



Research Article

India and Afghanistan: dynamic relations since decades

Abuzar Khpalwak Zazai ^{1*}, Najeebrahman Rahmani ²

¹Lecturer at Law Faculty, Karwan University, Kabul, Afghanistan

²Chancellor, Karwan University, Kabul, Afghanistan



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ABSTRACT

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The research has focused on clarifying the political collaboration between Afghanistan and India and its influence on regional dynamics. It has also examined the economic relations between the two countries and the consequences for both. Additionally, the study has analyzed the development projects and initiatives undertaken by Afghanistan and India in the past 20 years and their resulting outcomes. The information for this article was collected from multiple reports utilizing a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as from printed and electronic media sources. India and Afghanistan have engaged in extensive collaboration across multiple domains since 2001, with the aim of fostering a cohesive, autonomous, diverse, tranquil, and influential Afghanistan. India deliberately refrains from engaging in military actions and employing hard power tactics, instead prioritizing collaboration and fostering friendly relationships. In addition, India has made substantial investments in major infrastructure projects, including the Salma Dam, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, educational institutions, medical facilities such as the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health, and others. India has consistently demonstrated its reliability as an ally to the people of Afghanistan over the past two decades. The Afghan populace expresses considerable contentment with the efficacy and probity of the Indian administration.

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1. Introduction

India is one of the major powers in South Asia, and its main goal in Afghanistan is to support the post-2001 Afghan government. That being said, India has been significantly impacted by the political and security issues that followed the announcement of the US military's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Afghanistan is currently dealing with a political and security conundrum. Even after almost thirty years of turmoil and unpredictability that have seriously hampered the progress of Afghan society, the Afghan economy has shown significant improvement since 2003, with an average growth rate over nine percent. Afghanistan's GDP growth is not only creating job opportunities that contribute to the stabilization of Afghan society, but it also makes it easier for Afghanistan to expand its economic relationships with other countries. India is keen to expand its trade presence in Afghanistan, especially in sectors like mining and natural resources (WANG, 2018). According to Kirit K. Nair's article "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014 Strategy, Policy and Implementation" in the *Journal of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, India has taken a multifaceted approach, launching numerous projects in a range of sectors to boost economic growth and advance peace and stability in Afghanistan. It has purposefully refrained from using force in Afghanistan, focusing instead on creating non-coercive resources. India's engagement strategy in Afghanistan has proven to be quite successful, winning the support and favor of

the Afghan people and government, who view India as a dependable ally and economic partner (Nair, 2015).

Three main sectors comprise New Delhi's objectives: economic power, security, and regional hegemony. Afghanistan is often seen exclusively through the lens of security by New Delhi. Both New Delhi and Islamabad hope to continue playing a major role in Afghanistan's internal politics. While Islamabad feels that New Delhi wants to entangle it in disputes along its western frontier, India wants to limit Pakistan's ability to influence events in Afghanistan (Junaid & Malik, 2021). Signed on October 4, 2011, during Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai's visit to India, the Strategic Partnership agreement is linked to the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and is the country's first formal security deal. While reconstruction was the primary goal, the Afghan government also saw strong ties with India as a way to lessen unrest and aid the war-torn nation in stabilizing amid the expected power struggle that would follow the withdrawal of US and NATO forces in 2014. India and Afghanistan have a strategic cooperation pact that goes beyond just aid giving; among other things, it aims to advance the relationship by offering training to the Afghan National Security Forces. In the evolving geopolitical and geostrategic landscape, India views a strong, independent, safe, prosperous, and democratic Afghanistan as critical to both its security concerns and the overall stability of the region (Raiphea, 2013). The purpose of this study is to gather precise information about India's cooperation with Afghanistan in the areas of politics,

*Corresponding Author:

Email: abuzarkhpalwakzazai@gmail.com (A. K. Zazai)

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economy, reconstruction, and development. It additionally aims to evaluate the extent and efficacy of this cross-sector collaboration.

2. Review of Literature

The literature review provides a summary of the studies carried out in the pertinent subject and the theoretical framework that the suggested problem-solving approach can be based on. Below is a summary of the various studies that have been conducted on the topic of "Collaboration between Afghanistan and India in Political, Economic, and Development Sectors", Noor Abid and Dr. Khushboo Ejaz in 2021: titled "Indo-Afghan Strategic Alliance in the Post-9/11 Era" in their study paper: Afghanistan is strategically located at the crossroads of Central, Middle, and South Asian countries, making it a highly crucial geographical location on a global scale. This has ramifications for Pakistan. The world community, especially its neighbors Pakistan and India, has been interested in this region for a long time due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources. As a result, India has spent several decades making significant and ongoing attempts to forge relations with Afghanistan. Afghanistan borders the developing nations of China and Russia. It is located in the energy-deficient region of South Asia and has abundant energy resources in landlocked Central Asia. Powers seeking to expand their influence in the region, both regional and extra-regional, are drawn to Afghanistan because to its strategic significance (Ejaz & Abid, 2021). Afghanistan, according to Abdul Rouf Bhat, Mudasir Mubarak, and Raghavendra Pratap Kushwaha (2018), is essential to India's achievement of its goals in Central Asia. Additionally, they draw attention to the way that Afghanistan facilitates collaboration between India and the Central Asian Republics (CARs). India should keep pursuing its policy of engagement with the countries of Central Asia as well as Afghanistan. Given the challenging security environment, New Delhi must continue to be dedicated to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan (Bhat et al, 2018).

A study by Dr. Adil Zaman and Fazli Subhan was released in 2019. The current research report titled "The Current India-Afghanistan Relationship: Implications for Pakistan" claims that during the Taliban rule, India's participation with Kabul was minimal. However, relations took a favorable turn after Karzai took office, leading to the signing of a bilateral agreement known as the "India-Afghanistan Strategic pact" in October 2011. Afghanistan asked India for assistance in the fields of trade, security, economic growth, and general well-being. This was the first time, since the fall of the Taliban government, that the two countries had fully cooperated. In addition, the Indian government established a number of consulates at Mazar Sharif, Herat, Qandahar, and Jalalabad (Zaman & Subhan, 2019). Peerzada Ahmad Tufail (2021): in "A Study of India's Policy in Afghanistan" Commencing in 2001: Since 2001, India has actively pursued an approach to Afghanistan. India, a resolute and emerging power in the region, aims to bolster its security and increase its influence by enhancing the capabilities of its neighbors, with an emphasis on Afghanistan. Furthermore, India's approach to Afghanistan reflects its goals as a developing power to expand its influence in the region by cooperative means. India has made significant efforts to gain the confidence and support of the Afghan government and public, despite being the country that contributes the least to the country's development and rehabilitation. Reconstruction initiatives like building roads, highways, parliament buildings, schools, and other infrastructure projects are part of India's soft power strategy (Ahmad, 2021). Mehmet Turan ÇAĞLAR and Mirwais Muttaqi (2021): The study paper "Indian Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan 2001-2018" focuses on the continuous

rivalry in Afghanistan between the neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan and India. Afghanistan's relevance has grown greatly on a regional and global scale due to its strategic location connecting South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and East Asia (Muttaqi & ÇALAR, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

The author employed a qualitative approach to get the conclusions in this study, drawing on existing literature and articles to finalize the report. The author utilized various sources, including print, electronic media, and online materials, to create this article. This study aims to enhance readers' understanding of the partnership between Afghanistan and India in the realms of politics, economics, and development.

4. Research objectives

The research seeks to accomplish the following goals: The aim is to analyze the political collaboration between Afghanistan and India and evaluate its impact on regional dynamics. The aim is to assess the economic linkages between Afghanistan and India and study the implications for both countries. The aim is to examine the development initiatives and endeavors undertaken by Afghanistan and India during the past two decades, along with their consequent impacts. The aim is to assess the challenges and potential benefits of the collaboration between Afghanistan and India in specific sectors. To understand the impact of historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors on the relationship between Afghanistan and India.

5. Findings

5.1 Policies to strengthen the relations between Afghanistan and India

India's post-2001 strategy towards Afghanistan is motivated by a wide range of objectives, such as curbing the proliferation of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism in the area, backing a united, autonomous, diverse, and peaceful Afghanistan, promoting robust economic connections in the region pertaining to trade, transportation, and energy, and pledging enduring involvement in Afghanistan. India has shifted from its previous strategy of employing military force, particularly in its backing of the Northern Alliance, to a new, proactive approach focused on cooperation. India has opted to abstain from participating in military actions and has deliberately kept a distance from employing aggressive measures in relation to Afghanistan. India's soft power strategy aims to enhance its political influence by indirectly reinforcing and revitalizing its longstanding ties with the Afghan population. Furthermore, the objective is to bolster the capabilities of Afghan society and actively support the creation of a secure, democratic, and harmonious Afghanistan (Ahmad, 2021).

5.2 Infrastructure Developments

India has made significant expenditures in diverse major projects, including infrastructure development, road construction, irrigation, trains, and electrical transmission lines. Two prominent examples of extensive infrastructure projects are the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Salma Dam. According to Scott, the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram roadway fulfills two goals for India. First and foremost, it offers Afghanistan a more direct and alternate pathway to access the sea, thereby decreasing its dependence on Pakistan. Furthermore, if Pakistan denies commerce transit rights over land, India can utilize the route from Mumbai to the Chabahar port in Iran and subsequently transport its goods to Afghanistan once the highway is finished.

India has engaged in small-scale development projects in Afghanistan, providing essential services such as health clinics, schools, livestock facilities, bridges, bore wells, and public toilets to the Afghan population. The goal is to promote increased community participation and contribute to the rehabilitation and improvement of Afghanistan's infrastructure. Similarly, India has provided humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in the fields of healthcare, aviation, education, and food since 2001. India has reestablished the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul and has been actively sending medical missions to support humanitarian efforts in various parts of Afghanistan, particularly in the healthcare sector.

India committed \$800 million at the Berlin Conference to support the building and implementation of the Salma Dam Project in the Heart region of Afghanistan, with the aim of improving water storage in the country. The building was executed by Indian engineers. In 2003, a 107.5-meter-tall dam made of earth and rock fill was constructed on the Hari River. In June 2003, the Afghan Army Band was equipped with musical instruments (Sendhilkumar, 2015). Two extra electricity substations were set built in Doshi and Charikar in response to the Afghan government's request. These substations were created to provide assistance for the existing 220kV Transmission Line that runs from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul. In response to the growing needs of Doshi Town, the transformer capacity in Doshi was augmented, and authorization was granted for the installation of a third 16 MVA transformer at the Charikar substation. Both substations were finished and began functioning in 2016. In 2016, India contributed to the restoration of the century-old Stor Palace, located in the Afghan Foreign Office buildings in Kabul, to its original magnificence. The Stor Palace was officially opened on August 22, 2016, by the Prime Minister of India and the President of Afghanistan (Hashimy, 2022).

5.3 Economic and Commercial development

India recognizes the significant role of Afghanistan as a hub for economic routes that link central, south, and west Asia. Afghanistan holds great importance for India, not just due to its strategic value but also because it offers lucrative business prospects for Indian enterprises. Given the significant opportunities for commerce between India and Afghanistan, the bilateral trade amount of US\$ 683 million (with US\$ 474 million in exports and US\$ 209 million in imports by India) for the year 2013-14 is rather little. India's main exports to Afghanistan encompass man-made filaments, garments, clothing accessories, pharmaceutical products, cereals, dairy products, and poultry products. On the other hand, Afghanistan's primary exports to India mostly comprise dry and fresh fruits. India has implemented a range of initiatives to fully exploit the trade development potential between the two countries. In March 2003, India signed a Preferential Trade Agreement with Afghanistan. As part of this agreement, India provided substantial tariff discounts, ranging from 50% to 100%, for 38 dry fruit items. In November 2011, India abolished fundamental customs tariffs for all Afghan goods (except alcohol and tobacco products), granting them unrestricted entry to the Indian market without any tax charges. The commencement of operations at the Chabahar port in Iran will significantly enhance Afghan exports by providing a new transit route for the country to engage in commerce with India and other global markets. An Indian consortium called AFISCO, consisting of both public and private iron ore mining and steel businesses, led by the Steel Authority of India, successfully obtained a contract for the Hajigak iron ore reserves. Their objective is to build a steel factory with a capacity of 1.2 million metric tons per annum, which will also include a power plant with a capacity of

90 megawatts. Indian corporate delegations have been making frequent visits to Afghanistan since the start of 2013 (IAS, 2015). An important Indian endeavor in Afghanistan entails a triumphant proposal by a consortium consisting of seven Indian enterprises from both the public and private domains to establish the Hajigak iron ore mine, with a projected investment of \$6.6 billion. The Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) is leading a group that is seeking help from the Indian government for an investment. The consortium has pledged to build a mine, a steel factory with a capacity of six million tons, and an 800MW power station. For context, the project involves six million tons of steel, which is estimated to be worth around \$3.3 billion. In 2011, Afghanistan's GDP, which was boosted by the substantial deployment of ISAF forces, amounted to \$20 billion according to the World Bank. Afghanistan's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2001 amounted to \$2.7 billion. The Hajigak mine is believed to contain around two billion tons of iron ore resources (Price, 2013). India has been instrumental in fostering Afghanistan's economic development since 2001. India, being a significant economic and trade ally of Afghanistan, has made substantial investments in various development initiatives that have played a crucial role in enhancing the country's economic stability. India has provided financial support for various infrastructure projects as a form of humanitarian aid. This includes a donation of USD 178 million towards the construction of the Parliament Building in Kabul, the funding of the \$150 million Zaranj Delaram highway project that connects western Afghanistan to the strategically important Chabahar port in Iran, and the allocation of \$42 million for the Salma Dam Project on the Hari Rud River in Herat province. India has entered into a trilateral preferential trade pact with Afghanistan and Iran, which demonstrates its goals and interests in Afghanistan. India has allocated \$2 billion, positioning itself as the fifth largest contributor to Afghanistan, to provide financial help to the Kabul administration for the purpose of reconstruction. The bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan is steadily increasing annually as a result of the implementation of various initiatives and strategies by both nations. India ranks among Afghanistan's top three trading partners, with the bilateral trade value between the two nations amounting to USD 1.5 billion for the period of 2019-2020. Since 2017, the air Freight Corridor between the two countries has facilitated 100 flights, transporting items worth a total of USD 216 million. The Chabahar port in Iran, which facilitates the transportation of Indian commodities to Afghanistan through Iran, commenced operations in 2018 (Muttaqi & ÇAĞLAR, 2021). Over the course of the transformative decade (2014-2024), officials from India in Afghanistan will face difficult decisions in order to protect their interests, with a particular focus on the crucial requirement for economic stabilization in Afghanistan (D'Souza M., n.d.). The user's text is a bullet point. The bilateral trade during the fiscal year 2016-17 reached almost USD 800 million and has substantial prospects for future growth. Nevertheless, the complete capacity of economic connections will only be achieved when the Wagah-Attari route is accessible for bilateral trade. Up to this point, the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) has implemented limitations on this matter. India is the biggest market in the region for Afghan products, and the hindrance of transit has had a negative impact on the unrestricted movement of goods (Indo-Afghan Relations: India-Afghanistan Relations, n.d.).

India, being a highly esteemed nation, has enhanced its amicable connections with the Afghan government. In 2005, India strongly supported and lobbied for Afghanistan's inclusion in the SAARC. Both nations were dedicated to collaborating strategically and exchanging intelligence in their efforts against the Islamic militia. In the last 20 years, the Indian

government has committed over US\$3 billion to provide humanitarian assistance, create basic infrastructure, and rebuild governance capacity in Afghanistan, with the aim of fostering human development. India has supported Afghanistan through various humanitarian endeavors, including the provision of one million metric tons of wheat, the revitalization and reconstruction of hospitals, and the implementation of substantial health programs (Nandan & Kumar, 2022).

6. Political Engagement

India strategically seeks to exert political influence in Afghanistan's political sphere. Hence, India's economic measures play a crucial role in advancing its political agenda for Afghanistan, while strengthening political relations between the two states. India can enhance its political involvement in Afghanistan by aggressively engaging in the Afghan economy and providing assistance to the Afghan government and people. India maintained political links with Afghanistan despite the Taliban's governance in Kabul from 1996 to 2001, after Afghanistan gained independence in 1919. Following the defeat of the Taliban, which was supported by Pakistan, in 2001, India saw a chance to develop friendly political relations with the new Afghan government. The ultimate goal was to establish a pro-Delhi administration in Kabul, not only to compete with Pakistan but also to strengthen its position as a significant regional power (Muttaqi & ÇAĞLAR, 2021). Afghanistan has long been a center of intense power struggles and regional rivalries. The endorsement of coups, utilization of proxy warfare, and provision of weapons to local factions have cumulatively had a substantial impact on the stability of Afghanistan and the establishment of its government. The most prominent rivalry is evident in the competition between India and Pakistan. The hostility between these two countries existed before the Afghan conflict and is based on different understandings of nationhood, particularly emphasized by the ongoing disagreement over Kashmir that arose following British dominance in South Asia. Afghanistan quickly became entangled in this regional rivalry as Pakistan regarded the relationship between India and Afghanistan with apprehension, as it perceived them as potential threats to its territorial and ethnic unity. According to historian William Dalrymple, the relationships between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India can be described as a "lethal triangle of mutual distrust and competition," with all three countries being trapped in this dynamic (Constantino, 2020). Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna expressed his position during an interview with the Wall Street Journal at the UN General Assembly in New York in September 2009 that India firmly retains the view that war is not a viable solution to any crisis, including the one in Afghanistan. New Delhi's position demonstrates its recognition of the Afghan Government's efforts to create a democratic system that includes all parties. This is in line with India's involvement in various discussions, talks, and methods of reintegrating different insurgencies and wars (D'Souza, 2011).

7. Financial aid post-2001 and shared beliefs

India has played a significant role in the growth of Afghanistan and the South Asia area since 2001, and the two nations have maintained their historical, cultural, and societal connections. The 9/11 tragedy resulted in the eradication of Taliban authority and the allocation of comprehensive political and financial backing to the newly established Afghan government. Following the collapse of the Taliban regime, India's approach shifted to actively foster and sustain a friendly relationship with Afghanistan. President Karzai's nine visits to India provided significant impetus for the successful execution of India's planned projects in Afghanistan, enabling the country

to implement its policies without encountering any hindrances or risks. India pledged to contribute an extra \$500 million in development aid to Afghanistan. In October 2011, the visit of the Afghan president to New Delhi prompted discussions regarding the formation of an extended diplomatic partnership (Sendhilkumar, 2015). India has set two main goals in Afghanistan: firstly, to engage in rehabilitation and economic efforts, and secondly, to address security concerns by countering the influence of Pakistan and China through Afghanistan. In 2011, India forged a robust alliance with Afghanistan and pledged a substantial sum of \$2 billion for the purpose of rehabilitation. India's reconstruction and development policy has established it as a major donor to Afghanistan, taking on the duty for implementing rebuilding and development projects. India's significant expenditures in Afghanistan are intended to expand its influence in Central Asia, capitalizing on its enduring presence in the nation since the 1950s through massive development initiatives. India has made significant investments in Afghanistan's economy in order to maintain its regional security framework. India has committed to providing \$3.1 billion in financial assistance to the Afghan government, which will be allocated to all 31 provinces of Afghanistan. India is engaged in the development of dams, aviation connections, power stations, and investments in the healthcare and education domains. Additionally, it is involved in diverse industries, such as telecommunications via Indian networks. India has provided funding for the construction of the Afghan Parliament, which has been called the 'Atal Block' as a tribute to the late Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. In addition, India has provided financial support for the development of a 135-mile road that links Afghanistan to Iran's port of Chabahar. India has provided about \$3 billion in aid for the development of socio-economic projects. Although Pakistan is making investments in Afghanistan, it is undeniable that India has become a significant participant, utilizing both soft and physical power strategies in Afghanistan and implementing a long-term plan to fight the network of adversary states in the region (Akhtar, 2019).

8. Evolution of the Relationship

The Karzai regime's attempts to enhance its relationship with India were continuously impeded by Pakistan's strong concerns communicated to the United States. The United States expressed its willingness to allow India to participate in developmental endeavors in Afghanistan, while explicitly stating its opposition to India assuming any security-related obligations, in order to avoid provoking Pakistan. Hence, the UPA government in New Delhi, keen on maintaining the Indo-US reconciliation, was hesitant to confront the US regarding its efforts to increase its influence in Afghanistan. India, the fifth largest aid provider to Afghanistan, has undeniably made substantial advancements in terms of giving developmental assistance. The assistance provided has included backing for education, healthcare, and infrastructure. India has specifically built Afghanistan's new parliament building and provided training to its legislators. The Border Roads Organization has successfully constructed a 218-kilometer route that links the town of Zaranj, located close the Iranian border, to Delaram in the northeast. This accomplishment was achieved despite intermittent attacks by the Taliban on Indian workers. India has made significant contributions to the construction of a power transmission line to Kabul and the development of a hydroelectric project worth \$180 million at the Salma Dam in Herat. In addition, India has actively engaged in giving diverse forms of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, such as delivering food supplies, deploying medical teams, and creating a facility to provide prosthetic limbs to amputees. Furthermore, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) has annually

granted a maximum of 500 scholarships to Afghan students (Ganguly, 2012).

9. Major Challenges and Opportunities

India's main objective is to restrict China's impact, as China is employing the Gwadar deep-sea port in Baluchistan, which is next to Afghanistan's Kandahar province where the U.S. military bases are situated. This port provides the most efficient and shortest access to Pakistan, allowing travelers to reach Kandahar in just a few hours. India is concerned about the potential danger that China, specifically, poses to Indian trade in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, India is apprehensive that Pakistan could gain control over important energy routes. India is annoyed by China's dominance over the Gwadar port since it gives China the ability to observe Indian operations in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, as well as any future maritime endeavors between India and Iran. Similarly, Iran has legitimate worries regarding the utilization of the Gwadar port by the United States as a strategic location for monitoring Iranian activities. India has long recognized the importance of Afghanistan, but the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has made it much more crucial. This is because Afghanistan is located close to Pakistan and there are tense relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan after the Taliban era. India, being a dominant power in the region, has taken advantage of the tense relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, effectively establishing closer connections with Afghanistan. India has strategically designed its policy to economically and militarily restrict Pakistan by utilizing Afghanistan, while simultaneously aiming to discourage a positive relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as such a relationship would not fit with India's interests in Afghanistan (Akhtar, 2019).

10. Fading of relations

India became the primary regional provider of help to Afghanistan after the events of 9/11. India had allocated over \$3 billion towards several developmental and reconstruction initiatives in Afghanistan until late 2021. New Delhi strategically implemented the Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) approach to build a foothold in the recently transformed Afghanistan, while ensuring it remained uninvolved in military affairs. India fostered strong diplomatic relations with both the Karzai and Ashraf Ghani-led civilian administrations in Afghanistan. India's civilian-centric policies have earned it a unique position as a friendly neighbor dedicated to promoting peace and development in Afghanistan, as regarded by ordinary Afghans. New Delhi's utilization of soft power in relation to Afghanistan was attractive, but lacked long-term strategic foresight. While the US-led international community maintained its military presence and provided financial aid to Afghanistan, democracy appeared to be establishing itself and the Afghan state seemed ready to develop into a more advanced form. Upon the commencement of the US-led West's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the fragility of the emerging Afghan government became readily apparent to all observers. Over the past twenty years, New Delhi has heavily relied on the Afghan state as its primary focus and investment. India failed to provide sufficient diplomatic resources towards interacting with the Taliban, despite the apparent necessity to do so. The Taliban's hesitation was due to their long-standing animosity towards India and the numerous attacks that Indian security and civilian personnel in Afghanistan suffered as a consequence of the Taliban insurgency after 2001. One reason for this anti-Taliban stance was that the Indian government did not want to be perceived as being kind towards an Islamist extremist group that is renowned for disregarding human rights, especially

women's rights. India's failure to establish a relationship with the Taliban in the past decade ultimately resulted in a situation where the Afghan state collapsed due to the Taliban's widespread campaign in May-July 2021. This situation mirrored India's previous experience in Afghanistan in 1996. India was forced to shut down its embassy in Kabul and other consulates in different parts of the country due to the rise of the Taliban. For quite some time, experts and analysts have been strongly recommending the necessity of establishing communication with the Taliban, particularly after their resurgence in 2005-06. The security and foreign policy establishment in New Delhi, however, decided to prioritize developing bilateral relations exclusively with the government in Kabul. They disregarded the fact that, over the years (particularly since 2012), even the United States shifted its focus towards negotiations rather than military strategies as a more pragmatic approach to achieving peace in Afghanistan. Due to the rapid and successful military campaign by the Taliban in August 2021, followed by the collapse of the Ashraf Ghani government, India lost its physical and symbolic influence in Afghanistan (Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022).

11. Conclusion

India's approach to Afghanistan after 2001 has been diverse, influenced by a variety of interests. The objectives encompass curtailing the proliferation of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, bolstering a cohesive, autonomous, diverse, and harmonious Afghanistan, cultivating robust economic connections pertaining to commerce, transportation, and energy, and pledging enduring involvement in the region. India has shifted its policy from military intervention in the 1990s to a proactive approach that focuses on cooperation rather than military interventions. It has also moved away from using hard power techniques. India has prioritized the use of soft power to enhance its political influence and reinforce its longstanding ties with the Afghan people. India has made significant investments in major infrastructure projects, including the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Salma Dam. These projects aim to create alternate trade routes for Afghanistan and decrease its dependence on Pakistan. India has bolstered its ties with the Afghan government, showcasing a dedication to strategic collaboration and sharing of intelligence in the fight against Islamic extremists. India has committed over US\$3 billion over the last 20 years to provide humanitarian assistance, create infrastructure, and rebuild governance capacity in Afghanistan. India's strategy towards Afghanistan is primarily focused on mitigating Islamabad's sway in the area, in order to enhance its own position and political clout. India aims to strengthen its position as a significant regional player by actively engaging in the Afghan economy and providing assistance to the government and people. This effort also serves to cultivate political connections with Afghanistan. In spite of Pakistan's attempts to hinder India's establishment of a robust alliance with Afghanistan, India persists in allocating resources towards development initiatives and providing humanitarian assistance in the nation. India's objective is to maintain Afghanistan as an amicable nation and to oversee and exert influence over activity in Pakistan. India's considerable investments in Afghanistan demonstrate its enduring commitment and its endeavors to establish itself as a prominent force beyond the South Asian region. New Delhi implemented the Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) strategy to create a foothold in the 'new' Afghanistan without directly engaging in military affairs. India established strong diplomatic relations with Afghan civilian governments, which led to India being perceived favorably by ordinary Afghans as a friendly neighboring country dedicated to promoting peace and development. Nevertheless, this technique of using soft power,

although attractive, ultimately demonstrated a lack of long-term strategic foresight. Upon the withdrawal of the US-led international community from Afghanistan, the fragility of the Afghan state became apparent. India's exclusive emphasis on the Afghan government left it ill-equipped to engage with the Taliban, despite the urgent need to do so. Many experts and observers have consistently recommended engaging with the Taliban, especially after their comeback in 2005-06. Nevertheless, the security and foreign policy elite in New Delhi prioritized fostering relationships with the Kabul administration, rejecting the United States' turn towards diplomatic resolutions. As a result, due to the Taliban's swift military operation in August 2021 and the subsequent collapse of the Ashraf Ghani administration, India has forfeited its tangible and symbolic influence in Afghanistan.

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