



## INDIA'S RESPONSE TO THE OSTENSIBLE US PULLOUT FROM AFGHANISTAN

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### **Abstract**

*Afghanistan has a vital role in the region's geostrategic order as a result of its advantageous geographic location in South Asia. It is located close to the four countries that are currently in possession of nuclear weapons. It has become the main attention of the international powers to fill the power vacuum anticipated to be left behind when the United States withdraws its forces from Afghanistan. Afghanistan can be thought of as India's neighbor to the west. Any unrest in the state will have immediate ramifications for the entire country of India. After coming to terms with this reality, India has begun working with the state to stabilize Afghanistan and reestablish democracy and peace. However, India may face many geostrategic issues in Afghanistan due to the abrupt withdrawal of the United States from the nation and ongoing peace talks with the Taliban. For India to protect its long-term interests in this geostrategically significant region, it must immediately direct its attention toward these newly developing issues. This article focuses on the policy alternatives available before New Delhi to deal with the issues and repercussions that have emerged as a direct result of the noticeable departure of the United States.*

**Keywords:** *Geo strategic, Great game, Potential conflict, US withdrawal.*

### **Introduction:**

All four of the world's nuclear-armed states—China, Russia, India, and Pakistan—are located close to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a landlocked country located between Central Asia and South Asia geographically. To exercise geopolitical dominance over South Asia, control over Afghanistan is necessary. Any agreement reached with the Taliban would, as a result, have geopolitical repercussions for the region and the entire world. In addition to this, Afghanistan serves as a joining link between Central Asia and South Asia.<sup>[1]</sup>

Regarding geopolitical strategy, the country's position is ideal for a superpower like "the United States to challenge Russia and China" in any potential conflict. Afghanistan's location provides India, Pakistan, and China with an important geostrategic space for competing against one another to protect their security interests. Because of all of these factors, Afghanistan has remained a significant player in the "Great Game" until today. The diplomatic and political conflict between the British and Russian empires over the 19th century is called the "Great Game." Afghanistan and the regions immediately next to it served as the epicenter of the conflict. From a geostrategic perspective, the importance of Afghanistan's location makes for exceptionally fruitful hunting in this part of the world. At this time, it is anticipated that the noticeable withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan will create a power void in Afghanistan. As a consequence of this, it would appear that regional powers China, Pakistan, Iran, and India are competing with one another to fill this vacuum. This article will investigate the difficulties in Afghanistan due to the United States' withdrawal and the solutions India has proposed.<sup>[2]</sup>

### **The Withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan**

Richard Hass, who served as the head of policy for the State Department under George W. Bush, has alluded to the 'withdrawal doctrine' of the Trump administration. This theory is a component of the



Trump administration's noticeable retreat from Afghanistan. Following this theory, the United States of America has either already renounced or is in the process of renouncing many international accords, and a pattern of withdrawing from multilateral obligations has evolved. In addition, Trump's 'America first' strategy encompasses this concept. Afghanistan will have many repercussions as a direct result of this obvious pullout. The peace "agreement with the Taliban will end the United States" longest war, which has lasted for eighteen years and has been fought in Afghanistan. "The United States and the Taliban" have agreed on a "principle to peace framework." Under the terms of the agreement, the Taliban would assure that they would not allow the use of Afghan territory by terrorists that could result in the complete withdrawal of United States forces from Afghanistan.<sup>[3]</sup> If the Taliban lived up to its security commitments, the United States military would begin withdrawing thousands of its about 13,000 troops stationed across Afghanistan by the beginning of the next year, as stated in the parts of the accord that have been made public so far. The militants have declared that they will reject Al Qaeda, fight against the Islamic State group, and end terrorists exploiting Afghanistan as a haven. If this pact were to go through, the Taliban would control fifty percent of the country.

Additionally, Afghanistan will present a fresh set of geopolitical difficulties. However, this decision made by the United States of America is being contested by many critics. Skeptics believe that the withdrawal of troops could result in a catastrophe, opening the door for terrorists to set up a haven in Afghanistan again. "Al-Qaida, ISIS, and other foreign terrorists would join them in Afghanistan, the author writes, where a projected Taliban victory over the United States would serve as a beacon to foreign extremists. This would happen after the Taliban had gained control over half of Afghanistan."<sup>[4]</sup> In addition, the objectives of the United States administration in Afghanistan were "eradicating the Islamic state, destroying Al-Qaida, barring the Taliban from taking over Afghanistan, and thwarting large terror strikes against the United States before they develop." In 2019, the antagonists that first pulled the United States military "back into Afghanistan in 2001 and then back into Iraq in 2014 are still active in that country. We have a warning for those who attack Afghanistan," said the more experienced mujahedeen troops who fought in Afghanistan. "We have a warning for others who attack Afghanistan." We defeated the Russians in battle, and we are certain that we can do the same against you. The so-called "peace" that will result from the agreement with the United States will give the Taliban the upper hand, and the Taliban will believe that "we are the people the Americans chose to deal with, and they will try to rule Afghanistan." This will give the Taliban the opportunity to consolidate their power in Afghanistan. We triumphed against the Russians in the last war, and we shall do it again in this one as well.<sup>[5]</sup>

Skeptics argue that the objective of "the so-called war on terror" will fail and that the reintroduction of the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan will follow "the United States" departure. "The United States," on the other hand, has concluded that it cannot win the war in Afghanistan. There are two significant sayings that, when taken together, warn of the dangers of going to war in Afghanistan. First, Afghanistan is referred to as "a graveyard of empires." Secondly, after the first Anglo-Afghanistan war, G. H. Gleig "wrote in his memoir that it was "a war begun for no wise purpose, carried on with a strange mixture of rashness and cowardliness, taken to a close after struggles and disaster, without much glory attached either to the government which directed, or the great body of troops which waged it." This conflict has resulted in no positive outcomes, either politically or militarily. The eventual departure of our group from the country was analogous to the withdrawal of a defeated army."<sup>[6]</sup>

The unsuccessful attempts by the British to annex Afghanistan in the 19th century, the unsuccessful mission and failure of the United States of America in Afghanistan in the 20th century, and the USSR's attempt in the 1980s all serve as evidence of this reality. The recent obvious departure of the United



States is another manifestation of history repeating itself. Despite this, India's ongoing development process in Afghanistan and its future foreign policy toward Afghanistan would face many obstacles due to the United States exit from Afghanistan.

### **India's Role up to the Present and Possible Future Courses of Action**

There have been historical connections between India and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the "strategic partnership" agreed upon between India and Afghanistan in 2004 serves as the foundation for the current collaboration and interaction between the two countries. This was the first deal post-Taliban Afghanistan signed with any country for rehabilitation. It helped guarantee security connected with the withdrawal of the United States and NATO soldiers from Afghanistan. This decision was made based on "mutual understanding and long-term trust," which outlines the common concerns of commerce, education, economic expansion, security, and politics. "Afghanistan's ambassador to India, Shahida Abdali, declared in April 2017 that India is the largest regional donor to Afghanistan and the fifth largest donor internationally with contributions totaling over \$3 billion". . . New Delhi is home to more than 16,000 Afghan students and has been responsible for constructing more than 200 public and private educational institutions.<sup>[7]</sup> In addition, it has been stated that "India has aided in the construction of critical infrastructure: around 4000 km of roadways; Zaranj-Dilaram highway. The Salma Dam and electricity transmission lines; and the Afghan Parliament building; over 4000 Afghan officers have been trained in Indian military institutions, with an expected increment of 50% in the number of officers being trained in India this year."<sup>[8]</sup> The information presented illustrates the constructive and progressive effort India has been making in Afghanistan. In addition, India is making efforts to build a democratic and peaceful Afghanistan, with the primary goal of India being to produce human capital that may assist in reconstructing a country that has been devastated by conflict. In addition, India intends to empower Afghanistan to defend itself against any threat, whether from within or beyond, on the security front by providing Afghan officials with training. Although the current elected government in Afghanistan recognizes India's important role in domestic development and security, the return of Taliban rule could threaten India's ability to play that role. This is especially true when one considers Pakistan's growing role in "the peace deal between the Taliban" and the United States and Pakistan's geographical proximity to the Afghanistan Taliban.<sup>[9]</sup>

Pakistan harbors a deep-seated mistrust toward India's efforts to expand its presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan views India's growing influence as part of its strategy to encircle Pakistan as an encirclement policy. Because Pakistan has been pursuing a program in Afghanistan known as "strategic depth," which involves training, supporting, and armed groups who are capable of acting as a proxy for Pakistan's interests, Pakistan perceives India to be a threat to its strategic interests in Afghanistan, and this worries Pakistan. Pakistan holds the view that India is responsible for the unrest that is occurring in Baluchistan.<sup>[10]</sup> Despite this, the government of Afghanistan has demonstrated a policy of maintaining an equal distance from India and Pakistan. The statement that "India and Afghanistan's strategic alliance is not directed against any country" was made by President Hamid Karzai. In addition to this, "Pakistan is our identical twin brother, and India is a wonderful friend." The deal we made with our buddy won't "affect our brother's" situation. However, the interests of both Pakistan and India cannot be seen through the same mirror because they belong to different states. As a result of the unfriendly ties that exist between the two countries, they must consider matters of security. Both sides employ various techniques to establish a foothold in Afghanistan and protect their national interests.<sup>[11]</sup>

A lot is riding on Baluchistan for Pakistan, and if they want to fight a war in Kashmir through proxies, they can use Afghanistan. Kashmir and India's ability to travel to Central Asia via Afghanistan are at



risk because of this conflict. At a time when China is already attempting to encircle India, the closeness of China and Pakistan in Afghanistan and their alliance is another hurdle that India needs to find a way to overcome. Until recently, China did not have a significant presence in Afghanistan. By extending an invitation to a Taliban delegation for intra-Afghan dialogue, China is demonstrating its involvement in Afghanistan. With the assistance of Pakistan, China may reduce India's influence by utilizing its economy's capability to do so.<sup>[12]</sup> Therefore, to prevent China from overshadowing India's impact in Afghanistan through its economic might, India needs to create trust and get deeply involved in Afghanistan. China and Pakistan can utilize Afghanistan as a springboard to further their destabilization efforts in India, notably in the Kashmir area. In the 1980s, with the assistance of Pakistani intelligence agencies, many Afghan fighters crossed into Kashmir. Pakistan can exploit the current relations between India and Pakistan and Kashmir's situation to urge and mobilize its young people to engage in similar behavior. Geopolitical factors constrain the role that India can play in Afghanistan. The absence of a physical border with Afghanistan is the primary barrier preventing Pakistan from playing a more significant role in Afghanistan. This is the most important obstacle that India needs to concentrate on overcoming. In addition, attention should be paid to maintaining stable relations with Iran, which connects India and Afghanistan. Furthermore, even if an agreement is reached between the United States of America and the Taliban, the fact that the Americans are driven out of Afghanistan by the Taliban would give Pakistan and young Kashmiris, who are willing to take up arms against the Indian state, a significant boost. Because of the potential for Pakistani agencies to mobilize armed individuals or youngsters in the name of "Jihad" in Kashmir from Afghanistan, as occurred in the 1980s, it is essential to interact with the people of Kashmir to acquire their frustration and confidence to deal with any crisis that may arise as a result.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Conclusion

The Taliban currently govern approximately half of Afghanistan. Any arrangement with the Taliban, especially one that leaves India out of it, has the potential to be disastrous from a safety standpoint. As a result of the Taliban's increased proximity to Pakistan. The situation across Kashmir's borders could become more precarious due to this. As a result, India requires a prudent and realistic strategy to deal with any emergent challenge from "the peace pact between the United States and the Taliban." Keeping in mind India's backing for the democratic government, the Indian side must reach out to the Taliban in a way that is well-planned and ceremonialized. No other major nation in the region is as adamantly opposed to the Taliban as India. This may have significant ramifications after the United States leaves Afghanistan. Separate conversations have occurred between the Taliban delegation and all of the main powers in the region surrounding Afghanistan, including China, Iran, Russia, and Pakistan. In light of the current circumstances in Afghanistan, India's pro-government stance in Afghanistan is the appropriate posture; yet, the fact that it is upsetting the future stakeholders of Afghanistan, the Taliban, can be a risk to the country's national security. This is because the Taliban have a history of involvement in Jihad in Kashmir and the proximity of Pakistan and the Taliban in the current situation, which sees relations between India and Pakistan at an all-time low. Because Pakistan can recruit Talabani jihadis for its proxy war against India in Kashmir, these fighters are an asset to Pakistan.

The dynamic nature of India's foreign policy must be reflected in the current scenario. India must be vigilant about the potential outcomes of "the peace pact between the United States and the Taliban" while maintaining its participation in the ongoing construction projects in Afghanistan. It would appear that the United States will be able to protect its national interests and obtain an honorable departure from Afghanistan due to the accord. Afghanistan is a province that India cannot abandon. India's strategy toward Afghanistan needs to be rethought, particularly in light of the Taliban's emergence as a new





stakeholder in the conflict. This will ensure that India's long-term national interests are protected and will allow Afghanistan to play a role in India's rise to great power status. India needs to develop a policy of deep and inclusive involvement in Afghanistan by keeping in mind the significance of Afghanistan's geographical closeness with turbulent Kashmir. This is necessary for light of the fact that Pakistan and China are working together to create an axis that will encircle India. To secure India's vital national interests in Afghanistan over the long term and to meet any evolving potential challenge that may arise due to the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, prompt involvement is the need of the hour. Afghanistan is India's vital geostrategic space.

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