

## **The Proximity of Us-Indian Interest in Afghanistan and Its Implication on Pakistan**

**Shireen Mushtaq**

### **Abstract**

Afghanistan has been a stage of great power politics for centuries. The US aims in Afghanistan since 2001 has been to counter terrorism, a strategy that has seen several highs and lows, with each President having followed somewhat the same approach with a new title. This protracted conflict has become a burden on the USA economy as she played a major role in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan along with the constant military presence in Afghanistan. Recently, USA's President Trump, with his new Afghan Policy has welcomed the Indian involvement in Afghanistan for state building, reconstruction and development, acknowledging that India and USA should work together. At the same time President Trump has denied Pakistan the credit she deserves for facing the brunt of the Afghan conflict that has been raging on to 17 years. Pakistan has been involved in "doing more" in the case of Afghanistan however the acknowledgement for that has been far and few. The relations of US and Pakistan have suffered as a result of this. Now as the Indian strategic and economic interests are aligned with those of USA, the Indian involvement is favored. The proximity of US – Indian interests has several implications on Pakistan that are both strategic and economic in nature. The threat of Indian influence in Afghanistan is not imaginary for Pakistan, this enmity is deep rooted and guided by suspicion. It is therefore becoming a major challenge for Pakistan to pursue her own interests in Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan requires Afghanistan to be a friendly neighbor so that the changing economic regional dynamics and the ensuing economic prosperity as a result of CPEC, can be enjoyed equally by all regional states. However, given the Indian role in Afghanistan and the US policy towards Pakistan, cooperation seems far fetched.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan Conflict, Trust deficit, New Afghan policy, Interests

### **Introduction**

Afghanistan conflict is one of the most debated issues of the 21st century, with its complex nature and large scale impact this issues warrants all the attention it gets. The US involvement in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) have impacted seriously the regional dynamics of South Asia. The last 16 years since the invasion of Afghanistan regional actors have been playing their role in Afghanistan, with US encouraging them to pull Afghanistan out of its misery. the cooperation would not be controversial or viewed with skepticism if the US policy of treating key players on the basis of equality. For Afghanistan regional players such as Pakistan, India, China and Russia have constantly been reevaluating their policies to meet their own national interests or

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\*Author is Lecturer, Kinnaird College, Lahore, Pakistan.

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ends. Of these players Pakistan and India, and their respective relations with US has had a huge impact of Afghanistan. This Indo - US alliance in Afghanistan is a matter of concern for Pakistan especially in the light of stumbling US- Pakistan relations.

In the National Address on 12th August 2017, US President Trump announced the New strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia. This long expected policy took the administration the first six months to announce. The pillar of this policy are based on the following strategy adopting a condition based approach and abandoning time tables, integrating diplomatic, economic and military efforts, a revised regional approach – aggressive towards Pakistan and friendly toward India (New York times, 2017). It was also announced later that the position of Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan a position formerly held by Richard Holbrooke, under the Obama Administration will now be eliminated as Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson stated that the Acting Assistance Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, Alice G. Wells, a career diplomat, will serve in both positions.

Since the US lowered its forces in Afghanistan the Taliban's insurgency has picked up pace which though not significant but still causes alarm and destabilization. The Afghan government is losing control slowly to the Taliban, recruitment still continues though their numbers are few. According to the New Afghan policy, President Trump focused primarily on counterterrorism as the principal objective of USA since 9/11. the threat of a Taliban revival is real and such a comeback will have a huge impact of US prestige and material assets in Afghanistan and beyond. Therefore, counterterrorism takes a center stage. The new Afghan policy like its predecessor the Af-pak policy does not overlook the fact that the security of Pakistan and Afghanistan is a reciprocal relationship (Felbab- Brown, 2017).

### **US Policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan over the Years**

The US – Pakistan alliance has not been an easy engagement, the highs and lows of their relations have brought about much criticism, blame, feelings of resentment and mistrust on both sides. US – Pakistan may turn a cold shoulder to each other but they are indispensable to each other something that both actors are aware. The US - Pakistan alliance is a complicated story of cooperation and competition in Afghanistan. Cooperation to bring about a peace process that yields a positive outcome for both US and Pakistan, competition because of the opposing interest as to who should be in power or who should to be involved in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

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According to Barbara Elias (2013) the alliance theories can rightly explain the US-Pakistan relations, as they focus on three key features: Commitment, Dependence and Interest. These are the critical dynamics that determine bargaining leverage. The relations of US and Pakistan can be analyzed on this yardstick. Therefore a structural analysis of the Af-Pak policy describes the limitations of the US leverage in Af – Pak. Firstly, commitment in which two outcomes abandonment and entrapment resulted. Recalling the US has had a history of leaving once her interests are fulfilled, as had been the case after Geneva Accords 1988. The fear of entrapment is also there, being involved in a conflict that is not chosen but imposed, especially when interests are differing recalling the choice that Bush Administration gave “you’re with us or against us”. The second and third features are more interlinked than the first, dependency and interests, As far as dependency is concerned the US is dependent upon Pakistan and Afghanistan to fulfill its interest, especially the ones that cannot be fulfilled unilaterally. In such a scenario one cannot ignore that structure there are in fact “certain structural attributes that motivate different behaviors. Just as an individual hired on a temporary contract is likely to behave differently from an employee hired for a career position, an ally which knows it will be dropped has different incentives from one in a more durable commitment. Knowing the relationship in its current form is temporary that creates incentives for the regime to prepare for a future apart from the coalition”. Such is the relationship of US with Afghanistan and Pakistan, as the latter remains engaged in the alliance but also pursues their own interest and avails options accordingly because of the fear that the alliance status given by US to Pakistan and Afghanistan, may as well turn out to be temporary, therefore the loyalty is shaken (Elias, 2013; Kiran, 2009; Pant 2015; Shah and Riaz, 2013).

Under the Obama administration the Af-Pak policy was presented to equate the situation of Afghanistan and Pakistan, claiming the strong link that these two countries have the way they share impact of the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The Af- Pak policy, its predecessor under Bush administration and successor, the new Afghan policy under Trump Administration follows the same course and the core US interest in Afghanistan have persistently remained the same. The Af-Pak policy to deal with Pakistan was also termed as flawed (Yousaf, Yousaf and Zaidi, 2011).

According to Wisner (2009) writing in the era of Obama’s Af-Pak policy, after the 1988 Geneva accords that ended the Afghan conflict of 1979 the US left abruptly, leaving Pakistan to deal with a situation that Pakistan had to face the impact due to social, cultural and geographic proximity. Therefore, whenever talk of an Afghan

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policy is under way Pakistan has to be on the defensive. It's a lesson taught by history. The US alliance that has now shifted towards India, an arch rival of Pakistan, leaving her to defend her own interests. The author states that "Without a clearly defined goal, it is impossible to know what additional resources, including troops, will be needed. Are we trying to pacify Afghanistan? Defeat the Taliban? Develop Afghanistan, its institutions, and its economy and transform its mores? If so, we are doomed to failure. We do not have the ability, time, or resources available to accomplish such broad and far reaching Objectives" (Windsor, 2009). The Af-Pak policy linked the situation of Afghanistan to Pakistan, which they undoubtedly are but this equating was unwelcomed on both sides. This is because the resources committed in Afghanistan are far different from what is promised and provided to Pakistan. Definitely Pakistan has had a major role to play, by providing the support needed by US in order to set up and run a military offensive in Afghanistan. "India and Pakistan should continue to be treated separately by Washington. A hyphenated approach to "Af-Pak" is just as offensive as a hyphenated approach to "Indo-Pak," and it is unsurprising that regional politicians and commentators responded badly to both hyphenations. A more sensible strategic policy framework would recognize global, regional, and national policy agendas—and would work to frame an Asia policy that fully reflects these (Evan, 2012).

The US military aid to Pakistan has decreased by 60% since 2010. Pakistan's Afghanistan threats are two: the fears that a strongly aligned government with India will encircle Pakistan and unstable Afghanistan will lead to anti-Pakistan militant groups destabilizing the state. Whereas US interest in Pakistan are also wide ranging, the safety of Pakistan's nuclear weapons the drawing down of tactical nuclear weapons and preventing a Pakistan – India war. Furthermore, the democratization, pluralization and the promotion of civilian and technocratic governance are also on the agendas. Pakistan is also needed by US to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, as Pakistan has done so in 2014 and 2015. Therefore, Pakistan is not a bystander in the Afghan conflict it is in fact a key state in the conflict and in the process of conflict resolution. The US has always been bent towards favoring India and in Afghanistan's case this support is not new. US uses India as a trump card to get Pakistan's attention. The precise nature of US - India alliance is to pressure Pakistan, as the threat of Indian aggression is real, one has to admit that India being in Afghanistan is a troublesome for Pakistan. The more the India acquires ground, the more Pakistan loses its leverage in Afghanistan. Additionally, the Indian involvement in other cases such as the Baluchi separatist and other militant groups aiming to destabilize Pakistan. "Subsequent to President Trump's speech, senior U.S. officials

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again recognized the doubled-edged sword of the India card in Afghanistan—suggesting that India’s role in Afghanistan should not come at the expense of Pakistan’s legitimate interests in the country and that the United States is keen to see an improvement in relations between India and Pakistan and is ready to facilitate such efforts” (Felbab – Brown, 2017; Pant 2015). Leaders in US and Afghanistan are aware of the fact without Pakistan there can be no peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan is indispensable for Afghanistan a point reiterated by Former US Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair in February 2009 that earlier stated in a BBC Interview by President Musharraf in September 2006. The US is aware that is a Counterinsurgency War the intelligence is vital. Therefore, the support of Pakistan is needed to keep the US interests intact (Elias, 2013; International Crisis group, 2014).

### **Contours of the New Afghan Policy 2017**

The Trump Administration took time to announce the new Afghan policy contemplating facts and getting their own organizations and institutions on the same page. The Afghan policy is perhaps the most important of all especially because of the regional dynamics in South Asia that are largely linked to this policy.

- Abandoning timetables – means that there is no set date as to when US would or can completely withdraw from Afghanistan. This is done to avoid creating a vacuum.
- The number of troops to be increased were not disclosed.
- The US President also stated that there will be an increase in the powers of the commanders on ground who are fighting the war, to target terrorists and criminal networks - thus abandoning the approach of micromanagement by Washington.
- Combining military and economic efforts means to use carrots and sticks diplomacy.
- Adopting a regional approach – broadening the spectrum through Afghanistan is view and identify to key players that benefit the US interests . – identifying India in a positive light and truning a cold shoulder towards Pakistan, though acknowledging Pakistan is a former ally in the war.
- Broadening the approach to include the regional political scenario: The appointment of Assistant Secretary Alice G. Wells as the special representative of Central and South Asian affairs and the Special Representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan – this shows that the US is not only focusing on Afghanistan. It is

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adopting a broader spectrum to the changing regional dynamics and in that it sees Afghanistan as a variable.

- Trump Administrations hardline approach towards Pakistan is bound to widen the trust deficit of this alliance that is already walking a thin line.

### **Pakistan's Interest and Policies in Afghanistan**

Pakistani's interests in Afghanistan have remained the same over the decades, though Pakistan has gone through several changes since the invasion of 2001. Both USA and Pakistan have persistently focused on their respective goals, the implementation of policy may have changed but the strategy remains the same. As policy is in pursuit of interest it becomes obvious that the interests that have not changed even though the on ground situation in Afghanistan has changed. Various strategies have been adopted that include confrontation and reconciliation depending upon the need. The Afghan policy of Pakistan can be divided into several phases which explain how in different situations Pakistan's strategies have evolved in accordance with its goals or objectives. In the post-Soviet withdrawal era and the post-cold war era Pakistan had to shoulder the responsibility to stabilize Afghanistan.

In the post-Soviet withdrawal 1988 and onwards, with the difficulty of dealing with several Afghan warlords and their interests, the real test of installing a Pakistan favorable government in Afghanistan was a daunting task. During the 1990's the policy of Pakistan focused on two objectives: security and trade. The objective was to gain strategic depth against India and access to Central Asian states especially for the energy resources (Ahmed, 2012; Price, 2013). Soviets left a "puppet" socialist regime in Afghanistan led by Najibullah. Pakistan wanted to install the mujahedeen government who were Pakistan's allies. Pakistan succeeded in establishing a favorable government in Afghanistan for the time being after the Peshawar accords. The second important task was maintaining the influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan. The Afghan civil war began because of the power sharing incorporated in the Peshawar accords was not implemented in true spirit. After the Peshawar school bus incident in 1994, the relations of Afghanistan and Pakistan became "frosty"(Akhtar,2008; Price 2013). Later on as the Taliban came into power, Pakistan had to reassess strategy. In this period Pakistan had to prioritize again, the aim of achieving strategic depth against India. It continued to be the main objective and establishing friendly relations with the Taliban would have ensured that, hence Pakistan adopted a pro-Taliban policy. Secondly, supporting the Taliban Government in order to end the Civil war of Afghanistan and establishing a government favorable to Pakistan. For this purpose,

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Pakistan adopted a two track policy while diplomatically recognizing the Taliban in Afghanistan as the legitimate government. She also supported the idea of a broad-based government. The only states to recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan were Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE (Bajoria, 2011; Katzman and Thomas, 2017; Shahand Riaz ,2013).

This created a lot of problems for Pakistan especially after the 9/11 attacks took place. Pakistan's support for the Taliban became common knowledge. Pakistan had to choose either sides to be with them or against them. Former President Musharraf wrote that he suggested the recognition of Taliban regime of Afghanistan by the international community and then put pressure on the Taliban government. US refused his suggestion (Musharraf, 2013). This difficult relation cost a lot more than Pakistan gained from it. With the civil war raging in Afghanistan, the only option for Pakistan to stabilize its neighbor was to allow the emergence of a party which could be a strategic partner and put an end to the conflict environment in Afghanistan. Pakistan had of course never anticipated the later events, including their support of Osama Bin Laden and the attacks of 9 /11. Consequently, Pakistan became the front line state in the war on terror, the war that severely damaged Pakistan politically, socially and economically.

### **Post US led Invasion of Afghanistan 2001**

The post 2001 Afghan Policy of Pakistan is more significant and complex than in any other time. The dynamic of the conflict and the state as a whole had changed. The domestic condition in Afghanistan, the politics in the region and the international scenario as a whole was very different now. The objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy however remained somewhat the same. The involvement for other states in Afghanistan have risen Pakistan's concerns especially those whose presence in Afghanistan undermines Pakistan's security namely India. As Pakistan's post 9/11 interests in Afghanistan are analyzed and discussed by Najmuddin A. Shaikh in his article "What does Pakistan want in Afghanistan?" published on 13 January, 2012 in the Express Tribune. These interests as described by him can be divided as economic interests and security concerns. The economic interests include the utilizing of the resources of Central Asian states, utilizing the Gwadar port and continuation of projects such as TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline) and CASA (Central Asia South Asia electricity trade) 1000 project, seeking benefits from mineral exploration in Afghanistan by China, from the Aynak Copper Mines, check the effects of smuggling estimated to be \$ 5 billion worth of goods and 33 % of opium. Social and security concerns of Pakistan include the repatriation of the

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refugees estimated to be 5 million, 1.5 Million registered and 1.7 Million unregistered. The repatriation process began in April 2017, under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Khan 2017).

According to Chalk and Hanauer (2012) Pakistani goals in Afghanistan are to create “strategic depth”. This is because Pakistan and India are involved in a zero sum game for a long time especially since 1971. Pakistan perceives India’s increased involvement as a deliberate strategy of encirclement. Pakistan aims to foster a pro-Pakistani Afghanistan in Kabul that is hostile to India. The “strategic depth doctrine” of Pakistan however is widely debated keeping in mind deterrence as both Pakistan and India are nuclear weapon states. Scholars such as Ishtiaq Ahmed in his article “Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations and Stabilization of the Region” in 2010 he said that “At least after the 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, this thesis has become redundant. When nuclear deterrence between the two atomic powers is supposed to dissuade them from fighting an all-out conventional war, then why would Pakistan need to exert its influence in Afghanistan for the sake of securing “strategic depth?” At a time when India is contemplating a potentially dangerous Pakistan-specific Cold Start doctrine, it will be a rationally incomprehensible act on the part of Pakistan’s security establishment to rely on the outdated option of seeking the so-called strategic depth for the country in Afghanistan”( Ahmed ,2010; Kronstadt and Katzman , 2008 ).

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in the policy of Pakistan towards Afghanistan driven now by mainly three considerations, rise of domestic terrorism , rivalry with India and to avoid a surge in Pashtun nationalism . “Pakistan’s attitude towards Indian presence in Afghanistan has also changed in recent years from that of insecurity to reconciliation. However, it remains cautious that Afghanistan does not provide India the space to pursue security-driven agendas against Pakistan. “Pakistan has also concentrated on pursuing economic cooperation with Afghanistan on the economic front” ( Sarkar and Akhtar ,2015).

Pakistan has been pursuing economic cooperation with Afghanistan for decades. The conclusion of APTTA (Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement in 2010) allowed an increase in bilateral trade. Pakistan was able to establish commercial links and was able to thwart Indian interest for the time being. However, Pakistan was unable to expand its reach into Central Asian states, Pakistan could not undermine Indian political and economic interests, as Afghanistan and India became strategic partners in 2011. The membership of both India and Pakistan in Shanghai Cooperation Organization granted in 2017 is a gateway to Central Asian markets but Afghanistan lies at the crossroads of this economic initiative.



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### **Indian Interests in Afghanistan**

India and Afghanistan have shared a common perspective on issues, like Pashtunistan, directed against Pakistan. This alliance has been one long waiting to happen especially in the post-Taliban era. The post US invasion Afghanistan brought about that opportunity when India and Afghanistan could align their interest and worked towards a stronger alliance, especially after the Bonn Agreement of 2001 and more significantly after the Heart of Asia conference in Istanbul 2011. At the BRICS summit 2014 President Modi's statement reaffirmed Indian commitment to Afghanistan " India will continue to assist Afghanistan in building its capacity; in governance, security and economic development" ( Sarkar and Akhtar , 2013 ).

Afghanistan has sought closer ties with India, owing to her growing economy and the potential market that India possesses. In 2001, Afghanistan and India signed the "strategic partnership", this gave the latter a formal role in the Afghan security, as India started to provide military training to ANDSF personnel. India is the 5th largest donor to Afghanistan, funding projects worth over \$2 billion, within additional pledge of \$ 1 billion at the NATO Summit in 2016. India asserts that that her interest in Afghanistan are civilian and not military. The new strategy announced by President Trump calls on India to help more with Afghanistan in economic assistance and development. India identifies several interest in Afghanistan, primarily the geostrategic position of the state, and its manifold physical, strategic and economic gains. Having a strong foothold in Afghanistan gives India the opportunity to play a larger role in regional politics as other major players like China, Russia, Iran and US are also involved. With this India wants to establish itself as a great power. India has become the primary donor to Afghanistan, and it is involved in the reconstruction of the country, focusing on infrastructure, institutional establishments, and training of security forces. India's power projection, soft power stance, is becoming a problem for Pakistan as the threat of strategic encirclement looms over India, hence focuses on two main agendas, establishing influence in the security apparatus in Afghanistan and increasing dependency of Afghanistan on India through capacity building projects that Afghanistan cannot invest on her own. The Indian Involvement in Afghanistan is a threat to Pakistan's security, as an article in the Foreign Policy magazine stated that the US media focuses only on the Pakistani ties to jihadists and ignores the Indian involvement with Taliban in their pursuit to destabilize Pakistan through militant activities. The anti-Pakistan forces are not just Pakistan's problem, these people are also seen firing at US troops (Felbab- Brown, 2017; Kiran, 2009, Pant 2015; Kronstadt and Katzman, 2008, Price , 2013).

**Table 1**  
*Indian Interests in Afghanistan*

	<b>Strategic Interests</b>
Afghanistan as a potential route for access to Central Asia	Strategic position of Afghanistan in the heart of Asia, a link to Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia.
Afghanistan as a base to counter China's growing regional influence	To counter China's growing power
The increase trade with Afghanistan through the Chabahar port	To provide an alternative route against Gwadar port ( CPEC )
Ensuring access to oil and gas fields	Ensuring economic gains through oil/gas procurement projects
Bilateral trade (Indo Afghan free trade) \$ 2 billion – 40% Afghan exports	Increasing Afghanistan's dependence on India
Developmental aid for capacity building projects	Indian influence in the security apparatus of Afghanistan

**Proximity of US and Indian Interest in Afghanistan and its Implication**

The proximity and convergence of Indian – US Interests is not limited to Afghanistan and its implication on Pakistan are manifold. Over the years the Indo- US alliance has matured to include several partnership agreements and gestures of trust and mutual wellbeing. In this environment the US has signaled a positive response towards the Indian involvement in Afghanistan. Pakistan though a frontline state in the war on terror is now sidelined. India states it that it is focusing on capacity building and nation building alone, in Afghanistan, which is not the case, this position may change into a strategic military partnership with USA in Afghanistan.

The Indian - US interests in Afghanistan are wide ranging that aim:

- to have control over the access of Afghanistan's oil and gas reserves;
- to counter China's growing political and economic interests in Central Asia, to have a friendly Afghan government inclined towards India and USA;
- to limit Pakistan's pursuit of interest in Afghanistan;
- denying strategic depth though not seen a strategic dilemma due to deterrence;
- to closely monitor and manipulate the internal issues of Pakistan ranging from Baluchistan issue to the water crisis;
- and to destabilize the CPEC related projects, to discourage investment by China and other major states;

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“India for some time has always used Afghanistan as a second front, and India has over the years financed problems for Pakistan on that side of the border” stated Chuck Hagel, the US Defense Secretary (Mukherjee, 2013). Hence it is seen that the Indian interests in Afghanistan significantly undermined Pakistan’s interests in that state.

### **Pakistan’s Narrowing Policy Options in Afghanistan**

- The US aid to Pakistan has gone down to 350 million sought after in 2018, from the 2.2 billion that was provided shortly after 9/11 attacks. This decline in military aid has heavily affected the coalition support fund that reimburses the Afghan border monitoring. This allows Pakistan to stop militant activity across the border (Dawn, 2017) . With the drawing down of fund the number of recruits will be reduced on the border that currently stands at ten thousand troops. Decreasing cooperation with Pakistan would make matters worse, increasing cooperation and, bridging the gaps is a much needed approach.
- Since Pakistan’s, Afghanistan policy is based on a security – centric approach. The involvement of India in the security apparatus of Afghanistan is a major concern for Pakistan. Of course the Indian involvement in Afghanistan is bound to increase, right now national building and capacity building are the agendas but one has to understand the rationale for the economic support provided by India to Afghanistan. India is pursuing not only economic interests in Afghanistan but it is also aiming at a better strategic location at provides India and oversight.
- The Trump Administration’s criticism of Pakistan and praise of India only widens the gulf between the two South Asian rivals. Pitting India and Pakistan against each other will achieve no ends. Kashmir is a stalemate. South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is dysfunctional because of India and Pakistan and the constant state of war in which these two states find each other.
- Indian investment in Afghanistan is far more than what Pakistan can promise. India uses the aid provided as a leverage to keep the posture of Afghanistan in check and in her favor. The same is the case with US, leveraging the aid provided to handle Afghanistan.

### **Conclusion**

The New Afghan Policy aims for a broader approach towards the Afghanistan situation but in fact reflects a narrow approach of US to deal with the situation on

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ground. The widening of the gulf between India and Pakistan will surely have an impact on Afghanistan as well, because of the increased competition and mistrust between these states. Trump Administration instead of creating a delicate has disrupted the status quo all together. Afghanistan is a complex issue that lays at the heart of many regional powers rivalry and economic concerns, therefore a more elaborate and all-inclusive approach should be adopted to deal with Afghanistan situation.

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