors in the reconciliation process of Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan has been India's main competitor in Afghanistan. Generally speaking, the extent to which the United States and other western countries maintain their military presence in Afghanistan and India's perception on the counter-terrorism situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia in the period after 2014's withdrawal will directly determine the scale and strength of India's development of relations with Afghanistan. How regional countries, especially Pakistan, evaluate and view the intention and influence of India's relations with Afghanistan and make corresponding response will also hinder India's development on its relations with Afghanistan.

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