

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

India's Interests and Strategies in Afghanistan

Pankaj Kumar

Ph.D Scholar, South Asian Studies

School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

Abstract:

In the post September 11th terrorist attack on the twin towers and consequent waging of war against the al-Qaeda and mastermind of the attack Osama Bin Laden, Afghanistan has emerged as a flash point in international politics. Though India could not play an appropriate role as it wanted to play in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan led by the US, however, got an opportunity to help Afghanistan to depart from the repressive Taliban regime to a democratic regime. This paper aims to underline India's major interest and strategies adopted by it in order to achieve those interests. Given the geographical proximity and earlier role of Afghan soldiers in carrying out terrorist operating in Jammu and Kashmir since 1990s, it argues that unlike the US military approach, India's approach has been centered on economic assistance and political institutional building. India has been constantly relying on expanding economic and cultural engagements between two states to bring both states closer. It might help India to de-radicalise the Afghan society that has great significance for terrorism in India.

Key words: Strategies, Balancing, Post 9/11, Cultural Engagement, Institution Building, Great Powers

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, Afghanistan has acquired an important place in India's 'extended neighbourhood policy'. Given the geo-strategic location, Afghanistan is considered to a crucial link between India and natural resource abundant Central Asian region by Indian foreign policy and strategic analysts. For a long time, India and Afghanistan have enjoyed multi-faceted- civilizational, commercial and cultural- relationship. However, for last one decade, Indian policy makers are consistently striving for the revival of the old multi-facet relationship on the one hand and eyeing on commercial and strategic interests in Afghanistan and central Asia, on the other. In the post-Taliban era, through the persistent use of 'soft power strategy', unlike hard power strategy of the US and its allies, India has succeeded in creating a special place in of Afghan society.

India's efforts to rejuvenate its relationship with Afghanistan were enthusiastically responded by new government, established after the defeat of Taliban by the US lead forces in 2001. An interim authority led by Hamid Karzai came in power sought to adopt a foreign policy that seeks close relationship with India. Meanwhile, two factors have played important role in ameliorating the relationship, which had been reached at lowest ever in Taliban regime (1996-2001), between two states. First: even during Taliban rule in Afghanistan, India supported moderate Northern Alliance instead of radical Taliban. So many members of the Northern Alliance were either part of government or were at influential posts at various levels; consequently, it is obvious to see improvement in relations of Afghanistan and India. Lastly: India abandoned its earlier policy to support the Northern Alliance dominated by the Tajik ethnic group and marginalise hard-line Pashtun factions led by Taliban (Pant 2010: 136). Now, India made its policy more inclusive as it is trying to strike a balance between moderate and hard-line factions by supporting the interim government led by Hamid Karzai, an India educated moderate Pashtun.

In post-Taliban era, India has consistently pursued a proactive Afghanistan policy based on non-differentiation of 'good' and 'bad' Taliban. To deepen the ties, India has emphasised the institutional dimension in mutual relationship. India was first country which set up diplomatic mission in Kabul under the agies of Mr S. K. Lambha (Bhat 2009: 375) in post-Taliban regime. In order to strengthen its ties with Afghanistan, in addition to embassy in Kabul, India has established four consultancies in different parts: Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan, Herat in northern Afghanistan, Kandhar in southern Afghanistan, and Mazar-e-Sharif in Western Afghanistan. Moreover, to promote cultural ties, Indian Cultural Centre has been established in Afghanistan.

In the light of the US and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) plan to withdraw from Afghanistan in 2014, to meet the challenges of changing situations, India have to reorient its foreign policy and play greater role in Afghanistan. Afghanistan army and police do not meet the required standard to combat the terrorism, extremism and drug-trafficking. Therefore, given the fragile domestic political, economic and security conditions in Afghanistan, Taliban forces, with help of Pakistan and other radical forces, may try, as is being evident in last few years, to strengthen their foothold that can destroy the nascent democratic institutions. It would be catastrophic not only for Afghanistan but also for India's interests. Regionally, the 'power vacuum' created by withdrawal of ISAF might turn Afghanistan into battle ground for 'area of influence' among China, India, Russia,

Pakistan, Iran and Central Asian republics. In such situation, it would be testing time for Indian policy maker: how they will manage the rapidly increasing foot hold of China on the one hand and Pakistan's attempt to radicalise Afghanistan society and train them to fight against India's interests, on the other. Given the important role played by India in Afghanistan, how Indian policy makers would respond to emerging scenario is going to be crucial not only from Indian point of view but also to Afghanistan and other actors engaged in Afghanistan.

However, India's diversified roles in reconstruction of Afghanistan, I would argue, should not be seen merely as benevolence towards Afghanistan but extension of tools of its larger soft strategy. Meanwhile, in the light of India's past engagement and emerging opportunities and challenges, this essay aims to answer some questions: Why Afghanistan is important for India? What is at the stake for India or what India wants to achieve through this engagement is one of the main concerns of this essay. To achieve its goals what 'means' did India have adopted so far is another major concern. While trying to find out answers of these questions, it also tries to figure out what strategies and possible roles India's could play in post 2014 Afghanistan.

2. India's Interests in Afghanistan

Foreign policy of any country is driven its national interest. No factor alone can explain the foreign policy of a state better than its national interests. The manner in which national interests of a state is pursued is shaped by international factors, domestic prowess and the leadership style. India foreign policy towards Afghanistan is not exception as foreign ministry spokesman Syed Akrabuddin says 'India's presence (in Afghanistan) is... (driven by) its own strategic self-interest' (BBC 2012) and shaped by aforementioned three set of variables. India wants a peaceful, stable and democratic Afghanistan than can nurture and raise the living standard of people, resulting into a less radical society. Moreover, the 'consolidation of hard-won gains since the fall of the Taliban' (Pant 2010: 138) is another important goal of Indian foreign policy in Afghanistan. To provide an insight into India's Afghanistan policy, we need to have a look at a bit in detail of the interests that India is willing to preserve and enhance in coming years in Afghanistan.

3. Balancing Pakistan's Influence

Neither India nor Afghanistan would be able to ignore the shadow of Pakistan in their relationship. India Pakistan relations is characterised by what John J. Mearsheimer in his one of the realist principles calls 'states cannot be certain about others intentions'. Pakistan and India perceives each other as neighbours vying, first for 'area of influence' and second to minimise the influence of each other in Afghanistan. Given geographical situation, India in the east and Afghanistan in the North, Pakistan perceives a good relationship between India-Afghanistan as India's attempt to 'strategic encirclement' that would be detrimental to her national security and destabilising factor in internal politics. Therefore, for a long time (since 1971), Pakistan is trying hard to acquire a strategic depth in Afghanistan (Ganguly 2012: 4). Later on, Pakistan has opted a policy to send trained mujahedeen to fight against India in Jammu and Kashmir. In strategic terms, Pakistan's support for anti-India forces and leading role in radicalisation of Afghanistan society has been India's one of the major concerns. In Taliban regime, Pakistan had not only enjoyed close relationship with Taliban that is also evident in final landing Indian Airline plane in 1999.

Pakistan aims to limit India's presence and influence in a post-US and post-ISAF Afghanistan (Ganguly 2012: 4). In the post-Taliban era, Pakistan has exerted its influence on the USA to keep India away from security-related activities that has made India further suspicious about Pakistan intentions. By supporting anti-India force, Pakistan aimed to pursue three interrelated goals: to restrict India's role in reconstruction of Afghanistan and enjoying close relationship with Kabul; to promote terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India by sending militants recruited from Afghanistan and trained in Pakistan; and preventing India from building critical infrastructure in Afghanistan that will link it with rest of Central Asia; consequently, reducing Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan for land transit route. Through minimizing or at least, balancing Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, India could achieve three goals: establishment of peace and stability that is vital for India's national interest both strategic and commercial. Secondly, a peaceful, stable, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan with low level of radicalisation would be difficult for Pakistan to recruit Mujahedeen. Lastly: India would get land access to resource rich Central Asia via Iran and Afghanistan. However, India has to keep eyes open at the any possibility of rejuvenation of close ties between Taliban and Pakistan in post 2014 withdrawal of the ISAF era.

4. Economic and Energy Security

Since 1991, Indian economy has expanded many-folds; consequently, it requires raw material, energy sources to sustain its huge industrial sector on the one hand and on the new markets to sell the manufactured goods. Afghanistan provides ample opportunities to India industries and firms because it has an 'emerging local market of some 30 million low to middle-income consumers with domestic production trailing way behind this dynamically growing local demand' (Basu 2007: 93).

In addition to market, Afghanistan can provide raw material and much required energy for India's rapidly expanding industrial sector. According to a study by McKinsey a global consultancy, India's natural gas consumption by 2015 is expected to double from the current level of 166 million cubic metres a day and by 2025, the share of natural gas is expected to rise from 8 to 20 per cent (Aneja 2011). Afghanistan has large amount of oil and natural gas reserves. According to an estimate Afghanistan has 'undiscovered gas reserves range between 3.6 trillion and 36.5 trillion cubic feet, while oil reserves are estimated to be between 0.4 billion and 3.6 billion barrels, with 0.1m. to 1.3 m. barrels of natural gas liquids' (Gustavson Associates cited in Sharma 2011: 111). Besides Afghanistan, the Central Asian republic have large amount of natural gas and oil reserves. Few years back, the USA has discovered the iron, copper, cobalt, gold and critical industrial metals like lithium, estimated market value of \$1trillion that has potential to change the future of Afghanistan (Risen 2010).

Given the potential reserve of petroleum and minerals and technological inability of the host state, Afghanistan provides an opportunity for foreign actors, including India, to explore. Lack of expertise and financial support, Afghanistan would not be able to explore these minerals on its own, thus, it would require investment from outside. It provides ample opportunities to Indian public and rapidly expanding private sector to seize the opportunities. Therefore, along with public sector enterprises, Indian private sector has invested more than \$10 billion in Afghanistan, including a consortium of public and private Indian companies, led by the state-owned Steel Authority of India that won a bid to mine in three states in Afghanistan (Pant 2012).

5. Countering Extremism and Radicalisation

The rise of radicalisation and extremism in Afghanistan is closely connected with India's interests inside and outside Afghanistan. In fact, rise of extremism and Indian interests are inversely proportionate to each other. Given Pakistan's close ties with Taliban and its engagement in radicalisation of Afghan society, India's interests in Afghanistan are broadly shaped by historical facts and perception that 'Taliban return to power could place Afghanistan back in Pakistan's orbit and effectively put an end to Indian aid, investment and trade in the country, and cut off its own bridgehead into resource-rich Central Asia' (Miglani 2012). Several studies revealed the fact that India has enjoyed good relationship only when Afghanistan has relatively moderate regimes. In contrast, during the Taliban regime India-Afghanistan relations declined to lowest level ever. Through radicalising and promoting extremism in Afghanistan, historically speaking, outsider actors have used the sentiments of Afghan people against their own adversaries to pursue their vested interests. As one author has rightly noted 'the United States, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other US allies...(had spent) billions of dollar to back the anti-communist Afghanistan Mujahedeen who were fighting against the soviet forces' (Ararwal 2009: 352).

Nevertheless, with the demise of the Soviet Union, the US interest in Afghanistan gradually declined. Islamabad used these mercenary soldiers trained during Soviet intervention to instigate insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir. All the major terrorist outfits active in Indian Kashmir since the 1990s including Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba contained substantial chunks of Afghan elements (together with Pakistanis) (Basu 2007). Many of trained mujahedeen were recruited and trained during the Taliban regime. Therefore, it is important from Indian point of view to check the proliferation of militant Islamist ideas in Afghanistan and block the chances of the comeback of the Taliban which Islamabad exploited in spawning troubles in Kashmir (Basu 2007: 95).

6. Combating Drug-Trafficking and Terrorism

Opium production and drug-trafficking were one of the important ingredients of Afghan economy during Taliban rule. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, more than 70 per cent of opium production and 75 per cent of the world's heroin supply of the world in 2012 came from Afghanistan. As per World Bank a report, estimated opium production in Afghanistan is between \$2.6 and \$2.7 billion that constitutes approximately 27 per cent of the country's total Afghan Gross Domestic Product. The rise in opium production for three consecutive years has paved the way for Afghanistan to become the world's first true 'narco-state'. The U.N. special envoy to Afghanistan Jan Kubis argues that "illicit production and trade simultaneously funds insurgent activity and if not curtailed, threatens to undermine Afghanistan's institutions, security and economic self-sufficiency".

The rise of opium production in Afghanistan is closely linked with India's national security. Given the geographical situation of India between Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle, approximately 70 per cent of drug and narcotics has been easily trafficked through various routes in India. It has two important implications for India: security and health. In security realm, increasing nexus among drug-trafficking, organised crime and terrorists, in and outside the Indian soil, has significant implications for India's national security. In the age of globalisation, money generated from drug-trafficking has widely been used by terrorist to buy sophisticated arms and carry out attacks in different parts of India. It has been estimated that money generated from the illegal sale of narcotics accounted for 15 per cent of the finances of militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir (Das 2012: 05).

On the other hand, rising level of addiction in young generation is ruining health and economy of social fabric. Consequences of drug and narcotics are not only limited to consumers' physical and economic loss but encompass society if the forms of economic productivity, rise in health care expenditure and crimes in the society. Given, the rise of opium production and drug-trafficking and use of funds by extremists and terrorists to attack Indian interests inside and outside Afghanistan, among others, and more importantly, on Indian society provides incentives to seriously deal with the eroding the opium production and drug trafficking on Afghan soil.

7. Strategic Interests

From strategic point of view, India has two important interests: to develop Afghanistan as a bridge to natural resource abundant Central Asia and bring Afghanistan under India's 'area of influence'. Central Asian republics have billions ton taped and untapped oil and natural gas, which can fulfil India's demand of energy for next few decades. Recently, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have signed TAPI gas project that connect four states and mainly it will fulfil the energy demands of India and Pakistan. If Central Asian states and India come at an agreement to further develop energy links, Afghanistan may emerge as an 'energy bridge' between potential partners. It will reduce India's dependence on Persian Gulf for energy. Further to explore minerals, oil and natural gas in Central Asia, India has to maintain a strong foothold in Afghanistan as well.

Afghanistan also provides an opportunity to India to expand its influence in this region. So to meet the emerging challenge and seize the opportunity, India through large scale investment in Afghanistan wants to demonstrate its keenness to fulfil its responsibilities. As a Rand study shows India has upper hand vis-à-vis Pakistan in Afghan society. In a poll, 86 per cent of Afghan citizens have thought that Pakistan has negative role while only 5 per cent were of the view that Pakistan has made positive

contribution. In contrast, 41 per cent Afghans have positive view while 10 per cent have negative view regarding India. However, overall 74 per cent Afghans had positive views towards India while only eight per cent Afghans hold such view regarding Pakistan. In post 2014 Afghanistan, India's contribution in Afghanistan's reconstruction and its capacity to translate it into leverage would be an important factor in measurement of India's Influence in this region.

8. India's 'Soft Power Strategy' in Afghanistan

Strategies follow interests. In another words strategies adopted by a state are primarily decided and shaped by its interests. It would fall either of three categories: soft power strategy, hard power strategy or mix of both. Each strategy is correlated with distinct set of means. A strategy would qualify as soft power strategy if it is based on use of coercive means such as use of force, threat of use of force and/or sanctions. In contrast, soft power strategy is distinct means such as persuasion, cultural ties, and aid and assistance. While mixed strategy is based on mix of both means.

India's approach to the Afghan problem has been different from the Western powers, who concentrated mainly on security dimension of Afghan crisis. Because of Pakistan's reservation regarding fear of alienation, the USA did not allow India to carry out any security related role (Ganguly 2012: 3-4). At home, India's experience, as is evident in case of sending peacekeeping forces in Sri Lanka (1987), to send troops to establish peace and security has not been pleasant. Therefore, because of external pressures and a well calculated decision based on the understanding that use of any 'hard power strategy' would, most probability, be responded by reaction against it by radical forces, India has adopted 'soft power strategy'. Soft power strategy is based on means such as providing humanitarian aid, infrastructure development, rejuvenating cultural ties and reconstruction of Afghanistan, where India is supporting democratisation process, infrastructure development, capacity building, and prevention of radicalisation.

Though India's soft power strategy is based upon the non-coercive means yet, it does not proscribe cooperation in military and police training. However, what it proscribes is the use of coercive means such as use of force, threat to use force and imposing sanctions. As in the case of India and Afghanistan relations, Heine and Ghosh have noted that 'although she (India) provided some assistance to the Afghan National Army, including donations of military hardware, and some military and intelligence training, India's main focus has been on humanitarian and other kinds of aid' (Heine and Ghosh 2011: 50). Nevertheless, given its geographical proximity and strategic linkages, India could not ignore the security situation in Afghanistan thus 'peace and stability in Afghanistan have remained important foreign policy objectives for India' (D'Souza 2011: 03). Though changing security situation have significance for India, however, it did not have resorted military or coercive means to establish peace and protect national interests. Rather, India has adopted four-fold means based on 'soft power strategies' to achieve its enshrined goals.

9. Economic and Commercial

Consolidation of bilateral relations through economic and commercial means is important part of India's strategy. Since 2001, India has played a significant role in mainstreaming Afghanistan in world politics through reconstruction and development. India's approach to reconstruct and rebuild Afghanistan is based on the assumption that social and economic development is linchpin for stability, peace and security in Afghanistan and the region. India carried out development operations in close cooperation with Afghan government based on local ownership model. Immediately after ouster of Taliban regime, to institutionalise the economic cooperation, India signed a Preferential Trade Agreement with Afghanistan in 2003 and, later on in 2006, hosted the second Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan.

On the other side of spectrum, India is doing everything it can to open up its vast domestic market to Afghan exports to bolster the weak economy (Miglani 2012). Previously, to bring Afghanistan in regional politico-economic structure, India had taken an initiative that resulted in including Afghanistan in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. With aim to turn the war-torn Afghan economy into a preferred investment destination, in 2010, India organised Afghanistan investment summit in New Delhi. India has emerged as the fifth largest donor after the US, United Kingdom, Japan and Germany to Afghanistan as its total commitment reached at approximately \$ 120 million, as figure below shows, in financial year 2013-14.

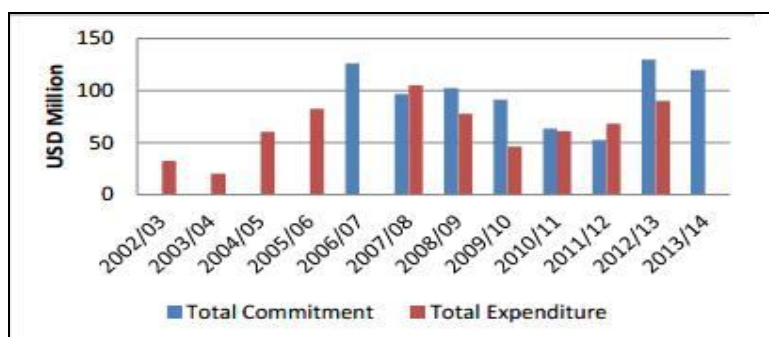


Figure 1: India's Development Cooperation with Afghanistan: Commitments and Expenditures, 2002/03 – 2013/14.

Source: Rani D. Mullen 2013

Allotted money is being spent in Afghan government's priority areas such as agriculture and industry, road construction, hydro-electricity, broadcasting, education and health, power transmission lines, telecommunications and information technology.

Indian government has eased custom duties on goods coming from Afghanistan. Indian foreign minister S. M. Krishna has urged the Indian companies business to install plants in Afghanistan and get benefit of low tariff rates. Consequently, a consortium led by state-firm Steel Authority of India (SAIL) last year won the rights to develop a huge iron ore deposit in Hajigak mines in Bamiyan province and a nearby 6 million ton steel plant at a cost of around US\$11 billion (Bhattacharjya 2012).

10. Infrastructure Development

India has a build a 218 km road linking Zeranj to Delram. Strategically, by providing an alternative route to linking Afghanistan to sea via Iranian Chabahar port, it reduces Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan. It provides a significant breakthrough. India is trying to link Zeranj-Delram road to Chabahar port on the Makran coast near Iran-Pakistan border via rail connections in Iran. Regarding strategic importance of Zeranj-Delram project, Nalini Kant Jha has noted-

The Zeranj-Delram project, for instance, will eventually link Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar and thereby relieve Afghanistan of its complete dependency on Pakistan for the transit of goods. At the same time, this will provide India a route to channel relief and development materials to Afghanistan, currently denied by Pakistan's refusal to connect trade and transit route rights across Pakistan territory (Jha 2009: 343).

It would link India to Afghanistan and central Asia. In addition to the highway, 'the Indian construction team also built 58 kilometres of inner-city roads, 40 kms in Zaranj, 10 kms in Gurguri and 8 kms connecting Gurguri to Razai', government sources cited. A well-developed infrastructure would help in sustaining stability in Afghanistan by attracting foreign investors. To ensure proper functioning of transport system in Afghanistan, India has donated hundreds of city buses for public transport facilities. Besides road transport, India has gifted three air buses to Ariana Afghan Airlines and essential parts as well. To build the capacity Afghan civil aviation agency India has retained a few of its officers and providing training facilities in air traffic control, pilots and airport management.

Power is an integral part of not only industrialisation and economic development but also in day to day lives of common man. India has completed the construction of 220kV DC transmission line linking Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and another 220/110/20 kV sub-station at Chimtala that would bring additional power from the northern grid to Kabul. India had also worked hard to construct Salama Dam Power Project on Hari Rud River in Herat. Besides providing irrigation facility to thousands of hectare land, this dam would also generate 42MW electricity.

11. Social and Cultural

The economic and energy and infrastructure development takes place at official level, whereas, socio-cultural aims to establish people-to-people link. It is based on the assumption that it would be deeper sense of connectivity and would not fade with passes of governments. In this regard, centuries old civilization and cultural ties between two states have played catalyst role. However, now-a-days, the popularity of Indian films, TV serials and songs has strengthened India-Afghanistan ties in post-Taliban era. Indian TV serials such as *Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki* and *Sare-ga-ma-pa* are very popular among masses in Afghanistan. Indian government has taken several steps such as organising film screening, concerts, dramas and exhibitions to promote Indian culture, among others. Historically speaking, a large number of Afghan musician have been trained in *Patiala Gharana* in India. However, currently, approximately 50-60 students in India Culture Centre premises and 35 in Kabul University are learning music without paying any fee.

India-Afghanistan cooperation in education field began in 1985, when India started providing ten scholarships to Afghan nationals pursuing studies in India. with the passes of time and regimes in Kabul, now, is has increased many fold as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is currently providing five hundred scholarships per year for Afghan under-graduate and post-graduate students to study in India.

12. Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance is one of the important tools used by India to win the hearts and minds of Afghan people and achieve its interests. Rather than through government, it affects directly to people. Following the collapse of Taliban regime, India come up with humanitarian assistance worth of 20,000 blankets and another consignment worth of about 25 tons of winter clothing was send to Afghanistan (Bhat 2009: 377). Moreover, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee pledged one million tons of wheat for displaced Afghans and dispatched a team of doctors and technicians. In addition, it provides free medical consultation to more than 30,000 Afghanistan people every month through Indian Medical Missions spread over in five Afghan cities. India is providing assistance to expand health care facilities in Afghanistan and pledged to give equipment worth of Rs. 2 million including setting up of a 300 hundred beds hospital and establishment of an Institute of Child Health in Kabul. Further, it has promised to supply medicine annually worth .2 million Rupees.

India is supporting a school feeding programme, administered by the United Nations' World Food Programme, aiming to provide 100 grams high protein biscuits to approximately two million Afghan children. So far, more than 6.4 million students have benefitted in 33 out of 34 Afghan provinces, except in Kabul. In 2009, India announced to provide 250,000 metric tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan to tackle current food crisis. Moreover, according to sources India has gifted 'vehicles including 400 buses and 200 mini-buses for mass urban transportation, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities, 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army, and 10 ambulances for public hospitals in five cities'.

India's soft power strategy has seeks to work better than hard power strategy of the West. As Saran and Mittra have noted-

Over the last 12 years India has worked exceptionally hard to win over significant pockets of support among the Pashtuns. Unlike the 1990s when India's support base was the ethnic minorities, support for India is now deeper and wider (Saran and Mittra 2013).

13. Conclusion

Overall, relationship between two states is primarily based upon the principle of non-reciprocity. Given the fragile security and weak economic conditions, India is providing aid and has opened up its market for Afghan goods without seeking similar exemption from Afghan side. However, relationship between two states is highly Asymmetric and ambivalent because of absence of industrialisation, Afghanistan is unable to produce such goods that can compete in Indian market, despite several concessions. Therefore, Afghanistan's export to India is limited to primary articles and dry fruits. In addition, India's engagement with Afghanistan has been non-security and aims to get strategic leverage and commercial gains. India aspires to exert influence and sought to have a significant say in emerging regional security and strategic order.

However, amidst the heated debate over the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, India has to decide how it would tackle the issue without compromising national interests. Now, India is left with a few options. First option is to accept the lead role of the US and reduce itself to a supportive. Another option, Satish Chandra suggests, is to send 'robust military' in Afghanistan with support of the Afghan government and other regional powers such as Iran and Russia.

Problem with first option is India's junior role and proposed US withdrawal in 2014. In case of opting second option, low level of peoples support for military presence, as happened in the case of the US and its allies, in Afghanistan. Presence of Indian military on Afghan soil might harm the hard gained Indian credential. Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether India is ready to handle security issue along with commercial, cultural and other aspects or not. More interestingly, if yes, then how. India has to make a balance between its responsibility and national interests because neither it will be willing to sacrifice its national interests nor damaging emerging status of rising power in case of failing to fulfil its responsibilities linked with image. If it chooses not to take responsibilities, possibly, it may jeopardise its image of rising power. At this crucial juncture, India policy makers have to show sophistication and rethink its policy options before taking any step. In this situation, best option for India could be of backing Afghan government's security policies rather than taking lead role like the ISAF and/or USA. To this end, it could opt to increase military assistance and training of Afghan military personal.

In situation of failure of exit strategy, as happened in Vietnam, the US and allies will look for a scapegoat. Meanwhile, question arises: then what strategy should India adopt? India would be left with a few options. It should concern only with strategic and economic issues and not to enter in security-related affairs. Though if necessary, India should limit itself to providing equipment and training to Afghan security forces. Moreover, Given the close ties between Pakistan and the USA and Pakistan's special relations with China, India should work is close cooperation Russia and Iran and form a coalition of like-minded states to preserve peace, stability and democracy on the one hand and prevention of radicalisation, proliferation of drug-trafficking and terrorism on the other. India could not ignore Iran's strategic location that provides land route to Central Asian republics via Afghanistan in case of Pakistan's refusal. Meanwhile, India has to reaffirm and reinforce its earlier policy of non-discrimination between various sections of Taliban. These steps would help India, in Satish Chandra (2011: 125) words, to restore its 'longstanding emotional, cultural and commercial links and relations between the two countries have traditionally been close from time immemorial, barring the period of Taliban rule.'

Unlike the West, India should continue its policy not to differentiate between good and bad Taliban. India supports for a well-functioning democratic government. As per the logic of democratic principle, sooner or later, every section of society including the Taliban will be part of the Afghan government, therefore, today any such artificial distinction may hamper its interests in future, when Taliban will be either in government or play significant role in government. And undoubtedly, it jeopardise India's interests directly and indirectly by supporting Pakistan and other anti-India forces. Therefore, India's policy should have to deal with whichever de facto government is in power at given point of time.

14. References

1. Agarwal, Prashant (2009), "Resurgent Afghanistan: Implications for India", in Mondira Dutta (ed.) *Emerging Afghanistan in the New Millennium*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, pp. 349-357.
2. Aneja, Atul (2011), "India and Afghanistan: The Way Forward", *The Hindu*, January 4.
3. Basu, Partha P. (2007), "India and Post-Taliban Afghanistan: Stakes, Opportunities and Challenges", *India Quarterly*, 63(3): 84-122.
4. BBC (2012), "India's Growing Stake in Afghanistan", 28 June. Accessed from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18622573> on 24th July 2013.
5. Bhat, Anil (2009), "India's Role in Reconstruction Process and Political Transformation in Afghanistan", in Mondira Dutta (ed.) *Emerging Afghanistan in the New Millennium*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, pp. 374-391.
6. Chandra, Satish (2010), "India's Options in Afghanistan", *Strategic Analysis*, 35(1): 125-127.
7. Das, Pushpita (2012), "Drug Trafficking in India: A Case for Border Security", Occasional Paper No. 24, New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.
8. Ganguly, Sumit (2012), "India's Role in Afghanistan", Barcelona: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.
9. Heine Jorge and Partha Ghosh (2011), "The Elephant in the War: India and the Afghan-Pakistan link", *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 17(1): 50-61.
10. Jha, Nalini Kant (2009), "Resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan: Implications for India and Pakistan", in Mondira Dutta (ed.) *Emerging Afghanistan in the New Millennium*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, pp. 337-348.

11. Miglani, Sanjeev (2012), "India Stepping up to the Challenge of Post-2014 Afghanistan", Reuter November 12. Accessed from: <http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2012/11/12/india-stepping-up-to-the-challenge-of-post-2014-afghanistan/> on 17th July 2013.
12. Mukhopadhyaya, Gautam (2010), "India", in Ashley J. Tellis and Aroop Mukharji (eds.) *Is a Regional Strategy Viable in Afghanistan?* Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp. 27-38.
13. Pant, Harsh V. (2012), "Filling the Gaps in Afghanistan", *Business Standard*, June 16. Accessed from: www.business-standard.com/article/printer-friendly-version?article_id=112061600060_1 on 18th July 2013.
14. (2010), "India in Afghanistan: A Test Case for a Rising Power", *Contemporary South Asia*, 18(2): 133-153.
15. Parthasarathy, G. (2013a), "India in the Af-Pak Mess", *Business Line*, July 16th. Accessed from: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/opinion/columns/g-parthasarathy/india-in-the-afpak-mess/article4921272.ece> on 18th July.
16. Risen, James (2010), "US Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan", *New York Times*, 13 June. Accessed from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/14/world/asia/14minerals.html?pagewanted=all&r=0> on 9th July 2013.
17. Saran, Samir and Abhijit Iyer Mitra (2013), "As the US Exits, New Delhi Must Adopt a Gutsy Afghanistan Policy to Safeguard its Interests", *Times of India*, June 27. Accessed from: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-06-27/edit page/40232693_1_afghanistan-india-northern-alliance on 12th July 2013.
18. Sharma, Raghav (2011), "India's Relations with Afghanistan", in David Scott (ed.), *Handbook of India's International Relations*, London: Routledge, pp. 107-117