

India-Pakistan-Afghanistan Triad: A Case Study of Classical Realism

Nazish Iqbal*

Abstract *India and Pakistan have their own political and economic aims in Afghanistan since inception. The association between Pakistan and Afghanistan have always remained uneven. This is due to the convergence and divergence of interest of both the states. Indian factor has played its greater role in the strained relationship between both the states. Hostile Indian presence on the Afghanistan border is a matter of security concern for Pakistan. Taliban factor always remained a threat for India. India signed strategic partnership deal with Afghanistan and became the sixth largest donor to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is getting greater economic benefits from India and in return has provided its land for terrorist activities against Pakistan. Pakistan on the other hand has played very effective role in bringing Afghan Taliban and United states to the negotiation table for achieving peace in Afghanistan. This paper utilizes the classical realism theory to explain the political and economic interests of India and Afghanistan and also explains the strained Pak Afghan relations ever since due to the involvement of Indian factor. So this triad always remained in conflict and on trajectory of uneven relationship.*

Key Words: Triad, Classical Realism, Strategic Partnership, Economic Interest, Taliban, Afghan Peace Process

Introduction

India and Pakistan pursue mutually exclusive objectives in Afghanistan and force sharply different tools to achieve their respective goals. Pakistan utilizes militant groups, including the Afghan Taliban, as strategic proxies, while India places considerable weight on its soft power influence among Afghans. Pakistan and India both have their equally exclusive aims in Afghanistan and ever since their inception both the countries have used various tool to gain those respective objectives. Ever since the foundation of Pakistan the relationship among Pakistan and Afghanistan has never been pleasing. The relationship has always remained on an uneven trajectory where the Indian factor has also played its role in stimulating the strained relations among Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ever since independence in 1947, both countries have tried to utilize the land of Afghanistan to achieve their own benefits and to gain supremacy in the region. The losses for Pakistan in Afghanistan has been considered the success for India and vice versa. From the Pakistan's standpoint, India's growing influence in Afghanistan has historical basis. India and Afghanistan has remained close allies from the rule of Zahir Shah from 1933 to 1973 and also during the reign of Soviet-backed communist rule of M. Najibullah. During the rule of Taliban, India along with the support of Iran and Russia supported the non-Pashtun faction of anti-Taliban fighters famous as Northern Alliance.

After the 9/11 terrorists attacks on the US Pentagon and the World Trade Centre, both India and Pakistan did not stop their animosity towards each other and both had conflicting interests in Afghanistan. Pakistan just had to secure its eastern borders priorily, but as the Indian influence started reinforcing in Afghanistan on the Western border, Pakistan had to revise its military policies to overcome the instigating military threat triggered by India. Hostile Indian presence in Afghanistan on Western border of Pakistan and the active part being played by the Indian intelligence agency is prominent issue of concern for security of Pakistan. The state of India is using

*Mphil, Department of IR, NDU, Islamabad, Pakistan.

the territory of Afghanistan to threaten Pakistan and is ultimately playing the role of spoiler for pursuing its strategic aims. India's strategic and economic support to Afghanistan is a way to counter Pakistan and exercise to exercise its military footprint in the region. India has also become the fifth biggest donor of Afghanistan and has assured \$ 1.2 billion funds to Afghanistan.

This piece of writing explores the dynamics of Pakistan's links with Afghanistan since 1979 and the evolving relationship between Afghanistan and India. This paper studies the competition between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan that dates back to the advent of Hamid Karzai rule in Afghanistan. Since their emergence in 1947, both India and Pakistan have had relations with a range of Afghan regimes. It also utilizes the classical realism framework to study the India Pakistan Afghanistan triad and examines the self-interests of India and Afghanistan and their close nexus. Afghanistan has ignored the fact that Pakistan has offered its maximum backing to Afghan Mujahedeen for the duration of the Soviet invasion. Afghanistan is pursuing its economic gains even by allowing India to use its land to promote terrorist activities and India is using this card against Pakistan. The paper also deliberates the recent efforts of Pakistan for the Afghan peace process.

Theoretical Framework

This research paper explores and analyse the strained relations of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Indian factor in it. To construct the theoretical basis and the epistemological position of this study, the analysis is carried forward in three dimensions. First the paper tends to explain the pattern of collaboration and friction among Pakistan and Afghanistan since inception and particularly afterwards the Soviet departure from Pakistan. Secondly, the paper tends to explore the growing ties between India and Afghanistan and the role of India as catalyst or the spoiler between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Thirdly the paper also analysed the encouraging role of Pakistan in Afghan peace process.

The theoretical framework for this research focuses on Classical Realism which describes that all states strive for power which is determined by desire to accomplish self-interests. EM Peter in her book 'Classical Realism and international Relations' argues that states are insecure, aggressive and power maximizer in nature, this scarcity of resources makes the state to act irrationally to maximize their gains. Nations try to attain their own interests and ignore the benefits of other states as there are no encompassing rules that bind them to do so.

Classical realism also explains that India and Afghanistan both are trying to pursue their national interests and are ignoring the efforts by Pakistan for the stability in the region. Afghanistan is strengthening relations with India for its economic gains and has allowed India to use Afghani land for the political aims of India. Afghanistan has strained relations with Pakistan ever since and has not ever showed good will gestures towards Pakistan ignoring the support by Pakistan during the Soviet invasion and for the Afghan peace process. All these situations can be well explained though the lens of classical realism.

Historical Overview

Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has faced many ups and downs. The relationship kept on changing from strained to peaceful but mostly remained tense. Afghanistan was the only country that did not vote in favour of Pakistan's entry into United Nations. Afghanistan pursued the separatist movements in Pakistan immediately and claimed large bands of Pakistani territory that prevented the normalized relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Immediately after the independence of Pakistan, the 'Durand line and the Pashtunistan' issue remained at the topmost. During the time period of 1947 to 1979, the ties among both the states weakened that they had to close borders and Afghanistan discontinued its trade via the territory of Pakistan.

Pak Afghan issue had two dimensions in that time period. One point of conflict among both the states is Durand line and the other one was Pashtunistan issue. Afghans considered Durand Line as the legacy of British policy which was enforced upon them under the Frontier forward plan of divide and rule. The Afghans were of the view that boundary demarcation agreement was valid only until the British rule and the boundary question need to be reopen between Afghanistan and Pakistan to resolve the boundary issue. On the other hand the problem of Pashtun identity in Pakistan, the Afghans claimed that British had approved the Afghanistan's concern in the favour of Pashtun's across the border under the Anglo Afghan Treaty of 1921. The Afghans remained in

conflict with Pakistan over this issue and declared the referendum of 1947 as bogus as the Pashtuns were not given the choice to merge into Afghanistan.

In order to comprehend India's current strategies in Afghanistan, it is required to narrate the important historical events of regional political history. During the rule of King Zahir Shah 1933 to 1973 excluding the brief pause of Indo Pakistan war of 1965, India retained excellent ties with Afghanistan. Although after the removal of his regime, the Indian state exercised good will relations with Communist regimes in Afghanistan comprising those that were imposed on Afghanistan following the Soviet assault of Afghanistan in 1979. The downfall of the Soviet puppet rule in Afghanistan and the resulting civil war in the country narrowed the Indian influence in the country. The Taliban's close by association with Pakistan, animosity towards the religious minorities and disrespect towards Indian resulted in the break of relations among India and Afghanistan. India established an operational relation with the Tajik led Northern Alliance to compete with the Taliban.

The Soviet invaded in Afghanistan in 1979 to hold up the communist rule against the growing insurgency in Afghanistan. United States was busy in making movement in Middle East, and was also successful in courting Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and Israel. So the Soviet Union was in a fear of the defeat of its communist proxy in Afghanistan. The Soviets invested millions of dollars and its huge army was also fighting in Afghanistan. On the other hand Mujahedeen were receiving great support by various international actors like Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, China, US and Saudi Arabia. After a long battle, the Soviets were forced to pull out of Afghanistan in 1989 after a great loss. But Moscow continued to fund the communist regime in Afghanistan but it did not prove successful and Kabul came under the rule of Mujahedeen in 1992.

The Mujahedeen's were divided into different factions and they were not agreed upon sharing power which resulted into the bloody civil war in the country. Moving ahead in 1994, the Pashtun students among which mostly were educated in the madrassas in Pakistan initiated a campaign to take the country from the rule of warlords. This force recognized as 'Taliban' came into the country in 1996 and took over the country by 1998. Most of the warlords of Mujahedeen fled to the north and joined the North Alliance. The main Mujahedeen groups liable of Soviet defeat were also from this North Alliance. India also made alliance with Russia and they were supporting this North Alliance as the Talibans that made alliance with Pakistan was a threat to India.

Post 9/11: Points of Conflict Among the Triad

The post 9/11 security environment not only changed the geo-political scene of the South Asian region but also the world at large. In quest for a resilient ally against terrorists especially Al-Qaeda and Afghan Taliban, Pakistan was a natural ally of the US. The post 9/11 event caused a great strategic change in Afghanistan as the Talibans were ousted by the United States and the new government of Hamid Karzai took over the charge. The new regime in Afghanistan became close ally of India and resulted as a great fear for Pakistan. This unexpected involvement of India in Afghanistan can be related to Kautilya theory that the enemy of an enemy is a friend. Likewise, the new head of the post-Taliban regime in Afghanistan Hamid Karzai had bitter feelings towards Pakistan as he believed that Pakistan was involved in his father's assassination in 1999.

On the other hand the new Karzai government had a strong association with India. He visited the Indian university in the Himalayan city of Simla and had love for Indian food and culture. All these aspects are manifesting towards the strong Indian and Karzai's government ties. Karzai considered India as a steady and perfect partner for Afghanistan. With all these circumstances, India's reappearance in Afghanistan became a grave threat to the security of Pakistan. The Indian embassy's inaugural in Afghanistan became a worrisome situation for Pakistan and a 'bone of contention' among both the states.

During the time period of 2003, the government of Pakistan conveyed great concern about the Indian actions along the Pak Afghan border. Pakistan blamed the consulates of India that they were doing more towards the India's intelligence agency and was working less for the humanitarian purpose. This criticism from Pakistani side on India range from false printing of Pakistani currency to acts of disruption and extremism on Pakistani land. Not only this, Pakistan has also blamed India for setting up various networks of terrorist training camps at various Afghan military bases.

The Indian embassy in Afghanistan was attacked in September 2003 as Kabul's claims failed to satisfy Pakistan that it would not allow India to sponsor any anti Pakistan action on its soil. Blame game started between India and Pakistan when the insurgency started in Pakistan's province Baluchistan. The chief minister of

Baluchistan Jam M. Yusuf in 2004 negated that Baluchistan Liberation Army was myth. He declared that Indian intelligence services were looking after various terrorists camps in Baluchistan. Since that Pakistani press kept on blaming and repeating the accusations about the Indian involvement in creating unrest in Baluchistan.

India's Strategic Objectives in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Apprehensions

India's enhanced strategic interest in Afghanistan is a worrisome situation for Pakistan. Afghanistan's border is shared with the six countries that is Turkmenistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan and China. India considered these countries as of great importance taking Pakistan and China as rivals and the other countries as a way to counter China and Pakistan. To achieve its aims and to broaden its mobility in the region, Hamid Karzai signed strategic partnership with India. In May 2002 India established its military base in area of Tajikistan that has its close border with Afghanistan. The purpose behind establishing this military base was to influence various upcoming happenings in the region. These strategic moves of India proved to be detrimental for Pakistan. India also tried to enhance its influence in Afghanistan since 2001 by providing aid of '\$1.3' billion for the rebuilding projects in Afghanistan. Not only this, India also became the sixth major contributor to Afghanistan and signed '\$1.3 billion' to Afghanistan for its reconstruction projects. Such acts of India were to win hearts and minds of the people of Afghanistan and to prove itself as regional authority. These moves of India in Afghanistan were directly to challenge the stability of Pakistan. India was giving aid to Afghanistan to repair its infrastructure and for the humanitarian assistance purposes as Afghanistan was a war torn country.

After United States, Japan, Britain and Germany, India today has become the sixth biggest contributor to Afghanistan. The border of Pakistan at the South Western province of Nimruz is bordering Balochistan. In 2003, the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee announced the Zaranj-Delaram Highway project that extends from the Iranian border to Delaram. India has the leverage of unloading goods at the Chabahar Port of Iran and send those shipments through that highway to Afghanistan. This highway project was intended to break the Pakistan's control of linking Afghanistan to the rest of the world through Khyber Pass and redirect Afghanistan's link to the rest of the world through this highway. Through this highway project, India not only got access to Afghanistan which was not permitted by Pakistan but also gain political supremacy in the region.

The backing of India to Afghanistan to build a strong alliance against Pakistan did not stop here. India also provided Afghanistan with three hundred military transportation vehicles to the military of Afghanistan as a measure of international struggle to make new Afghan Army. Afghan termed this assistance as a great instance of the regional cooperation. India also provide its cooperation in training the Afghan army in Indian military institutes and were also providing training to Afghan soldiers in Afghanistan. India is trying to proclaim its soft power in Afghanistan through various reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. This overall strategic encouragement in Afghanistan is indirectly a strategic hold of Pakistan. But India has not successfully achieved its aims yet as it has geographical constraints and there are religious ties among Pak Afghan people that serve as a barrier between the enhanced moves of India in Afghanistan.

Pak-Indo-Afghan Triad under National Unity Government

The National Unity government led by Ashraf Ghani that came in power in Sep 2014 and was re-elected in 2019 had troubled relations with Pakistan. The relations among both the states remained uneven, distrustful and apprehensive. The things were not favourable and Ashraf Ghani devised policy towards Islamabad and Delhi that was divided into three phases. President Ashraf Ghani tried to protect Pakistan's aid to prevent the troubled situation in Afghanistan and to attain long term peace and security. The new Afghan government considered Pakistan as an entity behind the unrest in Afghanistan. The new Afghan government endorsed the Pakistan's concerns regarding the Indian factor in Afghanistan and showed tilt towards Pakistan for the better situation in Afghanistan.

The new Afghan president did not pay an official visit to India for seven months to satisfy Pakistan. On the other side Kabul also denied India's weapon support to please Pakistan. Afghan government sent their soldiers to the military academy of Pakistan for training and worked hard to break various Afghan groups that were targeting Pakistan. A deputy named as Latif Ullah Mehsud of Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan was also handed over to Pakistan when he was arrested in Afghanistan in 2013 and also its part in arresting the suspects of the APS attack in Pakistan and also started its operation against TTP in Afghanistan. India sent its displeasure signals

diplomatically at these moves of Afghanistan. India sent its low profile delegation in Beijing in 2014 at the Heart of Asia Conference and then also in 2015 to RECCA as well as a gesture of displeasure towards Afghanistan.

In the second phase of Afghan policies towards India and Pakistan, there was a shift in Afghanistan's policy towards Pakistan. Kabul was of the view that Pakistan was not able to bring Taliban to the discussion table. The first official discussion with the Taliban's failed to give any satisfactory results because of the spread of the news of Mullah Omer's death. This led to the new wave of deadly assaults in Afghanistan. Ghani accused Pakistan as being engaged in these deadly attacks in Afghanistan. Therefore, Afghanistan elevate its relations with India which were left after the presidency of Hamid Karzai and sent Abdullah Abdullah the Chief Executive Officer of Afghanistan to India in March 2015 and also visited India in April 2015 and requested India to hold meetings for the Strategic Partnership Council which was not accepted by India.

Indo Afghan Recent Hostile strategies against Pakistan

Afghanistan's policy towards Pakistan has also changed later on where Kabul do not maintain good will relations towards Pakistan. Kabul is of the view that failed to justify its potentials that it claimed during the bilateral meetings and later at Quadrilateral support group meetings. The high level security issues in Afghanistan and growing influence of Talibans and attacks on Uri base in India and Pathankot led to closer ties among India and Afghanistan and increased antagonism against Pakistan. Both countries strived for isolating Pakistan in the region as well. India plus Afghanistan also signed up the Chahbahar transit and trade pact with Iran to side-line Pakistan. Resultantly the nineteenth SAARC summit which was planned in Pakistan was also cancelled.

The hostile actions against Pakistan by India and Afghanistan did not stop here. India also provided its MI-25 helicopters to Pakistan. The visit between both the heads of both the states Modi and Ashraf Ghani also increased since December 2015. India also attended those big conferences that were a matter of concern for Afghanistan. Ghani had such antagonized feelings for Pakistan that he once said publically that the greatest trial for Afghanistan is not Al Qaeda and Taliban but the relations with Pakistan. The present policies of Ghani are more or less similar to the policies devised by Karzai against Pakistan. The difference in the actions of both the leaders is that most of the international political attitude is in the favour of Ghani as he showed pleasant gestures towards Pakistan when he came into power. At the hearts of Asia Conference in India, Afghanistan not only \$500 million aid from Pakistan but also criticised Pakistan and was of the view that Afghanistan do not need charity relations, it needs goodwill relations. Sartaj Aziz criticised Ghani's views as the baseless allegations.

Pakistan's Recent Efforts in Afghan Peace process and India's role The historical, geopolitical and cultural situation between Pakistan and Afghanistan reveals a great challenge for India's policies in Afghanistan. Pakistan has two main priorities in Afghanistan that refers to departure of US forces from Afghan territory but Pakistan does not want US to completely withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. Secondly Pakistan wants Afghanistan to manage its proxies in Afghanistan that is the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan peace process that started in 2018 was assisted by Pakistan in Quadrilateral Coordination Group talks, Heart of Asia Conference and China Pakistan and Afghanistan trilateral conference.

The role of Pakistan in the past was to agree US and Taliban to come to the negotiation table. That purpose was achieved and the new responsibility on Pakistan's side emerged as building consensus among them. The process towards attaining peace in Afghanistan that started in 2018 failed to build a consensus among the leaders. But the conference that was held in Doha in Feb 2020 finally beheld a settlement on some important conditions and conciliations among Taliban and United States. The unfortunate on Pakistan's end is that neither the status quo nor India is in the favor of Pakistan. The agreement that was held in Feb 2020 did not completely come into practice and the recent manifestation of the failure is the attacks on Afghan security forces. The Taliban conducted many attacks in Afghanistan between March and April after the agreement. The Pentagon spokesman is of the view that the rate of attacks on US led forces is not high but the level of violence in Afghanistan is still great. June 2020 was declared the bloodiest month in the history of Afghanistan. This implies to the fact that the agreement between Taliban and US has failed to achieve its purpose.

India has always tried to derail the peace process by its negative and damaging actions. The reason behind these activities is that peace in Afghanistan is not favorable for India to accomplish its illegal propagandas. The US Special envoy for the peace process in Afghanistan in a meeting with the Indian External Affairs Minister conveyed him that India's role to disrupt the peace of Afghanistan will not be tolerated anymore and the negative

part being played by India in the peace of Afghanistan was also criticized by Taliban negotiator. He was also of the view that India is supporting the conspirators in the country.

On the other side, the role of Pakistan towards the peace process has been extremely valued globally. Zalmay Khalilzad praised the efforts of Pakistan for attaining peace in Afghanistan. The role of Pakistan was highly acknowledged by China, Russia and Afghan Taliban as well. According to these states Pakistan has done a lot for bringing the Afghan Taliban and US to the negotiating table. These efforts on behalf of Pakistan bring about the peace deal and have also served as an optimistic situation towards stability and peace in Afghanistan. Peace deal is not only favorable for peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan but it is also desirable for attaining peace in the region. This agreement will also serve as a barrier towards the clashes between Pakistani forces and Afghan forces near the Durand Line.

Recommendations

Peace in Afghanistan is very vital for the peace in region. India Pakistan Afghanistan triad should set aside their differences for achieving peace in the region and particularly in Afghanistan. It is pertinent to mention here that Pakistan need to continue its efforts towards the Afghan peace process. The role of Pakistan needs to be acknowledged by all the stake holders. Pakistan should coordinate with the great powers that are Russia and China for the better results of peace building process in Afghanistan. India need to stop its negative activities to sabotage the peace keeping mission in Afghanistan. If India wants to keep ties with Afghanistan, it should carry on those relations without using its negative activities against Pakistan. The future of Afghan should be decided by themselves without the interference of any outside entity.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it has been very unfortunate that India, Pakistan and Afghanistan foreign policies are not looked upon through the lens of bilateral ties. The triangular relationship among these three states greatly impacted their policies. Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan have remained India centric while on the other hand Indian policies in Afghanistan were also dominated by Pakistan's question. India wants to have regional domination by having strong ties with Afghanistan. It uses this card of Afghanistan to launch anti Pakistan policies. While Afghanistan is also using its India Pakistan card to achieve its strategic and economic gains. India and Pakistan view each other through confrontational lens.

The role of Pakistan is very commendable in bringing forth peace in Afghanistan and US to the negotiation table for the achievement of peace in Afghanistan but India has always tried to sabotage its efforts. India need to carry on its good will relations with Afghanistan but it need not to carry it on by creating instability in Pakistan. India and Pakistan need to set apart their differences aside and help Afghanistan to come out of the hazardous situation that is witnessing from many years. This cannot only be achieved through oral dialogues but their implementation is also necessary. The recent moves of India to build its highway to reach Afghanistan are a clear indication of Indian efforts to side-line Pakistan. Moreover India is also not playing any encouraging role to show its efforts in Afghan peace process. So this triad between India Pakistan and Afghanistan has not proved beneficial and constructive for the peace and harmony in the region.

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