India – Afghanistan Relation

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ABSTRACT
India and Afghanistan always had good relations except the period of Taliban in the beginning of 21st Century. This paper shows the relationship and business strategic between India and Afghanistan.

Keywords-- India, Afghanistan, Foreign Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan has all along been an important country to India. As early as 1949, Jawaharlal Nehru while spelling out the natural directions of India’s foreign policy emphasized the need to build cordial relations with Afghanistan as neighboring country. According to Nehru, necessarily India’s foreign policy must first turn its attention towards countries bordering it by land and sea. Which were those countries? In the words of Nehru “If you start form the left, Pakistan; I would also include Afghanistan although it does not touch India. Tibet and China, Burma (Now Myanmar) and Malaya (Malaysia)”, Thus, Afghanistan has always been an important country to India. Besides, given Afghanistan’s close links with the South Asian Civilization, the bilateral ties between the two countries stretches over centuries. After independence, when India decided to pursue an independent foreign policy and expounded the idea of ‘Non-alignment’ Afghanistan at least for some time followed the line of India and tried to maintain an independent foreign policy. Historically India and Afghanistan are traditional friends since the ages. Buddhism has connected the two countries together as well as the old silk route stretching form China to Central Asia. India and Afghanistan always have had good relations except the period of Taliban in the beginning of 21st Century. Relations between India and Afghanistan can be traced back to the era of Indus valley civilization. It had been a part of Maurya Empire during the ancient era, and as the Buddhism was introduced they controlled the area falling to the South of Hindukush. Thus ruled by the India-Greek Rulers the Indo-Scythian in the 3rd and 2nd century B.C. and having the impact of Hindu, Zoroa strain and Buddhist culture. Later on during the 10th century and until the middle of 18th century the Afghanistan based Turkic leaders invaded northern India. Amongst them were Ghanznavids, Khilzis, and Durani.

During these eras, especially during the Mughal period (1526-1858) many afghans began migrating to India due to political upheavals in their regions.

During the pre-independence time, Afghanistan became the playground of the great powers as Britain and Russia Exerted great game over the Soil of Afghanistan. Great Britain and Russia and their great game of colonization gave Afghanistan contested boundary between India and Afghanistan, as a consequence the ties between the two remained frayed. But After independence, as the problems of the Durand line got transferred to Pakistan, India had no reason not to enjoy good ties with Afghanistan especially given the adversarial nature of India – Pakistan relations.

In the post Independence era India and Afghanistan signed a peace treaty in 1950. During the era of cold war, when Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan, India was the only South Asian Country to recognize the soviet backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. India provided humanitarian aid to Afghanistan also. After the Pull out of Soviet Forces from Afghanistan. There was no change in the Indian Foreign policy towards Afghanistan. It continued to support Najibullah Government till its fall in 1989. Thereafter India supported the coalition government which took the control of Power in Afghanistan. But relations and control were broken as the civil war erupted in Afghanistan resulting in the rule of Taliban in 1996. The new Taliban regime was staunchly supported by Pakistan and recognized by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE. The rise of Islamism in Afghanistan and the proliferation of Afghan mujahedeen in the militancy in Jammu and Kashmir turned Taliban into a security threat for India. In the year 1999, the hijacked Indian Airlines flight 814 landed and stayed in Kandahar in Afghanistan and the Taliban were suspected in supporting them. Thus India’s ties with Afghanistan hit their nadir throughout the Taliban’s 7 years rule when India continued to support Northern Alliance by Providing money and material.

II. INDIA-AFGHANISTAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Indian Prime Minister’s visit to Afghanistan was followed by Afghani President karzai’s visit to India in October 2011. During his visit a landmark, Strategic
Partnership Agreement was signed between the two countries. The agreement comities India to training, equipping and capacity building to train and equip Afghan army and Police forces, expanding on limited training it conducted for the army in India a few years back in 2007. India acceded to Afghanistan’s request for 150 army officers to receive training at Indian Defense and Military academies and also agreed to begin hosting training sessions for Afghan Police officers. This was Afghanistan’s first strategic pact with any country, though it was trying hard to forge strategic pacts with USA and NATO to ward off threat from Pakistan. As part of the new Pact, bilateral dialogue at the level of the National Security Advisors has been institutionalized to focus on enhancing cooperation on security issues. New Delhi is hoping that Kabul will take the lead in defining the exact terms of this engagement even as India made it clear that it would “Stand by Afghanistan” When foreign troops withdraw from the country in 2014. Along with the strategic pact, two other agreements on India –Afghan cooperation in developing hydrocarbons and mineral resources were signed.

For some line, Afghanistan succeeded also to enjoy an advantageous status by pitting one super power against the other. But that was a phase of test of time for the third world countries and it was not quite easy for any third would player to keep itself aloof from the heat of cold war. Afghanistan also could not do it for some obvious reasons. It has fallen prey to the dichotomy of the United States’ proximity to Pakistan and the Soviet generosity of extending huge economic and military aid to this land locked country. Slowly, Afghanistan intruded to the Soviet sphere to influence which later resulted in the invasion of the former by the latter in 1979. Whatever be the internal situation that precipitated the crises in Afghanistan and eventually led to the entry of Soviet troops in the country, the Soviet move undoubtedly put India in a very hesitant position. On the one hand was the freedom of a non-aligned country at stake and on the other was the question of opposing the move of a friendly nation whose fired ship meant a lot for India during that world scenario. It was really tough for India to balance between the two and Mrs. Gandhi had to pursue a dual tight-rope policy. She neither endorsed Soviet incursion in Afghanistan nor condemned the move in very unmistakable terms. India was also the first non-communist state to accord recognition to the government installed by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan after its 1979 invasion. This no doubt damaged India’s credibility as a non-aligned state, but to say that India was all set defend Soviet occupation was also not correct. On Persistent prodding of Andrei Gromyko, then Foreign Minister of the U.S.S.R, Mrs. Gandhi tried to maintain a neutral stand and advised him that the Soviet troops should leave Afghanistan as early as possible. But soviet occupation continued for a decade more which was indeed a setback for India’s long cherished aspiration to establish an exclusive sphere of Influence in South Asia. However, India’s relations with Afghanistan continued and new Delhi supported successive governments in Kabul until the rise of Taliban in the 1990s.

The chaos that resulted in Afghanistan following Soviet invasion and its decade long domination had very far-reaching consequences both for global politics and India’s foreign policy. Like any other country. The end of the Cold war and the dissolution of the soviet Union have brought a flurry of Challenges for India both in economics and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have brought a flurry of Challenges for India both in economics and foreign policy front. India was busy in reordering its house in the new international power dispensation and also in meeting the challenges of globalization with little time to pay heed to post-cold war developments in Afghanistan. The power vacuum created by the sudden withdrawal of both the super powers has made the atmosphere in Afghanistan hospitable for the rise of radical Islamist elements to power. This became evident when the Taliban, spawned by the chaos and corruption that dominated post-Soviet Afghanistan, came to power in 1996. India was at a total loss at the rise of the Taliban and was unable to evolve a coherent foreign policy response immediately to deal with the situation. Subsequent seven years of Taliban rule witnessed the worsening of relationship between the two countries to lowest ebb. During that time India’s role remained limited to supporting the Northern Alliance, a rainbow coalition of minorities, against Taliban by providing money and material.

III. THE FALL OF TALIBAN AND SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

Since the fall of Taliban in 2001, India has found a space to engage itself with Afghanistan and a broad range of issues have been identified to take on and evolve interaction between the two countries, Afghanistan holds strategic importance for India as new Delhi seeks Friendly allies in the neighborhood and also seeks access to energy-rich Central Asian States, such as Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan through Afghanistan. Besides, as a rising power it is pertinent for India to make its presence felt by adopting a more proactive role in its extended neighborhood and forging economic, military and institutional links. In many ways, India’s role in Afghanistan in Post-9/11 era is suggestive of India’s role in Afghanistan has increased. This was reflected in an immediate upgrade of Indian representation in Afghanistan form a liaison office to a full-reflected Embassy in 2002. India actively participated in the Bonn Conference and was instrumental in the emergence of post-Taliban political authority in Afghanistan. Since then India’s main focus has been to support the Afghan government and the political process in the country as mandated under the Bonn Agreement of 2001.2 In the process there emerged a wide range of humanitarian, financial and technical cooperation between the two countries. In January 2009, India completed construction of the Zaran-Daran highway in the South-west of Afghanistan near the Iranian border; it built
As India’s presence grew in Afghanistan, its adversaries also became more intent and cautious to limit India’s role in the region. Among them the interests of China and Pakistan are visibly clear. Afghanistan has been a prize that Pakistan and India have fought over directly and indirectly for decades. To Pakistan, Afghanistan has always been a ‘strategic destination’ to balance India. Since the Birth of Pakistan, its Afghan policy was designed to serve this basic interest. According to Barnett R. Rubin, an expert on Afghanistan, Pakistan supported the anti-Soviet Mujahedeen and then the Taliban “to ensure that in the event of conflict with India, Afghanistan would provide Pakistan with support and allow use of its land and air space if needed”. It is, therefore, no surprise that Pakistan sees India’s growing influence in Afghanistan as a threat. After India opened consulates in Heart, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalbad, and Kandahar, Pakistan, as well as foment separation in Pakistan’s Baluchistan province. Pakistan’s fear is compounded by the opening of the new Indian air base in Farakhor, Tajikistan. This is the first Indian military air base overseas, and is convenient for transportation of men and material to and from Afghanistan. It is also move toward protecting India’s potential energy interests in the region. This led Taliban to bounce back with support from Pakistan and reclaim the strategic space from which it is ousted. Such developments caused set back to India and undermined its role in Afghanistan. In July 2008, the Indian Embassy in Kabul was struck by a bomb blast, leaving 60 dead including and Indian Foreign Service officer. In October 2009, a suicide car bombing outside the Indian Embassy left at least 17 dead and scores of others wounded. The attacks were supposedly carried out by Pakistani based Haqqani group with tacit support of ISI. When Pakistan will land all its weight to scuttle Indian’s influence in Afghanistan, Chinese action is likely to follow the same course. Both India and China intend to fill in the vacuum that would be created by the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Here comes another sign of problem for India. Both the regional powers will not expand their efforts in cooperation with each other; instead they are likely to act their independent national interests where the clash of interest seems to be inevitable. Chinese policy generally remains tilted to Pakistan to balance India’s rise as a regional power. The same factor is supposed to influence China’s policy in Afghanistan too. Besides, the U.S. needs China in Afghanistan more than any other state. As America and its allies withdraw their forces and the vast amount of investment supporting their involvement, there is the fear of a deep economic crisis which would lead to yet another phase of political turmoil in the region. China, an ally of Pakistan and an antagonist of India, is the only nation with the power and influence to force Pakistan to curb its support for the Taliban’s. China can also serve as valuable counterweight in the region to Russia. Already china has made its presence felt in Afghanistan and it is likely that it is china which is going to conquer Afghanistan commercially as it did to case of Iraq. The New York Times reported that since the 2003 U.S-led invasion, Iraq has become one of the world’s top
oil producers and that China has become its biggest customer, buying almost 1.5 million barrels a day, almost half of what Iraq produces. The greater presence of China with its unique chemistry with Pakistan does not indicate a very bright future for India in its Afghanistan venture. Instead, apprehension takes on that India’s road to Afghanistan will hardly be a smooth passage.

V. LESSONS AND RESPONSES FOR INDIA

Such complex equation in Afghanistan has indeed become a matter of anxiety for India. India’s experience with Bangladesh may get partially repeated in Afghanistan repeated in Afghanistan. There is every chance that the reconstructed Afghanistan may turn out to be a major hub to sponsor terror activities against India with the withdrawal of the U.S. forces to think so and the sign of that was evident in the 60-nation London Conference on January 2010. In the conference when the U.S. led allies made up their mind to negotiate with the moderate elements for Taliban, Indians became convinced of its apprehension. It was a signal to India that Pakistan would pay the role of mediator in negotiations with Taliban which would automatically sideline India’s interests. What else can be so catastrophic for India if the remnant of the Taliban Return to power with the backing of Pakistan’s military and ISI. These Changing realities and developments forced India to reconsider the nature of its engagement and presence in Kabul. The repeated attack on Indian embassy and India’s isolation in the London conference indicated that neither the radical Islamic groups would allow India to play a major role in Afghan affair nor the West was very impressed to assign a decisive role to India in Afghanistan. The United States has even openly discouraged India from assuming a higher profile in Afghanistan for fear of offending Pakistan. At the same time it has failed in getting Pakistan to take Indian concerns seriously. This has led to the rapid shrinking of strategic space for India. Obviously, India was forced to reassess its priorities given the huge stakes the New Delhi has developed in Afghanistan over the last decade. Despite having the fear of America’s exit in near future, India continued to believe that reason would prevail and all those engaged in the process of moving towards stability in Afghanistan would “stay on course”. But as Indian hopes have been belied, New Delhi restored to change its course of action in Afghanistan. India seems determined not to walk out easily form Afghanistan.

As the west outlines its plan of exit from Afghanistan, India also realizes its stake of strengthening security partnership with Kabul. It also recognized the need to coordinate more closely with states such as Russia and Iran with which it shared convergent interests’ Vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Pakistan. None of these states would accept a fundamentalist Sunni dominated regime in Kabul or the reemergence of Afghanistan as a base of jihadist terrorism directed at neighboring states. The Indian government reached out to Moscow at the highest political levels, reiterating the two nations shared position on Afghanistan and institutionalizing cooperation on this issue. 10 mere proactive conduct and engagement in reconstruction of Afghanistan is not enough for India to achieve its goals in Afghanistan. India has to win the Afghan battle over Pakistan diplomatically and it this venture both Russia and Iran are crucial for India. Resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan is a major threat to Russia’s national security as well. Moscow repeatedly laid down certain ‘red lines’ for the Taliban’s integration in political process-notably renunciation of violence, cessation of the armed struggle, acceptance of the Afghan constitution and a complete break-up with al-Qaeda. 11 India and Russia’s geo-political and security interests in the Central Asian region are same and India must explore the issue of common concerns between the two countries in the days to come to consolidate its position in Afghanistan. Iran is the third part of this triangle. The two countries had worked closely when the Taliban was in power and continued to cooperate on several issues including allowing transit facilities to Indian goods. But the relationship with Iran suffered a setback after India voted against it in the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA). But India has made an effort to restore its partnership with Iran in Afghanistan, with the two sides decided to hold “structured and regular consultations” on the issue of Afghanistan. 12 At the initiative of Iran, India is now part of a trilateral Afghan-Iranian-India effort to counter Pakistan’s attempt to keep India out of Afghan game. But keeping in view complexity of India’s foreign policy towards Iran, it is difficult to ascertain that how long the two countries would be able to endure their ties on Afghanistan. Nothing seems certain at the moment and much would depend on how actively India succeeds in exploring its diplomatic capability with regard to Afghanistan.

VI. CONCLUSION

Conflicting interests over Afghanistan would be the potent force to determine the foreign policies of the regional powers in near future. Much of that would be realized after the U.S. departure from the region. For India, its relations with Pakistan are the major fault line in its Afghanistan policy. So long India and Pakistan would view it as a chessboard to promote their regional interests, peace and stability would continue to elude Afghanistan. The stake of Pakistan is more to realize this and India must also realize that mere ‘soft power’ philanthropy would not yield the objective it is looking for.

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