



“US WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN: SECURITY IMPLICATION FOR INDIA”

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ABSTRACT

An important development in world geopolitics occurred in 2021 when the United States withdrew from Afghanistan. This shift was particularly significant in terms of the dynamics of regional security. There are significant repercussions that will result from United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, as the country has long-standing geopolitical and security interests in the country. In the wake of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, a power vacuum has been created, which has opened the door for regional and international entities, most notably the Taliban, to exert their influence. Even though India has made significant investments in Afghanistan's growth and stability, the country is currently confronted with increased security problems. These challenges include the possibility of extremist organizations making a comeback and the possibility of a region becoming more unstable. Pakistan's position in Afghanistan has become more prominent as a result of the withdrawal, and China's influence in the region has strengthened as a result of China's increased influence in the region. In light of this, India needs to reassess its foreign policy and security strategy, striking a balance between its regional obligations and the ever-changing realities on the ground. This is necessary in order to protect India's national interests and combat the increasing dangers posed by Afghanistan's instability.

Keywords : *Afghanistan, India, Security , Withdrawal , South Asian*

INTRODUCTION

The Taliban are anticipated to continue to hold power in Afghanistan after a year has passed since they took control of the country. The international community and the South Asian community, on the other hand, have not accepted it. Since the United States departed from Afghanistan in August 2021, the rule of the Taliban has had an effect on the economic and commercial sectors. This has made an already dire humanitarian situation even more dire and has raised worries about the safety of individuals. There is reason for anxiety in Afghanistan and the West over the Taliban's return to power due to the fact that they have provided a safe haven to al-Qaeda and were engaged in the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. On the other hand, it has significant implications for the ongoing struggle between Pakistan and

India over Jammu and Kashmir, which is more often referred to as Kashmir. This battle has been going on for a long time, and both governments employ proxies and development assistance to counterbalance each other in Afghanistan. Every side is making an attempt to anticipate the actions and effects of the other in Afghanistan, and they are also making an effort to offset the advances made by the other side via proactive evaluation and planning. Some people could see their engagement through the prism of strategic theory, while others would consider it to be a zero-sum activity. The return of the Taliban will have a significant impact on India and Pakistan, regardless of how you would interpret the activities that they have participated in. The situation in Afghanistan is examined in this article, along with the potential impact it might have on the security of India. Academic works, news pieces, and data acquired directly from the United Nations and the World Bank are the sources that are used in the article.

OBJECTIVES

1. To Examine India's Security Issues Following the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan
2. To Assess India's Strategic Reaction to Afghanistan's Changing Security Situation

Afghanistan: Current Context

In the World Bank Monitoring Survey on Afghanistan, which was conducted in March 2022, it was found that 70 percent of the population reported being unable to purchase food and other needs. This figure represents an increase from 35 percent in May 2021. Third of the participants who participated in the poll were unable to pay for the meals they were eating. In addition, there was a discernible decline in the amount as well as the quality of the food that was consumed. In the autumn of 2021, almost all people who need medical care were unable to get it. This accounted for around 94% of the total. Although there has been an increase in employment in both rural and urban areas, incomes have decreased dramatically. With the exception of the public sector, where there has been a decrease in the number of employment in government and security, this is the case. The willingness of the Taliban regime to seek help for development is not surprising given that over nine billion dollars' worth of Afghan assets are held in assets controlled by institutions in the United States. In order to rescue them from this calamity, the state and the general population are doing all they can to become involved. Meanwhile, the Taliban are taking precautions to avoid giving the impression that they are pleading with the West for assistance. In spite of the fact that the West continues to be skeptical about the objectives and of the Taliban, the Taliban are making an effort to present themselves as having control and as having lost their prior image.

Complex Strings Of Networks And The Role Of The ISI

As a result of India and Pakistan being involved in proxy wars over the Kashmir conflict, Afghanistan has become a difficult battlefield for all three of these factions. According to Zhang, "Afghanistan has extremely important geographical significance to India," despite the fact that the two countries do not share a border. In the interest of Pakistan, Shah and Hussain point out that a peaceful Afghanistan would be beneficial to Islamabad. Taye and Ahmed are of the same opinion, and they are focusing on the neglected subject of the potential benefits that may result from economic cooperation between the two countries. In order to have a complete understanding of the current situation in Afghanistan, it is necessary to investigate the complex web of connections that the Taliban maintains with the most important actors in the country, in particular al-Qaeda, IS-K, and the ISI. John Allen, the commander of the United States

and NATO forces in Afghanistan, makes the observation that the Taliban are not a single coherent entity but rather a loose amalgamation of local tribal leaders, independent warlords, and isolated or compartmentalized cells. This observation highlights the intricacy of the connections that are at play.

It is a total and utter fallacy to believe that the Taliban can keep authority over violence for an extended period of time. Assuming that Allen is correct, it is essential to keep in mind that the United States peace accord only covered the Taliban. Other non-state players, such as IS-K and al-Qaeda, as well as clandestine state actors, such as the ISI, are not bound by it and are free to operate on Afghan soil without interference. To be more specific, the United States did not engage in discussions for the peace treaty with the government of Afghanistan or any of the other parties engaged in the conflict. Because of this, the United States of America, its allies, and their interests are left up to the discretion of the Taliban to decide whether or not these groups constitute a danger to the United States' interests. Considering that al-Qaeda and the Taliban have been in contact with one another ever since the beginning of the war on terror, this is a serious situation. At this point in time, it seems that the Taliban do not possess the available operational and financial resources that are required to enslave the various parties.

Complex Triangle: Afghanistan, India And Pakistan

Despite the fact that the United States seems to be shifting its policy toward India, neighboring nations like as Pakistan and India, which do not exactly meet the criteria for being considered friends of the United States, nonetheless feel threatened by the Taliban's commitment to safeguard the interests of the United States and its allies from Afghanistan. The fact that these countries are being attacked by groups that are affiliated with the Taliban and are motivated by their own aims and purposes is the explanation for this vulnerability. Several terrorist organizations, including the Haqqani Network in Afghanistan, the LeT, JeM, AQIS, and IS-K in Pakistan, each pose a substantial danger to the security of India. Disputes that have arisen between Pakistan and Afghanistan along the Durand Line and the TTP have the potential to pose a challenge to Pakistan's sovereignty. Both the fact that Pakistan maintains strong ties to the Taliban and provides support to terrorist groups such as JeM and LeT in their efforts to liberate Kashmir from India and the fact that India and Pakistan continue to compete with one another over Kashmir are factors that contribute to the complexity of the situation.

India-Afghanistan Dynamics

While Afghanistan is going through this period of transition, India's security and strategic interests are intimately connected to the outcome of the situation. When the Taliban were in control of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, India's embassy in Kabul was shut down because of the intense pressure and attacks against Indian interests that were taking place during that time. In the years after the events of September 11, 2001, when the United States declared war on international terrorism and the Taliban were removed from power for their support of al-Qaeda, India reopened its embassies in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Herat. The United States of America withdrew from Afghanistan in August of 2021, which resulted in the Taliban, who were supported by Pakistan, seizing control of Kabul. This event altered the dynamics of the triangle that consists of Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan simultaneously. As a result of the violent section of the Taliban known as the Haqqani Network targeting Indian assets and personnel in Afghanistan, India's interests in that country have suffered as a result. There are three issues that India is now dealing with that are caused by Afghanistan.

Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

Since the nation of Pakistan acquired its independence in 1947, Pakistan and Afghanistan have maintained strained relations. The only exception to this is the period of time from 1996 and 2001, during when the first Taliban authority was in power. "From the very beginning, ill-will and bad blood between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been contributed to by a disputed border and the associated issues of Pashtunistan," said Shah and Hussain in their report. Afghanistan voted against recognizing Pakistan at the United Nations in 1947 because of the presence of the Pashtun people on the other side of the Durand Line. In a similar vein, the Afghan government did not support Pakistan's claims to Kashmir. In 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan made the decision to affiliate itself with the United States on the front lines of the conflict. When Muhammed Zia-ul-Haq was President of Pakistan at the time, he pursued what he called "Afghanistan's fifth province." In order to offer religious soldiers and mujahideen, he guided Pakistan toward becoming a theocratic state. However, ever since that time, the bulk of Afghan authorities have remained steadfast in their commitment to safeguarding Afghan sovereignty, while also holding misgivings over Pakistan's genuine intentions.

Post-US Withdrawal Situation in Afghanistan

Not only do Pakistan and Afghanistan share a border region, but they also have a lot of similarities in terms of history, religion, ethnicity, and culture. Despite this, the interaction seemed to be adversarial for the most part. Afghanistan was the only country that fought against the foundation of Pakistan following the split. Pashtunistan and the Durand Line are the things that both countries consider to be their Achilles' heel. The Pakistani government has always made an effort to maintain friendly relations with its neighbors, despite the fact that it has territorial claims. The war between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan in 1979 brought about substantial changes to the playing field while maintaining Pakistan's position as a prominent participant. Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator of Pakistan, took advantage of the situation by receiving military and economic assistance from the United States. In addition, he prepared jihadists within Pakistani soil to fight the Soviets and provided facilities for them to do so. Immediately with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the civil war, there was a significant rift that emerged inside the country. Following the formation of their own movement with Pakistan's support in 1996, the Taliban were able to seize control of the majority of the nation. As a consequence of Pakistan's role as a mediator for regional interests, relations between the government of the Taliban and Pakistan have remained cordial. Since September 11, 2001, there has been a substantial shift in the relationship between the two countries. Pakistan's neighbor is a war-torn and unstable region, which has resulted in a significant loss of human life and economic productivity for the country. As a consequence of the departure of Western nations, especially the United States, from the battle, there was a change in the balance of power in the region. While dealing with Afghanistan, it is necessary to take into consideration all of the parties involved, including Iran, India, China, Russia, and the United States. After the United States pulled out of Afghanistan and the Taliban regained control of the government, Pakistan, which plays an important role in maintaining peace in the area, became even more concerned. This was worsened by the fact that ISIS had returned.

India's Relation With Afghan Taliban And Its Effects On Pakistan

It is fair to say that relations between Pakistan and India have been difficult ever since both countries achieved their freedom. There have been three significant battles fought between the players over the contentious issue of Kashmir, which has been a source of tension. When it comes to their own area, every state is competing for domination. In contrast to India, China and Pakistan have maintained friendly relations for a considerable amount of time. By taking advantage of Afghanistan's evolving dynamics, both nations are striving to advance their own national interests and promote their own national sovereignty. As a result of the fact that Afghanistan and Pakistan are neighbors, India sees a chance to use the Taliban and the regions they control in connection with its fight with Pakistan. During the time when Pakistan and Afghanistan were at war with one another over the Durand Line, the former government of Afghanistan maintained friendly relations with India. Furthermore, Pakistan's support for the Afghan Taliban throughout their battles with the government of Ashraf Ghani is now a thing of the past at this point. After the Taliban in Afghanistan acquired control of the country, it was presumed that relations between the two nations would improve at that point. As a matter of fact, the Taliban would support Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir problem, and Afghanistan would continue to be dependent on Pakistan.

Immediately after their takeover of power, the Taliban made a request for aid to India, Pakistan's most bitter adversary. In his capacity as caretaker defense minister of Afghanistan, Mullah Yaqoob, the son of the Taliban's founder, has considered the possibility of sending his soldiers to India for the purpose of receiving improvement in their training. According to what he indicated, they have no reservations about strengthening their relations with India and sending military to that country (News Desk, 2022). According to this remark, the Taliban are working toward the establishment of favorable connections with India in order to undermine Pakistan's domination in the Afghanistan region. The proclamation served as evidence of the strengthening of the friendship between the two countries. During the same interview, Mullah Yaqoob made a solemn commitment that Pakistan would never be able to use their land as a weapon against Afghanistan. Since the beginning of its existence, Pakistan has been under the impression that the Afghan Taliban would support its stance on the Kashmir issue. On the other hand, the Taliban have made it very apparent that Pakistan and India are the only parties who have the authority to determine how to end the dispute in Kashmir. The Taliban could hardly care less about this information. There has been a demand for diplomatic efforts to be made in order to address the situation by the defense ministers of both countries.

Attack On Pakistan's Embassy In Afghanistan

An event involving a suicide bomb explosion that took place in Quetta in November 2022 and targeted the polio team resulted in the massacre of three people. Just two days after proclaiming a ceasefire that had been agreed upon with the government in June, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for the attack. In light of the fact that the Taliban are using Taliban territory in their attacks against Pakistan, the government of Pakistan has asked that the Taliban administration take severe action against the terrorist organization. A week later, an attempt was made to kill the senior Pakistani ambassador who was stationed at the Kabul embassy complex of the Pakistani government. As a reaction to the occurrence, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned the highest-ranking diplomat affiliated with the Afghan government to Islamabad in order to convey their concerns. The official statement from the foreign office reads as follows: "The responsibility of protecting the diplomatic mission lies with the Afghanistan Taliban, and the attack was a security failure of the government," according to Reuters (2022).

There are a number of non-state groups operating in Afghanistan, the most significant of which being the Taliban Taliban Party (TTP). The territory is being used as a weapon against the countries that are located nearby. So long as Afghanistan does not take any action to clamp down on these illegal organizations, the relationship between the two countries will continue to get more difficult. As a result of their ideological biases, the Taliban in Afghanistan are not ready to abolish groups of this kind.

The Taliban in Afghanistan are cautious to take action against the TTP for a variety of reasons, one of which being the chance that the two factions may form a cooperation with the Islamic State's terrorist organization. It was inevitable that this combination would pose a danger to the government overseen by the Taliban. That would be against to their national interest, thus they should not do it. In addition, Pakistan has been exerting persistent pressure on the Afghan Taliban ever since the attack on its embassy in Kabul. As long as the Taliban do not aggressively fight against non-state groups that are operating in Afghanistan, it will be hard for the two countries to normalize their relations with one another.

Addressing Grievances of Pashtuns in Pakistan

As a direct result of the War on Terror, the terrorist assaults that took place in FATA resulted in the loss of a great number of lives and the destruction of their homes. Individuals from these war-torn countries traveled southward in search of safety. Due to the fact that Pakistan chose to choose a side rather than stay neutral, a lot of people have an unfavorable perception of the country. As a result of several drone attacks, the number of people who have lost their lives in Pakistan has consistently remained significant. As an example, 86 students attending Madrassas were murdered in a drone attack that took place in Waziristan (Shah, 2010). As a consequence of these types of actions, the people who lived in FATA Waziristan had a sense of estrangement from their own homeland.

It is imperative that a concerted effort be made to relieve their suffering by providing them with basics such as healthcare, education, and other essentials. The victims of the war on terror are entitled to compensation since the conflict has produced damage that cannot be repaired. It is very necessary for Pakistan to take action in order to develop its commercial sector and to foster the establishment of industries. Young people should be educated, trained, and empowered via the youth development projects that are being implemented in their nation. Loans with more forgiving terms should be made available to them so that they can establish themselves once again. As their level of autonomy increased, they would become less dependent on non-state actors such as the TTP. In addition, residents of the area may make use of this opportunity in a manner that is in line with the practises and customs that are important to them.

Regional Economic Integration

The objective of Pakistan should be to achieve economic integration within the region. There should be no restrictions placed on the flow of business in the region, particularly between Pakistan and India. As a result of their dependency on economic resources, non-state actors would be eradicated, and no state would ever grant them permission to use their own territory in a conflict with another state. As a consequence of this, Pakistan need to aim for regional economic union, following the example set by the European Union in the 1990s.

Afghanistan is located at the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia and shares its border with the Central Asia on the north, Chinese province of Xinjiang on the east, Iran on the west and Pakistan on the south and Pakistan occupied Kashmir on the south-east. Therefore, Afghanistan is situated in the midst of many important regions of the world. Afghanistan's geo-strategic situation as a Rimland country joining Eurasian Heartland with the Indian Ocean has enhanced its importance in World Politics. Nicholas J. Spykman modified Mackinder's Heartland theory and argued that the real potential of Eurasia lay in what Mackinder called the Inner Crescent, not in the Heartland. He produced another Premise: —He who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia and He who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world

Afghanistan as a geopolitical entity contained three most significant passes namely Khyber, Gomal and Khojak and a corridor like Wakhan that joined the Heartland with the Indus lowlands. The geo-strategic supremacy of the Rimland lies in its vulnerability to both land and sea power and in its potentiality to facilitate multidimensional strategies based on both land and sea. For the British Empire and later for the US, control over Afghanistan was vital to spread their influence into the Heartland to develop continental strategy. Similarly, for Czarist Russia and later for the Soviet Union, Afghanistan provided the way to the Indian Ocean to develop a naval strategy. Furthermore, controlling Afghanistan in Soviet perception was to gain land connectivity with Pakistan, India and China. According to Robert Jackson, Russia and Pakistan were separated by the carefully negotiated strip of Afghan territory that gave Afghanistan a common frontier with China. And beyond the Wakhan strip, Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir interposed another barrier between India and Russia.

Afghanistan's geostrategic situation in the midst of other important regions of Asia facilitated its growth both as a trade route and route for military invasion. Afghanistan, invaded frequently by different rulers, slowly began to emerge as a trade route through which merchants and traders moved onto other lands. Later due to depredations of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, traders sought an alternative route to the Orient. The opening of the sea lanes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries affected Afghanistan's importance as a commercial crossroad. Still the importance of land routes remained and trade with the Central Asia and Iran was carried through silk routes in parallel with the sea routes. In similar vein, Afghanistan remained a potential route for military invasion since the time of Alexander the Great who coveted Afghanistan as a stepping stone to conquests in India.

Historically, Afghanistan provided the only possible line of attack on India for the Czarist Russia. There were two routes that a Russian army might have followed. One would be from Tashkent and Samarakand through Balkh and Kulm to Kabul and on to India by the Khyber pass or the Kuram route. The other would be by way of Baku and the Caspian to Merv down to Herat and on to Kandahar in Afghanistan. In the modern times, Afghanistan has been considered important to maintain influence in the adjacent regions rather than as a route for military invasion.

All these facts make Afghanistan geopolitically important not only for regional powers but also for the extra-regional powers like the British Empire in the nineteenth century and the US in the twentieth century. The geo-strategic location that Afghanistan enjoys is rarely found in world politics. This fact, rather being a boon for Afghanistan, has become a bane for it. It has become a victim in the old Great Game in the nineteenth century between the Russian and British Empires, in the Cold War period between the US and USSR and in the new Great Game going on in the twenty first century with multiple players. Despite all the lures that the geo-strategic situation of Afghanistan offers, the internal geography of

Afghanistan has been a hindrance for the major powers to realise their geopolitical objectives. Its terrain is spectacularly varied, with mountains rising over 7000 metres, broad rivers feeding fertile lands alternating with inhospitable deserts. Travelling around this landscape is difficult, for roads are sometimes so poor that neither horse nor donkey can climb the precipitous trails.

This research is an attempt to scrutinize the 20th and 21st century Afghanistan, which has been the curiosity of all the major powers. The safe havens of terrorism in Afghanistan, the unending conflict, enactment of democracy and the peace process with the Taliban, and Afghanistan from the Indian perspective are some of the important sections of this research. Afghanistan is a gateway to the Central Asian states, and this is what increases its importance.

Afghanistan is a multiethnic society, where the main groups are the Pashtuns, the Sunni Persian-speakers, the Uzbeks and the Shiah Hazaras, to which can be added a large number of other groups such as Turkmens, Nuristanis, Balochs, Pasha'is. Approximately, the Pashtuns represent 44 per cent of the entire Afghan population while Tajiks, the Hazara and the Uzbeks, represent 25%, 10% and 8% respectively. 7 Geographical contiguity, racial and religious affinity and trans-border interaction for a long time provided the ground for cross-border fraternisation between the people of Central Asia and adjoining Afghanistan. For the Central Asian states, Northern Afghanistan has been an area of strategic importance. There are about 4 millions Tajiks, 1.7 million Uzbeks, 0.6 million Turkmens in Northern Afghanistan who share their culture with their counterparts in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan respectively. On the western frontier, for most part of the history, Iran and Afghanistan belonged to the same sphere of influence. Most parts of the Afghan region were for a long time part of Iranian Empires. Herat is considered to be the area of natural influence by Iran.⁸ On the eastern frontier, there was constant movement of people across the border though the Durand Line demarcated the border between Afghanistan and the British Empire. The border currently exists in the treaty but not in practice. This line became the bone of contention between Afghanistan and Pakistan after the Indian sub-continent was divided.

CONCLUSION

As a consequence of the United States' departure from Afghanistan, India is confronted with a multitude of new and distinct security concerns. Concerns about cross-border terrorism, the consolidation of terror networks, and the possibility that extremist acts might spread to neighboring regions are some of the ways in which India's national security is put in jeopardy as a result of the ascent of the Taliban and the possibility of increased instability in Afghanistan. In addition, India's critical investments in Afghanistan's infrastructure and development are under jeopardy as a result of the evolving political and security situation in Afghanistan. India has significant problems in Afghanistan as a result of the growing influence of Pakistan and China in the region. In light of this, India is required to make modifications to its diplomatic and security strategy in order to safeguard its interests. These modifications should place a particular priority on strengthening regional alliances, combating terrorism, and providing assistance to an inclusive government in Afghanistan. It is necessary for India to participate diplomatically and in a proactive manner in order to protect Afghanistan's position as a stable and independent state. This is particularly true when considering the dynamic nature of the situation.

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