



Afghanistan: The New Hotspot of South Asian Geo-Strategic Competition

Sujit Kumar Datta

Abstract

This paper aims to identify the geographically important position of Afghanistan and how it has become a geopolitical battlefield in South Asia. The geographically crucial position of Afghanistan inside the South Asian Region has turned it into a battlefield of geopolitics. Further, the geographical circumstance and geographical additives of a rustic can make it tough and weak because of an internal policy. For example, India has a dangerous conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir, and China over Ladakh. On the other hand, China and Pakistan will work together in a mutual agreement even in such a changing situation as USA although they withdraw troops from Afghanistan cornering Afghan troops, and the Taliban's advance. Besides, Geopolitical considerations have been behind the invasion of the Persian Empire, Alexander's Campaign, Genghis Khan's attack, the British war, the invasion of the Soviet Union, and the presence of the Americans. It was joined by South Asian regional powers, Pakistan and India in the 20th century and directly and indirectly, these two countries have influenced Afghanistan. Thus, to complete this study, the researcher has used secondary data. Descriptive and exploratory activities have been also conducted by interviewing and discussing with experts in this field. Finally, this paper tried to analyze the role of China, India and Pakistan towards Afghanistan in the South Asian political context.

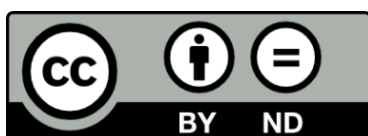
Keywords: Geopolitics, Taliban, Strategic Competition, BRI, Terrorism, South Asian Politics

Department of
International Relations
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Chittagong,
Bangladesh

datta.ir@cu.ac.bd



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1298-1099>



This article is published under the Creative Commons CC-BY-ND License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>). This license permits to use, distribute, and reproduce the contents of the publication for commercial and non-commercial purposes, provided that the original work is properly cited and is not changed anyway.



Original Article

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is a landlocked country with a total area of 647,497 square kilometers. Afghanistan is significant in this region due to its location. Scholars refer to the territory of these three regions as "a location at the crossroads of history". Due to Afghanistan's strategic location, many nations have shown a keen interest in the country (Erfan, A. H. 2021). Countries without sea connectivity generally have no geopolitical significance. Besides, countries surrounded by other countries are always on the edge of their neighbors. Nevertheless, this general concept of geopolitics will be proved wrong in Afghanistan. After 20 years of unequal war, the United States returned empty-handed from Afghanistan. However, even then, the conflict in Afghanistan is expected to continue in the coming days. Rather, after America's departure, other regional superpowers may want to keep impregnable Afghanistan under their influence. Furthermore, a new conflict without the United States could begin in Afghanistan in the same context. The political story of Afghanistan is not over. First the monarchy, then the dictatorship, then the Taliban fundamentalist regime governed by a coup, then the Soviet invasion again, the beginning of the civil war from there, and finally the terrorist operation, NATO forces entered Afghanistan in 2001. Despite U.S. and NATO forces on Afghan soil, the

United States has also announced the return of its forces by September 11, 2021. As a result, other NATO countries, such as the United Kingdom, are also withdrawing their troops (Webber, M. 2009). However, here too, the plight of Afghans does not end. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops Taliban activity has increased so much that Taliban forces have captured 50 of the 370 cities in just two months. The United Nations says the districts they occupy are located around the country's provincial capitals. They say they take a stand to capture the provincial capitals only if foreign troops are fully withdrawn from Afghanistan.

Experts hinted at the situation when foreign troops left as soon as President Biden announced the withdrawal of troops. The Taliban forces are going to keep their predictions in letter and spirit. Although the country's government says it can resist the Taliban, there is no evidence of that in reality. The United States has started withdrawing troops from May 1, 2021. Thus, the consequences of the violence that the Taliban group has started in less than two months can be devastating for the Afghan government and the security of the region (Azami, A. S. (2021). China and India have already expressed concern over regional security. September 11, 2001, is one of the deadliest days globally and a "turning point" in global political history. On this day, the terrorist al Qaeda group attacked the Pentagon,



Original Article

the Headquarters of the United States Twin Towers and the Department of Defense, killing nearly 3,000 people and leaving the whole world in a wee bit of a wee bit. Without overcoming that surprise, grief and loss, the United States declared a "War on Terror" and, as part of the operation, launched a campaign to destroy the Taliban group in Afghanistan and deal with terrorist threats in the region. Twenty long years have passed since then. The United States claims that the Taliban group sheltered and supported Al Qaeda. Later they also found this evidence (Johnson et al., 2007). However, in the last two months, the Taliban have shown with their fingers how much the US and NATO forces have been able to harass the Taliban group in this two-decade-long campaign. Nevertheless, the United States does not care much about it. Notably, there is a considerable gap between the priority list of the United States of present and the past. Terrorism was the main threat to the United States after Nine Eleven. As a result, the global response to terrorism has made its land safe even if it cannot eradicate terrorism from all places. So now terrorism has come down a bit on the U.S. priority list, and China has made it the main threat. Moreover, the United States is putting pressure on China and reducing spending on the non-profit sector by withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Afghanistan, officially known as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, is an

independent state in South Asia. It is located on a landlocked plateau between Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Khan, S. A. describes that Afghanistan is sometimes considered a part of South Asia and Central Asia. Pakistan to the east and south of Afghanistan, Iran to the West, Turkmenistan in the north, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and China to the northeast. The countries bordering Afghanistan are Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Khan, S. A. 2013). One side of Afghanistan is South Asia, and the other side is Central Asia. Thus, the Dragon China is eyeing Afghanistan, as the Afghan border includes Persian soil. Moreover, Afghanistan is a significant factor in the political and religious stability of the Middle East and Russia, even if there is no border. Afghanistan has been said to have become a cemetery for foreign countries over the ages (Akbarzadeh, et al., 2021). In the Middle Ages, Afghanistan, which King Jayapal of Hindustan had stopped, defeated three superpowers in the modern era. The only Afghans on earth have the distinction of giving Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States; the three most powerful states of the modern world, a taste of defeat. However, even then, the chances of peace in Afghanistan are slim! The geographically important position has made Afghan the center of the conflict between the superpowers. The current ruling pro-US Ashraf Ghani government in Afghanistan and



Original Article

the Taliban or warring Afghans are clashing overpower, and it is believed that Taliban fighters will take over the Afghan Masons within years of the US departure. Moreover, new equations will be added to the geopolitics of the Middle East, South Asia, China, and Central Asia if this happens. And also, Afghanistan has been known as an essential region of Asia since ancient times. Much ancient trade and external trade have taken place throughout this country. For centuries, many people have walked through Afghanistan, some of whom have settled here. The country's current ethnic and linguistic diversity bears witness to this history. Pashto is the largest population living in Afghanistan. They were also known as Afghans earlier (Han, Y., & Rychlik, M. 2021). However, Afghans refer to Pashtu and all state citizens irrespective of race.

President Ghani paid his first official visit to India in April 2015, following China, Pakistan, and the United States in October and November 2014. These visits sparked speculation that the delay not only indicated a reprioritization of Afghanistan's foreign policy calculus toward India but also contrasted sharply with Karzai's warm relationship with India. Moreover, Rakesh Sood, India's former ambassador to Afghanistan, said that India should not be concerned about President Ghani's connection with Pakistan since it would not detract from the goodwill India has built-in Afghanistan over the past decade. He

believes that the Indian government should speed up the construction of Chabahar port as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia (Sood, Rakesh. 2015). A top Indian diplomat attended intra-Afghan talks in Doha on September 12, 2020, as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar watched from afar. Jaishankar emphasized the necessity of an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace process throughout his speech. It conveyed that the peace process must respect Afghan national sovereignty and territorial integrity, promote human rights and democracy, protect minorities, women, and the vulnerable, and effectively address violence across the country. The friendship between our people is a testament to our shared history with Afghanistan." Every corner of Afghanistan has been affected by our 400-plus development projects. Afghans in the area have a long history of economic and cultural ties with India. Anti-India nations must not be permitted to fill the void left by the US withdrawal, limiting India's diplomatic freedom. All parties in the Afghan peace negotiations, including Taliban members with whom India has had no direct communication, must now be included. China has been actively pivoting to the vast expanses of Eurasia since President Xi Jinping took office, as evidenced by Beijing's increased engagement with its western neighbours. Wang Ji coined the term "Marching Westwards" in 2012 to describe China's geostrategic adjustment behavior. As the United



Original Article

States shifts to the Asia-Pacific region, Wang Yi argues for Chinese politicians to formulate plans to strengthen China's Western neighbours, especially Central and South Asia. Eurasian cooperation framework with the Middle East and from London to Shanghai. It contributes to China's economic and cultural ties with Western countries and contributes to China's internal development. Wang Ji said that this would accelerate the development of the Western region, a national strategy launched in 2000 to encourage the uneven development of China's western provinces compared with the eastern coastal provinces. (Wang Jisi. 2012).

Pakistan is also in the south of Afghanistan. S. K. Datta believes that Pakistan is a failed state where various terrorist groups have been covered up at different times. Al Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden was found in Pakistan. Therefore, some al-Qaeda members have joined the Islamic State militant group, and some members are still hiding on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (Datta, S. K. 2014). There is no guarantee that the members of these militant forces will not be prompt with the withdrawal of Western forces. These militant forces can join the Taliban and stand against the government, including terrorist activities. Furthermore, they can continue their destructive activities individually. It will depend a lot on the Taliban's mind. Moreover, D. S, Fayyaz illustrates that the Islamic State (ISIS)

branch in the region is present, gradually becoming a significant threat to South and Southeast Asia and Central Asia (Fayyaz, D. S. 2020). However, the Western world is not looking at it very seriously as there is not much chance of them being attacked by the Islamic State. D. M. Tariq proves that the United States has hunted two birds with one stone by announcing the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. First, the Afghan operation has reduced enormous military spending without prolonging it further. Second, the main challenge of the United States today has been to put some psychological pressure on China (Tariq, D. M. 2021). Nevertheless, China and other countries will suffer from insecurity by not thinking much about the Western power. Mohammed Tariq thinks that if terrorist activities in the region increase in the absence of Western forces, it will gradually cause concern to the West, even if it immediately impacts the region. However, at the moment, it will be better for neighboring Afghan countries to strengthen their defense system in the border areas (Tariq, M. et al., 2021).

China is one of the countries where it will fall into a Spillover effect theory if instability develops in Afghanistan. Uighur Muslim persecution in Xinjiang province and unrest in the region is significant embarrassments for China. According to the Spillover Theory, increased terrorist activity in a country or created political instability can affect



Original Article

terrorist or rebel groups in neighboring countries and increase their activity (Wong, K., & Li, F. 2021). So, in this way, since there is a religious similarity between the Uighur Muslim community and the Taliban in Afghans, it will undoubtedly add to China's discomfort. Nisa said that China and central Asian countries could also fall into military and economic insecurity. Afghanistan has borders with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. So, Afghan instability is not off the radar in these countries either. Afghanistan also has close trade relations with these countries. So, any instability will also disrupt the economic security of the region. Furthermore, any volatile situation in Central Asia will indirectly impact it (Nisa, Z. U. et al., 2021). That is to make the path of implementation of the Belt Road Initiative (BRI) project in China a little thornier. China's economic master plan, The BRI, has several roads oil and gas pipelines through Central Asian countries. Several activities of The BRI project are underway in the region. Therefore, trouble in Afghanistan and Central Asia means that the activities of the BRI project in the region will be a hamper.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is both descriptive and exploratory. Besides, interviews were also conducted with experts in the field. Furthermore, literature was also critically evaluated as part of the data

analysis process to gain some insights into the problem. The primary sources of data were obtained via books and periodicals as the majority of the data of this research came from open-source websites of well-known companies. Moreover, the two strategic vision, direction, and goals of the two neighbours' were fashioned by the contribution of the subject matter experts. A questionnaire was prepared for this purpose, and subject matter experts, including Afghan nationals, were requested to complete it. Secondary data sources were the reports, produced by India, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other associated countries, which are available in the public domain in way of Periodicals, national and international journals, newspapers and magazines, and internet sites.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Geo-strategic Competition in Afghanistan

The geographically important position has turned Afghanistan into a battlefield of geopolitics in the South Asian region. The United States is looking forward to establishing a controlled or controlled government in next Afghanistan, with half a dozen regional and global superpowers like Pakistan, China, India, Iran, Turkey and Russia. The geographical condition and geographical components of a



Original Article

country can strengthen a country and weaken it due to an internal policy. Geographical location and natural resources, which are associated with geographical location, Etc., due to weakness, can also lead to geographical curses (Gopalakrishnan, R. 1982). Afghanistan is one of the examples of this region where the history of a geographically important country located at the junction of Central Asia and South Asia is nothing but a geographical curse. The landscape of Afghanistan is such that it is always difficult to control or capture this country. That is why this country is called 'Samadhi in the Empire'. The latest evidence of this is the strategic defeat of the United States.

The geographic locations of Pakistan on the eastern side of Afghanistan and China's position are of strategic importance if it is the minor border in the northeast. This border with China called the Wakhan Corridor is strategically very important. China's Uighur is the way to connect the Muslim-dominated region and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This communication network is known as Karakoram Highway and is a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This multipurpose highway connects the Chinese-built Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea coast of Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan's main port, Karachi, is linked to the border city of Kandahar in Afghanistan. The communication route on the other border is the Khyber Pass in Pakistan

(Jaleel, S. et al., 2018). Surrounded Afghanistan is dependent on Pakistan for communication for geographical reasons. The Islamic Republic of Iran covers the western border of Afghanistan. Iran's port of Chabahar is a route for naval connectivity with western Afghanistan. Chabahar is virtually divided into two separate ports. Due to its geopolitical importance, India took the initiative in 2003 to develop its neighboring port, 'Shahid Beheshti'. The development work has been slow due to international sanctions against Iran. According to the 2016 agreement, one of the 16 berths at Iran port allowed India to be fully utilized. Shahid Beheshti of Chabahar has been using Afghanistan as the only way to communicate.

Iran's important port has given India an alternative route to its presence in Afghanistan, while Pakistan and China are likely to surround the BRI port strategically. India is in much trouble in Afghanistan's rapidly changing geopolitical context (Khan, I., & Syed, K. H. 2021). China's agreement under the Belt and Road Initiative to develop Chabahar port in Iran and build central Asia rail connectivity from ports is currently causing uncomfortable conditions for India. India has to compete with China in Iran. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are once part of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and are now home to three predominantly Muslim countries. Of these three countries, the



Original Article

other two countries are surrounded by Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is associated with the Russian Federation. Russia has historically been involved in Afghanistan's geopolitics, and now they are trying to do so. These Central Asian countries' trade routes with Pakistan are directly connected to Afghanistan.

On the other hand, India's primary means of communication are through Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Some provinces in the north of Afghanistan are inhabited by Afghan populations of Turkmenistan (Turkish), Uzbekistan (Uzbek) and Tajikistan (Tajik) origin. The famous warlord Uzbek-born leader Abdur Rashid Dostum is still influential among them. On the other hand, the late Ahmed Shah Masood, known as the tiger of the north, was a Commander of Tajik origin who was allegedly killed by the then Taliban forces at one point of the Taliban's rise. So, these countries and Russia are apprehensive about the Taliban's resurgence and the formation of a Taliban or Taliban-influenced government alone in Kabul. Iran, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and the United States are currently in touch with the Taliban among the countries around Afghanistan (Keskin, G. F. et al., 2020). Since an agreement has been reached with the United States, these countries will peacefully form the next government in Afghanistan.

The United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan have formed diplomatic

groups to establish long-term peace in Afghanistan and enhance regional connectivity. On the other hand, the China-Pakistan foreign minister-level has decided to complete discussions on the future in Afghanistan and do five rounds (Bekkevold, J. I. 2020). In addition, the Sino-Pakistan-Russia group formed in 2016 is also active. It is worth noting that the change in China's geopolitics and geostrategic around Afghanistan has put India in geostrategic complexity, including Afghan policy. China and Pakistan, in particular, are strategically surrounding Afghanistan in a very well-planned manner. Despite many political ups and downs after Mohammad Dawood's taking power and socialist rule in 1973, Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan were never better than four years of Taliban rule (1996-2001). The present Ashraf Ghani government is leaning towards India and expressing all kinds of messages of support. A few days ago, the Afghan Ambassador to Delhi sought military assistance from India. After the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, India has spent three billion dollars on hydropower generation, highway construction, power transmission and other infrastructure. The future of investment is uncertain in the current changing situation in Afghanistan. On the other hand, India's relations with China have now reached a level of hostility. After the clashes in the Galway Valley in 2020, India is said to have deployed 50,000 troops to counter China's increased military activity



Original Article

along the Arunachal border in the east, including Ladakh in India. India has the support of the United States in this initiative. So, on the Afghanistan issue, India has to compete with Pakistan or the Taliban and a much stronger China economically and militarily (Kaura, V. 2020).

China is acceptable to both sides in Afghanistan, and according to the Taliban, China is a friend of Afghanistan. China's immediate objective is to participate extensively in Afghanistan's development and connect the country with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China has considerable investments in Afghan butter iron and ceramics. China is the country that will have the most influence after the end of the US presence in Afghanistan. China has no other country to compete with economic investment. China's only consideration is that the Taliban should not support any Chinese group. The Taliban leadership has already assured China that 'Uighur' is China's internal matter, and the soil of Afghanistan will not use it in anti-Chinese activities (The Wall Street Journal, 2021).

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Afghanistan has the neighboring border with Pakistan. The Durand line in Pakistan and Afghanistan divides the Pashtu-speaking population just as the Bengali-speaking people have divided the border between India and Bangladesh. During the invasion of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan's freedom

fighters carried out a freedom struggle from Pakistani territory. Thus, the Government of Pakistan and intelligence agencies significantly influence guerrilla groups in Afghanistan. However, the Pakistani government sometimes resorted to duality when the US invaded Afghanistan. A section of Afghan guerrilla groups started having adverse ideas about Pakistan (Seerat, R. A. 2019). However, significant parts of the guerrillas have been in a close connection with the Pakistan intelligence agency ISI. In addition, the solid anti-US sentiment of current Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan has warmed the relations between the Afghan guerrilla and the Pakistan government. However, Pakistan is concerned about its security because some Pakistani guerrilla groups which were influenced by Afghan guerrillas are engaged in military clashes with the Pakistani government demanding the implementation of Sharia law, regularly fighting with the Pakistani army. In addition, some guerrillas from arch-rivals India's intelligence agencies are being used against Pakistan. Some Afghan militias aim to capture the northwestern border province from Pakistan by inciting Pashtu nationalism.

Moreover, the Pakistan government claims that India and the present Gani government assist militias. Thus, the Government of Pakistan is not interested in seeing India and the present Ghani government on the soil



Original Article

of Afghanistan after the United States. The plans of Pakistan to bring the government of guerrilla organizations to power in Afghanistan and ensure that guerrillas are dependent on Pakistan (Mohibi, A. S. 2021). Economically China also does not want a guerrilla government to come to Afghanistan beyond its influence. Pakistan's primary strategic goal is to make India as weak and irrelevant as possible in Afghanistan. Pakistan's main aim is to ensure that India does not play any role in Afghanistan's political and security issues in future policymaking. The Taliban is Pakistan's primary tool when it comes to that goal. Pakistan has always believed that India supports ethnic discontent and insurgency in Pakistan in connivance with the Afghan government in Kabul. Pakistan thinks India is inciting Pashtu nationalism for helping separatists in Baluchistan. These allegations have been made openly by Pakistan on various occasions. Tehreek Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Pakistan has repeatedly alleged that it is receiving training, weapons, money and shelter inside Afghanistan, known as the Pakistani Taliban (Jadoon, A. 2021). Pakistan has no problem with India going to Afghanistan and doing development work. If India acts against Pakistan from the soil of Afghanistan, Pakistan has a good reason to worry about supporting terrorism. India has long feared Islamabad and is trying to surround Pakistan by camping in Afghanistan. Pakistan's position on

India could be more assertive after the US withdrew troops from Afghanistan.

Apart from the Taliban, the Indian government has also started contacting other neighbors in Afghanistan who are more or less concerned about the Afghan security situation in the coming days. India talks to Iran, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan regarding Afghanistan issues. Some Afghan media and political experts blame Pakistan for the current unrest in Afghanistan. Like them, Pakistan's implicit Taliban support fuels unrest in the atmosphere of withdrawal of US troops. However, the allegations are not new. There have also been allegations from the Afghan government that Pakistan has provided shelter and military support to Taliban groups (Armajani, J. 2021). If this situation has to change, Pakistan must stop supporting armed groups. Meanwhile, Kabul must stop making such allegations to improve relations between the two countries like Pakistani officials.

China-Afghanistan Relations

Although land touches China in a chilly land in the north of Afghanistan, this one chill always holds a sea of worries for China. The Muslim-majority East Turkistan (Xinjiang) region in the west of China has been demanding independence for many years. China has suppressed the Uighur ethnic group of the Muslim faith in East Turkistan through force in many ways. However, in the last 20 years, many



Original Article

Uighur Muslims fought for guerrillas in the Afghan guerrilla-US occupation conflict. If a group sympathetic to the Uighurs in Afghanistan can sit firmly on the floor, China has always been apprehensive that these Uighur Muslims could resume the freedom movement from Afghanistan. Western countries, including the United States, Israel, have already taken a stand against Chinese aggression in East Turkistan (Xinjiang) to suppress China. Thus, when the attack by freedom-loving Uighurs from Afghan territory begins, China does not seem to side with international powers (Roberts, S. R. 2020).

China is building the Belt and Road (BRI) project to reduce trade distance spacing with Europe and Africa. An essential part of this is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China is keen to use Afghanistan as one of the partners in the corridor and a route to reach Central Asia's 'Stan' states. However, the presence of a robust anti-China government on Afghan soil could threaten China's massive project. Given the uncertainty of sovereignty and future economic routes, the Chinese government will deal profoundly with the current situation in Afghanistan. China is in touch with guerrillas fighting in Afghanistan through various means. China is offering guerrillas that China will help Afghanistan in economic development after guerrillas arrive in power. China will also provide technical and economic assistance for extracting

minerals from various mines in Afghanistan. In return, China wants Afghan fighters not to help Xinxiang's (East Turkistan) independence activists. Afghan fighters do not seem to drop such bait from China. The Pakistani government, an ally of Afghan fighters has long followed China's Xinjiang (East Turkistan) issue policy. Thus, all in all, China wants a government of fighters to replace the pro-US Gani government on Afghan soil, as well as China wants to be assured that its sovereignty does not threaten Afghanistan (Haiyun Ma, 2021).

China and Pakistan in Afghanistan

China and Pakistan will work together based on close cooperation and cooperation in such a changing situation as us troops withdraw from Afghanistan, the cornering of Afghan troops, the Taliban's advance. The foreign ministers of the two countries have also proposed establishing the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to focus on regional connectivity. According to a report in *The Hindu*, the two countries announced their five action plans on Afghanistan last Saturday at the third strategic dialogue between Beijing and Islamabad in Chengdu, China. The Chinese Foreign Ministry Wang Yi criticized the US move to withdraw all troops from the country as an essential turning point in the current situation in Afghanistan. The statement said the US fought an alleged counter-terrorism fight in Afghanistan, but its intentions



Original Article

did not succeed (The Indian Express 2021). Peace has not returned to the country, but a new black security hole has been created there. The Chinese foreign minister said China and Pakistan were the worst affected by Afghanistan's neighboring countries. Beijing and Islamabad need strong cooperation to adapt to the changing situation in the country. He said this is one of the things that have been given special attention in the strategic dialogue.

Foreign Minister Wang highlighted the five areas where China and Pakistan will work jointly. The first of the five action plans is to avoid the spread of fighting in Afghanistan and prioritize protecting the country from facing a full-fledged civil war. Second, focus on accelerating the Kabul-Taliban inter-agreement and establishing an inclusive political framework in Afghanistan. Highlighting the third action plan, Wang said fighting terrorist groups firmly as China thinks that if Afghanistan becomes unstable, it will also have to be a hit in Xinjiang province. Beijing has been accused of years of torture and human rights violations against millions of minority Uighur Muslim communities in the province. Fourth, to strengthen cooperation between Afghanistan's neighboring countries and fifth, to establish a platform for cooperation between countries. Analysts feel there is a visible difference in the views of the two countries on terrorism and the role of various armed groups in

Afghanistan, even though China and Pakistan have announced to work together in Afghanistan. However, the two countries also released a joint press release after the Sino-Pakistan Third Strategic Dialogue. Pakistan's Foreign Minister reiterated his country's commitment to speed up any peace and reconstruction process led by Afghanistan, support it and rebuild Afghanistan through peaceful means (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC 2021). Meanwhile, news agency Reuters reported that US Defense Minister Lyode Austin said on Saturday that the first task of Afghan security forces would be to pull off their advances before trying to regain control of areas lost to the Taliban. The Afghan government plans to integrate troops into strategically essential areas in the wake of Taliban fighters taking control of different areas one by one (Idrees Ali, 2021).

India-Afghanistan Relations

According to the official map of India, India has a border with Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan has no border with India as the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Kashmir in Pakistan is liberated. Nevertheless, even then, Afghanistan is an essential factor in India's stability, market retention and sovereignty.

- First, Afghan fighters always had eyes on Kashmir occupied by India. Thus, India has tried not to bring guerrilla organizations to power in Afghanistan in the last decades.



Original Article

- Secondly, Afghanistan is the gateway for India to enter the vast market of Central Asian 'Stan' states.
- Thirdly, India needs to influence the Government of Afghanistan to suppress the arch-enemy Pakistan better. However, India's departure from Afghan will ease the pressure on Pakistan.

These Indian initiatives will increase Pakistan's surveillance of Indian territory (especially Kashmir) more than ever before. For this, India has made huge investments in Afghan (pro-US and anti-guerrilla) governments in the last two decades. In the last few years, India has made considerable investments in Afghanistan in several other sectors, including water power projects, road construction, parliament buildings, and infrastructure construction. However, if guerrilla organizations come to power in Afghanistan after the departure of the United States, it will be difficult for the Indian authorities to enter Afghanistan. Thus, India has decided to establish new contacts with Afghan fighters through various means.

The way India has participated in the reconstruction of that country for 20 years, the 3 billion dollars invested in 400 projects in 34 provinces should be protected. Modi's India is currently swaying by the uncertainty of how the Taliban's new rise will determine the political fortunes of Central and South

Asia. The situation is not very comfortable yet. The decision to withdraw troops has worried India and created severe regional uncertainty (Nirupama S, 2021). China-Russia is also anxious, though somewhat pleased. The happiness is that it is another defeat for the United States for them. Due to the U.S. provocations, the Soviet Union had to return home from Afghanistan at one point in time. Moscow did not forget that. It has become a treaty with the same fate in the United States. The U.S. shamelessness has also pleased China since there is no end to the US efforts to stop China in Asia and the Pacific. The disrespect of the United States has similarly pleased Iran, which they corner. Pakistan is breathing a sigh of relief at President Joe Biden's decision to back down U.S. forces to win their military and presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's declared that no force in the world could ignore Pakistan. The country's home minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said India has been lying to the world for four decades. They are the ones who support terrorist activities in Afghanistan. Its western neighbor's goal is to make India unfriendly during this time of the shift. China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan are as happy as India.

On the one hand, the urge to protect interests in Afghanistan to secure Kashmir are both significant challenges. China is more active than Russia, on the verge of a possible shift



Original Article

in Afghanistan. Speculation and hope are being created as to whether China's money power can do what Britain, Russia and the United States of America have not been able to do. The need for countries like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, once a part of the Soviets, is to make Afghanistan politically stable in a joint venture between China and Russia. China also wants to seize this opportunity. The goal is to expand the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan. They are worried about the Taliban instigation of Uighur Muslims with militant attitudes. This fear is from Russia as well as Iran.

Many other countries are worried about the possibility that the Taliban will again control of Afghanistan, but India is probably the most worried country. Many countries are concerned about the future of Afghanistan, but India now has the highest interests in Afghanistan than any other country. If the Taliban retakes power, India will suffer the most. India is the country that was the quickest to increase its influence in Afghanistan since the Taliban was ousted from power in the U.S. military campaign twenty years ago in 2001. India has invested more than \$3 billion in more than 400 socio-economic and significant infrastructure projects to influence Afghanistan in the last two decades. In addition to dozens of education, health, sports, and cultural development projects, India has built a 218 km long important road called the Delaram-Zarai Highway.

They have also built a new Afghan parliament building in Kabul. Afghanistan is a significant country for India for greater regional economic ambitions, internal security and geopolitical interests. Afghanistan is critical for India to enter the Central Asian market. India plans to build two pipelines with Iran and Central Asia through Afghanistan. India has a dangerous conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir and China over Ladakh. Now that Afghanistan becomes an enemy state, India will be a significant headache. In the past, Mujahideen from Afghanistan came and started in Kashmir. There is an intense fear in India whether the Taliban comes to power or repeats it when its influence increases. However, India's biggest concern is Pakistan. If Pakistan takes control of Afghanistan's foreign and security policy, it will be a nightmare for India (Sushant S, 2021).

CONCLUSION

All discussions are now taking place on the inevitable return of the Taliban to Afghanistan's state power. Almost everyone is skeptical about how long the ruling government will survive in Kabul after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops. It is recalled that after the then Soviet Union, soldiers left Afghanistan in 1989, the Najibullah government's support by them lasted until 1992. Even after the presence of U.S. and international forces twice as long as the Soviet Union and the cost and death of more money, it is true that



Original Article

no state structure in Afghanistan can counter Taliban ideology and military operations. In the past decade, analysts have said in many ways that the centralized state that has been created in Afghanistan, the way the regime has sheltered corruption, the failure to build a participatory political system, and the way foreign influence has remained visible have not led to the Taliban being politically defeated. There are Taliban supporters in Afghan society, and the situation has worsened while dealing militarily without politically integrating them. However, it is also true that there have been some positive changes in Afghanistan's society during this period, unimaginable when the Taliban was in power. Peace talks have been held with the Taliban in this context, but little progress has been made. The question of geopolitics is of paramount importance in the calculations of the Taliban's return. Afghanistan has been considered the playground of the geopolitics of the big powers for thousands of years. Geopolitical considerations have been behind the invasion of the Persian Empire, Alexander's campaign, Genghis Khan's attack, the British war, the invasion of the Soviet Union, the presence of the Americans. It was joined by regional powers Pakistan and India in the 20th century; directly and indirectly, these two countries have influenced Afghanistan. Turkey and Iran are also continuing their efforts. Everyone wants to capture or at least control the country at the entrance of South Asia

and Central Asia. The people of Afghanistan have had to bear the curse of geography. They have rejected every attempt, but they have to count many fees for it.

Even now that geopolitics is still gaining prominence in the discussion, it is essential to remember that even if the sports are different, there is no guarantee that the consequences will be different. The main actors sit today are Pakistan, India, China and Russia. Because of India's close association with the government established in Kabul in 2001 and since Pakistan backs the Taliban, everyone's question is how much India will suffer if the Taliban comes to power what will be Pakistan's role in the future. Taliban contacts with China have been around since 2018, but the recent meeting of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi with Taliban representative Mullah Baradar Akhund has been the talk of the media about what China wants in Afghanistan and what will be the reaction in South Asia. The answers to these questions are not very complicated. Pakistan has long sheltered the Taliban to ensure its preferred government in Afghanistan, reduce India's influence and make its way into Central Asia. The objective is the same for India; however, the country's concern swells with concern stake in regional and international terrorist organizations with the Taliban. China's contacts and meetings with Taliban leaders are no surprise. China aims to emerge as one of the



Original Article

world's most influential countries by 2050 and present an alternative to the liberal world order built under Western countries' leadership after World War II. To this end, the Belt and Road (BRI) project was launched in 2013. The U.S. retreat has given China that opportunity. The problem of Afghanistan has global strategic importance. The border between China and Afghanistan could be used geographically to surround China. China's current leaders have not forgotten this.

In the context of the regime's crackdown on Muslims in Uighur, China is concerned about whether violent extremism spreads in its Jiangxi province. China blames the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) for this. They want the Government of Afghanistan not to grant shelter to ETIM. China is relying on the Taliban to ensure that. ETIM, but China also fears the presence of al-Qaeda or ISIS in Afghanistan. The second reason is economic. China wants to protect what it has invested in Afghanistan in the last few years. For these two reasons, China needs a stable Afghanistan, and it does not know who remained in power there. China and Iran also consider stability and no disruption of national security in any way. As a result, Iran's approach to the Taliban is no longer the same. Iran is glad that the United States is not presented at its doorstep. Iran's gains in China's handling of the Taliban. Russia officially called the Taliban a terrorist

organization but held a meeting with its representative in July and hoped that good relations with the Taliban would stop the spread of terrorist organizations to friendly countries in Central Asia. Unfortunately, China, Russia, Iran is building ties with the Taliban considering the interests of geopolitics and national security; But no one is questioning the Taliban about what will happen to the fate of Afghan citizens. Afghan society has citizens beyond Taliban ideology, especially in the last two decades, without the population that has developed due to change, and participatory governance cannot be built. Whether the Taliban is willing to do so individually or collectively with others is a big question.

References

- Akbarzadeh, S., Ahmed, Z. S., & Ibrahimi, N. (2021). Soft power, hard power dynamics: the case of Iran in Afghanistan. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1-20. doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2021.1928479
- Armajani, J. (2021). The Taliban. In *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements* (pp. 348-378). Brill. [Doi:10.1163/9789004435544](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435544)
- Azami, A. S. (2021). Warlords, the United States, and the state of anarchy in Afghanistan. *Central European Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 46-75. https://is.muni.cz/publication/1780963/2021_Vol-07_No-01_Art-03_Warlords_full.pdf
- Bekkevold, J. I. (2020). India in China's Grand Strategy: Change and continuity from 1949 to present. In *India's Great Power Politics* (pp. 23-48). Routledge
- Datta, S. K. (2014). *Inside ISI: The Story and Involvement of the ISI, Afghan Jihad, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, 9/11, Osama Bin Laden*,



Original Article

- 26/11 and the Future of Al-Qaeda-. Vij Books India Pvt Ltd.
- Erfan, A. H. (2021). The Geopolitical Influential Components in the Afghan Crisis. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, 4(7), 36-43. <https://www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jhsss/article/view/1849>
- Fayyaz, D. S. (2020). Footprints of ISIS in South Asia—A Challenge to Regional Peace and Stability. *South Asian Studies*, 32(2). <http://journals.pu.edu.pk/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/3121>
- Gopalakrishnan, R. (1982). *The geography and politics of Afghanistan*. Concept Publishing Company. A/15-16, Commercial Block, Mohan Garden, Near D.K. Post Office, Delhi, 110059, India
- Haiyun Ma (2021). China Is Worried About a Post-U.S. Afghanistan Beijing would have preferred U.S. troops to stay. Foreign Policy <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/16/china-us-afghanistan-withdrawal/>
- Han, Y., & Rychlik, M. (2021). Development of a Gold-standard Pashto Dataset and a Segmentation App. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 40(1). <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v40i1.12553>
- Idrees Ali (2021). First task for Afghan forces is to slow Taliban's momentum -Pentagon chief. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/first-task-afghan-forces-is-slow-talibans-momentum-pentagon-chief-2021-07-25/> (Retrieved on 5th August, 2021)
- Jadoon, A. (2021). The Evolution and Potential Resurgence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/sr_494-the_evolution_and_potential_resurgence_of_the_tehrik_i_taliban_pakistan.pdf
- Jaleel, S., Talha, N., & Mahesar, P. (2018). Pakistan's Security Challenges: Impact on Cpec. *Grassroots*, 52(1), 219-230. <https://sujo2.usindh.edu.pk/index.php/Grassroots/article/view/129>
- Johnson, T. H., & Mason, M. C. (2007). Understanding the Taliban and insurgency in Afghanistan. *Orbis*, 51(1), 71-89. doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2006.10.006
- Kaura, V. (2020). India's Relations with China from the Doklam Crisis to the Galwan Tragedy. *India Quarterly*, 76(4), 501-518. doi.org/10.1177/0974928420961768
- Keskin, G. F., Alibabalu, S. S., & Fatah, M. (2020). Russia's and Iran's strategic policies towards the afghanistan crisis. *Trames: A Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 24(2), 215-229. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=938020>
- Khan, I., & Syed, K. H. (2021). The strategic relations of Pakistan and Russia in 21st Century. *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review*, 2(1), 259-265. [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss1-2021\(259-265\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss1-2021(259-265))
- Khan, S. A. (2013). Geo-economic imperatives of Gwadar Sea Port and Kashgar economic zone for Pakistan and China. *IPRI Journal*, 13(2), 87-100. <https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/art5sha.pdf>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC (2021). Joint Press Release of the 3rd Round of China-Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxx_x_662805/t1895072.shtml
- Mohibi, A. S. (2021). The Afghan Peace Talks: Transforming Experience and Using Knowledge to Confront Future Crises—What Does the Afghanistan Experience Tell Us About the Future of Countering Violent Extremism?. In *From Territorial Defeat to Global ISIS: Lessons Learned* (pp. 112-138). IOS Press. Amsterdam, Poland.
- Nirupama S. (2021). Explained: A look at India's investments in Afghanistan. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-indias-afghan-investment-7406795/>. (Retrieved on 5th August, 2021)
- Nisa, Z. U., Bokhari, S. W. A., & Nadeem, M. A. (2021). Role of Central Asian Republics in



Original Article

- Afghan Peace Process The Need for Regional Approach for Lasting Peace in Afghanistan. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.52337/pjia.v4i1.131>
- Roberts, S. R. (2020). 2. How the Uyghurs became a 'terrorist threat'. In *The War on the Uyghurs* (pp. 63-96). Princeton University Press. USA.
- Seerat, R. A. (2019). China's role in afghan-Taliban peace talks: Afghan perspectives. *Institute of Chinese Studies*. <https://www.icsin.org/uploads/2015/08/24/6f949b585a51f6f4fd06226212c951aa.pdf>.
- Sood, Rakesh. (2015). Changed variables, same equation, The Hindu,. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/ashraf-ghani-india-visit-changed-variables-same-equation/article7143735.ece>
- Survey conducted for ABC News, the BBC and ARD (11-23 December, 2009) by the Afghan Center for Socio-Economic and Opinion Research (ACSOR) based in Kabul, a D3 Systems Inc. subsidiary. Interviews were conducted in person by (ACSOR), in Dari and Pashto, among a random national sample of 1,534 Afghan adults. https://blogs.elpais.com/files/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf
- Sushant S. (2021). Afghanistan Shows the Limits of India's Power. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/04/22/afghanistan-india-united-states-departure/>
- Tariq, D. M. (2021). The US Military Drawdown from Afghansitan and the Role Regional Dynamics of in the Peace Process. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, 15(6), 1034-1048. https://www.ijicc.net/images/Vol_15/Iss_6/15671_Tariq_2021_E1_R.pdf
- Tariq, M., Bano, S., & Amir, M. (2021). US Interest in Afghanistan and Current Peace Prospects. *SJESR*, 4(1), 365-370. [https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021\(365-370\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021(365-370))
- The Indian Express (2021). China, Pakistan agree to launch 'joint actions' in Afghanistan to drive out terrorist forces: Chinese FM <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/china-pak-agree-to-launch-joint-actions-in-afghanistan-to-drive-out-terrorist-forces-chinese-fm-7423741/>
- The Wall Street Journal (2021). China Meets With Taliban, Stepping Up as U.S. Exits Afghanistan. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-meets-with-taliban-stepping-up-as-u-s-exits-afghanistan-11627492777>
- Wang Jisi. (October 17, 2012). Marching West, China's Geo-strategic Re-balancing Huanqiu Times <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJxoLS>)
- Webber, M. (2009). NATO: The United States, transformation and the war in Afghanistan. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 11(1), 46-63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856x.2008.00349.x>
- Wong, K., & Li, F. (2021). Rise of China's Developmental Peace: Prospects for Asian Hybrid Peace building. *Operationalization of Hybrid Peace building in Asia*, 127. <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/48266/9783030677589.pdf?sequence=1#page=142>