

**Journal of Political Studies**

*Vol. 27, No. 2, July–December 2020, pp. 129–140*

## **India's Role in Afghan Peace Process**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The disastrous event of 9/11 changed the Political and Security dynamics of the world. The event of 9/11 provided a chance for India to enter into Afghanistan. Afghanistan attracts the world powers due to its strategic importance. Afghanistan is a gateway to the energy rich Central Asian Republics. India's involvement in Afghanistan is quite realistic. India had never established cordial relations with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The event of 9/11 gave India a chance to establish cordial relations with the Afghan political government. India participated in the Bonn Conference and announced its support for the people of Afghanistan in the reconstruction of the country. India enjoyed its best relations with the governments of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani in Kabul. India enhanced its ties with Iran to secure its interest in Afghanistan and to counter Pakistan. India and Iran have some common interests in Afghanistan. New Delhi has invested a big amount in various sectors in Afghanistan to enhance its influence in Afghan society. India has worked hard to facilitate Afghan Nationals to boost its soft power. India now influences the internal politics of Afghanistan. The world considers India a major market in South Asia. India's presence in Afghanistan has always been a source of worry for Pakistan. Pakistan considers India's presence in Afghanistan a threat to its National Security. Pakistan thinks India should work for the betterment of Afghan people but she should avoid using Afghan soil against Pakistan. Pakistan has already suffered a lot due to the disturbance in Afghanistan. Peaceful Afghanistan is in the favor of South Asia and for the Global Powers. This paper focuses on the Indian presence in Afghanistan and India's role to bring peace in Afghanistan.*

**Keywords:** *India, Afghanistan, Taliban, Pakistan, Peace Process*

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## **Introduction**

The origin of Kabul and Indian relations dates back to 1855 when both states signed a Mutual Agreement Treaty named Peshawar Treaty. New Delhi came physically in Afghanistan after the demise of the Taliban regime. India tried to justify its presence to announce that it would play its vital part in the reconstruction phase in Afghanistan. India's main objective was to counter the influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan (Rehman, 2014). Kabul has always been a battleground for the external powers. India's main purpose to create disturbance in the Internal Security of Pakistan. 70% of the people of Afghanistan think India is a better option rather than Pakistan and America (Constantino, 2020). Pakistan and America have spent a big amount of money and human resources in Kabul. India has become the 5<sup>th</sup> biggest donor for Kabul by announcing \$ 1.2 billion since 2001 (Joshi, 2018). Islamabad has shown serious reservations on the Indian presence in Afghanistan and Raw's involvement in militant activities in North Waziristan (Saleem, 2018). Indian Intelligence Agency's presence in Afghanistan shows the intentions of India. India is active in Baluchistan and is trying to sabotage the Pakistan China Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC injected a new life into Pakistan's economy. Therefore, India and its puppets sitting in the Afghan government are trying to weaken the security and economy of Pakistan (Shah, 2017). India has clear intentions that She does not want Afghanistan in the hands of Taliban militants with the aid of Pakistan. India wants to remain a key player in the matter regarding Afghanistan and India can use all sources to remain physically on the soil of Kabul. A peaceful Afghanistan is helpful not only in Pakistan but also in India and other states of the region. India has shown reservations about the Taliban and Pakistan nexus (Paliwal, 2015). New Delhi is trying to get maximum support of the Great Powers to achieve its hegemonic desire in South Asia. India is increasing its influence through Soft Power in Afghanistan. The Internal Security condition of India is not up to the mark and the issue of Kashmir and conflict with Pakistan are the main hurdles in the way of India to become a hegemonic state of South Asia. India has been increasing its military and economic growth for the last 10 years. No doubt New Delhi has become a big and attractive market for other states due to her immense size and population. Countries are considering India a suitable state for investment. Now India is aiming to increase her influence in the region through Soft Power and get the attention of World Powers (Pande, 2020). Taliban and America have signed a Peace Accord on 29 February 2020 in the capital of Qatar. America is going to withdraw her troops from Afghanistan till May 2021 according to the agreement signed by the Taliban and America. Neighboring states are playing their roles to bring durable peace in Afghanistan. This research paper focuses on the Indian role in Afghan Peace Process and Indian presence in Afghanistan.

## **Research Methodology**

The researcher used a qualitative technique to complete this paper. The researcher reviewed the Existing Literature relevant to this topic. The researcher got help from the Articles, Books and Newspapers to complete this research. The researcher approached different persons who have enough knowledge to speak on this topic. Mr. Abdul Basit Research Fellow, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore provided me with his expert opinion on my topic. MS. Farzana Shah a Peshawar-based journalist and has a grasp on Afghanistan also provided me useful information to complete my

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research work. The researcher visited different libraries to get relevant data on his topic. The researcher used Exploratory Research to find out facts regarding this topic.

### Literature Review

“Perspective on South Asian Security” by Shanthie D’Souza and Rajshree Jetly. Both are well aware writers on Security Studies. This book shows the interesting security dynamics of the South Asian Region. This book discusses the security issues of the region. Afghanistan is the country that has been in a state of war for the last 18 years. Afghanistan is the key topic of this book. Both writers discuss the Foreign Policy of India towards Afghanistan. India as a neighboring country of Afghanistan has security concerns. Indian Foreign Policy towards Afghanistan is very important from the Indian perspective. India has a great interest in Afghanistan as India has invested a handsome amount in Afghanistan. This book focuses on the Foreign Policy of India towards Afghanistan in detail (Souza & Jetly, 2012).

“The New Great Game in Afghanistan: Role of India (A Pakistani Perspective)” written by Dr. Iram Khalid. In this article, Dr. Iram Khalid explains the importance of Afghanistan for the world powers. She puts light about Indian involvement in Afghanistan after the brutal incident of 9/11. India invested a huge amount in Afghanistan and India is working on different projects in Afghanistan. Dr. Iram Khalid discussed in detail the purpose of Indian presence in Afghanistan. She also explains the Indian plans in the South Asian Region (Khalid, 2011).

“Indian Strategic Influence in Afghanistan: Realist Ends through Social Means” by Mariam Kamal. The researcher describes India as an emerging power in South Asia and World Politics. India’s presence in Afghanistan is a step to increase its Soft Power and to achieve its long term goals in Global Politics. She highlighted India’s plans in Afghanistan and its influence on Afghan politics and society. She also expressed New Delhi’s objectives and activities in Kabul (Kamal, 2019).

“Delhi-Kabul Nexus: Regional Dynamics and Geopolitical Perspective (With Reference to Pakistan)” by Fazal Abbas Awan, Asia Sial Alvi and Rabia Munir. The researchers focused on India and Pakistan’s role to bring stability in South Asia. Afghanistan is a new front for both arch-rivals. They explained the Indian role in Afghanistan and its effects on Islamabad. This research highlighted India’s security, economic and political interests in Afghanistan. They also discussed India’s approach to get access to Central Asian Republics via Afghanistan. America’s containment policy to China by using India was also discussed by the authors (Awan, Alvi, & Munir, 2019).

The writers pointed out Indian ambitions in Afghanistan. India is trying to get a prominent place in global politics. In Afghanistan, India is trying to overcome the influence of Pakistan. But India’s role in the Afghan Peace Process was missing. There is a need to work on India’s role in the Afghan Peace Process.

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The world has witnessed strong Indian relations with Afghanistan after the partition of the Sub-Continent. India physically came to Afghanistan after the incident of 9/11. It was tried to justify Indian presence in Afghanistan that India would play a significant role in the Reconstruction Phase of Afghanistan. Its main purpose was to

curtail Pakistan's presence in Afghanistan. India wants to become the sole owner of the South Asian Region. The presence of Pakistan is the real hurdle in the way of India. India always enjoyed its relations with Afghanistan except for the Taliban regime. The geographical location of Afghanistan appeals to India to maintain its strong ties with Afghanistan. The energy-rich states of Central Asia are the main destination of India. India constantly had cordial relations with all the regimes of Afghanistan except the Taliban. India not only enhanced its trade ties with Afghanistan but also working on local projects in Afghanistan. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and later the arrival of the Taliban regime India was sidelined from the political scene of Afghanistan. Although India always supported the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. During the period of the Taliban government, India did not play its active role in Afghanistan due to Pakistan's influence on the Taliban (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2015).

In September 1996 India closed its embassy in Kabul till 2001. India became a key player in Afghanistan after 9/11. Although India did not take part in military in Afghanistan its influence can be seen in Kabul. America toppled the Taliban government in 2001 and later Hamid Karzai became the head of Afghanistan. India took it as a great opportunity to settle in Afghanistan by investing money in the name of the reconstruction phase in Afghanistan. Indian historical, political, and cultural ties with Afghanistan compelled India to provide Afghanistan financial and political support for the rebuilding of Afghanistan (D'Souza, 2014). India's presence in Afghanistan can be seen in the larger picture. India is trying to enhance its influence on the South Asian states and wants to create hegemony in South Asia. India has a larger market than its neighboring countries in South Asia so it's easy for India to get the attention of the World Powers (Fair, 2014).

In February 2013 American Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia highlighted the importance of India during the discussion in the House of Foreign Affairs. He categorically stated that talk on South Asia cannot be held without the presence of India. Assistant Secretary also informed the audience about the Indian role in Afghanistan (The Hindu, 2013).

In January 2002 India committed to support Afghanistan at the Tokyo conference. India announced 2 billion dollars for the reconstruction of Afghanistan and became the 5<sup>th</sup> biggest donor after America, England, Japan, and Germany (Price, 2013). In 2011 India and Afghanistan have reached on an agreement to cooperate in different areas:

1. Governmental and Defense Cooperation
2. Commerce and Economic Collaboration
3. Develop the Capacities and Schooling Assistance

Communal, ethnic and people to people collaboration were made necessary to eliminate the trust deficit between both countries (Price, 2013).

Governmental level relations between India and Afghanistan have been nourishing since 2002. President Karzai has also visited India many times in his era. President Ashraf Ghani also considers India his friend and visited India to enhance bilateral ties between both countries. India has assisted Afghanistan on various occasions and showed great interest in reconstruction and rehabilitation programs in the country.

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India is supporting the Afghan government to maintain its influence in Afghanistan. Due to India's strong bilateral ties with the Afghan government, India could open its embassy in Kabul. India also opened its consulates in different cities of Afghanistan. Afghanistan has also got its membership of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). India supported Afghanistan to get its membership of SAARC. This initiative from India helped both countries to come closer (Kaur, 2017).

India also allowed Afghan people to come to India for medication and educational purposes. India also gave a great waiver in its visa policy to the people of Afghanistan. India announced a two-year visa for Afghan citizens and also exempted old citizens and children from police reporting. It was considered a great move from India to enhance its people to people contact with Afghanistan. India is also playing a significant role to support the economy of Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have signed a Trade Agreement to boost up trade between both countries (Grades Fixer, 2019).

According to the Agreement, custom duty was reduced from different items to enhance bilateral trade between New Delhi and Kabul. It was a great step to facilitate the economy of war-affected Afghanistan. As a result, the volume of trade reached 600 million dollars in 2013. But it was estimated to reach about 3 billion dollars in the coming years. It all depends on the peace situation in Afghanistan. Peace is the only thing that encourages trade among states. India and Afghanistan are hoping to get the maximum benefits of the trade agreement, and want to change the living standard of the common man (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2015).

Afghanistan is a rich country in terms of Natural resources. India has also signed an agreement on Strategic Partnership with Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan have tried to enhance their cooperation to find out Natural resources in Afghanistan. India is committed to helping Afghanistan in all sectors including Transport, Communications, and Information Technology. India has also signed two memorandums to find out Minerals and Natural Gas Reserves in Afghanistan. These Natural Reserves have worth approximately 1 trillion dollars (Choi, 2014).

India is playing smartly to get access to the Central Asian States. The central Asian States are rich in Energy Resources. India wants to utilize these resources of Central Asia through Afghanistan. India is investing to get a stronghold in the war-affected country Afghanistan. It will be easy for India to reach out to the Central Asian States including Russia through Afghanistan (Siddiqui, 2017).

India thinks that after the withdrawal of American and Nato Forces Afghan government will not be able to control Kabul. Things will not be in the favor of Pakistan too (Shayan, 2016). India thinks the Afghan government is not in a position to maintain peace in the country. Disturbance in Afghanistan can bring serious effects on India and the whole South Asian Region. India feels Afghanistan has serious challenges nowadays,

1. Weak Government System
2. Strong Individuals
3. Corruption on its Peak
4. Scattered Political Identities

5. Drug Trafficking
6. Militants Organizations

The revival of the Taliban is a serious threat to India. India knows the Taliban has defeated Nato and American Forces in Afghanistan. Now the Taliban is the powerful identity on the political scene of Afghanistan. The economic disorder is another worry for the Afghan government. The economy of Afghanistan depends on Foreign Aid. Countries are trying to reduce aid to the Afghan government due to the allegation of corruption. Afghanistan is the major producer of opium. Afghanistan is producing 80% of the world's opium. Money from opium ultimately reaches in the hands of the Taliban (Tolo News, 2018).

India as a cunning state is trying to find out workable options in Afghanistan. India's dominating position emphatically changes the status quo and settle new things according to her needs. India's presence in Kabul shows her needs to increase her security to control the outer environment in Afghanistan. In different ways, Afghanistan has got a prominent position in the Foreign Policy outlines of India (Pant, 2010).

India divides her interests into three main categories Security, Economic, and Regional desire. India is showing her soft image in Afghanistan to achieve her interests. India is trying to get her aim under social involvement. India and Pakistan both are arch-rivals. India and Pakistan have security concerns in Afghanistan. India's interest in Afghanistan should be seen through the lens of security. India thinks terror flow from the Pak-Afghan border knocks over India. India feels its involvement in Afghanistan is important to its regional security. India says Pakistan has no solution for Afghanistan, Pakistan does not want peace in Afghanistan. India's aggressive policy towards Afghanistan to prevent ground to Pakistan and other factors related to Pakistan. India also wants the minimum religious and extremist impact of Pakistan in Afghanistan. India is cautious about the security of its workers who are working in Afghanistan. India has sent 200 border police commandos for the security of its workers but India did not send its military to fight with the Taliban against the American demand (Kaul, 2007).

India does not want to allow Afghan soil to use against Indian interests. India fears that Islamic Militancy in Afghanistan will affect the Militancy Movement in Kashmir. That's why India wants to control Islamic militancy in Afghanistan. India also considers herself a victim of Islamization. Therefore, it is important for India to not allow the Taliban to get control of Afghanistan. India is trying to eliminate Islamic Extremism in Afghanistan. On the other side, Pakistan must help for setting up an Islamic regime in Afghanistan to raise pressure on India for Kashmir. Pakistan will be the winner if the Taliban gets hold of Kabul or get a major share in the government (Taneja, 2017). India goes one step up from other neighboring states, India provides training to Afghan military officials in different military academies in India. Approximately 100 military personals from Afghan Forces are getting training from Indian academies every year. Indian military officers are also busy in Afghanistan to teach women officers of the Afghan National Army the basic military rules and basic English skills (Ravi, 2017).

India has trained Afghan military officers but never keen to deploy its ground troops in Afghanistan. India offered in Dubai that she is ready for military exercises joint

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with Pakistan and NATO Troops after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and India couldn't cooperate in the military sector due to the trust deficit. India has no concern with Afghan people and peace in Afghanistan, India is there in Afghanistan to protect its interest. India wants to engage Pakistan on its Western borders and wants to create disturbance in Internal Security in Pakistan. India has been involved in various terrorist activities in Pakistan. Indian Intelligence Agency is involved in Afghan border areas of Pakistan in terrorist activities. India is spreading its Security Connections to Central Asia. India is the Fourth State to have a military base in Central Asia after America, Germany, and Russia. India had spent 10 million dollars to complete her base named Ayni in Tajikistan in 2007. This base enables India to respond to any aggression from the land of Afghanistan or Pakistan (Khattak, 2011).

Another side of the picture gives a clear sight of Indian influence in Afghanistan. America is supporting India to counter China to some extent in the South Asian Region. America is watching the shared values with India like democracy liberal ideas etc. India is also willing to take over the South Asian Region and wants her part in world affairs. India always tried to counter Pakistan in every field like Security, Economy Politically. Pakistan has not its best relations with Iran. Iran feels uncomfortable due to the American presence on her Eastern Borders. Iran, India, and Kabul tried to enhance trilateral relations via Chabhar Port. India and Iran have cooperated on trade in Afghanistan, their plans to get access to Central Asia (Hameed, 2012).

Pakistan with the help of China has built Gawadar Port with the Makran Coast in Balochistan. This port is considered the shortest way to Central Asia. Gawadar port will provide the shortest way to the Middle East. CPEC is a game-changer for the economy of Pakistan. China is taking great interest in CPEC and working hard to complete its ongoing projects. Gawadar will also open routes for Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Indian ocean (Azeemi, 2007). India has invested a big amount in Afghanistan to keep its presence to fill the gap after the withdrawal of Foreign Forces. Historically Afghanistan has been a trade route for the Central Asian States to sell their items in South Asia and Middle Eastern States (Elizabeth, 2016).

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India are part of a gas pipeline project. TAPI is a big project to solve the energy problems in India and Pakistan. TAPI gas pipeline project was under consideration in the early 90s during the Taliban government. India was not part of that time but later in 2008, India became the part of TAPI project (Bhutta, 2016). India has a great economic interest in Afghanistan. India has already invested a huge amount in Afghanistan on different projects. Peace is the first and foremost priority for Afghanistan to get benefits from the Indian investment. India is working on Medicine, Small Industries, Mining, and Communication projects as well as Information Technology (Iwanek, 2019). Afghanistan has no direct border with India. Afghanistan has no direct sea route as well. Afghanistan depends on Pakistan for its trade purposes and using Pakistani ports for goods transportation. Although relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have not been cordial since 2001. Pakistan and Afghanistan have a trust deficit both states are accusing each other to harbor terrorist sanctuaries. India took advantage of it and used Afghan leadership against Pakistan. India enhanced its trade with Kabul from 80 million dollars to 280 million dollars from 2001 to 2010. Afghanistan also exports its 20% items to Indian markets. India is the fifth biggest

exporter in Afghanistan. The Indian government also encourages private companies to invest in Afghanistan. Almost one hundred Indian companies have been invested in different sectors like Agriculture, Industries, and the Power Sector in Afghanistan (Pasricha, 2012).

India is active in the Social Sector of Afghanistan as well. New Delhi is trying to catch Afghan youth by providing them facilities. India is providing Sports facilities to Afghan youth. India is participating in the World Food Program in Afghanistan. Children in Schools are getting biscuits from schools, its main purpose to increase attendance in schools. Students from Afghanistan are studying in different universities in India and they are getting scholarships from prestigious Indian Institutions. India is also investing a handsome amount in the education sector in Afghanistan to attract the Afghan generation and World Community as well (Balachandar, 2012).

India has focused on its Cultural Exchange Program with Afghanistan. India is enhancing its ties with the local level through its TV Industry. Indian and Afghan societies are multi-ethnic different languages are spoken in both countries. Indian media especially Bollywood has a great influence on Afghan society. Indian Bollywood actors have a great fan following in Afghanistan. Indian dramas are very popular in Afghan women. Today media plays a very important role in societies and states are using media to enhance their Soft Powers. India has controlled a larger part of Afghanistan through its media (Nooristani, 2013).

Despite all these Investments where does India stand today in Afghan Peace Process? It's the most important thing India has a great interest in Afghanistan. India will protect its interest at any cost. India has made its feet on the ground in Afghanistan. The stakeholders must think that India is the biggest donor of Afghanistan in the region. America and even Pakistan and China should come forward and accept the importance of India in Afghanistan. Otherwise, India can play the role of a disruptor in these peace initiatives (Pant, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

India has influenced Afghan society after the ouster of the Taliban regime. India is using Afghan soil to create unrest in Pakistan. The establishment of Gwadar Port in Balochistan and Chinese presence there is the real worry for India. India does not want the Taliban militants in power and supporting Ashraf Ghani in Afghanistan as President and this system favor India. India is in a state of worry about how to protect Indian investment in Afghanistan if Peace talks succeed. India's aim to create unrest in Pakistan through Afghan soil but it will be difficult for India to execute her plans if the Taliban comes into power. India is playing the role of spoiler in the ongoing Peace Process. India is using its puppets in the Afghan government like Amrullah Saleh to derail this Peace Process. India is the biggest beneficiary if the Peace Process fails. America has already said to India to sit with Taliban leaders to discuss plans regarding Indian presence in Afghanistan. It is a difficult time for New Delhi to maintain her position in Afghanistan if the Taliban shares power with the government. India is using ISKP to counter the Taliban and derail the Peace Process. The Afghan government and The Taliban delegations are present in Doha for Intra Afghan Talks its historic moment in the recent history of Afghanistan. People are hoping that things will be better and peace will prevail in Afghanistan.



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