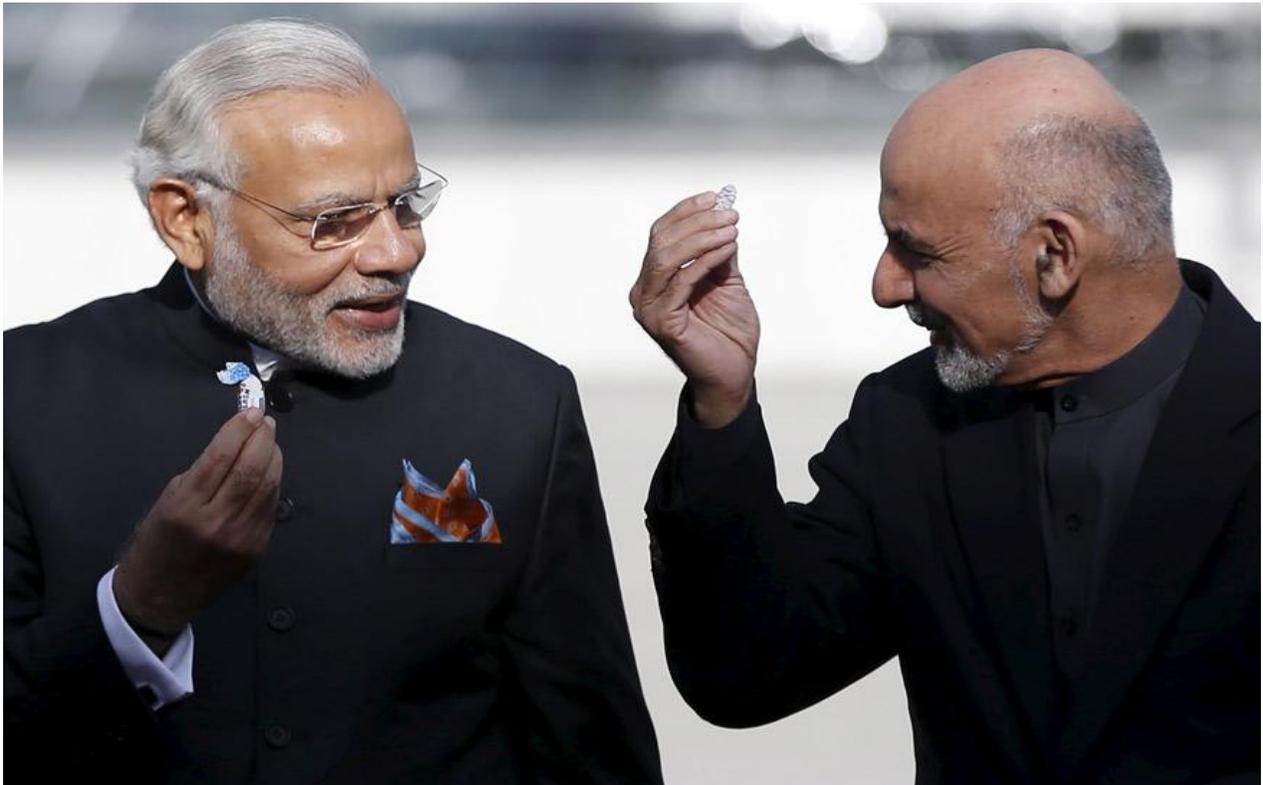




**NATO Foundation**  
*Defense College*

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*Afghanistan After 2014 US Drawdown:  
India's Waiting Game*

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## Abstract

*India perforce took in hand its policy towards Afghanistan after the US decision to drawdown its forces by December 2014. Its commitment on-the-ground of US \$ 2 billion and the realization that it stood to bear the brunt of the fall-out by Pakistan-nurtured radical Islamic terrorist groups made it incumbent.*

India's long and continuous history with, and current legitimate interests in, Afghanistan precludes an exit strategy after the Western forces leave. This sentiment has become even stronger as the regime in Afghanistan changes and the US drawdown nears. Bereft of a regular involvement in the decision-making processes relating to the future of Afghanistan, India has crafted its own strategy, elaborated below, to deal with the post-2014 situation. It is based on continuing to develop its soft power strengths while looking seriously at developing its hard power options. The success of its strategy will depend on the ability of the Indian state to re-assert the needed political will and could have a positive fall-out on India's relations with its other neighbours. The long pre-electoral scenario has stifled decisive action in favour of working within the *status quo* in Afghanistan. The outcome of the April 2014 general elections can be expected to have a significant impact on India's Afghanistan strategy.

Section one builds the rationale for the transformation in India's relationship with Afghanistan since Independence on 15 August 1947. Section two will delineate India's policy in the context of its current interests and goals in Afghanistan beyond the US drawdown. Section three will summarize India's view on the resilience of the Afghan state after 2014; Section four will elucidate on the instruments available to India after 2014 to achieve its goals, their leverage and limitation; and Section five will discuss areas in which these converge or diverge with other regional and extra-regional powers.

## Section 1: Evolution of India's Afghan Policy

Afghanistan has been a part of India's political, military and cultural space from the time of Emperor Asoka<sup>1</sup>. India's Afghanistan connection was given greater definition thanks to the British who fought the Anglo-Afghan Wars which saw Indian soldiers, by the misfortune of suzerainty, on the wrong side of those wars. The legacy of India-Afghanistan history, going back to at least 1000AD, when invaders from Afghanistan and central Asia repeatedly came to India on campaigns of plunder, pillage, conquest and conversion has etched Ghoris<sup>2</sup> and Ghaznis<sup>3</sup> into Indian memory forever. The links between the two countries are historical, cultural and civilizational. During the British time, with Afghanistan becoming the pawn in the Great Game with Russia, undivided India provided cannon fodder for the Anglo-Afghan wars.

Leading up to India's Independence, and its partition, an important strand of the Indian freedom movement in the Pashtun heartland, based on Gandhi's non-violent principles, was led by the legendary Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, known as the 'Frontier Gandhi'. After Independence, given the hostile relations between India and Pakistan, Afghanistan was always perceived as an ally. Independence and the 1948 India-Pakistan conflict in Kashmir meant the loss of a common border with Afghanistan with the exception of a thin sliver now part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. From 1947 to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, relations between the two countries remained generally sterile and settled along a path of border trade. With Afghanistan under the monarchy joining the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961 the two countries developed a degree of political affinity on regional and international issues.

The period since then can be divided into first, Soviet occupation till 1990; second, the chaotic period from 1992-1996; third, from 1996 to 2001 under the Taliban regime, and fourth, from 2011 under US

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<sup>1</sup> Ashoka was the last major emperor in the Mauryan dynasty of India. His vigorous patronage of Buddhism during his reign (265-238 BCE) furthered the expansion of that religion throughout India. [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/3879/Ashoka](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/3879/Ashoka).

<sup>2</sup> Shahab-ud-Din, known as Mohammad Gauri, was the ruler of Gaur located in the mountains between the old Ghaznavid Empire and Seljuk dynasty in the western part of the then Ghaznavid Empire, now central Afghanistan. Muhammad Ghori remains significant for his number of conquests and laying the foundation of Muslim rule in India. [www.studymode.com/essays/Muhammad-Ghori-89386/html](http://www.studymode.com/essays/Muhammad-Ghori-89386/html).

<sup>3</sup> Mahmud ibn Sebuktigin (971-1030) Sultan of the kingdom of Ghazna (998-1030), which originally comprising what is now Afghanistan and north-eastern Iran eventually including north-western India and most of Iran. Mahmud led about 17 expeditions from 1001 AD to 1026 AD sacking the Hindu temple of Somnath repeatedly. [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/355248/Mahmud](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/355248/Mahmud).

occupation and the Karzai government. India's support of the Soviet invasion lost it considerable prestige among the Afghan people, yet all the Afghan leaders appointed by the Soviets remained close and friendly to India. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1971 signed in the wake of the Bangladesh war had paid rich dividends in military equipment and the unflinching support of one of the two super-powers. For India, increasingly dependent on Soviet military and diplomatic support, its backing on the Afghan issue was a way to recompense Moscow. India was the only South Asian nation to recognize the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and the Soviet Union's military presence there.

Following the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from Afghanistan in 1989, India maintained its support, albeit in a haphazard way, for whoever was in power in Kabul, fighting a rear-guard action against the US-sponsored Pakistan-backed *mujahideen*. India continued to support Najibullah's government and provide humanitarian aid. After its fall, India supported the coalition government that took control. The *mujahideen* victory in 1992 ended this charade but brought turmoil with the US having withdrawn its support. India-Afghanistan relations ended with the outbreak of another civil war, which brought the Taliban, the Islamist militia supported by Pakistan, to power. The field was clear for Pakistan to develop its goal of gaining strategic depth in Afghanistan<sup>4</sup> by using Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to grow and nurture terrorist groups targeted towards Kashmir. It meant a stronger Pakistan hand on the government in Kabul. It also saw the beginning of insurgency in Kashmir fomented by Pakistan, under General Zia ul Haq, using the now unemployed trained *mujahideen*. The period between the take-over of the country by the Taliban until they were ousted in 2001 by the US was the nadir of India-Afghanistan relations.

From 1996 to 2001, India refused to recognize the Taliban government given their proximity to Pakistan and avowed hostility<sup>5</sup> to India. Their role in the negotiations leading to the release of

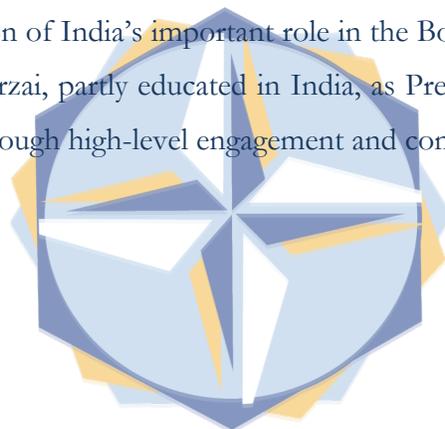
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<sup>4</sup> See "Pakistan's Endgame in Afghanistan" by Husain Haqqani in the same issue.

<sup>5</sup> "The Taliban rulers, worldwide pariahs for their harsh treatment of Afghan women and Buddhist statues, faced further scorn with a proposal that would force Hindus to wear an identity label on their clothing to distinguish them from Muslims. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/23/world/taliban-propose-an-identity-label-for-the-protection-of-hindus.html>.

passengers of the Indian Airlines flight 814 hijacked to Kandahar on 24 December 1999<sup>6</sup> was complicit. It was only after strong public pressure that the Indian government succumbed and released from their custody three dreaded terrorists, Maulana Masood Azhar, founder of Harakat- ul- Ansar which was on the US list of terrorist organizations, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh in 2002 implicated for murder of Daniel Pearl and a participant in the 9/11 attack, and Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar. India continued to support the Northern Alliance (NA), composed of ethnic Tajik and Uzbek warlords who were engaged in fighting the Taliban<sup>7</sup> led by Ahmed Shah Massoud. It maintained a hospital at Farkhor on Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, to treat the NA wounded. This complete absence of official relations with Afghanistan continued till 9/11 and the beginning of the Global War on Terror.

India's role in Afghanistan during the US occupation breaks down into three periods<sup>8</sup> although these divisions often overlap depending on changes in US policy: the initial period from 2001 to 2007 which started with the recognition of India's important role in the Bonn conference which brought in the government with Hamid Karzai, partly educated in India, as President. India has fully supported the post-Taliban government through high-level engagement and committed



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<sup>6</sup> The Taliban moved its militias near the hijacked Indian Airlines Flight aircraft, supposedly to prevent Indian Special Forces from storming the aircraft, and stalled the negotiations between India and the hijackers for days. Celia W. Dugger, "Hijackers of Jet End 2 Demands Made to India," *New York Times*, December 30, 1999. <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/12/30/world/hijackers-of-jet-end-2-demands-made-to-india.html>.

<sup>7</sup> "India's ability to maintain good relations with Afghanistan drew to a close with the Pakistani-aided and abetted Taliban victory in 1996. The Taliban victory finally gave Pakistan's politico-military establishment a long-sought goal: namely, what they believed to be a pliant regime in Afghanistan, one that would grant it strategic depth against India. India, on the other hand, was forced to abandon its embassy and withdraw its diplomatic personnel from Afghanistan. In early 2001, as the Northern Alliance was engaged in battle with Taliban forces, India reportedly provided Massoud's forces with high-altitude warfare equipment, defence advisors and helicopter technicians. Indian medical personnel also treated wounded Northern Alliance members at a hospital in Farkhor in Tajikistan near the Afghan-Tajik border." Pakistan and Afghanistan: Domestic Pressures and Regional Threats: India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan by Nicholas Howenstein, Sumit Ganguly, *Journal of International Affairs*, SIPA, Columbia, Vol 63, No.1 Fall/Winter 2009, pp. 27-140.

<sup>8</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "India's Changing Afghanistan Policy: Regional and Global Implications," US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College Press, Carlisle Barracks, PA. <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>.

financial assistance amounting to US \$ 2 billion<sup>9</sup>. India developed its assistance program during successive visits to India by President Karzai.

Nevertheless, from 2007 onwards, India found itself increasingly marginalized by the US and a West fearful of alienating Pakistan. It parlayed Pakistan's role in Afghan affairs even to the detriment of the West's own access and staying power. The appointment in 2009 of Richard Holbrook as the US Special Envoy for Afghanistan-Pakistan (AfPak) led India to oppose the spectre of his mandate including Kashmir as well. New Delhi's opposition ensured that Kashmir, and therefore India-Pakistan rivalry, did not become a part of the solution to the Afghanistan imbroglio.

An increase in the West's long-term commitment towards Afghanistan shifted the balance of power in favour of Pakistan due to its indispensability for logistic and political facilitation for the United States' increasing commitments. Pakistan secured a lever against India's policy and growing profile in Afghanistan. India came under regular attack by Pakistan-based and funded terrorist groups. Its embassy in Kabul was bombed in July 2008, leading to 60 deaths, including a senior diplomat. The project for the rehabilitation of the road from Zaranj to Delaram also saw the kidnapping of Indian workers who were ransomed out. The Indian Embassy in Kabul was attacked twice in October and December 2009 which, for the first time, was acknowledged, by the Afghanistan Ambassador to the United States, of being the handiwork of the Pakistan-based Haqqani group. The latest was the attack on India's consulate in Jalalabad in August 2013. India's exclusion from the 2010 International Conference on Afghanistan in Istanbul was another example of its marginalization from the decision-making vis-à-vis Afghanistan. The Conference's decision to commence talks with the Taliban- on the premise of the good and bad Taliban- was anathema to India's policy and caught it unawares. Pakistan had been able to portray that it could mediate between the Taliban and a US bent on finding a face-saving exit at any cost<sup>10</sup>.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The cumulative committed Indian assistance to Afghanistan amounts to US\$ 2 billion. India's development projects in Afghanistan can broadly be divided into: large infrastructure projects; humanitarian assistance; capacity building initiatives; and 'Small Development Projects'. Embassy of India, Kabul, September 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) Question-Answer on Stability in Afghanistan in Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis, Resources, March 3, 2010. <http://www.idsa.in/resources/parliament/StabilityinAfghanistan030310>.

<sup>11</sup> "Turkey's Ambassador Engin Soysal defending exclusion of India from the conference explained that Turkey believed different groupings of regional countries were needed to address different issues. Managing the views of Iran, India, and Pakistan would require a flexible diplomatic approach and Turkey will include India in future forums, such as the Regional Economic Conference (RECCA), which Turkey will host in 2010," *WikiLeaks*, <http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=10ANKARA246>.

The June 2011 US announcement of its troop drawdown increased pressure on India to contribute more in Afghanistan even though it was not kept in the loop on the decision itself.

The resulting reconsideration of its relationship with Afghanistan made it incumbent on India to tailor its policy on the basis of ground realities and its increased stake on the ground. The Taliban attacks on the Indian Embassy and other establishments in Afghanistan reflected Pakistan's recognition of India's evolving position in the security dynamic in that country. It imposed on India the need to factor in its stance towards the Taliban. Nevertheless, the US continued to discourage a higher profile by India while failing to get Pakistan to take India's local concerns seriously.

This led to the third and latest stage during which India decided that it would have to take care of its interests in Afghanistan on its own, more so after December 2014. Scholar Harsh Pant has stated succinctly that there was little US attempt to make India part of the larger process of ensuring a stable Afghanistan post-2014.<sup>12</sup> Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's during his overnight visit to Kabul on May 12-13, 2011, announced India's support to the Afghan government's plan of national reconciliation with the Taliban, committed a further US \$ 500 million for development assistance and decided to build the capabilities of the Afghan security forces by providing military training to ANA personnel and officers<sup>13</sup>.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between Afghanistan and India in October 2011 has an economic, political and security component. It aims at enhancing political cooperation between the two countries and institutionalizes political and foreign office consultations. India's initiative following the 'Heart of Asia' conference in Istanbul in 2012, led to the Afghanistan-focused Delhi Investment Summit in June 2012. When coupled with the setting up of the Afghanistan-India-US trilateral dialogue it becomes evident that, institutionally at least, India has over the last two years, created an institutional framework for a pro-active policy in preparation for the US drawdown.

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<sup>12</sup> Harsh.V.Pant, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

These developments establish the following parameters which would inform India's future policy towards Afghanistan:

- The Pakistan security establishment will continue to work towards its goal of using Afghanistan as a hinterland for its terrorist groups aimed at India;
- Pakistan will continue to strive for a stranglehold on Taliban's position in Afghanistan by virtue of its antecedents and current indispensability to the United States in attempts to reconcile with the Taliban ;
- the United States, despite its strategic partnership with India, is unlikely to weigh in India's favour and will defer to Pakistan as it moves towards 2014;
- As long as a government in Kabul is not prone to Taliban pressure, or does not have it as its part, Pakistan will not get strategic depth in that country;
- the forthcoming presidential elections are a landmark struggle between the opposing cohorts backed by the different opposing interests;
- India's policy will no longer have the benefit of the security umbrella provided by the US troops after December 2014.

These parameters dictate an Indian policy towards Afghanistan which seeks friendly and non-exclusive relations with Kabul and does not seek to deny access to Afghanistan's other neighbours. What then are India's current and enduring interests in Afghanistan?

## **Section 2: India's interests and goals**

India's interests have undergone transformation over the last decade. Paradoxically, while the United States' aims have been scaled down as the Afghan situation has worsened, India's economic and aid profile has grown both because of its own perceived interests and to support the United States. India's official and non-official presence in Afghanistan has also grown with consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat, and with representatives and personnel of Indian companies and other professionals present in Afghanistan. From near zero involvement on-the-ground a decade ago it now has assets which will need to be secured after 2014. As India's interests have grown, its 'red lines' have multiplied.

As a part of its proximate and strategic neighbourhood, India has legitimate interests in Afghanistan elaborated below. Given its turbulent history, India believes that Afghanistan's stability depends crucially on the extent to which it becomes a hub in the heart of Asia. Accordingly, India will continue to take a lead in Afghanistan's integration within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the world economy. These ideas underlie the Strategic Partnership between India and Afghanistan. India also sees Afghanistan as a means to rejuvenate its historical relationship with the central Asian republics.

### **Immunize India from Islamic radicalism sweeping Pakistan and Afghanistan**

The widening disorder and violence in Pakistan now engulf Afghanistan as well. There were early signs that the militants funded and nurtured by Pakistan would move out of its control. The Tehrik- e- Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an affiliate/offshoot of the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda, has been attacking the Pakistani state. The blow-back of its policy could further weaken Pakistan and inversely give the Afghan Taliban strategic depth within Pakistan given its weakened institutions under pressure from radical Islamist groups. In such an eventuality the likelihood of Pakistan's nuclear assets falling in the hands of these groups poses a grave threat to India. The relentless and recurring sectarian conflict within Islam, and in Pakistan, with the daily targeting of the Shia and other minorities like Christians and Hindus has not penetrated India so far.

India's immunization must envisage a two-tier buffer: first, insulating India as a whole from developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and second, keeping the fall-out in Kashmir from descending to the rest of India. India is acutely conscious that in case the Afghan state disintegrates after the US drawdown, giving way to the Taliban, it would be forced to involve itself in a war beyond its frontier. Its external face will be the attack on India's assets in Afghanistan, while its internal aspect will be the import of sectarian Islamic conflict orchestrated from abroad. The proxy war<sup>14</sup> that India confronts in Afghanistan has the danger of becoming a surrogate war<sup>15</sup> after 2014.

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<sup>14</sup> Covert, undeclared war through non-state actors.

<sup>15</sup> Open, undeclared war fought at a distance with possible military involvement.

## **Prevent Afghanistan from providing a safe haven to terror outfits targeting India**

India's experience after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 leaves no doubt that political instability and sectarian strife after 2014 presents a high likelihood of Afghanistan being used against India by Pakistan-based terrorist groups. The linkage between the various terrorist groups operating from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) area of Pakistan, and from Afghanistan, is complex. Regardless of the entities they target - Pakistan, US, NATO or India -, they have come together on a common anti-India platform through ISI intermediation between Hizb- ul- Mujahideen, Al Baraq, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Harkatul- Mujahideen- l-Alami, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Lashkar-e-Jhagvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba-Pakistan. Another aspect of the multiplicity of these terrorist groups is the uncertainty regarding whom they would back in the two on-going and inter-related peace processes which are increasingly fusing, first, between the Afghan Taliban and the international coalition backing the Afghan government, and second, between the TTP and the Pakistan government. The harder line taken by the TTP leadership under Maulana Fazlullah after the drone killing of Hakimullah Mesud has reportedly provoked an appeasement strategy by the Pakistan government to maintain their hold on the Afghan Taliban. At the same time, the deleterious sequestering of Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar has made him ineffective as a mediator<sup>16</sup>. In a parallel manner, talks between the Afghan government and Taliban led by Mutasem Agha Jan are to resume under the High Peace Council in the UAE.

India expects that its bilateral Strategic Agreement could be leveraged to prevent the creation of training and operating bases for infiltration by Pakistan-based terrorist groups into Kashmir and across the India-Pakistan international border. Much would, however, depend on governmental stability after the Presidential elections in April 2014. In the event that the next government in Kabul has a more radical bent, a surrogate war with Pakistan will be forced on India requiring it to develop other equities through the diverse tribes and ethnicities in that country.

India thus continues to maintain close political relations, not only with President Karzai but with the entire spectrum of Afghan political leadership. India has tried to navigate a fine line between two equally negative tendencies: on the one hand, to break the misrepresentation in official and

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<sup>16</sup> "Afghan officials believe Baradar, once the number two to Taliban supremo Mullah Omar, could encourage Taliban leaders to seek a negotiated settlement to end the 12-year insurgency in the war-torn nation. He still remains in Pakistan government custody," *Dawn*, October 31, 2013. [www.dawn.com/news/1053144/phc-questions-legal-ground-of-mullah-baradars-release](http://www.dawn.com/news/1053144/phc-questions-legal-ground-of-mullah-baradars-release). There are reports that he was in a drugged state and unable to interact when the Afghan delegation met him.

other circles suggesting that India was anti-Pashtun, and on the other, to avoid alienating or losing the trust of its non-Pashtun friends of the Taliban years, the Tajik and Uzbeks. A careful articulation of India's policy opposing all pro-Taliban forces but not all Pashtuns and development projects in Pashtun areas has helped the former line. India is confident that any winner in the presidential elections amongst the three leading the field, Abdulla Abdulla, Ashraf Ghani Ahmedzai and Zalmi Rasoul will continue to regard India as a natural partner. For this reason, India's policy has not played favourites amongst the candidates in the fray.

### **Support movement towards a sovereign, stable, inclusive and democratic government**

India's believes that Afghanistan's stability is important for its own security. Its policy is based on the belief that majority of the Afghans, including the Pashtun, will be loath to see the tangible gains of twelve years of development and democracy-building given up in the face of a Taliban resurgence. What is more, the stakes developed in the system by different sections within the country create a presumption that they would not surrender these tamely. The fact that 7 million Afghans voted during the first round of the presidential election gives ample proof. India believes that the presidential elections in 2014 could throw up a decision that will be acceptable to the Afghan people and a peaceful transition of political power could catalyse the reintegration of the Afghan Taliban provided they are allowed to do so.

In just over a decade after the Taliban was ousted, Afghanistan has seen a remarkable political and social transformation. In 2012, a majority of Afghans surveyed<sup>17</sup> said that they believed Afghanistan was moving in the right direction. Overall satisfaction with local security conditions has steadily increased since 2008, and satisfaction with the freedom of movement has increased since 2010. The country is moving towards a robust political system.

A very high proportion of respondents continue to express confidence in the two main national institutions responsible for security: the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP), with slightly greater confidence in the ANA. In all face-to-face confrontations with the Afghan Army, the Taliban have been defeated.<sup>18</sup> On the whole, their performance in providing security during the elections has been commendable. The survey shows that Afghans' support for peace and reconciliation remains very high, with a large majority across all ethnic groups, and in all

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<sup>17</sup> Nancy Hopkins ed. Afghanistan in 2012, A Survey of the Afghan People, (Kabul: The Asia Foundation 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Embassy of India, Kabul in personal conversation.

regions, in agreement with the government's efforts in the area of national reconciliation and negotiation with armed opposition groups. India's development assistance has been an important contributor to these positive tendencies.

### **Provide development assistance to Afghanistan**

India will continue to develop its economic presence in Afghanistan. From India's assistance amounting to US \$ 2 billion so far, US \$ 1 billion have been disbursed on significant projects widely diffused geographically and by sector. Afghanistan was the second largest recipient of Indian aid in 2009 and India is currently the fifth largest of Afghanistan's donors.<sup>19</sup>

It includes construction of the Afghan Parliament (completion June 2014), construction of 220 KV transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul (US\$ 20 million) and the Salma Dam project (US \$ 130 million) in Herat province; medical missions in selected towns and capacity-building projects for education and democratic institutions. Close to 2000 people are trained in India each year in Indian educational and training institutions. India has also started training ANA cadres in its military training institutions but has yet to agree to Afghan requests to provide heavy military equipment. Many of India's mega-projects are coming to an end by 2014 and India will remain cautious on new ones till the situation stabilizes.

Indian companies have also bid for major resource-based projects like the Hajigak iron ore project.<sup>20</sup> The viability of the project depends on the transit of the iron ore and steel through Iran, hence India's interest in developing the Chahbahar port in that country. India is also a signatory to the ADB-sponsored TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline project which will bring Turkmen gas to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan. From India's point of view security of the pipeline itself and the security of supplies delivered at the India-Pakistan border are primary concerns.

India's has major concerns on ensuring the security of Indian projects, and personnel working on them, after US-NATO-ISAF forces drawdown. India's large investment on the ground in Afghanistan will have to be brought to completion in conditions of security whatever it takes.

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<sup>19</sup> Embassy of India, Kabul.

<sup>20</sup> AFISCO (Afghan Iron and Steel Consortium) envisages mining iron ore reserves estimated between US \$ 1-3 trillion. The projected investment of US \$ 6.6 billion includes mining and export of iron ore, steel production and its transport through Iran.

## **Integration of Afghanistan into the SAARC and the World Economy**

In India's view India Afghan stability will depend on its emergence as an economically integrated state in the South and Central Asian region and the world. Apart from providing trade concession under SAARC for least developed countries like Afghanistan, India has also taken pro-active steps to end Afghanistan's trade isolation by completing the 218 km road from Zaranj to Delaram for facilitating movement of goods and services up to Milak on the border with Iran. Chahbahar port development is critical for regional connectivity between Central Asia, Afghanistan, India and beyond. The negotiations on a trilateral cooperation agreement between Iran, India and Afghanistan for the development and use of the port should be completed early. India also needs to be pro-active in investing in the projected facilities around Chahbahar particularly, the rail extension from Balkh to Turkmenistan and Tajikistan and the link to the Zaranj-Delaram highway. The investment by 100 private Indian companies in Afghanistan since 2001 is a sign of increasing capacity to take risks by the Indian private sector.

### **Section 3: India's view on the resilience of the Afghan state after 2014**

India's view on the resilience of the Afghan state after 2014 has two aspects: first, the strength of state institutions and second, the outcome of a relatively secure and free presidential election. It could set the tone for the forthcoming Parliamentary elections in 2015.

The large-scale voting indicates a degree of optimism that the Afghans will resist takeover by the Taliban after the US drawdown. The eventual signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement between the United States and Afghanistan, to which all leading presidential aspirants are committed, will send a reassuring message to the Afghans and could deter the Taliban.

The Taliban are no longer seen as the saviour they were after the chaos of the early 1990s but as a retrograde force against the gains in freedoms and prosperity of the last decade. Furthermore, their fighting ability is also no longer what it was, and the Afghan National Army appears confident of holding its own despite higher casualties. Nevertheless, reports that 'Pakistan is training a new breed of deep penetration pro-Taliban Pakistan-based insurgents to be its eyes and ears once the US/NATO troops leave'<sup>21</sup> are disturbing. Yet Pakistan's ability remains debatable in the face of mounting attacks by the TTP against the state. Thus while the net security balance could be against

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<sup>21</sup> Afghanistan Task Force: What India Can Do, Ananta Aspen Centre/DPG, New Delhi, March 2014, [www.anantaaspencentre.in/pdf/AFTF\\_report.pdf](http://www.anantaaspencentre.in/pdf/AFTF_report.pdf).

forces opposed to the Taliban due to the likelihood of Pakistan's military support, the political balance will be in their favour given the widespread fervour generated by the Presidential elections. In the Presidential election in April, eight candidates remained in the fray out of the 26 who had filed papers. After the first round, of the three leading candidates, are two foreign ministers, Abdulla Abdulla and Zalmai Rasul and Ashraf Ghani Ahmedzai, former finance minister. They represent the dominant shades of political and tribal interests in the country. President Karzai has stayed away from expressing a preference. The run-off, if necessary, is on May 28, 2014. India maintains good relations with all candidates but as a matter of policy has not openly backed. Its equidistance while keeping lines open to all is best suited to the situation. How the politics will play out the day after the results is directly proportional to the role, ceded by the West, to Pakistan in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

#### **Section 4: India's leverages and their efficacy**

The security umbrella provided by the United States' military presence in Afghanistan since 2001 was coterminous with the growth and diversity of India-US bilateral ties. It contributed to India's growing profile in Afghanistan. Neither their differences on a number of issues nor the absence of greater mutual consultation detracts from this assessment.

While India had always advocated that US departure from Afghanistan was predicated on bringing in political stability and security, it had no alternative but to acquiesce in the relatively sudden decision to drawdown at the end of 2014. India also compromised its position in meeting United States' exhortations to restrict its engagement in Afghanistan and keeping open its dialogue with Pakistan. In the face of the impending drawdown, India has had to look at securing its core interests and has strived to develop instruments which could provide the needed leverage.

#### **India's 'soft power'**

India's considerable soft power projection in Afghanistan is both intrinsic and self-generated. That it amounts to an important factor is seen from the continuous attempts by Pakistan to dislodge India from that country. It has three dimensions:

- a. An aspect of the Afghanistan-India relationship which is hard to ignore is the incredibly positive feeling the Afghans, both Pashtun and others, have for Indians, India and all

that it stands for, given the long-standing familiarity with Indian culture and more. It is intrinsic in nature and cannot be drawn down, only drawn upon as India faces the turbulent times ahead.

- b. Its second dimension is the hordes of Afghan refugees<sup>22</sup>- both political and economic- that successive regime changes in that country have thrown at India. They have instinctively perceived a far safer place to grow and flourish than elsewhere in their neighbourhood. Once again after the US departs, India will doubtlessly have another stream of such refugees.
- c. Its third aspect is the acknowledgement by the Afghan people that Indian development assistance, particularly the humanitarian projects, has benefitted them the most. Indian medical care is greatly valued as is Indian medical education with 50% of visas presently issued being issued for medical treatment in India.<sup>23</sup>

### **Fighting Continuing Insurgency in Kashmir**

India is bracing for the twenty-five yearlong insurgency in the state of Kashmir fuelled by Pakistan to get a new wind after the US drawdown. In 2013 cease-fire violations by Pakistan Army on the 740 km long Line of Control (LOC) has been the highest<sup>24</sup> since 2003. The recent increase in infiltrations across the LOC, the killing and beheading of Indian soldiers, the climate of fear in Kashmir, belligerent statements from the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and the increase of skirmishes across the international boundary further substantiate this presumption.

After nearly three decades of combating insurgency in Kashmir, India's security forces have literally bitten the bullet and are fully capable of ensuring that it is contained and restricted to the Kashmir Valley immunizing the country from its ravages. The Indian Army is increasingly using

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<sup>22</sup> Estimated to be 10.000 of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim faiths. There were about 11 million Indians of Afghan descent in 2006 according to UNHCR estimates, see

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=441190254&page=news>.

<sup>23</sup> Embassy of India, Kabul at <http://eoi.gov.in/kabul/>.

<sup>24</sup> The Indian Defence Ministry statement said that there had been 70 ceasefire violations by the Pakistani army in 2013.,<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/can-t-take-our-restraint-for-granted-defence-minister-ak-antony-on-ceasefire-violations-407640>.

drones, thermal sensors and foot patrols to keep close surveillance on the LOC<sup>25</sup>. There is a determination that nothing will be allowed to disrupt India's economic growth and its progress towards securing a role as a major global player; neither will the brunt of public pressure allow another Mumbai-type terrorist attack pass without retaliation.

India-Pakistan relations are a by-product, not the cause of the conflict in Afghanistan. They are not, and will never be, central to that conflict. For almost three decades, India's goal has been to shield itself from the consequences of external meddling into Afghanistan's affairs.<sup>26</sup> The continuing stalemate between India and Pakistan neither absolves nor provides an excuse for the inability of the Western powers to stabilize Afghanistan after over a decade. Conversely, neither would 'any improvement in India-Pakistan ties'<sup>27</sup> change the situation in Afghanistan so long as that country does not get a strong sovereign government able to resist the Taliban and its backers across its border. The continuing conflict in Afghanistan is due to the overlapping involvement of outside powers- Pakistan, the Soviet Union, the United States, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Al Qaeda- in the pursuit of their geopolitical interests.

### **India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership**

India expects that the India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement<sup>28</sup> could serve as the basis for future cooperation after the next Afghan government takes office. It lists cooperation in areas of political and security dialogue, trade and economic exchanges, capacity development and education, social and cultural exchanges and people-to-people contact. From India's point of view, its strategic dimension should be operationalized to deny sanctuary and war material to Al Qaeda and Taliban-affiliated terror groups targeting India and an institutionalized intelligence-sharing mechanism.

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<sup>25</sup> [www.foxnews.com/world/2013/11/09/india-braces-for-increase-in-kashmir-militancy-as-us-winds-down-presence-in/](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/11/09/india-braces-for-increase-in-kashmir-militancy-as-us-winds-down-presence-in/).

<sup>26</sup> Nitin Pai, "A deadly Line: William Dalrymple's triangulation error," [www.pragati.nationalinterest.in/2013/06/a-deadly-line/](http://www.pragati.nationalinterest.in/2013/06/a-deadly-line/).

<sup>27</sup> James Dobbins, US Special Representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan quoted in Shubhajit Roy <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/dobbins-india-pak-ties-crucial-for-afghanistan/1134860/>.

<sup>28</sup> Under the header 'Political and Security Cooperation' Articles 3,4 & 5 concern defence and security cooperation. <https://www.facebook.com/notes/dr-manmohan-singh/text-of-agreement-on-strategic-partnership-between-the-republic-of-india-and-the/10150318361885636>.

Conversely, the earnest of India's stake in the agreement will be judged by the Afghan government by India's ability to provide lethal weaponry in response to the former's pending request and further stepping up of military training to the Afghan Security Forces. India's assistance in revamping old Soviet-origin Afghan T-55 tanks and BMP APC's combined with increasing training facilities *in situ* and in specialized military institutions in India.

There are reasons to believe that this aspect of the bilateral relationship could get positive traction after the next Indian government takes office. India's goal should be to gradually move towards a mutual defence cooperation agreement<sup>29</sup>.

### **India's developmental assistance in Afghanistan**

India's development assistance will continue to remain an important plank of India's leverage in the future. India is acutely conscious that continuing economic presence in that country could require the presence of Indian troops or security contractors to safeguard these assets.<sup>30</sup> India continues to mull over this possibility.<sup>31</sup>

### **Ties to Ethnic minorities**

As explained above India has been, and seen to be, close to the members of the erstwhile Northern Alliance- the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara minorities and their leaders. While this remains true to a large extent, India has suffered from a misperception of its distance from the Pashtuns. In the event of a deterioration of the political and security environment after 2014, it is likely that India will once again have to rely on its closeness to the northern alliance groups.

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<sup>29</sup> Afghanistan Task Force Report, *ibid*

<sup>30</sup> Excerpt from "A Conversation with: Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan Amar Sinha," New York Times, November 8, 2013, [http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/08/a-conversation-with-indian-ambassador-to-afghanistan-amar-sinha/?\\_r=0](http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/08/a-conversation-with-indian-ambassador-to-afghanistan-amar-sinha/?_r=0)

<sup>31</sup> "A Conversation with: Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan Amar Sinha." *Ibid*.

## Talking to the Taliban

During Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh's visit to Kabul in May 2011, he had stated that India supported the Afghan government's plan for national reconciliation with the Taliban. This statement was a result of considerable soul-searching after the West's decision at the Istanbul conference in 2010 to reconcile with the 'moderate' elements of the Taliban. India's experience with the Taliban government during 1996-2001 made plain the organization's animosity to India which though articulated in religious terms received its strategic, geopolitical and logistic underpinnings from Pakistan<sup>32</sup>.

The active discourse within the Indian strategic community<sup>33</sup> on talking to the Taliban has been the *Leitmotif* of India's consideration of its post-2014 Afghan policy. A significant recent development was the presence on 13 November 2013 of Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef<sup>34</sup> at a conference in Goa. It appeared to convey India's intention to engage with elements of the Taliban who have returned to the mainstream and to the peace process.

It had been strongly criticized by the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which had dealt with the Taliban regime during the hijacking of the Indian Airlines aircraft to Kandahar in 1999. Thus, the longevity and seriousness of this initiative remain moot.

## Leveraging India-US strategic partnership

The most significant development in their wide-ranging dialogue has been in the area of defence cooperation. Although US companies did not succeed in their bid in 2011 to get the large multi-role combat aircraft order, India's acquisition of US \$ 9 billion worth of long-range aircraft held promise for the future.

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<sup>32</sup> One of the latest examples is their reaction to the Pakistan Press singing eulogies on the occasion of the retirement of India's cricket maestro Sachin Tendulkar. Pakistani Taliban warned media houses in Pakistan. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/dont-praise-tendulkar-hes-india-pak-taliban-warn-islamabad-media/1/326708.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Two views from the opposing sides can be found in: Ajai Shukla, "How long can India ignore the Taliban?"; *Business Standard*, June 14, 2011, at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/ajai-shukla-how-long-can-india-ignore-the-taliban-111061400018\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/ajai-shukla-how-long-can-india-ignore-the-taliban-111061400018_1.html); and Vinita Priyadarshi, "Talks with the Taliban: Implications for India," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, South Asia Article no. 3059, February 5, 2010, at <http://www.ipcs.org/article/south-asia/talks-with-the-taliban-implications-for-india-3059.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef is one of the founding members of the Taliban, a close confidant of Mullah Mohammad Omar, was part of the Taliban regime (1996-2001) and their Ambassador to Pakistan when 9/11 happened. He was handed over to the American Forces in Pakistan and spent four and a half years in US prisons including Guantanamo. He was released without being charged.

The conclusion of the first-ever India-US 'Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation' in October 2013, during Indian Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh's Washington visit, was a landmark event establishing a 'partnership in defence technology transfer, joint research, co-development and co-production'<sup>35</sup> coupled with US \$ 10 billion of defence equipment purchase. India needs to go beyond the sectoral aspect of this accord to leverage a broader discussion on the evolving geostrategic landscape in South Asia after the US drawdown.

Notwithstanding the growing apathy to continuing involvement in Afghanistan after 2014, two factors will continue to enmesh the US: first, the 9/11 attack on the US homeland was planned and executed from Afghanistan and neither the ideology nor the capability of those groups have been eliminated; second, Pakistan, and its stability, will continue to impose itself on US foreign policy<sup>36</sup>. It will not be as easy to turn its back on Afghanistan as it was on Iraq.

### **Reinvigorate relations with Tajikistan**

India's relations with Tajikistan have been greatly boosted during the decade of the US presence in Afghanistan. Their traditionally friendly relations have been transformed through high-level visits, development assistance and military-to-military cooperation<sup>37</sup> into a strategic partnership of which the defence relationship is an important component. Tajik President Emmamoli Rahmanov has visited India five times, the last in September 2012. Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari visited Dushanbe from April 14-17, 2013.

India's refurbishment of the Gissar airfield as an alternative to Dushanbe has been of great benefit to that country and provides India strategic options. India has a military training team at Gissar.

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<sup>35</sup> "US-India Joint Declaration on Defense Cooperation," September 27, 2013, White House Office of Press Secretary, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/27/us-india-joint-declaration-defense-cooperation>.

<sup>36</sup> "No exit from Pakistan" by Daniel Markey, CFR Washington DC, October 2013, at <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/no-exit-pakistan/p31250?co=C011801>.

<sup>37</sup> "We have very strong and close defence relations. India has played a major role in the development of infrastructure at the Gissar military aerodrome which was inaugurated by President Rahmon himself in October 2010. India is also training a large number of Tajik officers and cadets both within Tajikistan as well as by sending them to various military courses in India including the NDA and the IMA" Mr Ajay Bisaria, Joint Secretary(Eurasia) quoted in "Security Trends South Asia-India Tajikistan Relations," *Security-Risks.com*, April 15, 2013, at <http://www.security-risks.com/security-trends-south-asia/india-defence/india-tajikistan-defence-relations-1885.html>.

There is also discussion on the construction of a hospital there. Other major projects to tap Tajikistan's hydro-electric power potential are being discussed. India is also considering the revival of the military hospital it had set up during the 1990s at Farkhor inside the Tajik-Afghan border to support the erstwhile Northern Alliance.

### **Dialogue with Afghanistan's northern neighbours**

India has taken serious steps to open dedicated dialogues with Iran, Russia and China, both in bilateral and trilateral frameworks, given their common interests in ensuring that the Taliban do not come back to power in Afghanistan. These are elaborated in succeeding paragraphs.

### **Section 5: Intersecting Interests**

A recent mapping of the interests of the five major powers involved- India, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia and China-<sup>38</sup> aptly treats Afghanistan and Pakistan as a 'conjoined entity' in view of the common and intersecting nature of their internal political, ethnic and religious instability and of their external relations with the United States. It recognizes that, both in fact and in the calculations of the powers involved, the two cannot be separated.

India believes that the current political reality of Afghanistan is a deep suspicion of Pakistan and, to a lesser extent, of Iran; and an ambivalence towards the US and UK<sup>39</sup> for their failure to contain terrorism and softness towards Pakistan. India's interests in Afghanistan intersect with those of other major powers: both convergent and competitive. While maintaining regime security and avoiding Islamic radicalism are commonly shared goals, the same cannot be said either of exploitation of Afghanistan's mineral resources or promoting negotiations with Taliban and other radical elements.

### **Pakistan**

For India, the denial of transit through Pakistan to Afghanistan has meant more than trade. It has allowed Pakistan to keep India away from direct contact with the state and people of Afghanistan while letting Pakistan itself use its contiguity with Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) to wage an

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<sup>38</sup> "Mapping the Sources of Tension and the interests of Regional Powers in Afghanistan and Pakistan," CIDOB, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, December 2012.

<sup>39</sup> See "Assessing Britain's role in Afghanistan" by Shashank Joshi in the same special issue.

asymmetrical war to create the strategic depth they hanker after. Speculation that the economic motive - trade, exploitation of Afghan mineral resources and oil and gas pipelines- could lead Pakistan to grant Most Favored Nation (MFN) status and allow transit is unfounded. India's policy towards Afghanistan continues to regard these as immutable parameters.

At the same time, Pakistan's leverage in Afghanistan through the Taliban may also not be the same as in the 1990s. Aside from its own fight against the TTP, TNSM and other affiliates in Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa (KP), the Taliban security advantage *vis-a-vis* the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF), will not be all that great, unless, as stated above, it is significantly backed by Pakistan (the ISI, TTP, *jibadi* outfits like Lashkar-e-Toiba and others). Pakistan's post-Soviet *jibadi* political capital appears deeply in the red, most of all among the Pashtuns. Furthermore, the widespread conviction that some sort of United States military presence will continue even after 2014 mitigates the fear of a total Taliban takeover.<sup>40</sup>

India believes that without Pakistan playing a more positive role in Afghanistan, it will continue to be a 'spoiler' in the peaceful stabilization of that country. Pakistan has been concerned about the close relations between Afghanistan and India under President Karzai. It does not wish to visualize a cooperative relationship with India in Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> The imperative of Afghanistan's stabilization after 2014 requires the United States to propose a trilateral dialogue between India, the United States and Pakistan for the limited purpose of finding a cooperative way forward in Afghanistan. It would provide a logical counterpart to the US-Pakistan defence dialogue<sup>42</sup> and the India-US-Afghanistan trilateral dialogue.

## United States

The United States' early concern regarding India's involvement in Afghanistan reflected Pakistan's views on India's involvement in that country. After the announcement of the US

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<sup>40</sup> CIDOB Report, November 2013.

<sup>41</sup> See "Pakistan's Endgame in Afghanistan" by Husain Haqqani in the same issue.

<sup>42</sup> "Afghanistan drawdown: US, Pakistan defence officials end talks," *Business Recorder*, November 24, 2013, at <http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/1257448/>.

Drawdown, it appears to have acquiesced and even exhorted India to do more. In effect, it has reflected the swing of tensions in the US-Pakistan relationship. Pakistan's use of the twin bogeys of 'concern' at India's military involvement in Afghanistan and 'fears' of encirclement by India have effectively swayed the United States.

India believes that the US has been excessively indulgent with Pakistan's behaviour. India considers that despite its growing orientation towards the US, in the context of Afghanistan, the latter's 'hyphenated' view of relations with India and Pakistan remains unchanged.

That being said, the India-US Strategic Dialogue and its off-shoot – the India-US-Afghanistan Trilateral dialogue<sup>43</sup> – are seen by India as platforms to reach a common position on these issues. The latter track needs to be activated after the next Afghan government takes office. The political instability and fanning of religious fanaticism created by the United States' 'undeclared war' against Pakistan, with more than 350 drone strikes causing over 2000 deaths,<sup>44</sup> including the killing of Osama bin Laden and Hakimullah Mesud, calls for a wider India-US discussion on the stabilization of the AfPak region as a whole. India believes that despite an all-pervading desire to exit from Afghanistan, the reasons described above will continue to hold back the United States. Above all, its two important national interests after 9/11, to ensure that Al Qaeda is degraded, and anti-America terrorists cannot operate out of Afghanistan to harm the United States, still remain unfulfilled.<sup>45</sup>

## China

India tends to see China's role in Afghanistan in the context of that country's avowed 'all-weather' friendship with Pakistan and its aggressive moves to project its power in South Asia. China's common concern with India at the possible return of the Taliban<sup>46</sup> is nevertheless tempered by their flexibility to deal with the Taliban to ward off their subversive religious influence in Xinjiang and for facilitation to operate its massive copper mining concession at Mes Aynak. China can be expected to deal with any government which assumes power after President Karzai even if it is led by the Taliban.

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<sup>43</sup> See "India, US, Afghanistan to hold trilateral meet next month," IBNlive, August 13, 2013, at <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/india-us-afghanistan-to-hold-trilateral-meet-next-month/414070-3-244.html>.

<sup>44</sup> See "The United States and Afghanistan after 2014" by Larry. P. Goodson in the same issue.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> See "China Ponders Post-2014 Afghanistan: All In or Beijing Bystander?" by Andrew Scobell in the same issue.

What appears to be missing is a more concerted bilateral discussion between India and China on their respective interests in Afghanistan and parallel a trilateral China-Afghanistan- India forum. This is mostly due to China's reliance on Pakistan in its Afghanistan strategy.

## **Russia**

India and Russia shared a common concern that the United States did not pull out precipitately from Afghanistan. Since the announcement of the US drawdown, they share an interest in the country's political stability and in containing the impact of radical militant Islamic ideology in the neighbourhood<sup>47</sup>. During President Putin's visit to New Delhi in 2012, the joint statement called on Pakistan to take action against the perpetrators of terrorism against India and eliminate their safe havens in Pakistan.<sup>48</sup> Russia thus confirmed its own aversion to the Taliban and the proliferation of jihadi fighters nurtured in the FATA area.

India and Russia also share a common geopolitical interest in maintaining security in Afghanistan and in the arrest of trafficking in drugs and small arms. At the same time, India is not on the same page with Russia's goal to ensure that the US does not gain a lasting foothold in Afghanistan and southern Central Asia.<sup>49</sup> India sees a mutual interest in intensifying India-Russia consultations on Afghanistan.

India 'strategic partnership' with Tajikistan, particularly military cooperation, is another strand to India's cooperation with Russia on Afghanistan. They work together on the management and use of the Gissar airfield. Russia has also secured an extension from the Tajik government for retaining up to 2042 its military contingent of 7000 soldiers on Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan.

Russia's championship of India's full membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) appears unlikely to bear fruit in the foreseeable future. India should seek from Russia an institutional level dialogue with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the principal

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<sup>47</sup> See "Resetting the Bear Trap" by Kathryn Stoner in the same issue.

<sup>48</sup> Joint Statement on the 13th India-Russia Annual Summit: "Partnership for Mutual Benefit and a Better World", Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, December 24, 2012, at <http://mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/20993/Joint+Statement+on+the+13th+IndiaRussia+Annual+Summit+Partnership+for+mutual+benefit+and+a+better+world>.

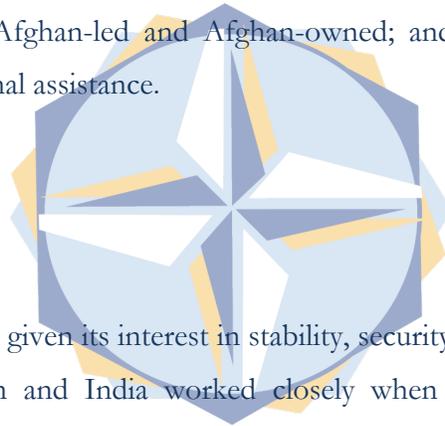
<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

security framework in Central Asia, particularly because it controls the use of civil aviation space over Tajikistan.<sup>50</sup>

## **Russia-India-China**

The first-ever joint meeting between the Foreign Ministers' of Russia, India and China (RIC) in New Delhi on 9 November 2013 on Afghanistan brought together China's two most important continental Asian neighbours. It also brought together Afghanistan's three non-Islamic neighbours.

The three countries reiterated their common concern about terror spreading from Afghanistan and agreed to cooperate in the Regional Anti-Terror Structure (RATS) under SCO, to prevent escalating threats and combat drug trade. They further agreed to jointly work towards a 'secure stable Afghanistan which enjoys development.' They called for 'additional measures'<sup>51</sup> from the international community to firstly, ensure a smooth general election; second, truly support a political reconciliation process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned; and third, jointly support the UN efforts to coordinate international assistance.



## **Iran**

India sees Iran's role as positive given its interest in stability, security and the prevention of terrorism by radical jihadi groups.<sup>52</sup> Iran and India worked closely when the Taliban were in power in Afghanistan given their concern regarding violence against the Shias in Pakistan, and the simmering situation in Baluchistan which creates leverage for both countries vis-à-vis Pakistan. At the same time, unconfirmed reports state that Iran has not been averse to episodically provide support<sup>53</sup> to the Taliban given their common concern to evict the United States from Afghanistan.

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<sup>50</sup> When the author was Indian Ambassador to Belgium India had secured an institutional dialogue with NATO on Afghanistan in 2004 aware of the fact that its non-aligned policy had an embargo on relations with military pacts. The same imperatives apply vis-à-vis the CSTO in India's Afghanistan strategy.

<sup>51</sup> Russia-India-China Communique from the 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of Foreign Ministers, New Delhi, November 10, 2013, at <http://www.safpi.org/news/article/2013/russia-india-china-communique-12th-meeting-foreign-ministers>

<sup>52</sup> CIDOB Report November, 2013.

<sup>53</sup> "US uses false Taliban Aid Charge to pressure Iran" by Gareth Porter, December 7, 2013, <http://ipsnorthamerica.net/news.php?idnews=2388>

The access which India gets through Iran to reach Afghanistan and Central Asia and the fact that Iran is its most proximate source of crude oil (apart from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE) for its energy-hungry economy are crucial determinants of the bilateral relationship. Yet, India's votes in the IAEA against Iran and its unarticulated opposition to Iran's nuclear ambitions have made it difficult to put the relationship on an even keel. Iran has been disappointed at India's withdrawal from the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline in 2009 on pricing and security issues and delays in finalizing the Chahbahar port development project. Iran and India are now exploring other options both for oil and gas.<sup>54</sup>

Thus far India has been deftly able to manage its interests caught at one end of three triangular relationships: US-India-Iran, US-India-Israel and Saudi Arabia-India-Iran. A trilateral dialogue between Iran, India and Afghanistan could usefully address their political congruence and the economic imperative to secure investment and funding for the regional connectivity plans based on Chahbahar.

## **Conclusion**

Afghanistan is and will remain, part of India's strategic neighbourhood. It has always been the recipient of the fall-out from any change of regime in Afghanistan. This will happen again after the substantial reduction of US troops from that country in 2014. India's absence of geographical contiguity with Afghanistan and its marginalization from the decision-making process regarding that country has forced it to develop an independent post-2014 strategy.

India's policy in Afghanistan seeks friendly and non-exclusive relations with Kabul and does not seek to deny access to Afghanistan's other neighbours. Its goal is to insulate India from falling prey to the Islamic sectarianism sweeping Pakistan and Afghanistan; ensure that India, and Kashmir in particular, are immunized from terrorism; support an inclusive government in Afghanistan which would reject the Taliban's credo; continue its economic presence in that country; and foster Afghanistan's integration with the region and the global economy. India's strategy after 2014 is aimed at preserving these interests through institutional leverages with other like-minded powers from the region and outside and maintaining an effective presence on the ground.

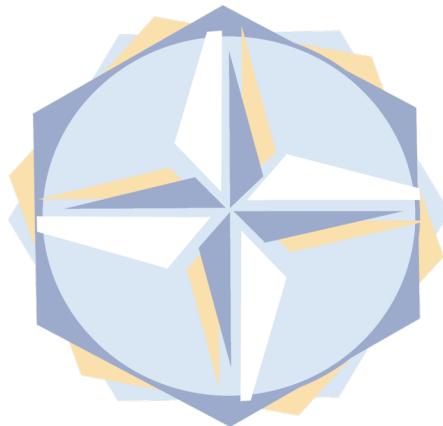
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<sup>54</sup> <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/buy-more-oil-will-reroute-pipeline-iran/1118948/0>

Although none of India's interests in Afghanistan is an existentialist threat to Pakistan yet its multiple susceptibilities will hinge on ensuing developments within Pakistan and that country's relations with Afghanistan. "To stabilize Afghanistan the United States and the international community would do well to acknowledge, understand and address Pakistan's deep insecurities arising from the Durand Line."<sup>55</sup>

India went into Afghanistan after its occupation by the United States in full awareness that elimination of terrorism would redound to the security and prosperity of its people and those of the region. Its substantial stake during the last decade bolstered its own interest and that of the Afghan people. Its strategy after 2014 is based on these parameters. Its success could have a profound impact on its policy towards South Asian countries as a whole.

**Rajendra Abhyankar**



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<sup>55</sup> Nitin Pai, *ibid.*



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