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## **Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Relations: A Paradoxical Perspective**

### **Abstract**

*Afghanistan is the extended frontline state between the two arch rivals India and Pakistan in South Asia. The paradoxical relational understanding among Afghanistan-Pakistan-India and their interest-oriented policy endeavors is the core research problem of this study. The paper addresses two phases of instability in Afghanistan: the Soviet-Afghan war and war on terror; and how the regional powers interceded in Afghanistan to broaden their political agendas and achieve influence against each other in the region. The first wave of instability in Afghanistan addresses Indian and Pakistan's role during the Soviet Afghan war and Pakistan's patronage to Taliban regime and Indian extended sustenance to Northern Alliance. Whereas the second wave of instability in Afghanistan highlights the US war on terror and how Pakistan and India equally responded to their broader regional role in Afghanistan. Methodologically, the study is based on the historical-descriptive analysis of the political dynamics and its overlapping impact on Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The study also observes US part and contribution in conflict prone area of Afghanistan.*

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, instability, Soviet-Afghan war, Taliban, war on terror.

### **1979 Soviet Intervention: First Wave Of Instability In Afghanistan**

How truly *Amir* Abdul-ur-Rehmansaid in his memories that “Afghanistan is like a poor goat on whom the lion and the bear have both fixed their eyes and without the protection and help of the Almighty Deliverer the victim cannot escape very long”<sup>1</sup>. On the eve of December 27, 1979, after a large explosion at the Ministry of Communications provided the Soviet Union to intervene conventionally, and attacked on the government installations in Afghanistan. Amin and his guards were killed by a special Soviet Assault Unit that surrounded *TapiTajbek* Palace; the wing of the palace was completely destroyed. “Whatever his characteristics, his [Amin] country owes him one debt of gratitude: he never tendered the Soviet the crucial invitation that would have legalized the invasion. He paid for that refusal with his life”<sup>2</sup>. The Soviet Union justified their intervention under the Treaty of Friendship and cooperation with Afghanistan (1978). The Soviet Union claimed three major ground reasons for the intervention in Afghanistan: 1) a request for military assistance by Afghan government [headed by Amin]; 2) Soviet Union's commitment to give the required assistance under the terms of the treaty;

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and 3) Collective or individual self-defense against foreign-armed aggression, in accordance with the UN charter [article 51]<sup>3</sup>. Whereas, Agwani<sup>4</sup> explains Amin's stance and Soviet's unjustifiable claim that 'surely, he [Amin] could not have volunteered to sign his death warrant', besides that Soviet position was further unjustifiable by the obvious absence of any reason of Babrak's investiture.

### **Indian Role in Soviet-Afghan Crisis**

India claims long shared cultural and historical ties with Afghanistan, but their mutual interest and close ties can be traced from the decades of 1960s-70s, India and Afghanistan developed their relations under the USSR cover, whereas, Pakistan, after the Sino-India war 1962 moved closer to China. The interest-oriented support and mutual policy between India and Afghanistan appeared in King Zahir and Daoud's reigns. Fair<sup>5</sup> quotes that India enjoyed good relations and expanded development activities during the period of 1979-89 during the Soviet presences in Afghanistan. "Moscow could hardly have had a better third world ally [Non-aligned India] to work with against an expansion of Chinese or US influence or to represent claims of Soviet global power and responsibility"<sup>6</sup>. India supported the Soviet-backed governments in Afghanistan, and carried with her development activities under the Soviet cover, India was the first state as well, which formally recognized the Soviet installed regime in Afghanistan in 1979.

Initially, India has been in a situation of unease after Soviet's intervention in Afghanistan. New Delhi opposed the interference of any state in other states' internal affairs. The then Prime Minister of India Mr. Charan Singh expressed his deep concerns and opposed the Soviet intervention, and the UN Indian permanent representative was asked to regret and seek Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. India perceived Afghanistan in a situation of a major danger due to US armed backing to Pakistan. Despite US assurance towards India that the US-given arms to Pakistan will be only utilized against the Soviet aggression. However, after Indira Gandhi assumed power in 1980, India neither publically condemned the Soviet Union's act of intervention in Afghanistan, nor been supportive. The Indian Ambassador B.C. Mishra remained silent, when the issue of Soviet's intervention in Afghanistan was brought forward at the UN Security Council, but later India supported the 17 Non-aligned nations calling for 'immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan'.

India adopted a two-pronged approach due to the fear of global power's support to Pakistan and the fear of losing Soviet's backing. In January 1980 the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi revised her stance, "without being critical of the Soviet Union publically, she supported the Afghan revolutionary leadership and urged them to appreciate the need for Soviet withdrawal over a period of time"<sup>7</sup>. India also stated that "no reason to doubt the Soviet claim that its troops had moved into Afghanistan at the invitation of the Afghan government"<sup>8</sup>, hoping that USSR will not stay a day longer than it is necessary in Afghanistan. During the Soviet-Afghan crises India seemed more concerned about Pakistan's role and the process of arms-buildup, and growing US presence in the Indian Ocean. The Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi summarized that the Soviet's troops were sent into Afghanistan only after Pakistan's training camps were training rebels against the

Afghan government. It has been claimed by Prasad<sup>9</sup> “India’s endeavor not to jeopardize its close friendly ties with the Soviet Union”. On the other side US was aware of India’s strong reservations against the Soviet intervention and its pro-Afghanistan stance. By December 1980, Soviet Union induced number of succors and broad range of projects in India totaling 40 billion in order to get support on the Afghanistan issue.

“Soviets agreed to a \$ 1.63 billion credit for India to purchase weapons and equipment over a 10-15 year period..... At least as important for India were the items the Soviet agreed to sell at this time. These included five highly sophisticated MiG-25 ‘Foxbat’ aircraft, an unannounced number of fast attacks boats equipped with missiles, and 100 T-72 tanks with another 600 to be license-produced in India”<sup>10</sup>.

Since 1979 India’s strategic interests in Afghanistan have been parallel with Soviet’s interests in the region. Chauhan<sup>11</sup> mentions that the Indian and Russian interests in Afghanistan are under close collaborations, he stressed on couple of strategies and options for India in Afghanistan after Soviet’s withdrawal in 1988 to encounter Pakistan, 1) at international forums, India should raise the issue of blatant violation of the Geneva Accord both by Pakistan and US, 2) India must try to convince US that the hoisting of fundamentalists to power would be against the American interest in the region, 3) India should advocate immediate extension of financial and technical assistance by various international agencies for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, 4) India should also make serious efforts to include Afghanistan in SAARC. Chauhan’s purposed policy-outline reveals Indian fear against Pakistan’s growing strategic depth and collaboration in Afghanistan. Hence, Indian improbability in Soviet-Afghan war and apprehensions from China and US did not allow her to play major role during the conflict. Indian security concerns rouse with the rise of Islamic militant groups in Afghanistan and its possible implications for Kashmir. However, after Soviet’s withdrawal from Afghanistan, India supported Najibullah in 1987-88, and established her presence and contacts in the beginning of Geneva Accord negotiations with Afghanistan. The then Indian minister of state for external affairs met King Zahir Shah in Paris, but the ethnic frenzied condition of Afghanistan did not pave the way for the desired resolution.

### **Pakistan’s Strategic Depth and Role in Soviet-Afghan War**

After the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, fall of Shah in Iran [an US ally] and the Iranian revolution, Pakistan remained the only state, through which US could aid the *mujahedeen*. On the other side, President Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan was looking for legitimacy and external support. He played the most important role during the Soviet-Afghan war, without Zia there would be no Afghan victory. Secondly, Zia’s other main objective was to attain strategic depth against India through Afghanistan, a political and strategic backing that can support Pakistan vis-à-vis India. Mahmood mentions that historically invaders in the subcontinent came from north to south, providing strategic depth to themselves<sup>12</sup>. Rashid also

endorses similar perspective that Taliban didn't provide strategic depth to Pakistan, Pakistan provided strategic depth to Taliban. Zia followed path of Islamization that led to huge number of volunteer-*Jihadists* flock to Pakistan to join the holy war against the Soviets [according to Rashid an intricate network has been built between the ISI and Jamaat-e-Islami (JUI) run by *Maulana* Fazlur Rehman for the distribution of weapons, funds and volunteers amongst the *mujahedeen*]. JUI contributed a lot in clustering hundreds of *madrassas* along the Pashtun belt in KPK and Baluchistan, offering the young Afghan and Pakistani-Pashtuns free food, education, shelter and military training. According to Rashid in 1971 there were only 800 *madrassas* in the country, but by the end of Zia's regime in 1988, there were 80000 registered *madrassas* and 25000 unregistered *madrassas* in Pakistan. Zia trained the volunteers-*Jihadists* and armed them through ISI against Communism in Afghanistan. 1980s is considered as the birth year of 'Global Islamic Jihad', supported by US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Saudis and CIA gave the financial and weaponry support, while Pakistan's ISI provided the training camps along the Durand Line. By the end of the Soviet-Afghan war, ISI trained 80,000 to 90,000 *mujahedeen* with US collaboration. CIA funding enhanced from 1984 to 1988 from \$ 250 million to \$ 400 million respectively<sup>13</sup>. *Mujahedeen* were divided into seven groups, which were recognized and led by Pakistan and CIA, none of the main fighting groups [Pak-Seven] were led by Durrani Pashtun<sup>14</sup>.

Nonetheless, strategic depth further flourished in Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif's terms. Although, extremism was seeded in Zia's tenure but kept under strong-implemented strategy during the civilian-democratic periods, "neither of her [Benazir] governments (1988-90, 1993-96) removed the legislation introduced during Zia era", "The government of Nawaz Sharif (1990-3, 1997-9) slowly continued the Islamization of Zia era"<sup>15</sup>. This era also witnessed social transformation and the introduction of Kalashnikov and heroin culture that later laid serious implications and fractured the internal social fabric of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Subsequently, in the wake of Geneva accord, Afghanistan was left alone within house wield menace, *mujahedeen* took over Kabul. The civil war became more brutal and bloody that pushed Afghanistan into anarchy that dismayed Pakistan's vision of a strategic ally who can provide strategic depth against the security threat of India.

### **US Role in Soviet-Afghan War**

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan marked as the watershed point in US-USSR relations. The 1979 intrusion severely restricted US options in Afghanistan, but absurdly it broadened US policy focus in Afghanistan, and made USSR bleed till its disintegration. In 1977, Parcham and Khalq reconciliation against Daoud was considered as the first alarming bell for Washington, "only outside force could have predominated over the mutual distrust that Parcham and Khalq felt for one another"<sup>16</sup>. In July 1979, Carter administration ordered CIA to provide low-level assistance to the rebels in Afghanistan. By the last weeks of 1979, the US delivered about five warnings to USSR against any intrusion in Afghanistan, the

emerging conflict added more value to Pakistan's strategic position in the eyes of Carter administration. In the aftermath of Soviet intervention, ZbigniewBrezinski offered Pakistan more assistance to *mujahedeen*, Zia considered the first offer as 'peanuts', later the size of the grants grew steadily. Reagan administration undertook a five-year program of \$3.2 billion in assistance to Pakistan's military in 1981. "Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the USA, apparently acting in a joint policy to contain Soviet power in the region, have also been active in sending small arms via Pakistan, since the beginning of 1980"<sup>17</sup>. Reagan administration willingly overlooked Carter administrations' concern over Pakistan's nuclearization and General Zia's illegitimate rule. On the other side Regan administration was not ready to overlook India and alter her relationship with Pakistan due to Indian concerns. Therefore, US developed two-track policy towards India and Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan war, besides Pakistan's support in Soviet-Afghan war; US also tried to distance India from Soviet Union. By the advent of 80s decade US and India started following bifurcated approach, "the American and Indian came to the conclusion that perhaps that the best thing we can do is agree to disagree on geostrategic questions that this is an issue we are not going to be able to settle"<sup>18</sup>. Thus, this turning point appeared as the era that witnessed Indian and US developing relations and economic, cultural, and technological cooperation.

US and Soviet rivalry continued till Garbachev came to power in March 1985. Soviets declining economic conditions forced Garbachev to rethink about their foreign policy and expansion strategy in Afghanistan. He brought reforms in military, political, economic and humanitarian programs. He proceeded to attain global economic status and the revival of the stagnant Soviet economy, which forced USSR to improve her relations with United States. "From the first year of the Afghanistan invasion, reports indicated that the Russians were losing the war, but he [Brezhnev] refused to acknowledge this.....but also exacerbates the problem and increase the losses"<sup>19</sup>. The geo-political and international considerations dominated the ideological agenda behind the Soviet intervention of Afghanistan. "Gorbachev may have successfully opened channels of communication with 'moderates' rebel leaders, but he needs the help of the United States. Without US blessing, neither the *mujahedeen* nor Pakistan are in a position to make a decisive move. President Zia-ul-Haq has been talking since 1986 about a political settlement in Afghanistan and has also paid tribute to Gorbachev's political honesty"<sup>20</sup>.

Resultantly, the domestic political scenario of Afghanistan changed after Najibullah's takeover. His political dimensions were similar to Garbachev. Najibullah proceeded with the policy of national reconciliation as state policy. By the time, all the sides agreed to reinstate cooperation, Soviet Union would withdraw its troops, and other actors would halt their assistance to the *mujahedeen*. "The General Assembly resolution that defined the secretary general terms of reference reaffirmed, "the right of the Afghan people to determine their own government and to choose their economic, political and social system free from outside intervention, subversion, coercion of constraints of any kind whatsoever"<sup>21</sup>. A unilateral cease-fire was declared on January 14-15, 1987 by the armed forces of Afghanistan. On April 14, 1988 a formal agreement 'Geneva Accord' was signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan with the United States and

the Soviet Union serving as guarantors. In which they emphasized on the settlement of the Afghan issue and the complete withdrawal of Soviet militia within nine months. The withdrawal of the Soviet forces took place in two phases; after the first phase Pakistan started air violations and continued to supply arms to *mujahedeen*. "Afghanistan had accused Pakistan of violating Geneva Accords in some 85 protest notes it had so far filed with the United Nations Good Office Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan"<sup>22</sup>.

The Soviet forces pulled out of Afghanistan, the unattainable task was achieved in which United States can take more credit for making the Soviet Union pay heavier price than it was anticipated. On the other side it is believed that the major credit goes to the Afghans themselves, their implacable hate for foreign invasion and dominance, and their willingness to sacrifice their lives considered as an unpredictable phenomenon for the Soviets. The US perceived it as defeat of *Communism* and the Muslim world perceived it as 'solely as victory of Islam' that inspired many militants to encounter the other super power [United States] and to build a new Islamic *Ummah*. Though, Soviet Union began the procedure of withdrawal of its troops from May 1988, aiming for total withdrawal to be completed by February 15, 1989. Soviet Unions' strategy reflected Mikhail Gorbachev's economic reforms and his support of disarmament. The armed intervention in Afghanistan proved to be as the biggest political mistake by Soviet Union, which later contributed and heightened Soviet's crisis until 1991.

The year also marks the end of US-Pakistan close relations, US has betrayed democracy and supported a man in uniform in order to pursue her interest-oriented policy in Afghanistan during the Cold war. Benazir, Pakistan's democratic successor after Zia, claimed that US have been unfair to Pakistan. Nonetheless, once victory was achieved by the combined efforts of CIA, ISI and GID, the US administration abandoned Afghanistan and Pakistan leaving them in complete violent and extremist chaos, dealing with millions of refugees and casualties. Bruce Riedel in his book *Deadly Embrace* states that many time US betrayed democracy in Pakistan and renewed her love affair with every military potentate.

### **TALIBAN PHENOMENON IN AFGHANISTAN [THE SECOND GENERATION OF MUJAHEDDEEN]**

Just after nine days of Soviet withdrawal Afghanistan in February 1989, Azzam the ideological brain behind the phenomena of Global Jihad presented his vision for the future *Jihad* in Islamabad,

"we will fight, defeat our enemies and establish an Islamic state on some sliver land, such as Afghanistan. Afghanistan will expand, *Jihad* will spread, Islam will fight in other places, Islam will fight the Jew in Palestine and establish Islamic states in Palestine and other places. Later these states will unite to form one Islamic state"<sup>23</sup>.

President Najibullah (1989-1992) who had been brought to power after Soviet's withdrawal kept on being under severe threat by the Islamic rebels. He assumed power after Babrak Karmal, who stepped down from Afghanistan's premiership or replaced by the Soviet power. After Soviet's withdrawal Najibullah became extremely vulnerable, and the intensified domestic situation could not provide him progressive political grounds. Therefore, he resigned in mid-April 1992 and tried to flee to India but due to resisting fighters loyal to *mujahedeen*, the driver took a U-turn and delivered him in the United Nation compound. He lived there for four years under the UN protection in Kabul until the Taliban captured Kabul and assassinated him on September 27, 1996<sup>24</sup>. End of Najibullah's era in 1992 curtailed the entire Communists' traces from Afghanistan. In the years from 1992 to 1996 "a period of unmitigated despair during which undisciplined warlords seemingly determined to establish that they were even less appetizing than the Communist regime, battered each other for no obvious purpose at hideouts cost to the civilian population"<sup>25</sup>.

By 1992 Kabul fell under the Tajik united forces of Burhanuddin Rabbani and his military commander Ahmad Shah Masud and the Uzbek forces led by General Rashid Dostum. This was the first time in the history that non-Pashtun forces captured Kabul. Burhanuddin Rabbani controlled Kabul and the northeast of Afghanistan, Ismael Khan controlled three provinces in the west centering Herat, the *Shura* Council of *mujahedeen* commanders based in Jalalabad controlled the Pashtun belt bordering Pakistan and lastly Gulbuddin Hikmetyar controlled a small region to the south and east Kabul. Later, Gulbuddin Hikmetyar and Dostum fought mercilessly against Rabbani in Kabul.

In post-Soviet withdrawal, the Afghan political-elites were severely divided. Peshawar Accord (April 1992) was the first settlement attempt. The accord was a base for the provisional period of Islamic state in Afghanistan. It was a very brief text, consisting of twelve paragraphs, according to the second paragraph Rabbani became the President and head of *Shura-I-Qiyadi*, the prime ministership to Hikmetyar and the defense ministry to Masud. The second settlement attempt was Islamabad Accord; Rabbani signed it on March 1993 with Hikmetyar and the representative of five other resistant groups. However, all the settlement-attempts among the political elites failed, as Maley mentions, there were three main reasons behind the political instability in post-Soviet withdrawal: 1) the level of distrust within the elite was too high especially between Hikmetyar and Masud, 2) the impact of external powers, which affected the identities of the participants in the settlement, and 3) lastly, the absence of a state and the fragmentation of Afghan army<sup>26</sup>. "In Afghanistan there was chaos already in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion. Existing formal and informal structures of governance had broken down. An ideological cadre emerged as a source of order and began its activities by assuming the role of arbitration"<sup>27</sup>.

Thus, the civil war and bloodshed between the warlords in Afghanistan led to the incitation of Taliban movement to clean the society under their own Islamic interpretations. The newly formed force of students 'Taliban' headed by Mullah Omar were Pashtun in majority, mostly were camps born, and young *madrassa* students who never fought the Soviets, they claimed the revival of 300 years' rule

of Pashtun dynasty in Afghanistan, but ideologically, they differed from the previous ruling modern elites. Taliban represented middle and below middle classes people who belonged to war torn camps families across the border in Pakistan, whom children studied in crafted *madrassas* in Zia's regime. Most of the students were grown with extremists' ideological narratives and financial upheavals that pushed them to be part of *Jihad*. The Taliban saw themselves as the purifiers of the society that after the guerrilla war gone astray. They followed extreme interpretation of the *Sharia* Law, according to which they crushed the women freedom and blocked them only for the accomplishments of their desires. Consequently, by 1994, Taliban forces attacked Kandahar, within three months, Taliban had captured 12 provinces of Afghanistan and reached to the outskirts of Kabul and Herat. By February 1995, Taliban forces captured Hikmetyar's headquarter at Charasyab and the same year, Taliban forces defeated Ismael Shah and controlled Heart and Mullah Omar was declared as *Amir-ul-Momineen* [Commander of the faithful] that legitimized his leadership, declaring *Jihad* against the Rabbani government. By September 1996, Taliban movement had emerged as a force that displaced Rabbani government and captured Kabul and formed a provisional Islamic government and summarily executed the former President Najibullah<sup>28</sup>. Maley outlines Rabbani's failure reasons, 1) factionalism within the Jamiat-e-Islami; 2) failure to find moderate Pashtuns with whom to ally; 3) Rabbani's serious error of judgment in reaching a rapprochement with Hikmetyar; and 4) lastly, Taliban was backed by Pakistan and Osama Bin Laden for a further bid to take over Kabul. Rabbani's regime lacked a committed external patron and the US was indifferent to its fate<sup>29</sup>. In 1997 Taliban captured Mazar-e-Sharif and offensively slaughtered the Northern anti-Taliban alliance, which was under the control of General Rashid Dostum and Uzbeks. In 1998, Taliban forces led a brutal massacre of *Shia* Hazara in the north [under severe confrontation with Iran]. The *Shia* killing in Afghanistan led to serious regional clash between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia backed Sunni [*Wahabi*] Taliban, and Iran that brought both of them at the edge of war. After assuming power, the political force of Taliban was reduced due to their inability to carryout economic reforms, refugees' rehabilitation and to maintain law and order in Afghanistan.

### **Pakistan's Support to Taliban Regime**

Pakistan played major role in Afghan-Soviet war as the fatherly ally to *Jihadists* that made Pakistan intact to Afghanistan's internal matters but with added interests. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's support to Taliban in Kabul was feared and suspected by India, Iran and the Central Asian Republics (CARs). By the year 1992-1993 US was under Indian pressure to declare Pakistan as a terror sponsor state due to enhanced militancy in Kashmir. "The region was now deeply polarized with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia's allied to the Taliban and other regional states backing the opposition"<sup>30</sup>. Pakistan sought a client regime in Afghanistan to encounter India and endorse its strategic depth, therefore, Pakistan recognized Taliban as the legitimate government in 1996 and asked Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates to recognize Taliban's government formally, but rest of the states were reluctant to offer international recognition to Taliban. In the same year Pakistan offered cooperation on several development projects between Taliban and Pakistan [in different sectors as Civil Aviation, Telecom, PIA, Railways, Radio,



and National Bank]. On the humanitarian grounds Pakistan also kept 5 million Afghan refugees, according to Azizudin during the Soviet war, 5 million refugees were given refuge in Pakistan, still we have 3 million, we don't have that much strength to keep the refugees<sup>31</sup>. "Soviet intervention resulted in the deepening of the civil war leading to the death of 1.5 million Afghans and created 6.2 million refugees who fled Afghanistan, mainly to Pakistan and Iran"<sup>32</sup>.

In addition, the consequences of Soviet withdrawal and disintegration, brought several changes on the regional mapping, it diverted major players' attention towards the CARs. Pakistan's post-Soviet policy was desperately keen for land route towards the Central Asian States, but it was not possible due to the ongoing unrest in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister Benazir in 1993 also stressed on from Peshawar to Hindu Kush route through Kabul but it couldn't be materialized due to establishment's support to Hikmetyar. Another route was proposed on eastern side from Quetta to Ashkhabad through Herat. The then Pakistani Interior Minister Naseerullah Baber visited Chaman and Pakistan agreed on building a highway from Quetta to Herat, Bhutto also met Ismael Khan and General Rashid Dostum to open the southern route. Similarly, India braced the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan to pursue her interest-oriented policy towards CARs. On the other side, US policy makers were also looking for understanding between the ascending authorities in Afghanistan to build the proposed gas pipeline by the American oil giant UNICOL between Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan. During 1995-97, US support to Taliban was even more driven because at the time US had no alternate strategic plan towards accessing Central Asian energy resources. Zaki mentions that US installed Taliban in Afghanistan in order to get support for US UNICOL project. US turned against Taliban when they didn't fulfill the geo-strategic interests of US [Taliban didn't sign on the UNICOL agreement], which depicts general point of imperialistic nature of US in South Asia.<sup>33</sup>

### **Drugs Trafficking in Taliban's Regime**

Since centuries Opium Poppy has been cultivated in Afghanistan, it has been traded to east and west, carried by camel caravans through the old Silk Road. In 1960s and 70s, Afghanistan was destined by many western hippies for less costly and easy availability of heroin and other toxic substances. "Afghanistan produces over 90 % of the world's heroin, according to United Nations on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC)"<sup>34</sup>. Drug trafficking has been increased during the Soviet command in Afghanistan, this era is considered as the paradigm changer in which many heroin factories has been founded in Afghanistan and in the tribal areas of Pakistan. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, poppy cultivation became one of the major economic sources of Taliban, which further got strengthened during the Taliban regime in the 90s decade. Taliban secured the poppy cultivators and paid them good prices against their harvested products, until the Taliban regime, poppy cultivation and heroin smuggling was extremely operational and was considered as one of the main factors in destabilizing Afghanistan and her neighboring states. Later, Taliban stopped poppy cultivation in 1998-99 under Mullah Omer's directions, which was started again after the end of Taliban's regime under Karzai's government<sup>35</sup>. Andrabi mentions that during the Taliban regime Afghanistan was peaceful and there was zero poppy cultivation [details are

available in UNODC report], at that time Taliban was not a threat [internally and externally], the law and order situation was stable<sup>36</sup>.

### **Indian Support to Post-Soviet Afghanistan [Northern Alliance]**

India enjoyed good relations with Afghanistan under the Soviet cover. By 1992 India established cordial ties with Afghanistan [without Russian backing] under Burhanuddin Rabbani [the non-Pashtuncontrol]. Ganguly mentions “indeed, even during the Burhanuddin Rabbani (1992-1996) command in Afghanistan India had a limited presence in the country”<sup>37</sup>. Fall of Rabbani and rise of Taliban by 1996 completely alienated India. Indian government didn’t recognize the Taliban regime in Kabul, India backed and strengthened her ties with the Northern Alliance (NA) to encounter Pakistan backed Taliban regime in Afghanistan. During the Taliban regime India claimed for neutrality, but extended her conventional support to NA. After the Prime Minister Gandhi, the new government of India by V.P. Singh preceded with the same policy-lines or two-pronged policy in Afghanistan. Mishra mentions that India followed three-pronged policy in Afghanistan: “1) to maintain contact with the leaders of all groups including SibhatullahMujaddedi, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Gulbuddin Hikmetyar and Rashid Dostum, so that eventually it could deal with whoever came to power, 2) to continue to provide assistance in the economic and public health sphere to the extent feasible, and 3) to explore possibilities, in collaboration with states like Russia and Iran, of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan”<sup>38</sup>.

India was threatened by the rise of Taliban and their strong links with Pakistan and Al-Qaida that encouraged militants’ fight with the Indian troops in Kashmir. Under the Taliban regime India was forced to cut-down all her relations with Afghanistan, by 1992 India was forced to close her diplomatic mission and aid disbursing agencies, and was told not to interfere in Afghanistan’s internal matters. Therefore, by 1996, India established her direct ties with NA under Ahmad Shah Masud and Burhanuddin Rabbani and also urged the international community to support NA. Indian Ministry of External Affairs provided NA with military hardware, worth around 8 million US dollars, military advisers and technicians to maintain Soviet made MI-7 and MI-35 and human assistance. Ashraf states that “India strengthened the defence of the Northern Alliance by providing high-altitude warfare equipment worth \$ 10 million through its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and the defence advisers provided technical advice to Northern Alliance”<sup>39</sup>. In late 1990s, India negotiated with Tajikistan as well, to transport military supplies and advisers to support the NA through the Fakhor Airbase [near the Afghan border], and also opened a hospital to treat the NAs’ fighters.

By the decade of 90s India was forced to revise her relations with Taliban, because of Taliban’s ascendance to power, and secondly, hijacking of Indian plane (IC 814). The plane was hijacked from Kathmandu and after a terrible flight from Amritsar [India], to Lahore [Pakistan], to Dubai [United Arab Emirates]. The plane was landed in Kandahar [Afghanistan] demanding the release of three Pakistani *jihadist* Kashmiri freedom-fighter detained by India. After unsuccessful negotiations, India was forced to release them and one of the released [Masood Azhar] later, formed *Jaish-e-Mohammad*. India claimed that the three

detainees, eventually played their role in the 2001 Parliament attacks, killing of US journalist Daniel Pearl in 2002, the attack on the Karachi US consulate in 2002, and countless assaults in Kashmir<sup>40</sup>. Such incidents further strained relations between India and Kabul [Taliban]. India believed that the Taliban regime with Pakistani backing and sustenance is training Kashmiri terrorists in Afghanistan. Taliban's irresistible backing from Pakistan has overblown Indian relations with Taliban and affirmed anti-Taliban stance that led to Indian collaboration with Russia and Iran. Ashraf mentions: "Mr. J.N. Dixit in his book 'India, in cooperation with all like-minded countries, should resist the coercive propagation of any kind of religious, social or ethnic extremism which can profoundly destabilize Afghanistan's Asian neighbours'"<sup>41</sup>.

In post 9/11, India managed excellent relationship with Afghanistan that strengthened Indian position and influence in Kabul [extended policy of supporting NA vis-e-vis the Taliban]. In the wake of *Twin Tower Attacks*, India offered all the logistic support to US, aspired to play major role in Afghanistan, supported the possibility for NA to come in power and to keep Pakistani-backed Taliban away. India's foreign policy observed a major shift from anti-Pakistan stance to pro stabilized and developed client regime in Afghanistan to avoid the return of extremist Islamic control of Taliban that could provide strategic depth to Pakistan and enhance militancy in Kashmir<sup>42</sup>. India did play her role in war on terror, not as a front line state but as an indirect actor, moreover, Indian emissary in Afghanistan 'Satindra Lambah' backed the new government in post 9/11, and strengthened Indian ties with power holders. "Many of the new Afghan leaders, like the defence, foreign, and interior ministers paid their first abroad visit to India. President Hamid Karzai's Indian connections also seemed to play a positive role for India"<sup>43</sup>.

### **War On Terror (9/11): Second Wave Of Instability In Afghanistan**

A week after Taliban seized Afghanistan's capital, US considered a ray of hope and wanted to open an embassy in Kabul, and the US Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphel stated that they have no quarrel with the Taliban in terms of their political legitimacy or lack thereof. US considered Taliban are in line with Washington's anti-Iran policy and can play as a supporting factor in Afghanistan for southern gas pipelines from CARs that can provide an alternative route than Iran. Rashid also mentions that US supported Taliban through its allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia from 1994 to 1996, because they considered Taliban anti-Shia/Iranian and pro-Western. US officials under the Clinton administration were in support of Taliban, considering them the right people to fill this void. Mainly, they are Pashtuns, from where Afghanistan's rulers must be drawn, they are *Sunnis*, and hostile to Iran. Ideologically they are not anti-west, and may invite the formal King to return. Once they restore order, Taliban will withdraw from politics as they have promised US energy cooperation can construct oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan, and rents from these pipelines will fund reconstruction<sup>44</sup>. The Clinton administration was clearly sympathetic to Taliban, as they were in line with Washington's anti-Iran policy and were important for the success of any southern pipeline from Central Asia that would avoid Iran. The US Congress had authorized a covert \$ 20 million budget for the CIA to destabilize

Iran. Tehran had accused Washington of funneling some of these funds to the Taliban, a charge that was always denied by Washington.

The policy, which changed the US stance and made her back away, was the fatal mistake of keeping Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan, UNICOL-disagreement, and severe human rights violations with disgracing treatment of women and children. The US-Afghan relations kept strained due to presence of Osama bin Laden [Al-Qaida's leader] who flew from Khartoum with his family in May 1996 to Afghanistan and declared *Jihad* against the Americans, claiming their control over Saudi Arabia's authoritarian ruling elite. Osama's manifesto was based on the fact that US has been occupying the land of Islam [holiest of places in the Arabian Peninsula] amongst the Muslims. US is dictating the monarchs of the Arabian Peninsula-states, and humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbours, plundering its riches and creating its army-bases in Islam's holiest land, to some extent Osama's manifesto is considerable. In the same year President Clinton signed the anti-Terrorism Act that allowed the US authorities to bargain with the Taliban regime to handover Bin Laden, and block assets of the terrorist organizations. US offered catchy amount \$5 million for Bin Laden's capture. Pakistan [Nawaz Sharif] was also approached in US talks with Kabul, to convince Mullah Omar to hand over his guest Bin Laden [who later became his son-in-law]. Malik mentions, "the multinational *mujahedeen* force, which the United States had supported against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980's, has now transformed itself into a multinational hydra-headed Islamist fundamentalist monster"<sup>45</sup>.

By July 1998, Taliban forces closed all the NGOs offices, and killed two Afghan UN workers on the same day. By August 1998, US-Afghan relations were further intensified, when a suicide car bomber blew up the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Bin Laden was convicted for the terrorist acts, as reactionary move Clinton's administration ordered to hit the terrorists' camps in Jalalabad, which was run by Bin Laden. By December 1998, the international response to Taliban's atrocious assertiveness in Afghanistan resulted in anti-Taliban UN Security Council Resolution with unspecified sanctions on Taliban for harboring terrorism, violence, drugs, and human rights violation [Pakistan was the only country which did not support the resolution]. From 1998 to 1999, Taliban tried to cut-deal with the US using Bin Laden as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis their recognition by the US authorities. By July 1999, US imposed range of sanctions on Taliban, freezing all their assets and banning all commercial and financial ties between US and Afghanistan, so they would handover Bin Laden. The deteriorated relations between Taliban and US have over-pressurized Pakistan, apparently, US was expecting that Pakistan might moderate the growing Talibanization in Afghanistan. However, their illusionistic analysis come to an end on the eve of '9/11', according to Zbigniew Brzezinski former US National Security Advisor, "American citizen only woke up to the consequences when the Afghanistan-trained Islamic militants blew up the World Trade Centre in New York"<sup>46</sup>. After 9/11 incident, US waged war on terror on Afghanistan and supported NA to topple Taliban's Islamic Emirates that fallen in less than a hundred days [which took six years to emerge]. Mullah Omar ordered his followers and fighters to disperse, and avoid any further direct confrontations, many of the Taliban prominent people

moved across the porous border to Pakistan and settled in Baluchistan and Quetta. According to Yousafzai, since 1945 US had bombed 79 countries. During the US attack on Afghanistan, Taliban never really fought, they melted and got scattered, hardly 1000 Taliban were killed and after few weeks they came back<sup>47</sup>. Meanwhile, US got engaged in Iraq war (2003) that paved the way for Taliban to regain strength<sup>48</sup>. A war that should have ended in 2002, had been rekindled. “The militants were now headquartered in Pakistan, a country facing severe political crises that was pushing the state to the brink of failure. Having the fastest-growing nuclear arsenal in the world and being its second largest Muslim country with a population of 180 million, Pakistan seemed poised to become a *jihadist* enclave”<sup>49</sup>. However, US initiated war against Al-Qaida in Afghanistan under her broad agenda of ‘Global War on Terror’, succeeded only in constricting Al-Qaida’s operative ability, US failed in eliminating the threat. Thus, “Al-Qaida not only has survived and sustained its position in the global security environment but has also gained a competitive advantage in relations to United States and its counterterrorism efforts”<sup>50</sup>.

### **Pakistan’s Support in War on Terror**

In the backdrop of 9/11, Pakistan was left with no option other than to become a ‘front line state in war on terror’. General Mahmud [the then DG ISI] was in US at time of 9/11 incident, and quoted famous lines which has been given by Richard Armitage [Deputy Secretary of the State] that either Pakistan cooperated with United States against Al-Qaida and the Taliban, or it would be bombed mercilessly back into the stone Age<sup>51</sup>. US preferred Pakistan on India due to its geographical proximity with Afghanistan and secondly, the Indian army was equipped with Russian training and weapons<sup>52</sup>. Musharraf believed that by joining war on terror, he took a favorable decision to Pakistan’s national interest. Ahmed mentions that Islamabad didn’t have any other options; the immediate and unconditional reversal in her established policies even surprised the Americans<sup>53</sup>.

“Whatever President Pervez Musharraf has done to help the US in its war against terrorism was to avert the grave consequences of saying ‘no’ to the US. Pakistan’s support was vital for the US because it not only wanted to use the territory of a country which shares the border with Afghanistan but also to avert the support which was being given to the Taliban government by Pakistan”<sup>54</sup>.

Pakistan was compelled to change its policy from pro to anti-Taliban. Otherwise, India would become the sole beneficiary that can undermine Pakistan’s sovereignty, nuclear resource, and pave the way for India to become a super-regional US ally and an influential actor in Afghanistan. Therefore, Musharraf asserted that it is not in our national interest to destroy ourselves for Taliban viz-a-viz US power. He also stressed that India would not have any role in the Afghan war. By mid of September 2001, Bush administration relieved all the imposed sanctions on Pakistan, and Musharraf became the major US military aid recipient that enhanced Indian apprehensions. Musharraf-Bush affairs couldn’t bring the

needed results; US couldn't capture Mullah Omar and Bin Laden, Karzai kept on complaining that Mullah Omar is living in Quetta (2007) under ISI cover. US massive bombing on Afghanistan forced Taliban leaders and fighters to find safe hideouts in Pakistan, they moved through the Af-Pak porous border to Quetta and Baluchistan. "Many of the host countries are vulnerable to terrorism because they are the victims of artificial geographical boundaries imposed by former colonial Empires without regard to ethnic composition"<sup>55</sup>. By the end of Musharraf's regime, the ideology of Taliban penetrated in Pakistan's social fabric and formed Pakistani Taliban. Augmented number of Taliban infiltrators in Pakistan led to new phase of religious extremism and radicalization that laid serious implication on the internal security structure of Pakistan. It enriched mushroomed terrorism in different social segments. The Pakistani Taliban lacked commanding hierarchy as compare to Taliban in Afghanistan, the ideological identity of Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were inspired by the Afghan-Taliban and Al-Qaida. Al-Qaida persuaded a rigid and bloody policy to replace the Pakistani state with an Islamic Emirate, it has been also claimed that TTP was financed by India to conduct anti-establishment terror acts. TTP emerged as the most threatening security concern in Pakistan, challenging Pakistan's all aspects of modern and moderate existence. In 2008, Obama administration extended its aid to increase anti-terrorism measures in Pakistan with the faith of 'to do more', but with a slightly changed policy of restoring democracy that introduced the Kerry-Lugar-Obama bill. The US administration preferred that "United States should cut off Musharraf and push for a transition to civilian democratic rule, Musharraf's military regime, they suggest, will never be a trustworthy partner capable of effectively fighting militancy and extremist ideologies"<sup>56</sup>.

### **Role of India in Afghanistan (post-9/11)**

Pakistan's policies dominated the initial years after 9/11 in Afghanistan. During war on terror Pakistan gained recognition regarding its role and geo-strategic importance with respect to Afghanistan. According to some US scholars that Pakistan has been given as over-view recognition in war on terror that gave leverage against the Indian interests in the region. "India was surprised that Washington did not seek isolate Pakistan after 9/11"<sup>57</sup>. But then again, many scholars have also admitted that the events of 9/11 proved to be very supportive to the Indian interests in Afghanistan. India quickly assessed the impact of 9/11 on the region that may lead to increased political space for Pakistan and reduced opportunities for India. Fani mentions that India's main concerns after 9/11 were 1) Pakistan would find new diplomatic and media support for the cause in Kashmir, and 2) US would be under pressure to balance its strategies between Indian and Pakistan<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, Indian strategies inculcated importance of Afghanistan in her regional policies, "since the ouster of the Taliban, India has worked to become Afghanistan's most important partner for reconstruction in recognition of the country's strategic importance for India within and beyond the South Asian region"<sup>59</sup>.

Since 1947, India's constructive and economic role in Afghanistan is not new for India and Afghanistan. Whereas, in post 9/11 the Indian role in Afghanistan is fairly new to India's security agenda, it threatens Pakistan's strategic depth, which

has long been vital to Pakistan in Afghanistan; it also enhances Pakistan's fears of strategic encirclement. D'Souza elucidates that India's growing influence in Afghanistan and Pakistan's security concerns of encirclement in what it perceives to be its 'strategic backyard' is due to 'zero-sum' geopolitical rivalry between India and Pakistan, dubbed by western analysts as the 'new great game', which is seen as a source of further instability<sup>60</sup>. However, in post 9/11, India is considered a major stakeholder in Afghanistan's security, social and economic development and keenly observing the unfolding scenario after the US withdrawal from Kabul<sup>61</sup>, and Afghanistan's policy is also receptive towards Indian influence and initiatives. In December 2001, India reopened the Indian embassy in Kabul followed by number of consulates. Zaki mentions that India has six consulates in Afghanistan, and the rest are security centers, to provide security to Indian workers<sup>62</sup>. Pakistan is in continuous fear due to India's massive engagement through the present number of consulates in Afghanistan [in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif] that led to the perception of cooperation and competition in Afghanistan as zero-sum game between both nuclear neighboring states<sup>63</sup>. Pakistan asserts that India is using its consulates in Afghanistan to aggravate the situation in southern Afghanistan bordering Pakistan, supporting the Pakistani Taliban and also supporting the insurgency in Baluchistan.

India is displaying its soft image for the security and development in Afghanistan, it adopted a cautious approach by relying on her soft role rather bringing her boots on ground in order to attain its broader interests in South and Central Asia. "In such a situation, India engaged herself in Afghanistan for reconstruction as a soft power"<sup>64</sup>. Indian interests are not confined to encounter Pakistan; India broadly is aspiring for stable Afghanistan as a strategic priority and responsibility of a regional power.

Hitherto, under Pakistan's pressure and US unappreciated Indian role in Afghanistan, in January 2010 India was excluded from the International Conference on Afghanistan and New Delhi was declared irrelevant to the evolving security dynamics in Afghanistan. "The London conference decided that the time had come to woo 'moderate' section of the Taliban to share power in Kabul. Pakistan seems to have convinced the West that it can play the role of mediator in negotiations with Taliban"<sup>65</sup>. Obama's miscalculated announcement of NATO troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2011 also left India with a frightful future of Afghanistan. But India's persistent soft role, development process and enduring interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan's inability to control terrorism changed the US perception to pro-Indian policies in Afghanistan. In 2011, under Karzai's government, India signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement for cooperation with Afghanistan in the political, security, economic, trade, capacity development, education, social, cultural, civil society and people to people contacts; the agreement does not include the presence of Indian combat troops in Afghanistan<sup>66</sup>. In 2012, in Kabul Conference India offered its economic support and regional integration for Afghanistan, in the same year India also hosted the Investment Summit on Afghanistan in Delhi. In December 2013, the Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited India and requested for greater security cooperation, asserting India's regional alliance in post-2014 US withdrawal to ensure stable Afghanistan. On the other side India was willing to play major role and fill the security gap in

Afghanistan not only vis-à-vis Pakistan as a counter strategy but to attain her other broader objectives vis-à-vis China. US early withdrawal in 2014 was not in Indian interest neither Indian endorsed US continued presence. US presence in Afghanistan is backed by India until it secures its interests and broader options<sup>67</sup>. Indian broader set of objectives in Afghanistan (post 9/11) can be defined as follows,

- i. To encounter Pakistan's strategic depth [to minimize Islamabad's influence] and to controxtremists' militancy that can ignite the separatist elements in Kashmir and increase Indian national security threats.
- ii. To back economic and political development in Afghanistan through supporting the collision-governmental structure in Afghanistan, while keeping the NA card for any unfortunate precedent as in case of Taliban's reemergence.
- iii. To approach and influence the Central Asian Republics and energy resources by an alternative transit trade rout via Iran [Chabahar Port] to Afghanistan and bypassing Pakistan.
- iv. To attain her broader regional objectives of being super-regional power backed by US vis-à-vis China.



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