

**THE IRANIAN FACTOR IN INDIA'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY,
2001-2014**

*Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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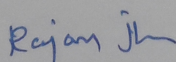
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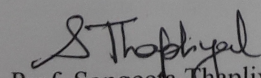
DECLARATION


I declare that the thesis entitled “**The Iranian Factor in India’s Afghanistan Policy, 2001-2014**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

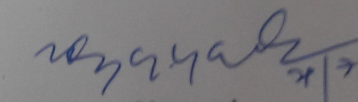

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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is surrounded by Iran on one side and the countries of the erstwhile republics of the Soviet Union on the other. Its foreign policy is as much influenced by the presence of these countries as it is by the presence of Pakistan in its south. This research is based on the assertion that Iran is the central factor in India's Afghanistan Policy. Though, other neighbouring countries too have influenced its foreign policy vis-à-vis India in their peculiar ways Iran is important factor for Afghanistan's India policy. Hence, Iran becomes important to study India-Afghanistan relationship. In the thesis there has been an attempt made to understand the role of all the regional powers, in particular Iran, in shaping India's policy towards Afghanistan.

Iran is the closest among all the neighbouring countries to Afghanistan. Pakistan's long border with Afghanistan does have similar importance for simple reason of historical and cultural links. However, unlike Iran which was for a very long time ruled by same rulers as in Afghanistan and was part of the same Empire, Pakistan was part of India. Iran shares not only a long geographical boundary with Afghanistan at its eastern part, but also shares a long history of political and cultural coexistence and exchange. In fact, for a long period in the medieval era, there was no geographical distinction between both the countries (Rasanayagam 2007). The cultural and ethnic links between both the countries however, have been a bone of contention and an important point shaping their modern political relations. The bordering Hazara community in Afghanistan is Shia by faith. Since majority of Iranians are Shias it has been considered or rather been accused by rest of the ethnic groups in Afghanistan that Hazaras are closely protected by the Iranians sometimes against the largest interests of Afghanistan itself (Mausavi 1998). It should be noted that majority of the population in Afghanistan is Sunni even if there are ethnic differences. This along with the common hatred against minority Shia groups among the Sunnis has led to various instances of clashes between Afghanistan and Iran (Mausavi 1998). This cultural and historical clash has been one of the main reasons of the hostile

relationship between both the neighbours. This enmity became worse during the Taliban regime, which was not only predominantly Pashtun, who are Sunnis but which has a very fanatic interpretation of Islam demonising Shias as heretics¹ (Rashid 2010).

Afghanistan is a landlocked country and therefore depends heavily on Iran and/or Pakistan for its access to sea. It had been the one of the central reasons that despite all their differences, the economic relationship between Iran and Afghanistan has survived (Kidwai 2005). India, given its hostile relationship with Pakistan and traditionally a good relationship with Iran depends on the latter when it comes to access Afghanistan through land. India has been able to maintain its economic and political relationship with Afghanistan largely because Iran has been providing transit route to Afghanistan through its land (Kidwai 2005; Dutta 2011). Iran and India have cooperated on the issue of Afghanistan on more than one occasion. During the civil war between the Taliban and Northern Alliance in the 1990s and early 2000s both countries supported the later. Iran has been one of the vocal supporters of the Indian interests in Afghanistan. Hence, India-Afghanistan relations are routed through Iran.

For India its interests in Afghanistan needs continuous geographical link which it wants to establish and maintain at any cost. In the end, this would serve its strategic and economic interests and investments in the Central Asian region. That is why it is investing substantially in building infrastructure in Iran and Afghanistan. India and Iran have agreed to build a port in Iran (Chabahar) solely to have access to Afghanistan through land route (Gleason *et al* 2009). Afghanistan, after the fall of Taliban, too wants to build strong links with Iran and India. Indian investments in both the countries provide a golden opportunity to its policy makers to build a vibrant long term relationship with both the countries. In fact, Afghanistan wants to attract as many foreign investors as possible. It guarantees stability and prosperity of the country and for that it sees countries such as India and Iran, in particular, important (Abdullah 2002). It is not difficult to see mutual benefits for all three countries in this scheme. There are several positives which can play important role in shaping these relations. Iranians see Hazara community as a potential link between it and

¹ In Islam there are various sects including Shias and Sunnis. The origin of these different sects is based on the question of heredity of the legacy of Prophet. There has been a long and bloody history of clash between these sects in Arabia and other parts of the world. For details see, Zafar Harris (2014).

Afghanistan to create a harmony across the borders. Apart from that the linguistic and cultural links between both the countries are seen as potential bases of cooperation. India too, because of its historical cultural links feels comfortable to base its relations similarly.

There is a regional dimension of India-Iran relations in the context of Afghanistan. The relation between Saudi Arab and Iran has been hostile for various reasons including the race for regional hegemony. Here again Iran becomes the natural partner of India. This is because India has its own reasons to not trust Saudis. Saudi Arab has been one of the central actors in Afghan affairs ever since the Soviet invasion in 1979. It had not only funded the militias fighting against the Soviet but has also supported the establishment of the Taliban regime in mid 1990s. It is also a close ally of Pakistan in the region. This also created distrust among the Afghan policy makers post-Taliban. Saudi's have, however, tries their diplomatic and financial powers to address this distrust. For example, it has tried to mediate the hostilities between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It has always tried to resolve the conflict between them through mediation and financial means (Rashid 2010). It has been one of the most important investors in Afghanistan and therefore a crucial country for Afghan's foreign policy. In the Indian context in the 1990s, Saudi factor was a kind of hindrance for its good relationship with Afghanistan for the simple reason of its closeness with Pakistan. Saudis were also, kind of a rival for the regional influence which India wanted to establish (Rubin 1995). The result was an uneasy relationship.

In fact, the Taliban regime was funded and diplomatically sustained by Saudi Arabia. It was one of the two countries (Pakistan was the other country) in the world which had recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. On the other hand, India was supporting the Northern Alliance and it had very good terms with some of its war lords. Nevertheless, when the Taliban regime was accused of supporting and harbouring Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaida after the September 2001 attacks on the U.S. and it was more than clear that U.S. will have a war with it soon, Saudis shifted their stand and kept quite when the Taliban was replaced with Hamid Karzai government in late 2001 (Rashid 2008). From that time onwards, Saudi Arabia and India are on one side on the question of Afghanistan. This is because both the countries have various common economic and strategic interests in Afghanistan.

However, due to various regional and political reasons Saudi Arabia is less important for India in Afghanistan than Iran. In this thesis all those reasons have been identified.

This thesis is an attempt to understand India's Afghanistan Policy and identify the historic role of Iran in shaping this. The role of Iran has been identified through an examination of its influences in the post-Taliban (2001-2014) phase in order to minimise the vagueness of the instable period of Afghanistan's history in the 1980s and 1990s. This thesis explores the question of strategic significance of Iran in India's Afghanistan Policy along with its political and cultural significance in the region. The thesis also looks into the role of the external players in the trilateral relations between Afghanistan, Iran and India.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to understand the approaches to Indian foreign policy towards Afghanistan and the role of Iran, this review has been divided into three broader themes. Firstly, the India's Afghanistan Policy: theoretical perspectives. Secondly, the strategic constraints posed by neighbours such as Pakistan and thirdly, Iran as a factor in Indo-Afghan Relations.

India's Afghanistan Policy: Theoretical Perspectives

Indian foreign policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan may be studied under Neo-liberal, Nehruvian-Marxist or hyper realist schools. Neo-liberals (Roy 2011; Chandra 2009), argue the case of greater engagements between the two countries as it will be beneficial for both of them and their development. Faith in cooperation and greater engagements in resolving issues of conflict and development is the guiding light behind this set of arguments. It is almost a classic approach now. Nehruvian-Marxist (Muni 2007, Bhadrakumar 2011; Prafulla Bidwai 2005) and others would argue for the cautious approach in the pursuance of relationship and defend the non-interference in each others' domestic matters. This set of scholars is guided by the post-colonial protectionism. The obsession is to maintain the independence of the foreign policy and avoid even the appearance of any asymmetrical attachment with a great global power. The discourse of imperialism and opposition to it provides legitimacy to this approach. The hyper realists, (Raja Mohan 2011; Chellany 2010; and Harsh V Pant 2011) would argue for the aggressive pursuance of the country's interests at any cost.

They are believers in real-politic. The “zero-sum” nature of relations of two or more countries in the international politics is the main highlight of this approach. There is complete denial of any role of morality and normativity in shaping the international politics. Neo-liberals such as (Chandra 2009; Norfolk 2011) would argue in favour of business engagement in order to strengthen the political relationship between countries. They also argue in favour of cooperation in international forums for building close cooperation at bilateral level. It should be noted here that this categorisation is not foolproof and there are scholars here who can qualify to be included in all three categories. This categorisation is just to have a broader discussion on the different theoretical aspects of Afghanistan-India relationship.

There are writings on the role of some regional powers in shaping the Indo- Afghan relationship as well. As Sengupta points out “while India’s “Look North-West” policy has never been as clearly articulated as the “Look East” policy there have been attempts to promote policies in a multi dimensional manner” (2012). This is clear enough example of the absence of any long term planning as far as policies towards its western front is concerned for a very long time. For a very long Indian policy towards its western neighbours lacked any regional approach and was based on the dealing with individual countries.

Identifying the role of other actors in the region in shaping India’s Afghan policy most of the scholars agree with the point that India and Afghanistan cannot avoid Pakistan in their political relations for its geographical contiguity, historical and cultural similarities and political and strategic reasons (Ganguly 2002; Khosla 2003; Pant 2011). Among the global players the role of U.S. is very crucial in deciding the political relationship between both the countries. It is particularly so after 2001 due to increasing interest of the super power in the region (Khosla 2003). Afghan engagement with India after 2001 is also influenced by China and other Central Asian actors (Hiro 2011). Afghanistan-India relationship is also influenced by Iran and other regional players (Ingram 2010). All factors except U.S. can be managed in some way or other by India in its relationship with Afghanistan. The role of U.S. as the central actor when it comes to India’s Afghan policy in direct relationship with Pakistan in the region has been studied in detail (Chellaney 2010). However, there is very less focus on the role of Iran.

Afghanistan-India relationship is an important topic for both Indian and Afghan scholars. Both the countries need each other for their mutual development. Kaushik (2004) argues on liberal lines while discussing the Indian need of engaging with Afghanistan. He states that India had to adopt a cautious approach by building a close understanding with the regional forces and powers whose interest converge with its own. Hence, he is in favour of regional cooperation on the engagement with Afghanistan. On similar lines, Pant (2011) argues that India has a responsibility to build a vibrant democracy in Afghanistan as that will guarantee its own peace and stability. This theme has been seconded by various other scholars as well (Dutta 2008; Muni 2002). However, among scholars there is no unity in identifying the need of other regional players particularly Iran.

India has been proactively involved in the peace building efforts undertaken by the world community in Afghanistan post-Taliban. It has been a member of Bonn convention in 2001 and in all its later editions. The main purpose of this policy is to help build Afghanistan as a stable political regime which will insure the Indian interests in the region (Ganguly 2002). Indian attempts to develop a strong relation with the Afghanistan are also guided by its concerns for internal stability and strategic thinking to control the rise of Pakistan (Yadav and Barwa 2011; Anand 2007). This description however, is based on the realpolitik readings of India's involvements in Afghanistan. Are there any moral reasons or principals behind India's efforts to build democracy and stability in Afghanistan?

India provides a great source of political support to Afghanistan in international forums. It gives both moral and political support against any kind of external threats. India had been very assertive in Afghanistan throughout modern history of the nation. Even during the years of unrest and civil war it has not been absent from the scene as it had engaged the various factions and inculcated a client base in the country (Bhadrakumar 2011). Though India did not oppose Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and was rather committed to Soviet supported Najeeb regime, its emphasis on building peace in the country has been identified and acknowledged by the interests in Afghanistan. India was actively engaged in all the attempts on various forums to stop the civil war in Afghanistan while gradual developing links with the more progressive factions in the war for long term interests.

The works on Indian engagements are very clear about stating its long term goals. For example, Khosla argues that India's role in helping the nascent democratic system in Afghanistan is very crucial but it has a long-term role to play both as a model and as a constructor of the system (2007). However, it should not be confined to providing legitimacy to the present regime but should really be concerned about the real grounding of the democratic ethos in the country (Kona 2007). The Indian intervention in the domestic policy formation in Afghanistan should not be confined as per the definition provided by western powers and it should try to develop its own understanding of various factors involved in the situation (Kona 2007).

The role of India in Afghanistan should be guided by the idea that its success provides a test for its claims to be an emerging power in the world politics and therefore it has to make its presence felt (Basu 2007). Yet another approach to the study of Afghanistan-India relationship is the approach adopted by Yadav and Barwa (2011). They argue that the relationship between these two countries is more strategic in nature than political. What they term as 'relational control' is basically a point of argument that Indian manoeuvres in Afghanistan are attempts to control Pakistan and neutralise the threats from China. The strategic aspect of India-Afghanistan relations is one of the central themes of this thesis.

It can be concluded that India is very clear that it wants to create stability in Afghanistan so that it can secure itself from the bad influences of the instability in its neighbourhood. The division of writings in three broader categories is also more relevant to Indian approach than to understand the Afghan concerns. However, the Afghan perspective is totally invisible. What is the objective of Afghanistan in having greater political ties with India? Is it because it wants to develop its own liberal structure and democracy or is it because it does not feel secure with the presence of Pakistan in its neighbourhood? This thesis provides answers to some these questions and tries to find out the Afghan perspective on its relationship with India.

Strategic Constraints

Afghanistan's existence as a geopolitically important country and as a victim of super power rivalry has been mentioned by several authors (Hiro 2011; Emadi 2010; Rashid 2008). During the colonial period, British policy towards Afghanistan (1793- 1907)

was largely shaped by the considerations of Indian defence from Russians (Bilgrami 1972). British attempts to safeguard the South Asian sub-continent were based on providing it with a geographically viable frontier, surrounding it by a chain of buffer states and controlling the mountain passes that link it with the Asian heartland. The so-called Great Game in and around Afghanistan during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and again during the Cold war was a result of the geopolitical and geo-strategic importance of the country. Both the empires in the case of first Great Game and both the super powers in the case of the Cold war were interested in getting a hold over Afghanistan for strategic reasons (Hiro 2011).

India and the other countries in the region need to learn from British experience (Warikoo 2002). India as a successor state of Britain does not have the same calculations about the strategic importance of Afghanistan though. Nevertheless, it is beyond any doubt that Afghanistan is strategically important for India. Raja Mohan has rightly argued that Indian foreign policy makers have failed to use the legacy of the British in the region and it has been one of the main problems of Indian approach to Afghanistan (2012).

Some of the writers on the subject have recently identified the strategic importance of Afghanistan for India. Afghanistan is not only a bridge between Central Asian states and South Asian states in the present context. It is also the source of various historical travels and invasions to South Asia. Afghanistan is also crucial for its strategic location and rich mineral resources. Along with it, it is holding the key to international drug trade and terrorist groups (D'Souza 2011). For India terrorism and accesses to Afghan natural resources are the most important considerations for its own domestic stability and economic prosperity.

Central Asia is crucial for India not only because of its oil and gas reserves. These reserves India wishes to tap for its energy security anyway. The importance of Central Asia is also because of other major powers such as the U.S., Russia and China. They have already started competing with each other for influence in the region (Pant 2011). If India wants to be a part of this greater game it has to have strong links with Central Asia. To fulfill India's interests in Central Asia physical connectivity remains a major obstacle. India does not have direct borders with any of the Central Asian states. It has to depend on Pakistan, China or Iran for access to Central Asia (Usha

2012). Given the hostile relations with Pakistan any direct access to Central Asia remains an important handicap. Keeping this in mind any policy must include strengthening security cooperation, close consultation on Afghanistan, stepping up multilateral engagement, reviving North-South trade corridor, setting up Central Asia e-network with its hub in India and establishment of a new Central Asian (Ahmad 2012).

Understanding each other's importance in international politics, both the countries have signed a strategic treaty in 2011 (D'Souza 2011). This treaty is very crucial for both the countries especially for Afghanistan as it provides it the opportunity to guard itself from Pakistani maneuvers in the country. It can also pave the way for a greater cooperation between both the countries in international forums. They can come close to U.S. as well through this treaty (Kapila 2011). However, this treaty is meaningless without the factoring in of Iran. It has been realized by Indians lately and therefore there have been attempts to build trilateral cooperation in the region. This thesis explains that awakening and its reasons in detail.

It is also true that Afghanistan needs India for its reconstruction. For example, Afghanistan has become overly dependent on the Indian support after September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S and its aftermath (Dutta 2008). Dutta sees it as an advantage for India as it has provided it "the unique opportunity to 'make hay while the sun shines.'" India has used this opportunity and has made Afghanistan a camp for its further influence in Central Asian States. Dutta suggests that India should act more proactively in its Afghanistan policy as it has never done before. There are several scholars who push for more pro-active role of India in the region and in Afghanistan in particular. However, it is rare to find a scholarship explaining the ways. In this thesis there is an attempt to identify those ways through which India can push harder in the region and become a significant player.

J N Dixit (2000) had previously cautioned the Indian policy makers that the impact of violent uncertainties in Afghanistan could lead to problems. According to him, the presence of fanatic and extremist Islamist militants from Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan and even from some Arab countries were part of the Taliban movement and had found training and sustenance in areas controlled by the Taliban. As has been seen in the past, these militants have been indulged in

violent acts not only in Afghanistan but also in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and even in India in the Jammu and Kashmir region. Afghanistan had been a base for the international terrorism under the overall leadership of Osama bin Laden. His activities, well documented by intelligence agencies of several countries, have proven the point raised by Dixit. This also highlights the need of a very strong groundwork before India gets involved in the country. It also points out the requirement of a local partner, which will help India in readings the situations fast as they change. Can Iran be one of such partners? Very rarely this issue has been discussed in the literature reviewed. This thesis would try to answer such questions.

The various arguments put forward by various scholars have pointed out the strategic importance of Afghanistan for India. Dixit identified the fact that the U.S. had twin objectives, namely to effectively counter terrorism directed at the U.S. from Afghanistan, and in long term, to have a positive equation with whichever government is in control in Afghanistan, to enable the U.S. to utilise the oil and natural gas resources of the region stretching from Turkmenistan to Uzbekistan through Afghanistan. According to him, the Central Asian Republics on the one hand and India on the other do also have the same strategic objectives in the country. They, he suggests, should be concerned about the situation in Afghanistan and try strategically to interfere there strategically along with through political and diplomatic processes. The growing strategic importance of Afghanistan, in the wake of U.S. invasion of the country, has increased. It has not only increased for countries like U.S. and China but also for emerging regional players such as India. Rashid (2008) and Hiro (2011) have also identified the same.

According to Rashid, Afghanistan has been the centre of competing outside interests since its formation in the last century. Drawing similarities and analogy with the Great Game in the last century between Britain and Russia in the region, Rashid terms the phrase “New Great Game”. He argues that the various powerful countries including India have been involved in the game of gaining greater influence in the countries’ affairs in its latest edition after 2001 American invasion. It is well known that how the earlier version of Great Game in the early twentieth century was a strategic phase in world’s history. In that version of the Great Game Russian and British forces vied for power in South and Central and the West Asia. According to Rashid, this experience

in the past has made Afghanistan competent in manipulating the powers around it and hence it tries to benefit from this game. The competition among the powers in which they seek leverage to shape its policies helps Afghanistan to bargain and win purses from rival powers.

Post-Taliban regime in Afghanistan has opened new opportunities for India to restore its presence and credibility in that traditionally friendly country (Muni 2009). Muni argues that Indian diplomacy has done well to join the international coalition against global terrorism that fought the Taliban regime and their *Al Qaeda* mentors in Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. He is of the view that while India seems to play a constructive role in Afghanistan, it will have to pursue its interest and initiatives cautiously. India's policies towards Afghanistan have been greatly influenced by its concerns on Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir. India has tried to balance the threat from Pakistan in its internal affairs through its strong ties in Afghanistan (Yadav and Barwa, 2011).

Though it is a well accepted argument that a politically stable and peaceful Afghanistan should be the first priority to Pakistan's own core interests of security, growth and prosperity in the long term (Khan 2012), myopic vision of its policy makers has kept the negative role in plays in Afghanistan. Pakistan has constantly fuel the ethnic tensions in the country and hence has been one of the main reasons of its instability. The lack of cohesion in the regime led by Hamid Karzai and ethnic tensions in the country may harm its reconstruction (Hiro 2011). It can also indirectly impinge on India's policy since it is seen as being more closely identified to the Northern Alliance comprised mostly the ethnic Uzbek and Tazik leaders (Thottam 2011). Muni argues that India should make best use of its cultural diplomacy and fund the goodwill existing at the grass root level in the Afghan Society. It will have to conduct its economic and commercial diplomacy prudently so as to restore and consolidate its image in Afghanistan as a benign external influence and friendly and dependable neighbour. India should keep a close rapport with other like-minded countries, including the U.S., Russia, France, Germany, Japan, China, and Iran. These countries have great interest and stakes in the security and stability of Afghanistan in order to avoid the unnecessary confrontation in the region (Warikoo 2002).

Iran as a factor in Indo-Afghan Relations

Given the massive poverty among the population and prevalent instability in the country, it has been argued by various people that Afghanistan is not that attractive for the big economies in the conventional sense or in terms of the market logic (Marsden 2003). However, after the invasion in 2001 there are various new avenues created for the big players in the economic field to be interested in the country. Besides exploration of various reserves of natural resources the country also provides a big market for construction of infrastructure projects, weapons and drugs production and sale (Marsden 2003). These unconventional prospects attract a large number of players in Afghanistan making the competition tough for India.

However, the reconstruction of the destroyed economy of Afghanistan provides a great opportunity to Indian companies to invest in the country and build a viable economic relationship (Roy and Mishra 2011). The energy needs of the growing Indian economy is an incentive for a policy to engage with Iran and Central Asian Republics as it will serve India's strategic interests better (Laishram 2011). India should be more assertive to fulfil its energy needs through the country. Afghanistan can be a bridge between energy rich Central Asian republic and their markets in India. The problem of the transit route through Pakistan can be settled through the use of diplomatic and economic pressures (Chellaney 2010).

Since Afghanistan is a link to Central Asian Republics it is important for India's economic interests in more than one way. It can be a supply line, a transitional market and a hub of Indian goods being transported to the Central Asia. Accordingly, formulating appropriate policies that can counterbalance impending regime change within the strategic zone will serve India's policy and Afghanistan can provide an important destination for both the future source of the energy and a transit route (Dutta 2008).

The growing trade and other economic relations between India and Afghanistan have created a favourable situation for the Indian capitalists in the country. The growth in Indian economic activities in the region will help Afghanistan to rebuild the nation (A Chandra 2007). The reconstruction programs undertaken by the Indian firms in the country provide cheap and better services to Afghan clients and create a positive

image of India among them. TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) project is a great example of the growing Indo-Afghan economic relations (Joshi 2010). Joshi identifies the importance of Afghanistan in the Indian attempts to get energy security through overseas projects in Central Asia. The geographical location of Afghanistan can be a blessing for the country in the coming days as countries like India cannot source the resources in Central Asia without its help (Joshi 2010). It can be economically paying for the country. This issue has been identified by the Afghan policy makers as well (Rahmani 2009). This can prompt them to look for multinational engagements in the country creating trouble for India. India need to move peremptorily to forge alliances in Afghanistan and Iran looks friendly enough to have that understanding.

India has invested heavily in the sectors like infrastructure (road, electricity etc) after 2001 invasion. These Indian investments are both politically and economically important for Afghanistan (Dutta 2008). It would create a situation of self reliance for it during the crucial phase of nation-building. These investments would reduce the dependency of Afghanistan on other countries in the region such as Pakistan (D'Souza 2007). D'Souza further argues that though there are certain challenges in the efficient execution of all these aid programs of India still it cannot be ruled out that if implemented properly it would create a very strong goodwill for India in Afghanistan. Indian aid to Afghanistan has a great humanitarian aspect as well. This humanitarian support provided by India in the sectors of hospital and education among several others, would be beneficial for Indian investors in the long run (Bhatt 2009).

Studies of Afghan-India economic relationship suffer from the same problems as the study of their political relations. There are a few representations of the Afghan economic interests in India. The fact that Afghanistan needs heavy investment in the fields of infrastructure and industrialization has been identified by all the scholars. However, no one seems to argue about Afghanistan's plan to create more and more space for foreign investors in order to generate economic integration of the country and its impacts on India. It is an important question to look in to that whether India is capable and willing to indulge in a multiparty competition in Afghanistan. It is also to

be seen whether if willing can India face the situations alone or it needs an ally. This thesis has been an attempt to answer all such questions.

Available literature on India-Afghanistan relation shows that there are several researches from the Indian perspective. Various theoretical vantage points such as Nehruvians, neoliberals, and hyperrealists' have been instrumental and dominating enough to put the Indian strategies in the region on the table for all to see and understand (Bajpai 2010). However, there is a dearth of literature pertaining from the Afghan side. The lack of literature from the Afghanistan's perspective acts as a major challenge for the researchers working on the region. In most of the cases, one is lost to grapes the other side of two-sided relations. This thesis is a humble attempt to put the Afghan, that other side of the two sided relations, perspective on the table apart from familiarising a third parties' which is Iran, role in this bilateral relation.

DEFINITION, RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

One cannot study India- Afghanistan relations in isolation. Often bilateral relations have been determined by several factors predominantly among them being the role of other countries. For example, one cannot study and understand U.S.-Iran relations without factoring in Israel and Saudi Arabia. In the light of this, India's Afghanistan Policy has been analysed in the context of Iranian factor. The popular misconception that India- Afghanistan relations is simply a bilateral engagement just like any other bilateral relations is not fully correct. As far as one knows it is dependent on many extraneous factors such as India's relationship with its neighbour Pakistan. Its search for a land route to Central Asia and its concerns about Pakistan's influences in Afghanistan which can go against Indian interest are two major concerns which makes the role of Iran in India's Afghan Policy a central one. With all its complexities for example, Iran's relations with the U.S., it is difficult to make a simple statement about Iranian factor in India-Afghanistan relations. Rationale behind factoring in Iran in this study and not any other country is that it is an important Muslim country and an important neighbour of Afghanistan with lots of mutual interest with India.

India's relation with Afghanistan is an important indicator for India's strategic community. The success of it is the success of their country's aspiration as a regional and emerging global power. From this perspective the study has attempted to

understand the obstacles involved in achieving the desired goal. Therefore, this study is of immense national significance. Consideration of the period between 2001- 2014 is long enough to examine the India's policy towards Afghanistan considering the Iran factor. Year 2001 is important from a strategic point of view especially because U.S. invaded Afghanistan in the year and pushed the Taliban out of the power. It also established a more open and popular government in power. In the post 2001 period till 2014, in these 13 years when the NATO forces remained predominant in the country, the menace of Taliban still persisted but it became gradually obvious that peace and stability in Afghanistan is possible. Year 2014 is important for the region because of U.S. and NATO forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan making it largely self reliant and free in terms of security. The withdrawal of the NATO forces has the impact on Afghanistan's neighbour particularly Iran. Iran becomes crucial now for the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan for more than one reason. This thesis attempts to suggest some policy recommendations to Indians about the need of an alliance with Iran in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a country of chronic instability. It has very rarely seen a relatively long term of peace and political stability and hence there is large gap in the understanding of its foreign policy. In the aftermath of the formation of modern state in the country, its rulers either used to see other countries as prey to their greed of geographical expansion or have remained in isolation. Since the country has also been a victim of super power rivalry and competition in both nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was never free to pursue an independent foreign policy. It was only after the fall of the Russian and British empires in the first half of the twentieth century that Afghanistan got a short period of independence. However, it was for a very short period. The existence of Afghanistan-India relationship in political and economic spheres in its official capacity was only for these few years between 1947 and 1978. Once there was Soviet invasion and advent of civil war the independence of Afghan foreign policy was lost. It was only in the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban in 2001 that it got a new lease of independence.

Afghanistan-India relation is a crucial subject of study for the students of foreign policy and international relations. It is an important area not only because of its potential to benefit both the countries involved but also for the understanding of the

general rules of engagements between two developing countries at the different levels of development. The bilateral relationship is a study of two actors influenced by various independent and dependent variables such as geopolitics, national interests and power rivalry.

The present thesis attempts to understand how India chooses to deal with Afghanistan in political, economic and strategic spheres during 2001-2014. As stated above the year 2001 marked the end of a long absence of a world recognised government in Afghanistan. It also marked the beginning of a relatively stable system in the country. The year 2014 is important because it marks the end of an era of a decade and half of the establishment of Karzai government and India's relationship with it apart of being the year of the withdrawal of the NATO forces. This study delineates how Iranian factor has played a significant role in India's Afghanistan policy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The thesis has tried to answer following questions while studying India's Afghan policy.

1. What is the India's Afghanistan Policy?
2. What is the historic role of Iran in shaping India's Afghanistan Policy?
3. How Iran influenced India's Afghanistan Policy between 2001 and 2014?
4. What is the strategic significance of Iran in India's Afghanistan Policy?
5. What is the political and cultural significance of Iran in India's Afghanistan Policy?
6. How external actors influence India's Afghanistan Policy and Iran's role in it?

HYPOTHESES

The thesis has examined the point that:

- Revival of historical ties and ethnic bonding has enhanced bilateral cooperation between India and Iran, and,
- Indian investment in Iran's Chabahar port has the potential to overcome India's lack of physical access to Afghanistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The preparation of the thesis has been based on analytical review of literature and empirical assessment of data collected from primary and secondary sources of information. Primary sources are identified as local newspapers of Iran and Afghanistan which is available on BBC monitoring online and Google News Achieve. Apart from the available secondary sources of information like books, periodicals, journals, news clippings and so on, additionally sources such as various government documents have been used in this research work. Special emphasis had been given to gather Afghanistan government documents, pacts or agreements that have been signed with India and SAARC. Simple statistical analysis such as tabulation and graphical representation of data has been utilized for studying the direction and patterns of bilateral trade and future investment as well as the cost benefit assessment has been undertaken wherever was necessary.

SCHEME OF CHAPTERS

This thesis has six chapters including introduction and conclusion. **Chapter 1: Introduction**, deals with a brief introduction touching upon the background, rationale, literature review and the research methodology of the study. It includes the definition and scope of the study, frames the hypothesis. The objective of this chapter is to provide a clear and simple introduction of the thesis. The chapter establishes the need of going deep and further from the conventional patterns of the study of bilateral relationship.

Chapter 2 is titled as **Evolution of India's Afghanistan Policy**. This chapter narrates the evolution of India's Afghanistan policy. The chapter provides basic information such as the first attempts to establish relations between India and Afghanistan and its gradual progress between pre-colonial times and the time of the rule of Taliban. This chapter also identifies basic interest areas in Afghanistan in which India needs to invest both politically and economically. It identifies the weak points too. This chapter provides the necessary background to understand India's stances vis-à-vis Afghanistan today.

Chapter 3 is titled as Iran: **Iran-Afghanistan Relations**. This chapter provides information regarding the relationship between Iran and Afghanistan. The rationale

behind this chapter is to know the cultural, historical, political and economic links between Iran and Afghanistan so that Iranian strategic calculations in Afghanistan become clear. The clarity of Iranian motives helps in factoring Iran in India's Afghan policy. Hence, this chapter describes historical and cultural links between Iran and Afghanistan and points out the points of comfort and discomfort between both the countries. Third chapter examines the impact of different ethno-political interfaces such as Hazaras, Uzbeks etc on the Iranian policy towards Afghanistan and its impact on Indo-Afghan relations. This chapter further examines the various areas where these two neighbours have developed strong ties and how it converged with Indian interests in Afghanistan in the period 2001- 2014.

Chapter 4 is India- Iran Relations, which is both a general history of the relationships between both the country and descriptions of their common interests in the Central Asian region and in Afghanistan. In this chapter the evolution of India-Iran relations through the ages of Safavids, Mughals and British period has been narrated. The troubles during the Shah regime and in the post Cold War period have also been identified just to establish the instability of the relationship and its persistence. This chapter also examines the India- Iran Relations in post Taliban period as well. This chapter establishes the historical facts of mutual cooperation in the region. The mutual hostilities in the past towards Pakistan and the U.S. brought them together. However, in the 2005 onwards the relation between Iran and India has suffered due to Indian attempts to go close to the U.S. This chapter provides details of their mutual endeavours in Afghanistan during the 2001 war against the Taliban and hints the prospects of their cooperation in the country.

Chapter 5 is tilted as Iran Factor. This chapter deals with emerging multilateralism in India's Foreign Policy. This chapter examines how multilateralism shapes India's Afghanistan policy and also examines the role played by the international actors in given time in influencing India's Afghanistan Policy. Among all the international and extraneous factors, the role of Iran remains outstanding as far as India's Afghan policy is concerned. This chapter explores how India and Iran can come together and help each other is catering to their individual interests in Afghanistan. This however is not possible with the involvement of Afghanistan and so the chapter identifies the

multilateral nature of India's Afghan policy where all three actors benefit from cooperation in various fields.

Chapter 6 is Conclusion which is a summary of the findings and examination of the hypothesis listed above.

CHAPTER 2: EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY

²India's Afghanistan policy can be traced back to British rule in India. Determinant of British India's Afghanistan policy was its imperialist project in the region. With the independence in 1947, India's Afghanistan policy was guided by philosophy of its National Movement. Another factor which shaped India's policy was historical developments in Afghanistan and world politics in general. To quote a noted expert on Afghanistan, Asghar Bilgrami

“The relations of Afghanistan with India are, however, as old as history itself. The valleys and mountains passes of Afghanistan acted as channels for currents and cross-currents of history that had continually flowed from Central Asia into India, changing the colour and character of the Indian people and moulding the course of their destiny. This process continued till the establishment of British hegemony in India. And it was under the British that Afghanistan came to occupy a commanding position in the political and military considerations of their Indian empire” (Bilgrami Asghar H 1972).

Due to geostrategic location, Afghanistan made first major attempts of its contacts with British India in 19th century to cope with the British policy and the “Great Game” Dilip Hiro has explained in the following words:

“Another major strategic reason for the Tsar's southward drive was to stop the advance of the British Empire in India. Over the past century, it had progressed from Bengal in the east toward Afghanistan. The Tsars were keen to prevent Afghanistan from turning into a British colony or protectorate. The resulting competition between Saint Petersburg (as the city was known from 1703 to 1914) and London for influence in Central Asia intensified to the extent “The Great Game” was coined by British writer Rudyard Kipling the term to describe it.” (Hiro 2010: 25).

The British inroads into Afghanistan had the motive to advance its control over the South and West Asian regions and to keep them away from the increasing influence of the Russian Empire. The imminent objective of the policy adopted by the British India towards Afghanistan therefore was to stifle the Russian from its attempt to have the presence in these regions. The ‘Great Game’ between these two empires as unfolded in Afghanistan was indeed the manifestation of the geo-strategic location of

² This chapter is a revised and extended version of my MPhil dissertation “Afghanistan- India Relations, 2001- 2011, submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2012.

the latter. Hence, battle over the occupation of Afghanistan marked these motivations of the rivalries. The British had the advantage of having India in control as their colony. The collaborators like Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Punjab helped the British create enough troubles to the Afghan rulers. They declared that the Afghans must either snap their ties with Russia and its ally, Persia or face the consequences of wars with British India. As a result, the world history witnessed three successive wars known as Anglo-Afghan wars in the pursuit of the British to control the hostile region. The first war (1839- 1842) was a setback to the British as they had to suffer massive defeat. Dost Mohammed, the ruler of the time, who was captured for the short time by the forces of Britain was released and restored to the power. The defeat in this war, however, did not diminish the British desire to have decisive control over the region and therefore, in 1878, it started its mission to control Afghanistan again (Bilgrami Asghar H 1972).

At the time of second Anglo-Afghan war, Sher Ali Khan, the son of Dost Mohammed Khan, was the ruler. Unlike his father, he couldn't withstand the advance of British forces and thus lost the war. Consequently, it gave permanent British influence in the economy and politics of Afghanistan. The treaty, in the aftermath of the war, known as Gandamak treaty, negotiated between King Mohammed Yaqub Khan and the British, signed on 26th May 1879, gave the frontier areas of Afghanistan to the latter. It also had provisions for British presence in Kabul and other important cities. This treaty gave Britain upper hand in their battles against Russia. The frontier areas, once brought under occupation, with the Afghans having no option but to accept the British presence, made the latter assured about their supremacy. However, internal revolts against the foreign control and the provisions of the Gandamak treaty forced Britain to relent most of these gains gradually (Runion Meredith L 2007), it left border areas relatively safe for Britain and consolidated its control over Indian territories.

The years following the treaty saw some significant world events with the beginning of the the First World War. Britain was more involved in internal politics facing the challenges created by the rise of nationalism in India. The October Revolution in 1917 brought in Russia at the forefront of the world politics. This communist revolution shook up the understanding arrived at by the treaty in 1895, between Russian Empire and British India regarding Afghanistan. This treaty had recognised Afghanistan as a

buffer state. The changed scenario led to the rethinking among the British India officers about the status of Afghanistan. Simultaneously, the Afghan rulers prepared themselves to regain the control over most of the border areas. Hence, it created yet another challenge to the British interest in the region. The British sought to tackle it once they were free from the First World War. It therefore culminated in the outburst of the third Anglo-Afghan war in 1919. Under the new king, Amanullah, Afghanistan attacked the British frontiers and demanded the complete independence of his country from the clauses of the Gandamak treaty forced on the Afghans in 1879.

The peace negotiated to end the war created an independent Afghanistan under the leadership of King Amanullah and established Durand line as international border between Afghanistan and British India. This treaty was the beginning of diplomatic relationship between the two countries which was carried forward by the successor, Indian state after 1947. It can therefore be said that British ambitions in Afghanistan resurfaced after the 1917 revolution in Russia which led to the third Anglo-Afghan war (1919) and finally ended with the formal recognition of Afghanistan as an independent nation on 8 August 1919 in the Rawalpindi Treaty (Runion Meredith L 2007). This treaty demarcated the border between the two countries. It, however, remained inconclusive and the negotiations went on for successive years.

Meanwhile, the politics had started assuming different dimensions due to rapid transformation taking place in Europe. The rise of communism as well as fascism in the mainland European countries made British administration in India sceptical about the future of its control. The new ideologies had their proponents in Afghanistan too. Iran too was not aloof from these political changes as these ideologies found resonance in that country too. The British therefore tried to control over the region in order to block the channels spreading the influence of these ideologies and thus Afghanistan again turned into a strategic location. A treaty was signed in 1921 between Afghan king Amanullah and Soviet Russia. This was an attempt to generate pressure on the British so that Afghanistan could get a better deal. In the same year, it concluded one more treaty with Italy. These treaties were aimed at both increasing the say of Afghanistan internationally and fostering the reforms under the leadership of Amanullah domestically. In 1931, another treaty was signed between Soviet Union and Afghanistan. It, however, didn't impact the British India adversely in the

subsequent years. Later, Afghanistan was able to have a manageable relationship with both the countries as they were allies in the Second World War.

India-Afghanistan: Early Negotiations on Border and Other Significant Issues

Indo-Afghan diplomatic relations has a long history which starts around as early as 1840s. The British adopted violent measures to curb the activities of the northern tribes particularly the Pashtuns around 1860s. These sorts of measures had been initially proposed by Lord Lytton and modified later by Lord Curzon. Consequently, the major initiative which came in the form of a diplomatic endeavour to resolve issues like border and the role Russia was the conference held in Simla in 1873. This was an initiative which wanted to defuse the tensions following the first Anglo-Afghan war. Both the parties agreed upon various grounds in order to avoid any war in the future. Nevertheless, due to lack of trust and reliable sources of communication this diplomatic initiative did not create any long term basis for good relations. After the second Anglo-Afghan war, they tried to resolve their issues of serious concern through negotiation. In 1879, the treaty established first diplomatic channels between the two countries. British India had representatives received at Kabul and in return Kabul had wider access to Indian territories (Bilgrami Ashghar H 1972). Another opportunity for a peaceful resolution of disputes between two countries arrived in 1920 at Mussoorie Conference. The issues raised for the conference were Afghanistan's demand for independence. Afghanistan also put forward the demand of the recognition of the role of the country in the First World War and to get the say in the then ongoing Khilafat movement. Moreover, After the 1917 Russian revolution, a new regime had come to power there. This regime was ideologically opposed to Russian Empire and it was suspected by the British that Afghan government might be helping the Bolsheviks against the British Empire. Thus, this Mussoorie conference deliberated on these issues. However, it was not a complete success since British Government in India saw these demands as too ambitious and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the conference created a long history of discussion and negotiated settlements in future (Sareen Anuradha 1981). Apart from these diplomatic engagements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Afghanistan shared a warm relationship with common Indian masses fighting for the independence of their country from the British rule.

Indian National Movement and Afghanistan

Afghanistan set out to become a modern state as king Amanullah, with his moderate view and a proponent of the anti-colonial policy, spearheaded the reforms. This also forged an outlook helpful for people fighting for India's independence from British occupation. The people of both of the countries showed up mutual support at numerous instances against their common enemy, that is, the British colonialism. Afghan government was sympathetic to the cause of Indian. During the First World War, it allowed the Provisional Government of India in exile to be formed and stabilised in Kabul. This government was supportive to the Afghanistan to have its control over the frontiers in the Third Anglo-Afghan war (Jafri 1976: 38-39).

Indian freedom fighters too were sympathetic to the Afghan claims for independence and when the Third Anglo-Afghan war broke out, Indian National Congress leadership actively opposed it. According to Jafari, in 1921,

“All India Congress Committee, for the first time in its history, adopted a resolution of foreign policy referring to the dominance of the British interest in the region and dissociating itself from the British policies. The resolution passed, thus, informed the “neighbouring and other non-Indian states” that the present government of India in no way represented the Indian opinion and that their policy had been traditionally guided by considerations more of holding India subjection than of protecting her borders; that India as a self governing country could have nothing to fear from the neighbouring states; and that the people of India regarded most treaties interred into by neighbouring states with the Imperial government as mainly designed by the latter to perpetuate the exploitation of India” (1976: 36).

In the document of the Indian National Congress, it is explicitly stated that the congress believed that the British government did not represent the will of the people of India. The wars carried out or the treaties concluded on behalf of the government of the time in the name of the Indians had been opposed by the congress and were regarded to have been exploitative of the people of India. This document also served later to be one of the guiding ones for the independent Indian state in its relations with the neighbours.

The border between British India and Afghanistan, namely, the Durand line was porous. Hence, a large number of the leaders from Indian side used to take shelter inside Afghanistan. One of the most significant examples of it was the fleeing of the radical leaders who formed Communist Party later in Afghanistan. In the early 1940s,

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose too took the route via Afghanistan to escape from British India. The defiance of the Afghan administration in following the strict order from the British administration gave various national leaders and groups the confidence to rely on the country. Such much-needed help at the time of India's freedom movement became a building block for India's Afghan policy in later days.

Jawaharlal Nehru in 1930 "when visualising his plan for an Asian Federation, included Afghanistan in it and always viewed with favour and sympathy the problems of India's next door neighbour" (Jaffri 1976: 38). The massive support in Afghanistan for the independence movement for India is evident from the fact that popular leaders like Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan was known as frontier Gandhi. He hailed from Pashtun and had tremendous followers both in Afghan areas and North West Frontier Province. He led the *Khudai Khidmatgaar* movement which was vocal against the British policies towards Afghanistan and helped create a friendly link between Indian national movement and common Afghans (Jafri 1976). It has been argued by several historians that even during the Khilafat Movement in the early 1920s Afghanistan played an important link between Indian and Turkish movements. The point here is that Afghanistan was a geographical link between India and rest of Asia during India's movement for independence. This was one of the reasons that, in 1919, when Khilafat movement was on its peak in India, leaders like Maulana Mohammed Ali "made a strong plea for the migration of Muslims to Afghanistan, because in India, he feared, the conditions were not conducive for the proper flourishing of their religion" (Jafri 1976: 17).

The foreign policy of independent India was later informed with friendly relations vis-a-Afghanistan. It also provided a linkage to the Soviet Russia and subsequently to Central Asia. This role of Afghanistan is still quite relevant from Indian point of view. Until now, it provides moral base to India's Afghanistan policy.

Nadir Shah and Zahir Shah

In 1923, Afghanistan formulated its constitution which was not well received by scores of leaders and the common people because of purportedly being imbued with modernist and western outlook. In spite of Soviet support, in 1929, the King finally succumbed to the coup led by Nadir Shah. He was not a modernist and thus he

reversed all the reforms undertaken by king Amanullah. He was, however, assassinated in 1933. Zahir Shah took over and ruled the country till the next coup in 1973 which toppled him and brought in at the fore Daud who proclaimed Afghanistan as a republic and became the first president of the country.

Afghanistan, in post-war period, again became the hotspot as the erstwhile allies in the war turned into ideological rivals, which were called as Cold war. It started after the Second World War and went on until the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991. During the Cold War, both of the rivals, Soviet Russia and USA, wanted to make Afghanistan their strong base in the region. Despite the fact that the then secretary of state of US, John Foster Dulles, refused the Afghan Prime Minister Daud's request of military assistance in 1954, the location of Afghanistan on the southern border of Soviet Union and as a northern neighbour of Pakistan, which was an USA ally, reinvented its old role as a buffer state between two super powers. Afghan diplomats knew their important role in the region and hence went to Soviet Union for military aid once refused by the USA which was soon granted. In fact, in 1955, Khrushchev visited the country founding a long term relationship between the Soviet Union and the youth of Afghanistan (Jafri 1976).

Afghanistan Policy: Initial Years

Diplomatic Ties

The huge political upheaval in Indian was likely to happen in the aftermath of the war. The partition of the country had been looming large; for it had become almost an avoidable fate with the leaders to already make their mind. Soon, as it turned out to be, the bordering areas of Afghanistan would become a new nation called Pakistan. Nevertheless, "King Zahir Shah in an address to the National Assembly expressed the hope that political changes in India will hardly affect the bonds of friendship between the two countries." In India, too, the interim Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru "mentioned Afghanistan in his future plans of India's relationship with foreign powers". First international platform was shared by both the countries in April 1947 both sides highlighted the mutual friendly relations and resolved to strengthen them still further" (Jafri Hasan Ali Shah 1976: 22).

Following historically shared political ties, India set up its formal diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, on 4 January 1950, by signing the first 'Friendship Treaty.' This treaty sought to bolster the mutual areas of cooperation between the two countries. It also recognised the historical linkages between the two countries and pointed out the need to create greater and deeper linkages in future (Jafri 1976: 63-64). The role of Afghanistan, from Indian point of view, was regarded as one of the champions of peace and decolonization. The Afghan officials also expressed the similar view about the future role of India in the world politics in 1953. According to the ambassador Sardar Najibullah, foreign policy of Afghanistan is guided by the "desire for peace, support to the right to self determination, opposition to colonialism and military pacts and non-alignment" (Jafri 1976: 44). In the context of Afghanistan's relationship with India, he said that, "our relations are based on the community of views which exist in the principles of foreign policy of both the countries. This fact and the historical and traditional relationship are the real reason for our sincere relations" (as quoted in Jafri 1976: 44). Hence, Afghanistan was one of the first few countries with which India established friendly relations immediately after independence on the basis of the principles of mutual coexistence and non-interference which later became the principles of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Cold War and Afghanistan

During the Cold war, Afghanistan became a strong ally of Soviet Union. The communist movement also became stronger in the country which started challenging the established system. The ideals as enmeshed in communist politics started making ground in the public. To counter such politics, the Afghan administration tried to build a domestic opposition to it. However, Soviet Union actively supported the attempt of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) which had two factions, namely, the khalq and the Parcham. In order to build the confidence of these movements, it rendered them both financial as well as ideological back-up and ensured that, in case of any crisis, it would come to their rescue. As a result, very soon, after the opposition to the constitution of 1976, the first left-leaning government was established following the coup in 1978. This government headed by PDAP made Afghanistan a close ally to Soviet Union. Hence, this was a clear message of

Afghanistan to the world, amidst the Cold war, of its ideological position which indeed was against the interest of the western Block (Arnold Anthony 1981).

Sour Revolution

After its independence from the clutches of the British, Afghanistan first became a kingdom under the rule of the Amanullah Khan (1919-1929). Subsequently, he was replaced by the duo of the father and the son, Nadir Shah (1929-1933) and Zahir Shah respectively. These kings were supposed to be modernists and therefore were expected to establish a political and economic system could ensure the well-being of the people. On the contrary, these kings failed to obtain these objectives and went against the global trends of the demands for democracy and sharing of the power with the rising classes. Riding on the popular mood in 1973, the then Prime Minister of King Zahir Shah, Daoud Khan staged a coup with the help of military. It is believed that Khan represented the resentment of the people against the kings' close relations with the Soviet Union. Several political formations, fighting for the democratization of Afghanistan such as *Parcham Party*, supported the coup. The new regime declared the abolishment of kingdom and constitution of 1964. It founded a new republic. Daoud Khan became the first President of Afghanistan (Saikal Amin 2004).

The constitution, which was prepared in 1964 by the experts who had been appointed by the king Nadir Shah, had the provisions for the rights and the elected parliament comprising two chambers (*Wolesi Jirga* or elected/lower council and *Loya Jirga* or upper council). It envisaged Afghan political system as a constitutional monarchy. These provisions were purportedly to be implemented gradually. In 1965, Afghanistan saw its first parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, this experiment was widely considered to be a failure. The communist and the socialist ideas influenced the new regime under the leadership of Daoud Khan. Daoud himself was not a communist. Yet, the main domestic and external support to his regime came from *Parcham Party* and Soviet Union respectively. Daoud was too ambitious to be under the dominance of any other group. He therefore wanted to terminate the say of the *Parcham party*. With such ambition, he tried to improve the relations with the countries opposed to Soviet Union such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and United States. Consequently, in 1977, he unleashed the brutalities against the communists with the disguise of a new constitution. The radicals among the left revolted against his violent measures. This

led to the removal of Daoud Khan. And, in April 1978, they succeeded in forming the government under the banner of People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA (Saikal Amin 2004). This take over is also known as Saur Revolution in the Afghan history. The foreign policy of the short-lived Daoud regime was oriented towards diversifying the diplomatic channels of the country (Runion Meredith L 2007: 102).

Rise of Communism

The coming of the PDPA (an umbrella group of Parcham and Khalq factions) in power had been preceded by the significant rise of the Parcham Party in the Afghan politics. A large number of young Afghanis had long since been enthused by the Bolshevik revolution in northern neighbouring country, the Soviet Union. By the time of Daoud's coup, these youth were politically charged and vocal. They protested against the superficiality of the constitutional reforms being introduced by the king. The popularity of the socialist ideals and the rise of the communist formations were the main social and political events of the 1970s Afghan history. This eventually prepared ground for the PDPA's rise to power and later on followed by the Soviet invasion of the country. This phase of Afghanistan's history was eras of both makes and break with its ties with India. The country was a democratic republic with the reign of the PDPA. Muhammad Taraki became the president of this new democratic republic. This regime attempted to change the social, economic and political atmosphere in the country with Socialist colour. Such efforts were not liked by a large number of traditional groups and were conceived as an attack on Islam and local culture. This prompted the resentment against the left-leaning regime in the country. This resentment had been fuelled by the anti-left regimes in the world, particularly the USA. As a result, Afghanistan began to witness the emergence of a new phase of politics with the rise of the so-called *Mujahidin* fighting against the communist regime. Thus, Afghanistan became a new battle ground of old and new rivalries.

Soviet Invasion

In the name of protecting the ideologically left-leaning regime in Afghanistan, Soviet Union dispatched its troops to the country in December 1978. This invasion was seen as an invasion of Afghanistan worldwide and a defining moment in the Cold war. This furthered the clashes between the two super powers all over the world. Besides

it, it also polarized the Afghan society. It was divided up between those who supported the invasion to protect the pro-communist government and the ones supposed to be pro-western powers who were fighting the government.

The large groups who opposed the Soviet invasion consisted of old royal loyalists and supporters of democracy in Afghanistan. These groups were also supported by the West. Society so divided was led to a protracted period of instability and civil war in the country. In order to oppose Soviet invasion, west encouraged fundamentalist forces such as Taliban. This, later on, after the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, became yet another source of Civil War in the country temporarily ending up with Taliban coming to power and destroying the country even further. The Soviet invasion couldn't help much the government of Afghanistan to have control over the country. The PDPA government led first by Barbak Karmal (1979-86) and later on by Mohammad Najibullah could not go much beyond the confines of the city, Kabul, for most parts of their existence. The PDPA regime, since it had leaning towards the Soviet Union, could not forge as much amicable relations with rest of the countries of the world including India too at that moment. For India had also opposed the intervention of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. However, India remained a supporter of stability in the country and it did not therefore show much interest in joining the west in their active opposition to the communist regime in the country.

When Soviet Union intervened (1978) in the country in order to protect the communist regime from opposition forces, it led to over a decade of Civil War (Saikal 2006). The invasion of Afghanistan was a reaction not only to support a communist regime in power but also to curb the rise of pro-US forces in the country. Apparently, Daoud was gradually shifting towards its western allies and US and the Soviets could not see it happening (Emadi 2010: 96-98).

Through the period of the first Great Game, India was still a colonised country and thus unable to play any meaningful role in world politics. On the contrary, during the Cold War period, India had become an independent sovereign nation-state, was leading the non-aligned movement, and hence opposed to any strategic calculation regarding a member of the movement. In fact, India hoped for a better coordination. Despite all that, when a communist regime was established in Afghanistan, India established relationship with the regime. This move was more of a strategic than

political in nature. India had close relationship with the Soviet Union at the time and it did not want to make it hostile (Raja Mohan, 2008). Afghanistan was not in a position anyways to have a strategic relationship with India at the time. Ostensibly, It had to lean towards the Soviet Union. This was not liked by US and other western powers as it was considered as eminent threat to the West. According to Eamdi,

“The United States regarded South Asia and the Persian Gulf as its spheres of Influence. It regarded the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a calculated strategy intended to acquire control over a major portion of the world’s oil resources, posing a direct threat to security of the region and the United States” (2010: 164).

In pursuit of its interest in the region, the USA therefore had to promote and incite the sorts of forces opposed to the left-leaning government in Afghanistan. In such effort, it created and supported the so-called Islamic militias known as *Mujahidin*. The militias were capable enough to put up formidable challenge to the government in the country. Finally, in 1988, Soviet Union had to withdraw which resulted in the fall of the government in Afghanistan (Saikal 2004). The country again falls prey to the internal political upheaval.

Non-Aligned Movement

“Both the countries (India and Afghanistan) have continued to follow the policy of non-alignment, the only difference being that Afghanistan normally use the term ‘neutralism’ to describe her foreign policy, while India prefer to call it ‘non-alignment’ (Jafri 1976: 48).

In the initial years since the establishment of the formal official diplomatic relations, India and Afghanistan maintained a low diplomatic profile. Nevertheless following the years of the intensification of NAM, and India turning to be its one of the strong protagonists, the mobilising the entire third world countries under its umbrella became the need of the day to its diplomacy. It wanted to convey the message of the independence of the foreign policy of the newly decolonized sovereign nation- states to the super powers. Afghanistan too adopted a policy of neutrality vis-a-viz the rivalry between the super powers. It, nevertheless, supported India for its policy of non-alignment in international politics. "Perhaps, the cooperation in international forums was the only political relationship shared by both the countries in the 1970s. Afghanistan, nevertheless, due to its considerations kept on supporting India over Pakistan” (Sharma 2011).

Afghanistan-India relationship owes a great deal to the NAM started in the 1960s against the Cold War rivalry.³ Afghanistan declared non-alignment as its one of the foreign policy objectives under the name of ‘impartial judgement’ (Ma’arof 1987). This policy was derived from its geographical position as buffer between Russia and British India. Being landlocked and also not so economically developed country made it dependent upon its neighbours for trade routes and economic assistance. The adoption of neutrality therefore was an indispensable for the survival of Afghanistan (Ma’arof 1987).

Afghanistan, having a long border with the Soviet Union could not afford to pursue a pro-West policy. At the same time, it also could not pursue entirely a pro-Soviet foreign policy for fear of being dubbed as communist. Shift to either side could mean an end of active non-aligned and independent foreign policy of Afghanistan (Ma’arof 1987:10).

It had “consistently espoused the principle of peaceful coexistence which has been a pre-dominant feature of Afghan foreign policy” (Ma’arof 1987: 11). It was believed that the regime, preceding the 1978 episode of takeover by the pro-Soviet forces, actively followed the NAM. Thus, the policy of non-alignment had been one of the factors that brought India and Afghanistan close to each other particularly under King Daud (Dixit 2000). They worked together ensure the independence of the NAM countries in their policy-making which was being threatened by the vested interests of the super powers to install satellite states among these countries (Jaffri 1976).

The regime in Afghanistan came closer to India to strengthen both old cultural and political ties in 1970s, which had been severed in early days following the independence. This growing ties apparently got jolted at the time of the regime change in 1978 and subsequently the intervention of the Soviet Union when India in fact didn’t speak up to maintain its relationship with both the governments which came in power in Kabul and the Soviet Union India had already signed a friendship treaty in 1971 (Dixit 2000). Given its hostile relations with Pakistan and the latter’s close relationship with USA, India designed a strong support in international politics

³ NAM has been one of the main determinants of the Indian foreign policy. NAM created a common platform for various Third world countries to come together and create a common foreign policy approach vis-à-vis the world.

which no other than the Soviet Union could offer. India tacitly supported the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan which made the opponents of the Soviet backed regime hostile towards India. It culminated further in the deterioration of the credibility of NAM since the regime in Kabul had also openly shown its loyalty to the Soviet Union (Ma'arouf 1987).

The geo-strategic location of Afghanistan made it an important player in world politics. Bordering with the USSR put it amid the crossfire of the rivalry between USSR and USA. India could not do much in this rivalry in Afghanistan as it had limited resources of power. It had signed a treaty with USSR going against the stated adherence to NAM. It established diplomatic relations with government of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). In the light of these political inclinations one can see as to why India was reluctant to have a clear stand (Dixit 2000). Since, India had a relatively better terms of relationship with Daud's regime it was more expected that it would support him. However, it adopted a more traditional approach and according to Dixit, "India adopted the classical and formerly correct stand that it will deal with whichever government is in effective power in Afghanistan and that India's commitment and involvement is with the people of Afghanistan" (Dixit 2000 : 20).

The relationship between the two countries- Afghanistan and Indian- did not improve significantly in the following years after the regime change in 1978. The instability in Afghanistan had increased and had taken immeasurable toll on the life of the people of the country. Amidst all this, India had not much scope to intervene directly in the domestic affairs of Afghanistan. The *Panchsheel*⁴ adopted in the Nehruvian age of the foreign policy of India was also one of the elements directing towards non-intervention in the domestic affairs of another country (Nair and Paul 2004). At the time of the active support of the USSR to the socialist camp in Afghanistan, having succeeded in replacing the king and established a new democratic republic, India maintained a calculated silence. Later on, it developed good relations with government in Kabul. This phase, with the socialist regime in Afghanistan, was considered to be unprecedented in terms of growing friendship between the two

⁴ The term is used to denote the five broader principles of NAM. These were; Peaceful coexistence, non-aggression, non-interference, mutual cooperation, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty.

countries. It could be attributed to the fact that both Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi had tilted towards the USSR in spite of the fact that the country had proclaimed its commitments to the principles of the NAM (Dixit 2000).

The silence of India, through in the late 1970s, at the time of Soviet intervention, did not go down well among the Afghan people who were opposed to such act. It was understood as betrayal committed by India to Afghanistan. The resentment had been fuelled by the opposite camp supported by the USA. This fostered the emergence of the *Mujahideens* close to the Pakistani establishment (Rashid 2008). Yet, not everything was lost for India in Afghanistan as it supported Najibullah government and did not disturb its relations with some of the warring groups. These groups were the only source of contact in Afghanistan when the civil war broke out in the country with the collapse of the USSR (Muni, 2002). With the end of the civil war in 1996, the Taliban came to power supported by Pakistani establishment. It was therefore unimaginable to India as to how to have a relationship with the Taliban. Very soon, The Kandhar episode⁵ further decimated the possibility of political relationship between the two countries (Norfolk, 2011: 6). During the Taliban in power, the diplomatic relations between the two countries were almost non-existent barring the contacts being rarely managed with some of the warring factions in the Northern Alliance. This support to such groups should be seen as the only way to protect the Indian interest in Afghanistan as Taliban was antithetical to such interest. It occurred despite the fact that India had proclaimed in principle a policy of non-interference. According to Norfolk,

“Indian diplomatic and development initiatives in Afghanistan experienced a hiatus while the Taliban ruled Kabul, during which time Delhi extended support to the non-Pashtun Northern Alliance as a strategic imperative. The Northern Alliance provided the only credible counter balance to a regime in Afghanistan directly threatening India’s national security interests. Delhi continued to provide ‘quite and limited support’ for the groups fighting the Taliban, but did not use force or overtly support attempts to depose the regime” (Norfolk, 2011: 6).

The Taliban lost the power in 2001 with the invasion of the country by the USA. This was supported by the Northern Alliance. A new government was formed by the support of both the Northern Alliance and the USA. It ended the diplomatic isolation

⁵ In 1999 Indian Airliner ICJ 804 was hijacked by the terrorists. It was landed in Kandhar where negotiations between Indian officials and Terrorists happened and India was forced to release four dreaded terrorists from Indian jails in exchange for the passengers of the plane.

of the country from the world politics (Emadi 2010). Hamid Karzai became the head of the new government in Kabul and wanted to re-establish the historical ties with the countries such as India. This government welcomed the proposal placed by India to help reconstruct the country (Ashraf 2008). Since 2001, the relationship between the two countries has again gained momentum and the democratic process in Afghanistan has also been further strengthening. To comprehend the trajectory, it can be divided in three following phases:

Post Cold War

Gorbachov withdrew the Soviet army in 1988 as he signalled the new policy of non-intervention. He, however, supported the Najibullah government in Kabul. In 1988 Soviet army withdrew from Afghanistan due to the new policies of non-intervention adopted by Gorbachov. The PDPA government led by Najibullah tried to do away with *Mujahideens*. The *Mujahideens* were the impending threat to the government in Kabul. However, it could not succeed to achieve it. It then adopted the policy of “national reconciliation” to bring about peace and stability in the country. According to this policy, the government wanted to create a dialogue between the Soviet army and the *Mujahideens* (Runion Meredith L 2007). This dialogue too failed given the support of the western powers to the opposition forces in the country. The hostility shown towards Najibullah had more to do with the latter being a supporter of the Soviet intervention than to his domestic policy. Moreover, even though the Soviet army left the country, Najibullah could not buttress the support to remain in power. The *Mujahideens* wanted to overthrow Najibullah. Moreover, the government was weakened with the desertion of some of its very loyal supporters such as Abdul Rasid Dostom. In this context, the Najibullah government, without any external backing, couldn't survive the concerted blows of the forces like the *Mujahideens*. As a result, it stepped down in 1992. This created the scope for the fighting factions of the *Mujahideens* to step in at the centre stage of power.

Civil War

Though Afghanistan, since 1978, has witnessed internal unrest and inexplicable large-scale violence, with the withdrawal of the Soviet army did the situation deteriorated further. The period of Civil War (1988-1996) can be easily extended and particularly

after the 1996, though there was a strong government in Kabul led by the Taliban. The collapse of the Najibullah government paved the way for the *Mujahideens* to step in. The forces, led both by Abdul Rushid Dostom and Ahmed Shah Massod took the control over the city of Kabul in April 1992. They initially eliminated the common enemy of the *Mujahideens* in the city. Later, the different factions of *Mujahideens* started fighting among themselves to control the city. This turned into a civil war. They nevertheless tried to form a functioning government acceptable to all the factions of *Mujahideens* under the leadership of Burhannudin Rabbani. A body called Islamic jihad was constituted to give every leader and the faction their share in the functioning of the government. This too failed to bring them together. They could not develop mutual trust for each other. Their distrust towards each other was embodied in the fact that though they all had a share in power, they did not weaken their control over their respective areas of the city of Kabul (Saikal Amin 2004).

They replaced, by a decree, the constitution which the old regime had put in place in 1990. The situation had worsened so badly that each faction wanted to manage as much power and territory for itself as possible. In this attempt, each of them tried to get the support of the neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. These factions were largely based mostly on ethnic loyalty and therefore wanted to secure their complete control over the separate territories occupied by them. Iran was helping Sazman-e Nasr. It was led by Abdul Ali Mazari who hailed from the Hazara tribe of the country. He wanted to form a strong Shia constituency in the country. Besides Iran, another major player was Pakistan. Pakistan supported such groups as those headed by Rabbani (Jamait-e Islami) and Hekmatyar (Hezb-e Islami) despite the fact that they were rival to each other (Saikal 2004). India too was trying to manage a working relationship with the new government led by Rabbani though it was fraught with difficulties posed by Pakistan. Yet, the Civil War had created enough scope for manoeuvres by all the interested parties in the country. India too was able to get its links in the country with a strong bond with Ahmed Shah Massod and his Jamait-e Islami.

The infighting had weakened the government. It had become totally ineffective. It was so chaotic to control the groups even for the foreign countries like Pakistan that they started looking for new and more cohesive formations. In this desperation, in 1994,

Pakistan found out a strong student group emerging from the southern parts of Afghanistan which was led by Mohammed Omer. This movement was called Taliban.

Taliban

Under the leadership of Umer a group of students was “to inspire a new extremist form of fundamentalism across Pakistan and Central Asia, which refused to compromise with traditional Islamic values, social structures and existing state systems” (Rashid Ahmed 2010: 2). According to Rashid most of the commanders of Taliban were *Mujaheedens* in the past. These *Mujaheedens* were trained and supplied with arms by the Western countries via Pakistan. Objective of Taliban was to create a theocratic state in Afghanistan. Taliban propagated extremist version of Islam. They were opposed to western modernity and propagated their own version of political Islam. In this way Taliban were close to Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia and Deobandis of South Asia. But “Unlike other Islamist parties Taliban has no aim to create a political ideology “(Griffiths John C 2011: 236). Within two years of its inception Taliban defeated fragmented *Mujaheedens* forces. This became possible because it got consistent support from Pakistan and other external forces. After capturing political power and control over Kabul, Taliban created a reign of terror. It not only prohibited most of the recreational activities in the country but also imposed a very harsh code of conduct on women.

However, despite its increasing influence over Afghan territory Northern Alliance under the leadership of Ahmed Shah Masood and Rabbani were still fighting with Taliban. But due to active and logistical support provided by the Saudis and Pakistan Taliban were able to consolidate its hold over Afghanistan. Taliban rule isolated Afghanistan in world politics. No country except Pakistan and Saudi Arabia recognised Taliban government. On the other hand, India maintained its close relations with Northern alliance during Taliban period in Afghanistan.

Northern Alliance was loose alliance of *Mujaheedens*. It was the only link with outside world in Afghanistan. During hijacking of Indian Airlines IC -184 there was a brief channel of negotiations opened between India and Taliban. However, it remained a short term. This was because Taliban’s were not ready to entertain

Indian views rather it favoured Pakistan. Due to these reason Indian policy makers was willing to support war against Taliban after September 2001.

The Taliban was defeated by joint operations of Northern Alliance and the US forces in 2001. After Taliban rule Afghanistan opened itself to world for new opportunities and development. The new regime of Afghanistan led by Hamid Karzai was internationally recognised. This is the first time in history since 1978 when government of Afghanistan is internationally recognised. Dark Age for Afghan foreign relation has ended.

When we evaluate the politics of Afghanistan in retrospect, we find that Taliban was radically anti west. (Cooley 2000). Taliban practice isolation in its foreign policy. It had no relations with any country in the world except Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Despite its reactionary and inhuman treatment of women and minorities US was not opposed to Taliban. The strategic interests of US in the fields of oil exploration were one of the reasons of not opposing Taliban. Apart from this fact Taliban's anti-Iran and Russia policies encouraged US to support the Taliban regime indirectly through Saudi Arabia and Pakistan for a very brief period. According to Ahmed Rashid,

“Between 1994 and 1996 the USA supported the Taliban politically through its allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, essentially because Washington viewed the Taliban as anti-Iranian, anti-Shia and pro-Western. The USA conveniently ignored the Taliban's own Islamic fundamentalist agenda, its suppression of women and the consternation they created in Central Asia largely because Washington was not interested in the larger picture” (2010: 176).

It is clear that USA's approach towards Taliban was guided by its narrow interest. The persistent pursuance of their interests by the superpowers led to re-emergence of Great Game in the 1990s. This term was coined by Ahmed Rashid (2010) as the “New Great Game”. This time again Russian empire was replaced by the Russian federation and other countries in the region such as China and Britain was replaced by USA. The scope and players in this latest version was much bigger than the previous one. Unlike, in the past where having control over land was the central concern (Hopkirk 1990) this time the race for resources of the region became more important. However, according to Rashid, just like in the past,

“Today's Great Game is also between expanding and contracting empires. As a weakened and bankrupt Russia attempts to keep a grip on what it still views as its frontiers in Central Asia and control the flow of Caspian oil through pipelines

that traverse Russia, the USA is thrusting itself into the region on the back of proposed oil pipelines which would bypass Russia. Iran, Turkey and Pakistan are building their own communication links with the region and want to be the preferred route of choice for future pipelines heading east, west or south. China wants to secure stability for its restive Xinjiang region populated by the same Muslim ethnic groups that inhabit Central Asia, secure the necessary energy to fuel its rapid economic growth and expand its political influence in a critical border region. The Central Asian states have their own rivalries, preferences and strategic imperatives. Looming above this is the fierce competition between American, European and Asian oil companies” (Rashid 2010: 146).

According to Rashid the role of Afghanistan remains central to this version of the Great Game too despite the fact that it is no more the central concern of the main players as in the past.

“But as in the nineteenth century, Afghanistan’s instability and advancing Taliban were creating a new dimension to this global rivalry and becoming a significant fulcrum for the new Great Game. The states and the companies had to decide whether to confront or woo the Taliban and whether the Taliban would impede or help pipelines from Central Asia to new markets in South Asia” (Rashid 2010: 146).

Afghanistan becomes a central actor in New Great Game too due to following reasons.

1. Afghanistan is land route to Central Asia.
2. It is a source of global drug trafficking.
3. Centre of global terrorism.
4. Untapped natural resources

Apart from this Afghanistan is bordering world’s most unstable regions. Bordering with Iran, China, Central Asian states and Pakistan makes Afghanistan one of the hottest locations in today’s world politics.

Map 1: The New Great Game



Source: <http://www.chowrangi.com/the-%E2%80%9Cgreat-game-for-pakistan%E2%80%9D-and-the-clash-of-intrests.html>

Post 2001 Afghanistan is slowly trying to use its central location in the New Great Game to its own advantage. It is ready to give all stakeholders some kind of benefit on the conditions to respect the sovereignty of the country and is ready to invest their money for development of Afghanistan. According to the Afghan president Hamid Karzai “Afghans do not mind the presence of western competition over Afghanistan until they meddle in the domestic affairs and mind their own business” (Lebedev 2011).

India’s Afghanistan Policy: Post Taliban

After the fall of Taliban regime India revived its diplomatic relations with Afghanistan. Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh inaugurated the embassy in Kabul in December 2001. (Hussain 2008: 46). With reopening of the embassy, it was beginning of a new era in relationship with complete new thinking and strategies on both sides (Yadav and Barva, 2011). When Afghanistan was going through civil war and unrest International politics was going through radical transformation. After cold war idea and nature of international politics was completely changed. A new trend emerges in bilateral relationship between countries after cold war. This was a time when neo liberal economy determined international politics by and large. The attack on world trade centre was allegedly orchestrated from Afghanistan; gave a new momentum to the already changing international politics. War on Terror completely changed the dominant discourse of international politics. Where trade and business was dominating now War on Terror became new grammar of World Politics. A new era of unilateralism came into force. Intervention in other’s domestic affairs in the name of terrorism was becoming a new language of world politics. A demand of universalism was also on the board. (Rashid 2008). After September attack on world Trade Centre countries of the world had to reframe their foreign policy approaches including third world countries.

After the fall of Taliban India’s Afghanistan policy too changed. The nature of India’s Afghanistan policy changed in the form of changing objectives of both the countries vis-à-vis their relations with each other. Unlike in the past after 9/11 economy and the strategic considerations defined the extent of the political engagements between India and Afghanistan. (Yadav and Barwa 2011). New regime led by Hamid Karzai was looking for the resources to reconstruct Afghan economy. It needed money and other

basic resources. To re-emerge as a nation Afghanistan needs infrastructure. Without economic ties there would be no use of political relationship as far as nation building project is concerned. India- Afghanistan relationship in post Taliban era is more economic in nature than political. Therefore, it needs to be studied carefully.

In 2004 Afghanistan had its first presidential election. This election was organised according to the new constitution adopted in 2003. Hamid Karzai won the election. He becomes a legitimate head of state to pursue foreign policy. Next five years were very challenging in countering insurgency by remaining forces of Taliban in the remote areas of the country. This was a crucial period for India- Afghanistan relationship. New Afghanistan regime was worried about accommodation ex Taliban militants and ex *mujahidins* of Northern alliances. In order to prevent them from joining any other armed group it was necessary to get them accommodated in some employment. India can build infrastructure in Afghanistan which can provide employment opportunities. India was looking for this kind of opportunities as it wanted to neutralise the influence of Pakistan. It also helps any future threat from youth militias' infiltration to Kashmir (Pant 2011). On the request of Hamid Karzai India participated in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. During this period India provided maximum humanitarian support to Afghanistan. The new political situation strengthens bilateral relations between the two countries and led foundation for a strong strategic partnership.

President Karzai re-elected in fresh round of elections in 2009. This year a new parliament was also elected in Afghanistan. The victory in election was a kind of legitimacy to policies of Hamid karzai in his 1st term. Stability of new political system in Afghanistan is the real challenge for Hamid Karzai. In a multiethnic country like Afghanistan only democracy can provide stability to the political system. Creating a vibrant democratic political system India was giving its assistance to Afghanistan. India. A new building of Afghan parliament was built with Indian support. It also provided training in conducting peaceful election in Afghanistan. In a way Afghanistan trusted Indian model as an ideal of democracy. (Chandra V 2005). By giving support and assistance India exercised its soft power in Afghanistan. In absence of democracy in Afghanistan it was much easier for India to do that. Building democratic process in Afghanistan was new political aspect of India- Afghanistan

relationship in post 2009 elections. Political relations between both the countries became stronger. It was a victory of Indian diplomacy in Afghanistan.

India's Afghanistan Policy: Economic Dimensions

Like political and cultural relationship India- Afghanistan, trade relationship has its root in history. From ancient to modern period, trade between two countries has been flourishing continuously. India was exporter to handicrafts and agriculture products to Afghanistan. On the other hand, Afghanistan's woollen and other products were very popular in India. During Taliban period, this trade relationship was disrupted between both the countries. With the advent of new regime in Afghanistan, trade relationship has been resumed between India and Afghanistan.

Based on Washington consensus feature of world was Liberalisation Privatisation and Globalisation (LPG).⁶ Impact of globalisation is seen in every state's foreign policy. State gives primacy to economic affair in their foreign policy. India's policy towards Afghanistan was also influenced by economic factors.

Three decades of civil war Afghanistan's economy has seen widespread destruction. A lot of investment was needed as Afghanistan lacks domestic capital. (See below). Afghanistan was not in a position to choose investors. Afghan officials "argue [that] the choice of investor has nothing to do with geopolitics but is an attempt to lift one of the world's poorest nations out of misery through investment" (Bhattacharya 2012). According to Afghan mining minister Wahidullah Shahrani, "our strategic benefit is, first, to get the investment and, second, to create more jobs" (Bhattacharya 2012).

Because of huge untapped natural resources like oil and gas Afghanistan was attracting global investors. China was the first country which "made the first big-ticket bet on Afghan mines" (Bhattacharya 2012). It had won a \$3 billion concession to develop the Mes Aynak copper mine southeast of Kabul in 2007. Security is one of the most important problems with the economic recovery of Afghanistan. Due to the war with Taliban in Afghanistan it is difficult for any projects to be operational.

⁶ Washington consensus refers the global understanding that liberalization has no alternative and state should become less and less active in the economic activities. It was the document on which the neo-liberal world dominated by the policies propounded by World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization etc is based.

It has “delayed efforts to build infrastructure such as roads and rails needed to sustain a sizable mining industry” (Bhattacharya 2012). Not only existing investment and ongoing projects face security problem but safety concerns was expressed by companies wanted to invest in Afghanistan as well. Taliban bombing Indian embassy in Kabul is a clear example. It prevented some potential Indian investors. They fear that things could go worse after foreign troops pull out from Afghanistan (Bhattacharya 2012).

Given the situation Afghanistan was looking to India for attracting investment. For both the countries it was a perfect time to revive historical linkages and shared world view.

A history of Trade and Economic Relations between India and Afghanistan

Hindu Kush mountain range was passing through Kandhar and this made Afghanistan the hub of international trade in ancient era. By using this land route Indian traders reach Iran and other west Asian countries. Due to passing of traditional silk route of trade through Afghanistan Indian traders often visit Afghanistan. For Indian product Kabul was one of the important market in the region (Chandra A 2007). Buddhism had a great influence over Afghanistan. The exchange of people and goods was very frequent. Afghanistan was considered as an Indian province. Cultural exchanges between India and Afghanistan gave birth to several arts and crafts.

Amiya Chandra says,

“Trade fostered close political and people to people contacts [between Afghanistan and India]. Ghandhari, mother of the *Kauravas*, came from this region. The *Kushan* Empire had its summer capital in Afghanistan at the wine centre; kاپisi...Afghanistan lay on the famous and ancient Silk Route, India’s major pathway of international trade. Spread of Buddhism gave further impetus to close economic interaction. Throughout the medieval period, during and after the British rule in India, Afghanistan remained a major supplier of dry fruits, fresh fruits, raisins, and species to India. The 2600 KMS long Grand Trunk Road stretching from Kolkatta to Khyber Pass in Afghanistan built in the 16th century.....has been the hub of transport and trade of the Indian sub-continent (sic)” (2007: 164).

Mixed forms of Greek and Indian arts are known as Indo-Afghan Art form or Gandhara Art.⁷ Invasions came from Afghanistan during 10th and 11th century. In 13th century invaders from Afghanistan established political and military control over India. This has further boosted trade relationship between both the countries. The next 600 hundred years Afghanistan became part of India. (Chandra S 1997). Afghanistan became independent state during British colonialism in India. Due to this, there was a halt in trade between both the countries. There was a destruction of domestic industries in both India and Afghanistan in next couple of centuries. British destroyed Indian handicrafts industries for its own imperial interest. In 1947 when India got independence both New Delhi and Kabul established formal economic ties. In 1957 both countries for the very first time exchanged letters regarding development of trade. In this letter, they agreed to give each other transit facilities for trade. In this letter, both the countries agreed to give each other special transit facilities for trade. After the establishment of socialist regime in Afghanistan in 1978 India and Afghanistan signed another major trade agreement. This agreement gives Most Favoured Nations status to each other. Under this agreement a joint committee was established to facilitate free and fair trade between both the countries. Till the advent of Taliban regime this agreement was base of official trade relationship between India and Afghanistan. (Chandra A 2007: 176). During 19th century Imperial rivalry between Russia and Britain caused civil war and instability in Afghanistan. The Afghan domestic industry was ruined by stoppage of supply of raw material and destruction of Indian market.

“The establishment of a regime in Afghanistan which believed in loot and destruction made it permanent no-go area for most of the traders making it a poor country gradually shifting towards drug trade and lawlessness” (Dupree 2002). This situation was controlled a bit during the revival of monarchy in Afghanistan in the first half of the twentieth century. However, “this did not last long as Afghanistan again was gripped by a civil war in the 1970s” (Saikal 2004).

⁷ Several Buddhist arts were created according to the Gandhara art form. It has been most obvious in the status of Buddha at the time found in different parts of North-West India.

Afghanistan as a Destination for Investment

Afghanistan has revived its economy in post Taliban period. Civil War and Taliban period ruined Afghanistan's economy. It has made Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world. Afghanistan is one of the least developed countries in the world according to World Bank. Per capita income of Afghanistan is just \$92 in 2001 which has gone up to \$ 501 in 2010 because of international aid. Due to lack of basic infrastructure Afghanistan failed to provide a decent life to its 25 million populations.

Afghanistan's seventy-five percent populations reside in rural area. Forty-eight years is life expectancy for both male and female in Afghanistan. It is much lower than other underdeveloped countries of the world. Electricity reached to only fifteen percent population of the country. . Its death is highest at sixteen in year 2009. Just four percent population is using internet in Afghanistan. Less than 40 percent people are mobile subscriber in 2009.⁸Amiya Chandra says,

“Afghanistan is one of the world's least developed and poorest countries with 90 percent of the population living in rural areas at subsistence level. Only about 12 percent of the country's total land is arable, 3 percent under forest cover, about 46 percent under permanent pastures, and the rest (39 percent) are mountains. Prior to the conflict in the late 1970s the Afghan economy was characterised by food self-sufficiency, pre-dominance of agricultural exports, macro-economic stability, free floating exchange rates and low debt burden. Afghanistan's economy has witnessed widespread destruction over the past two and half decades of war. Most of the major social, administrative and economic institutions of the country have fallen apart due to the Soviet Occupation, population displacement and heavy fighting among various *Mujahideen* factions. Transportation and communication systems, heavy and small-scale industries, education and agricultural; infrastructure are among the most seriously damaged sectors. This economic decline has exacerbated the level of poverty and economic hardship throughout the country. Largely dependent on subsistence agriculture, the country has witnessed diminishing economic level, declining food security, reduced excess to urgently needed services and an increased population. A wide range of disparities exists between different regions and within each region. Gross domestic product has fallen substantially over the last two decades because of the loss of labour and capital and the disruption of trade and insufficient food, clothing, housing and health care” (2007: 165-66).

This all shows that there is a big scope of investment in infrastructure and human development in Afghanistan. In this context India can play a constructive role. Factor other than infrastructure development India can explore market of Afghanistan which

⁸Until otherwise stated all these data are taken from <http://data.worldbank.org>

is least competitive. Since there is a lack of domestic consumer production units Indian producers can draw tremendous benefits from the exploitation of the market. There are number of reason to engage Afghanistan economically. One of them is tapped and untapped natural resources (Fick and Lockhart 2010). India can have access to these resources. It is because India and Afghanistan enjoys good political relationship in post Taliban era. Afghanistan's apprehension towards Pakistan is another opportunity for India (Bhat 2009).

Because of potential provider of minerals to the world economy all major power of the world including US and China are in race for resources in Afghanistan. India has to face a good competition with these countries. For example, its Amu Darya basin and Afghan-Tajik basin have an estimated reserve of around 2b barrels of oil. Afghan government is looking to open these oil fields in order to generate employment and reduce the dependence on foreign oil (Economist Country Survey 2011: 18). Other countries are already investing in these products through their local partners. India can have the similar arrangements. Similarly, the Afghan government is interested in opening the exploration of its iron ore deposits in Hajigak and Indian companies can use the opportunity.

Without foreign investment, infrastructure and economy of Afghanistan cannot be built. Therefore, Afghanistan needs foreign capital and investment. It had a negative current account balance in 2008 and had a deficit of 67 percent in the capital needs and its formation in domestic markets (Economist Country Report 2011: 6). Despite all these negatives Afghan economy is growing very fast. It had a growth rate of more than 20 percent in 2009. Hence, Afghanistan can be a very lucrative destination for foreign investment. Indian companies in infrastructure and construction and government agencies working in social sector have incentive to go and invest in Afghanistan. The fact that India is preferred by Afghan diplomats and also that it already enjoys a status of second largest trading partner (India is Afghanistan's third largest exporter and second largest importer according to Economist Country Report 2011) makes the task easier. In order to exploit the possibilities in Afghanistan India is leaving no stone unturned. It has established four different consulates in Afghanistan in its four different regions namely: Herat, Jalalabad, Kandhar and

Mazar-e-Sharif. Beside this India is also pitching for Afghanistan's overall development while mobilising world's engagement in the country.

According to then Indian Foreign Minister, S M Krishna, India sees the need of Marshal Plan⁹ to rebuilt Afghanistan. India pitched for this because it identifies that "Afghanistan faces at least four deficits -- a security deficit, a governance deficit, a development deficit, and an investment deficit". All these deficits cannot be addressed properly if world does not adopt a comprehensive plan to rebuild not only the country's economy but also its political and military systems. According to Krishna, "Afghanistan needs time, development assistance, preferential access to world markets, foreign investment and a clear end-state and strategy to make sure that it does not once again plunge into lawlessness, Civil War, and externally sponsored extremism and terrorism" hence, "conceptually there is need for something like a 'Marshall Plan' for Afghanistan, involving all the major stakeholders" (As quoted in http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_indian-industry-plans-10-billion-investment-in-afghan-sm-krishna_1621879 Accessed on 16 July 2017).

India-Afghanistan Business Forum

Mutual groups were established by India to further its economic interest. Immediately after the formation of Karzai regime in Afghanistan. India- Afghanistan Business forum was established. Objective of this forum is to build a link between the buinessness group of India and Afghanistan. It is appreciated as a "unique attempt by any foreign country inside Afghanistan" (Hussain 2008: 48). Its function is to coordinate between business communities of both the countries. Trade fair and *melas* is organised in each other's countries. This helps in showing products of both the countries in each other's major cities. With the help of these forum meetings of businesspersons and industrialist of India and Afghanistan was also organised. India-Afghanistan business Forum has been very helpful in business activities between both the countries. This forum has been an important instrument of engagement and a

⁹Marshal Plan was a full package of economic assistance adopted in 1948 by the US in order to rebuild the Second World War ravaged countries of the Europe.

major source of various joint initiatives between both the countries. Under these sub headings India – Afghanistan economic relations can be studied.

The Volume and Nature of Trade between Afghanistan and India in Post- Taliban

At official level trade between India and Afghanistan during Taliban period was nil. Post 2001 Afghanistan established trade and economic ties with India. After Taliban regime India become Afghanistan’s largest trading partner. Data of Asian Development Bank says that India is the principal market for Afghanistan’s exports. India purchased twenty one per cent of the total exports of Afghanistan. (Europa 2010: 518). However, India is not the preferred destination for imports of Afghanistan. On the other hand Pakistan figure largest import destination of Afghanistan and India does not even figure into top five lists also. (Europa 2010: 518). In this context, Indian business community and government of India to increase both the volume of trade with Afghanistan and diversify goods in trade as until date only some agricultural products have been the main trade items have started various initiatives. In 2001-02 India was exporting rubber, cotton products, tobacco and its products, sugar, apparel and clothing accessories to Afghanistan. It was importing edible fruits and nuts, cotton, lace, gums, resins, oil seeds and related products, miscellaneous chemical products (Chandra A 2007: 180).

Trade between India and Afghanistan has grown remarkably in the last ten years. According to India’s Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 2001-02, the total Afghan export to India was \$ 17.52 million. Its total import from India was \$ 24.37 million. Hence, the total trade between both the counties stood at \$ 41.89 million in 2001. By the year, 2010, the volume of trade between both the countries reached \$ 588 million (see the table).

Table 1: Afghan-India Trade 2008-09 and 2009-10 (in Million US \$)

Afghanistan’s total exports to India	2008-09	126
	2009-10	125
Afghanistan’s total imports from India	2008-09	394
	2009-10	463

Source: <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/default.asp>

As seen in the table it is clear that the trade balance is heavily in favour of India. One more thing should be mentioned before going further. If compared with the previous years' data, the import from India has increased more than seventeen per cent while exports have dipped around one percent. This might be a sign of long-term revival of Afghanistan's economy. The main competitor of India in terms of trade with Afghanistan is Pakistan as it is the largest source of Afghan imports. In 2004-06 import from Pakistan was \$ 511 million while from India it was just \$ 170 million (Gleason *et al* 2009: 277). In 2008 India had just 6.9 per cent share in Afghanistan's total imports in comparison to Pakistan 36 percent. (http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/afghanistan/export-import.html).

Important hurdles in trade;

1. India does not have direct physical accessibility to Afghanistan. This is the major hurdle for trade between both the countries. Since Pakistan does not allow India to trade through its territory it has to explore another land route via Iran.
2. Afghanistan does not have much manufacturing industry. Therefore, it had to over dependent on agriculture products for foreign currency. Afghanistan total export in 2007 half was made of only agriculture products. (Europa, 2010: 522). This makes it a provider of raw material.
3. Lack of infrastructure like roads and ports in Afghanistan is another impediment.
4. Bad law and order situation in Afghanistan pose another problem for International trade.
5. The trade imbalance between both the countries favours India. It needs to be balanced. For this India needs to give some concessions to Afghan goods. However, during Karzai's second visit to India a trade agreement was signed between both the countries which gave up to 100 per cent tariff concessions on

38 Afghan export goods to India (Kidwai 2005: 218). More tariff concessions on goods are needed.

These hurdles resulted in very slow growth of trade between both the countries. Still there is a hope between India and Afghanistan to do better in future. According to Afghan commerce minister Mustafa Kazemi, “India is the best market for exporting Afghan goods. Afghanistan has major plans to trade with India. We will be able to oust other competitors out of the Indian markets very soon” (Kidwai 2005: 216).

Preferential Trade Agreement

Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) was signed between India and Afghanistan on 6 March 2003. Under this treaty provision was made for free movement of goods through reduction of tariffs between both the countries. Preferential Trade Agreement granted some sort of concessions to Afghan business groups. (Chandra A 2007: 178). Balance of trade till this date has remained in favour of India. For healthy and long-term trade relations this is not a good sign. However, India and Afghanistan are making their best effort to make it more balanced. In other words Afghanistan has to increase and diversify its exports to India. Concession on duties on some essential products was granted under this agreement. While India granted concessions to fresh fruits and precious stones of Afghanistan, it also got some concessions on black tea and pharmaceutical products from Afghanistan. (Chandra A 20007).

South Asian Free Trade Agreement

India used to play a crucial role in economic affairs of the South Asian region. After the formation of Karzai govt India played a crucial role in including Afghanistan in SAARC. This made Afghanistan a member of South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) in 2011. After this it ratified SAFTA in May 2011. Since Afghanistan is one of the Least Developed Countries of SAARC, it got many concessions. These concessions benefitted both India and Afghanistan. India got benefits as the biggest economy in the region which had the capacity to fulfil the requirements of the SAFTA. Unlike countries such as India and Pakistan Afghanistan have more time and greater concessions (<http://www.saarc-sec.org/userfiles/saftaagreement.pdf>) to fulfil the requirements of the provisions of the treaty. The main objective of agreement was to enhance the regional trade among the member state of SAARC. In this way it also

helps in improving trade ties between India and Afghanistan. The best part of the agreement was the concessions Afghanistan got. This concession will help Afghanistan to overcome trade imbalance with India. This would help India also. It can be seen as a successful Indian attempt to institutionalise economic relations with Afghanistan.

However, in spite of all these efforts the volume of trade between both the countries remains low. However, efforts are being made by India and Afghanistan to improve the economic ties. In this regard various programmes and economic exchanges are organised. Confederation of Indian Industries had organised a “Made in India” show in September 2002 to attract Afghan consumers. It was a great success. Eight thousand Afghan executives and twenty five thousand common Afghans (Hussain 2008: 47) attended this show.

Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India (TAPI) Pipeline

India has been struggling for energy sources in last few decades. Since India is not producing enough energy it is heavily dependent on other countries. India is importing energy from other countries. India is exploring energy sources other than its traditional suppliers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. In this regard, Central Asian countries are a feasible substitute as it has large natural resources.

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India signed an agreement to build a gas pipeline, which will pass through Afghanistan and Pakistan. Origin of this pipeline will be Turkmenistan and it will end in India. Length of TAPI will be seventeen hundred kilometres. It will cost \$7.6 billion (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-18622573>). Asian Development Bank has funded this project. (ADB).¹⁰ Afghanistan will be benefitted \$1.4 billion annually from the project as transit fee (<http://www.pmpipeliners.safan.com/mag/pp10411/r06.pdf>). Apart from this project will generate employment. Pipeline project has the potential to create some additional industry which in turn provides permanent employment. For country like Afghanistan which has a flourishing economy it will help in meeting energy requirement. (Palau 2012).

¹⁰ In fact the project is not new. It was first conceived by ADB in early 1990s. It took long time to materialise as a project due to several reasons primary was the unrest in Afghanistan. India has joined the project rather late after 2008. See for details https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/CFC_Afghanistan_TAPI_Feb12.pdf

According to Akiner, “when completed, the pipeline will deliver 90 million cubic meters of gas a day; most of this will be divided equally between India and Pakistan, but Afghanistan will have a share of approximately ten percent” (2011: 18). It was big success of India- Afghanistan economic ties.

Map 2: TAPI Pipeline



Source: https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/CFC_Afghanistan_TAPI_Feb12.pdf

India's state owned gas company (ONGC) is one of the leaders of a consortium trying to persuade global investors to stump up the amount necessary for this project. Despite all this enthusiasm from all the parties, it has been assessed that the problem of difficult geographical terrain and instability in the region may play the role of hurdles in the project (Akiner 2011).

India's Aid

Since 2001 India helped Afghanistan with \$ 2 billion dollar in its reconstruction. This makes India largest regional donor to the Afghanistan. (Roche 2012). India made profound investment in building several schools and hospitals in Afghanistan. It also invests in building several infrastructural projects for academic and social upliftment. India rebuilt the Habibia School in Kabul in 2007. It also provided kits to 8646 students in various schools besides providing other essential equipments for academic institutions.

Indian government has gifted 20000 desks cum benches to schools in Afghanistan. India is also providing teaching staff to different schools besides training the existing Afghan teachers. India is also providing different kinds of scholarships for the higher studies to Afghani students (Bhut 2009). Different Indians higher educational institutions offer over 800 scholarships in different disciplines to Afghan citizens (Laishram 2011). India is also providing a grant of over \$ 5 million to Afghanistan for the construction of 38 schools and other associated uplift projects primarily in the conflict ridden areas estimated to benefit around 40000 students (D'Souza 2007: 839).

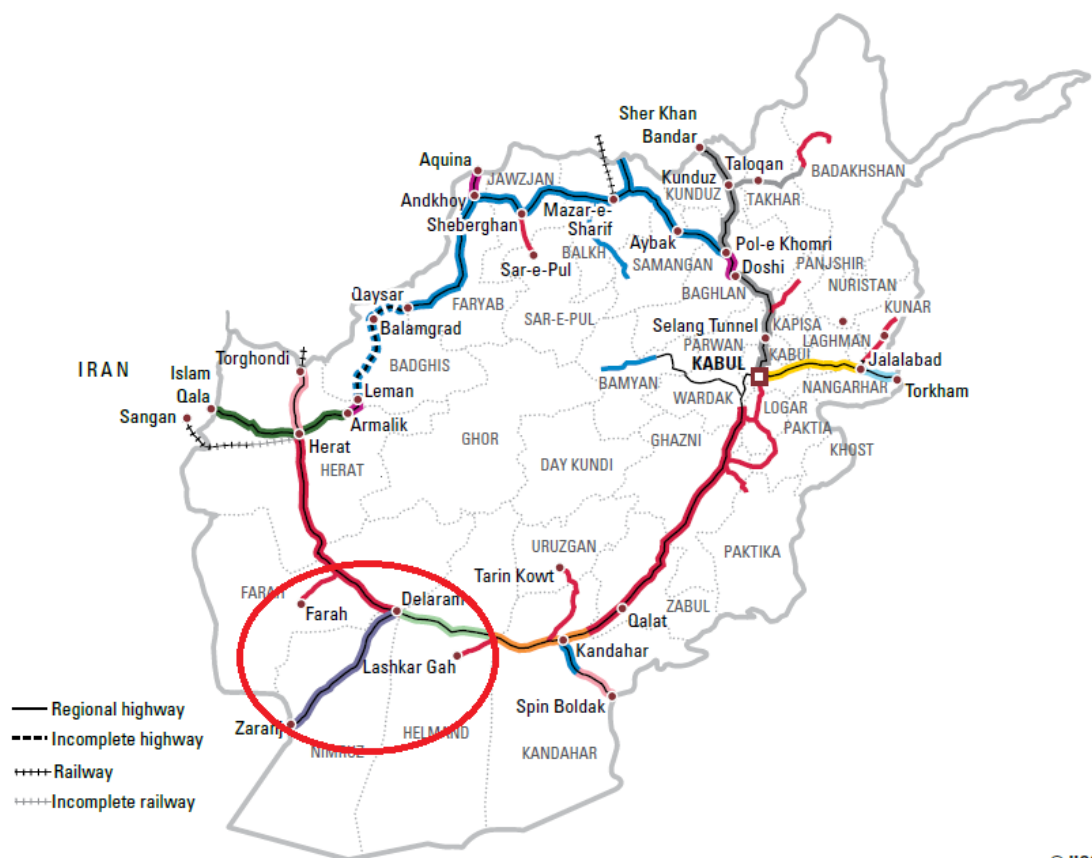
Afghanistan appreciates Indian support as the latter is also involved in several other educational and institutional development projects including training of students, technical experts and civil servants. Its private sector too is involved in such activities. Capacity Building Programmes are also underway in the fields of diplomacy, media and information, civil aviation, agriculture research and education, health care and medical science, tourism, education, standardisation, rural development, public administration, electoral management, administration, and local governance. It is also providing massive humanitarian aid to Afghanistan including medical facilities, medicine and food. (Jha Rajan 2014) India is also involved in reconstruction of Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health. The project was finished in 2007 with the total cost of \$2.7 million funded by India alone. (Chandra 2007:189)

Infrastructure support

India's role in upgrading infrastructural facilities in Afghanistan has been substantial. India gave \$70 million grant for the construction of Zaranj-Dilram road link between

the Iranian port of Chabahar and Afghanistan in order to create an alternative land route to the land-locked Afghanistan. The Border Road Organisation was assigned to complete the 250 Kilometer road between Chahbahar and Afghanistan (Hussain 2008: 48). India is very keen to get a bigger share in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In order to win back the Afghan government's and people's favours, it promised in 2002 to invest around \$4.5 billion in the reconstruction of the country in five years. Indian Chamber of Commerce and industry had prepared a list of 30 Indian companies which will have greater role in this process (Hussain 2008: 47).

Map 1: Delaram-Zaranj Highway



Source: Civil-Military Fusion Centre: Afghanistan in Transition

India is spending more than 40 percent of its total aid in creating a viable power generation and supply base in Afghanistan (Chandra A 2007: 183). It has undertaken the task to reconstruct or build several small and medium size power generations units in the electricity deficit country. For example, by the end of year 2003 there was a survey undertaken by the Indian companies to build Bamyan micro hydro project (Chandra A 2007). India also undertook the construction of 202 kilometres long 220

kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 kV substation at Chimtala bringing Uzbek electricity to the power hungry Kabul city. It will facilitate the lighting of the city throughout the year. This project was completed in collaboration with the Afghan Government, ADP and the World Bank, with inputs from USAID and International Energy Firms, and was an outstanding example of regional and international cooperation in Afghanistan. The other two major infrastructure projects, the construction of the Afghan Parliament in Kabul and the construction of Salma Dam power project in Herat province was supported by India and others to be completed by 2011-12 (<http://meaindia.nic.in/meaxpsite/pressrelease/2011/01/bilateralafghanistan.pdf>).

India assisted in changing the political economy of the landlocked country, so that it would no longer be dependent on Pakistan for resources or access to major ports. It was this reason that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during his Afghan visit in 2011 announced a new assistance of US\$ 450 million to meet the requirement of ongoing and forthcoming projects. This aid package is in addition to US\$750 million already announced by India to implement the projects in various sectors including infrastructure development, education, healthcare and social development. The Indian Prime Minister also offered to consider extending a US\$50 million Line of Credit facility to Afghanistan in order to promote bilateral trade and investment. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described the crucial Zaranj-Delaram highway, being constructed by India in western Afghanistan as a *symbol of cooperation*, which has been completed and would be handed over soon to the Afghan government. India is equally involved in rebuilding industrial sector in Afghanistan. (Bhut 2009).

Besides trade and investment, India is also involved in various other sectors. One of the most important assistance is financial support to Afghan government. For example, in 2003-2004 India provided \$100 million to Afghanistan. (Ibid)

India is supporting the construction of Bank network and in organising Afghan banking system. For instance, in 2002 India sent experts from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to Afghanistan to assist the Da Afghanistan Bank. Several Indian Banks have opened their branches in Afghanistan in past few years. Indian government is also helping to recreate urban development in Afghanistan while helping it technically and financially. Afghanistan needs strong support from India in building a viable

information technology sector. Indian firms such as Infosys and TCS are helping in training in software professionals in Afghanistan who will work in the e governance in the country.

Agriculture

India is also building Afghanistan's irrigation system to support farming. It is trying to revive several dams in order to rebuild Afghanistan's agriculture infrastructure. It is also supplying technology along with several power plants.

India's Afghanistan aid programmes are a combination of business activity and humanitarian support. There are certain problems faced by India in Afghanistan. Most of it is related to security as certain militant groups have targeted Indian investment and aid programmes. They consider the presence of Indians in Afghanistan as interventionist forces. Taliban generally supports the militants and Pakistan trained combative.

Apparently, according to some data, for the construction of every 1.5 kilometres of road one person was killed (Mukarji 2011: 33). Most of those who were killed in this violence are Indians. The Indian embassy in Kabul was hit by two bomb attacks in 2008 and 2009, killing 75 people and wounding hundreds. Indian engineers working on projects in Afghanistan have been kidnapped and hostels for Indian workers have been attacked. The Taliban have claimed many of these attacks, but India blames Pakistan's military spy agency, the ISI, saying it is trying to undermine New Delhi's influence. Hence,

“Making India less visible in Afghanistan, without reducing its influence, has become a priority for policy maker in Delhi. While its larger infrastructure projects wind down, India has expanded its delivery of what one observer has called ‘Phantom aid’, whereby money is channelled through the Afghan government to local communities. These small development projects (SDPs) insure greater local ownership and participation and, according to the Ministry of External Affairs, none have been targeted by militants” (Norfolk 2011: 14).

Military and Internal Security Policy

India has been concerned about the building of stability and peace in Afghanistan once NATO forces are withdrawn. Nevertheless, Indian military engagements in

Afghanistan are primarily focussed on safeguarding its current investments from attacks of militants and other hostile sections. According to Indian officials, there are currently about four thousand Indian workers and security personnel working on different relief and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan. Since 2006, following increased incidents of kidnappings and attacks, India has sent the country's mountain trained paramilitary forces, tasked with guarding its border with China, to guard its workers; there are about five hundred police personnel deployed in Afghanistan currently. India provided police training to 250 Afghan police forces and cadets in India in 2002.

India is providing trucks, cars and other important vehicles to Afghan military. These vehicles are used for civil purposes also. On cooperation in the security sector, Afghan Defence Minister General Abdul Rahim Wardak said in June 2011 that "we will welcome any cooperation in the field of training and helping our national security forces to be able to defend their country". Military equipment supplies were also under discussion between India and Afghanistan. India also committed to build capabilities of Afghan security forces and is providing training to them. It is also looking to Afghanistan as potential market for its armament industry. It has already offered its light helicopter for the Afghan army in 2011 (Norfolk 2011).

Exploration of Mining

Afghanistan has large deposits of various minerals including oil, gas, gold, copper and coal (Economist Country Report 2011). India is among several other countries are competing for a role in extraction of some of these minerals in different parts of the country. Most of the mines are located in very remote areas where it is difficult to operate without any substantial infrastructure and security. Still, it is Afghan government's policy to increase foreign investment in the mining sector as it's the main source of government revenue.

Indian companies have to compete with companies from China and Russia along with the US in procuring contracts for mining. In a latest development, a consortium led by state-run Steel Authority of India (SAIL) had to invest up to \$6 billion in the mine, railroads and a steel plant in Afghanistan in order to compete with its Chinese competitor. The bid also signals India's intention to remain engaged in Afghanistan

long after 2014, when US led forces complete a pullout. The contract for the Hajigak mines in Bamiyan province is also with Indian companies. It is considered to be the single biggest foreign investment project in war-ravaged Afghanistan. Exploration at Hajigak is due to start next year (2013) and development of the mine will take four to five years.

Afghanistan imports its energy needs from Iran and some Central Asian republics till now. Investment in mining sector is seen a potential source of self-sufficiency by Afghan officials. In 2010, it was estimated that Afghanistan had between \$ 1 trillion to \$3 trillion worth of mineral resources (Mukarji 2011: 33). According to Afghan Minister of Mines, Wahidullah Shahriani, "Afghanistan's rich mineral resources have the potential to transform the nation's economy and provide early investors with substantial upside. The global interest shown in the current mineral tender processes confirms the widespread confidence in this potential" (<http://www.mineweb.com/mineweb/view/mineweb/en/page674?oid=147220&sn=Detail&pid=102055>)

So far, mainly Chinese and Indian companies have shown interest in mining resources of Afghanistan. China's National Petroleum was chosen as a preferred bidder for an oil field in northern Afghanistan, taking the country a step closer to a second major deal after winning a \$4 billion copper project in Logar province in 2007. Global miners such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton have stayed away from Afghanistan because of security concerns and also because of high production costs especially in transporting deposits from the landlocked, mountainous country with few roads and other infrastructure.

For India, a direct land route from Hajigak is not feasible because it would involve travelling through Pakistan. Other options include transporting the ore westward to the Iranian port of Chabahar which is connected by roads that Indian engineers have built. The ore can also be moved by slurry pipelines after turning it into slush, but that may involve Pakistan as well. India seems to be banking on the fact that the overall security situation will improve in coming years. A lot of things can change from now till the time Indian mining bids reach production stage which will take years. This time will be crucial for the test of India-Afghan

relations.<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304811304577367160335316288.html>

Besides China and other competitor in Afghanistan, India is also facing the challenge from Pakistan. It is more of a political nature than economic as Pakistan is using every trick to disrupt Indian economic investment in the country. There are fears that an Indian –run mining concession could be a tempting target of Pakistan supported groups and its intelligence agency ISI. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is more concerned about its economic development. According to one Afghan official, “we will be guided by Afghanistan’s national interests in arriving at a decision,” on whom to give and not give a contract. “If it is an Indian company which wins it then so be it,” the official said, dismissing concerns that deeper Indian involvement will stoke new tensions with Pakistan (<http://dawn.com/2011/09/15/indian-firms-eye-huge-mining-investment-in-afghanistan/>).

India is Afghanistan’s biggest regional aid donor and sixth largest overall. It has pledged \$2 billion in projects, from constructing a new parliament building to laying a highway to Iran, to project Indian “soft power”. Pakistan publicly derides those attempts to secure influence in what it sees as governments in Kabul have concerned its backyard, but Islamabad, that, it feels are too cosy with India. .

An understanding of political and economic development in India- Afghanistan relations suggests that there is a great potential for the further development of trade and economic ties between both the countries. However, there are several hurdles in the way of a healthy and vibrant economic relationship between both the countries. One of the most important hurdles is the lack of infrastructure. This hurdle can be overcome through greater and faster investment. The next major problem in the development of greater economic ties between Afghanistan and India is related to security. This cannot be addressed until Afghan government takes certain long term and firm steps in this direction. It has to build a strong military and police force as well as it has to address some of the basic concerns of the rebel forces in order to win them back. One thing is sure, with an economy ravaged by more than three decades of war, Afghanistan’s government is under tremendous pressure to ensure that projects involving foreign investment flourish. For this it has to take some visionary steps which would bear fruits.

India's Afghanistan Policy: Strategic Dimension

The use of Afghanistan as a corridor for centuries by invaders to attack India is a historical reality. The Greeks, Persians, Scythians, Turks and the Afghans themselves all made their way to invade India through Afghan corridors. Further, the country's geostrategic location has been crucial in international politics since the days of the imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia. After Indian independence in 1947, Afghanistan became important as a counter to Pakistan and a trade route to Central Asia. In the 1990s, it was a major source of foreign militants infiltrating into the Kashmir Valley. In Indian strategic thinking, this historical backdrop looms large. As Vishal Chandra has argued:

“The geostrategic significance of Afghanistan, as a land bridge between South and Central Asia and much beyond, has since times immemorial ensured that regional and extra-regional powers have politico-military and economic stakes in Afghanistan”. (Chandra 2006: 64-92)

Due to domestic instability, Afghanistan in modern times seldom articulated a strategic interest in India, despite seeing it as a counter to Pakistan's hegemony. However, in the post-Taliban period Kabul regards India as a reliable ally in international politics.

The Old and New Great Games

The first “Great Game”, as coined by Rudyard Kipling (Hiro 2011:25) between the Russian Empire in the north and the British Empire in the south ended with an informal agreement in 1895 recognising Afghanistan as a buffer state. However, British ambitions resurfaced after the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Third Anglo–Afghan war ended with the formal recognition of Afghanistan as an independent nation on 8 August 1919. Later the country's strategic importance came to the fore during the Cold War, when it again became a centre of great power rivalry as the Soviet Union and the United States of America (US) looked to increase their influence in the region. Afghanistan's location on the southern border of the Soviet Union and as a northern neighbour of Pakistan, a US ally, reinvented its old role as a buffer between two superpowers.

The Soviet Union's 1979 invasion led to over a decade of civil war (Saikal 2006). The invasion was not only to support a communist regime to power but also to prevent the

rise of pro-US forces, as Daoud Khan had been gradually shifting towards the US and its Western allies (Emadi 2010 : 96–8).

During the first Great Game period, India was not an independent country and could not significantly influence events. During the Cold War era, New Delhi was part of the Nonaligned Movement and hence opposed any strategic calculation regarding a fellow member. However, while it hoped for better coordination between the two, India was not explicitly opposed to the Soviet invasion and when a communist regime came to power, it established relations. This was more of a strategic rather than a political move, as India was close to the Soviet Union at the time and did not want to alienate Moscow (Raja Mohan, 2011 <http://www.india-seminar.com>). Moreover, Afghanistan was in no position to have an independent strategic relationship with India at the time as it was under Soviet influence. This control was not liked by the US and other Western powers and they considered it an imminent threat to the West (Emadi 2010).

In the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan became embroiled in a civil war. The civil war saw the rise of the Taliban to power, whose foreign policy was isolationist and who kept relations only with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The US was not opposed to the Taliban regime despite it being considered reactionary and known for its inhuman treatment of women and religious minorities. Washington's strategic interests in oil exploration and the Taliban's anti-Iran/Russia policies encouraged it to support the regime indirectly through Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Rashid 2010). The persistent pursuit of self-interest by the superpowers led to the re-emergence of the great game in the 1990s termed by Rashid (Ibid) as the "New Great Game". This time the Russian Empire was replaced by the Russian Federation and the British Empire by the US. The scope and players in this version were bigger than in the previous one. Unlike in the past where control over land was the central concern, this time the race for the resources of the region became more important. However as in the past, this "Great Game was also between expanding and contracting empires" (Hopkirk 1990).

The role of Afghanistan remained central to the New Great Game as well despite the fact that the country itself was no longer the primary concern of the main players. (Rashid 2010) It became a central actor as a land route to Central Asia, a source of the global drug traffic and a centre of global terrorism. Moreover, there are untapped

natural resources in the country and it borders many unstable regions—the Central Asian States, China’s Xinjiang region, Iran and Pakistan—making it one of the hottest locations in world politics.

In the aftermath of the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Kabul tried to use its central location to its own advantage while offering all stakeholders benefits if they agreed to respect its sovereignty and invest in the country’s development. According to former President Hamid Karzai, Afghans do not mind the presence of Western competition over Afghanistan until they meddle in domestic affairs (Lebedev 2011, online at <http://www.independent.co.uk>).

The silk route and the trans-Afghanistan pipeline

In the neoliberal phase of world politics where economics determines strategic concerns, Afghanistan’s location is an important factor. India and other countries see it as a gateway to Central Asia and other parts of landlocked West Asia (Nides 2011: 1–6). Afghanistan is aware of its potential as a trade route and is willing to use it as a source of much needed revenue. As such, it has been signing treaties and memoranda of understanding in this sphere. The “New Silk Route” is a crucial strategic bargaining chip for Kabul in its relationship with New Delhi as well. Both have signed the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline deal and a port is being developed in Iran as well as link roads throughout the country.

TAPI is a multiplayer, multipurpose project with the potential to create opportunities for countries like India and Pakistan to come together as well as foster cooperation in the region. Countries such as China have been also trying to find a role for themselves in the project due to its geostrategic importance. The main beneficiary both in economic and political terms would be Afghanistan (Foster 2010, online at <http://www.ensec.org>). For all countries including India, security is a major concern in the implementation of the project.

Afghanistan however has not been able to provide security and given the condition of its armed forces seems unlikely to do so in the future. Nevertheless, Afghan officials hope that the involvement of other countries in such projects would help build a solid security structure (Ibid). Kabul thus has been using geopolitics in nation-building and economic development and sees its relationship with India in this context.

Afghanistan also offers transit routes to China and Iran along with other countries in the region. This is under the broader programme of recreating the Old Silk Route. Many argue that the New Silk Route is an American initiative undertaken to exploit the natural resources of the country (Malou Innocent and Tridivesh Singh Maini, 2012, online at <http://www.livemint.com>). Thus while the New Silk Route is seen with promise in countries like India, others like China and Russia are worried about the US taking the lead. However, all the countries agree that Afghanistan is central to increasing regional trade. New Delhi wants to reach the Central Asian States and therefore is keen to build land routes through Afghanistan and Iran. It has already invested heavily in building roads and other economic infrastructure in the former to pursue its long-term strategic interests in the region. India's strategic deal signed with Afghanistan on 4 October 2011 proved the latter is centrality as a transit route to Central Asia and a major player in regional cooperation. As D'Souza says

“The trade and economic agreements in the pact are a reiteration of India's commitment to Afghanistan's economic growth and its role as a ‘bridge’ between South and Central Asia. The emphasis on ‘regional economic cooperation’ in the Agreement on Strategic Partnership indicates India's vision of binding the countries in the region through a mutually beneficial cooperative framework” (D'Souza 2007).

Drug Trafficking

In Afghanistan, a serious concern of the world community has been the proliferation of illegal drug trafficking. The business of drugs and narcotics has been a major source of funding for organised crime including international terrorism. According to the World Bank, there is a strong linkage between drug production and its trade, the warlords and insecurity in Afghanistan and the region. The report of the World Bank says “The drug trade adds up to a vicious circle of mutually reinforcing problems ... presents a grave danger to the country's entire state-building and reconstruction agenda” (Rashid 2008 : 324).

On 9 December 2004, two days after his inauguration as the elected president, Hamid Karzai declared *jihad* against drug trafficking. While speaking at a national counternarcotics conference in Kabul, he called it a “national disgrace” (Chandra 2006: 65). However, it is a difficult issue for the Afghan government to resolve, as

due to a lack of alternative sources of income farmers in the country chose to grow opium. This has created a great challenge for the administration, as it cannot bring stability to the country until drug production is stopped. Farmers however must be first provided alternate sources of income before being asked to stop production. As the government has not succeeded in doing so, the Taliban and other opposition factions have continued to use opium production for much needed finance. Rashid says that “The Taliban resurgence, al Qaeda’s reorganisation and the restarting of its training camps for international terrorist groups after the US invasion would have been impossible without the explosion in heroin production” (Rashid 2008 :317).

Afghanistan supplies approximately 90 per cent of the world’s heroin (Schweich 2008, online at <http://www.nytimes.com>). Not only opposition forces but supporters of the government as well use the cultivation of opium as a source of income (ibid), which prevents the administration from taking action against the production of drugs. This situation has created a strategic challenge for Afghanistan and questioned its credibility. The government has weighed options of taking help from foreign forces and India is considered a key player in this context as well. A major Indian concern is that money from the drug trade in Afghanistan is used to support militants in its restive state of Kashmir as well as other terrorist groups in the country. In this context Rashid remarked that “Pakistan’s ISI (Inter Services Intelligence) uses money from the drug trade to fund some of its covert operations” (Rashid 2008:319). India is keen to control the flow of drugs in the region and deprive terrorist groups and their supporters of a major source of funding. Hence, there is a convergence of interest between India and Afghanistan. India has been training Afghan security forces to deal with internal security challenges as well as build infrastructure for developmental economic activities. These activities are seen as future alternatives to the production and trade of drugs.

Terrorism

Terrorism is an old problem in the South Asian region and countries such as Afghanistan and India have been long sufferers. However, it was only after 11 September 2001 that certain countries such as the US identified it as a global problem and began waging the “war on terror”. The start of this global war led to the fall of the

Taliban regime, as it supported al-Qaeda and its leadership. Although the regime was removed, global terrorism did not end rather it has become even more aggressive.

Afghanistan is still considered a major hub of international terrorism. Due to the government's inability to control its remote parts and the persistence of the Taliban, terror groups find easy shelter in the country (Rashid 2008). India has also been a victim of terrorist activities emanating from Afghanistan. During the 1990s, foreign terror organisations operated in Kashmir and the majority were Afghans supported and funded by Pakistan (Cooley 2000). New Delhi was thus willing to support Washington's war efforts in 2001. However, this backing was scuttled due to the US's reluctance to choose India over Pakistan ("War on Terror: India-Pakistan Factors", Centre for Peace and Development Studies, online at <http://www.cpdindia.org>). In this scenario, India chose to play a more subtle role and started supporting the Northern Alliance in its war against the Taliban ruled state (Rashid 2008:70). Once the Taliban regime was removed and the Northern Alliance came to the fore, India was in a better position to pursue its interests. After Hamid Karzai came to power, India adopted a strategic policy to control the support from Afghan warlords to Kashmiri militants. It used diplomatic channels to pressurise the government and international forces in Afghanistan to block the sources of funding and other support to militants in India.

However, as the central government in Kabul remained weak and opposition forces strong in some pockets, India failed to destroy the global links of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. This led to a shift in the policy of the Indian government on the issue of terrorism and it began arguing for greater global collaboration in the development of Afghanistan as a long-term strategy to control the growth of terrorism in the region. The problem of global terrorism cannot be solved through bilateral relations, especially as Afghanistan is not in a situation to deal with the problem. It needs the diplomatic and military help of influential players in the region. Realising this, in the aftermath of the 2009 elections, India agreed to cooperate with the US and other forces to counter the threat of terrorism in Afghanistan. The methods adopted for dealing with the Taliban have been crucial. Until then, India had been of the opinion that there should be no negotiation with the Taliban as they were hugely influenced by Pakistan. Eliminating their influence from amongst the masses in the

country was the only way. This was the rationale behind the spending on the social reconstruction of the country (Jha 2009:337–48).

The Indian government's opposition to the Taliban was not only because they were pro-Pakistan but also because they were antithetical to the norms of democracy. Nevertheless, the position of not engaging with the Taliban became a subject of debate among scholars. According to Ahmed Rashid (Rashid 2012: 194), it was only in 2011 that India "finally accepted the need for talks with the Taliban". The division between the good and bad Taliban by the US was intended to drive a wedge between various Taliban factions and India saw sense in supporting this mission.

Pakistan Factor

Afghanistan and Pakistan are neighbours with several ethnic and geographical similarities as well as various mutual problems. Since its establishment, Pakistan has considered Afghanistan as its strategic depth vis-à-vis India and therefore has tried to maintain influence over it. In the past, Pakistan was the training ground of forces opposing the Soviet Union's invasion (Griffiths 2011). However, Pakistan considers stability in Afghanistan as harmful to its own interests. Accordingly, it has always tried to create ethnic divisions and gain a say in domestic affairs. This strategy was devised to prevent its own ethnic groups from demanding independence (Rashid 2012). Islamabad not only opposes the Indian presence in Afghanistan but also sees any attempt to build a strong and stable state as antithetical to its own interests. In this context, the Afghanistan–India relationship is seen as a dangerous development by Islamabad—one that it has tried to curtail and hinder in various ways. (Jha Rajan 2015) Pakistan policy on Afghanistan vis- a- vis India has been disturbing because of the following

Firstly, Pakistan has refused to provide transit route to its neighbours. Opening its borders on both sides for the passage of Indian and Afghan trade would improve bilateral relations between the two. Pakistan however does not want to strengthen Afghanistan and reduce its own influence. Secondly, Pakistan opposes a greater Indian strategic role in Afghan affairs. It claims that this would imperil its own security as it argues that India is trying to encircle it while creating allies in Afghanistan (Healey and Rubin, 2011, online at <http://www.nytimes.com>). Thirdly,

Pakistan targets Indian investments in Afghanistan and helps all anti-India elements through monetary and other means. The ISI has been found to be involved in various attacks on Indians in Afghanistan (ibid). Fourthly, Pakistan also opposes Indian aid to Afghanistan in international fora and argues that it is meant to turn Afghanistan against Pakistan.

Constrain in Afghanistan-Pakistan ties

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, world powers became involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Marsden 2003:91–106). US policymakers identified the importance of Pakistan in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and in 2009, Richard Holbrooke the American special representative for the region devised the policy of Af-Pak. It was based on an essay by Barnett Rubin and Ahmed Rashid (Rashid, 2012, *ibid*, p193). They argued for the Obama administration to constitute a regional diplomatic initiative to bring all neighbours to the table to discuss a “peace process” and non-interference guarantees in Afghanistan.

India opposed the initiative for two reasons. First, it considered Pakistan a source of international terrorism and averred that until it took action against its own terror groups, it should not be invited to participate in international fora. Second, Indian policymakers believed the policy of Af-Pak would provide an opportunity for international interference in Kashmir (Rashid 2012,). India’s reluctance to join the Af-Pak policy provided Islamabad with an opportunity to increase its influence over Kabul. It also resulted in several attacks by the Taliban on Indian investments and establishments in Afghanistan. Instead of engaging Kabul at a regional level, New Delhi opted for bilateral arrangements and signed a strategic partnership treaty in 2011.

Federally Administered Tribal Areas

Pakistan’s northwest has close links with Afghanistan and most of the territory is inhabited by tribal people. Although the region has porous borders and tribes move freely across them, the area has never accepted Pakistani rule. Islamabad views Kabul’s engagement in its affairs as a main reason for the unrest in FATA and alleges that Indian agencies are also involved in creating trouble there (Butt 2011 online at <http://tribune.com.pk>). Pakistan sees alleged Indian involvement in FATA as a

counter to its own involvement in Kashmir. A growing Indian presence in Afghanistan provides easier access to its intelligence agencies and therefore Pakistan opposes Indian activities in the border region. Indian authorities however view Pakistani propaganda as a means of creating hostility among local Afghans and as a pressure tactic to deny India any space to work in the country.

The Durand Line

Pakistan's opposition to India is also substantiated through its position on the Durand Line—the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan created by the colonial administration in 1893 running through the tribal areas. Pakistan does not respect the border and uses its porosity to support anti-Afghan administration forces such as Pashtun rebels. This is a central part of Islamabad's policy towards Kabul and New Delhi. Bajoria, a noted expert on Afghanistan says, "Pakistani actions in the region are concerned about bolstering security against India. ... Pakistan sought to support a 'client regime in Afghanistan' that would be hostile to India, giving the Pakistani military a secure border and strategic depth" (Bajoria 2009). Since the start of the global war on terror, Pakistan has used the porous Durand line for its own benefit. It claims to be fighting terrorists in its territory while simultaneously supporting terrorists in the region. No blame can be ascribed to it as it claims that the terrorists are from Afghanistan. Most foreign militants in Kashmir come from this region (Cooley 2000). The areas on both sides of the Durand Line are havens for terrorist groups and international forces find it difficult to deal with them, as they cross the border at will.

Kashmir Trespass

Kashmir is situated adjacent to Pakistan. Although it is an integral part of India, Pakistan is trying to annex it by hook or crook. They are sending Pakistan trained *Mujahidins* in Afghanistan to Kashmir to spread violence. A major strategic concern of India in relations with Afghanistan is the issue of Kashmir. The Indian government has been facing a tough challenge from the Pakistan backed separatist movement there. The support of Kashmiri separatism has deep historical roots. Once it became clear that the Soviet Union had weakened and there was no immediate threat of external aggression, Islamabad started supporting armed rebellion against its main

enemy India. In the late 1970s, General Ziaul-Haq's coming to power and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan led to the rise of Pakistan's aggressiveness in Kashmir. It trained and built-up militant groups and sent them across the border (Hiro 2011). The result was long-term insurgency in Kashmir first led by domestic militants and later by foreign ones—all supported by the Pakistani establishment monetarily and otherwise. When the Kashmir insurgency began, Afghanistan was in the middle of a civil war and its youth were available for recruitment to other parts of the world. The majority of foreign militants in Kashmir came from Afghanistan (Cooley 2000). The main terrorist outfits that were active in Kashmir in the 1990s included the Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Jaish-e-Muhammad and the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, all with substantial numbers of Afghans members. Most militants received training in camps in Afghanistan, were taught *jihad* in Taliban run schools and received ideological backing from the al Qaeda. An incident that exposed the direct relationship between the militants in Kashmir and Afghanistan was the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane in 1999. It was a defining moment in Indo-Afghan relations and later drove India to tacitly support the US led invasion. After 2001, when the world community put pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting the Taliban, Pakistan used it as a bargaining chip to keep up its operations in Kashmir.

India on the other hand saw a viable option in supporting Afghanistan's new regime for controlling the activities of the Taliban and other militants. This explains India's activism in Afghanistan post-2001. It is difficult to ignore Pakistan in Afghan-India relations. "To acknowledge that Pakistan is central to the future of Afghanistan is a bow to the tyranny of geography" (Raja Mohan 2011). Afghan and Indian policymakers have so far not fully taken into account the reality of this situation. On the other hand, Pakistan should not see any treaty signed between its neighbours as antithetical to its own interests in the region. As in the case of the TAPI, it could bring benefits to the country in the long run. Commenting on the Afghan-India strategic relationship, Sajjad Ashraf, a former Pakistani ambassador to Singapore and now a professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, has argued that Pakistan should not react unnecessarily.

The Afghanistan–India strategic Agreement

Based on calculations of mutual interests, Afghanistan and India signed a strategic agreement on 4 October 2011. It recognises the contributions both countries could make to each other's development and protection. Given the international atmosphere and plethora of interests involved in the stability or even instability of Afghanistan, the agreement is important, more so in light of the eventual withdrawal of international forces. According to the provisions of the agreement, both countries will help each other in economic, political and social endeavours and cooperate in international fora. The two will also discuss all relevant matters before taking a final decision. India has also agreed to help in building Afghanistan's infrastructure and provide essential training to its armed forces and police personnel to maintain stability in the country (Kapila 2011, online at <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Regional Players

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a regional grouping initiated by China, Russia and some Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan gained observer status in 2012. This signified the latter is growing importance in the region and highlighted the competition for influence among external powers. In 2016 India became a full member of the SCO along with Pakistan. As per Daniel Norfolk "Despite the deviating interests of other key players in the region (China, Russia, Iran, the Central Asian Republics and Saudi Arabia) and the US, India's interests and policies broadly converge with most involved (with the obvious exception of Pakistan)" (2011: 19)

Afghanistan's future inclusion in the SCO is also seen as furthering the creation of a common platform with the Central Asian Republics. As Iran is also an observer in the organisation due to become a member, the platform becomes wider and more significant. According to former Indian Foreign Minister SM Krishna, Afghanistan represents the most important security challenge faced by India and other players in the region and in this context "the SCO provides a promising alternative regional platform to discuss the rapidly changing Afghan situation" (Krishnan 2012, online at <http://www.thehindu.com>). Apart from the prospect for the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan through the SCO, India has been keen to use the grouping to combat

terrorism emerging from the region. According to the Afghanistan–India strategic treaty, “Both sides agree to consult and cooperate at the United Nations and other international, regional and multilateral forums. Such cooperation is to be aimed at influencing decision-making in these forums in the interest of both countries” (MEA).

Hence, the SCO provides both nations the opportunity for greater cooperation and fulfilling the aims and objectives of their strategic treaty. Although the possibility of Afghanistan becoming a member of the SCO has been expressed on numerous occasions, each time the concerns and expectations have been the same. Daniel Norfolk has observed that

“As India’s reservations concerning US withdrawal from Afghanistan have been rendered irrelevant by events on the ground (and) the incremental draw down of American and coalition troops has commenced, it is ready to look for alternatives. ... The SCO offers a promising avenue by which India can offset some of its anxiety surrounding the possibility of a security vacuum and can work to achieve several of the objectives that remain elusive throughout its engagement with occupied Afghanistan. ... By entering into an association led by China, India will be addressing wider and more acute strategic priorities, managing relations with its larger more powerful neighbour and it may enable New Delhi to pressure Pakistan into cooperating in Afghanistan. ... Increased cooperation with the SCO will also improve India’s access to Central Asian energy reserves and markets. Here again, the members and mechanisms of the SCO can discourage Pakistani recalcitrance” (Norfolk 2011).

India therefore is looking at the SCO as the platform, which could serve multiple purposes in its foreign policy towards the region. For Afghanistan as well, the SCO provides an avenue for cooperation with regional powers and engagement on an equal footing. It offers the opportunity to attract investments from these countries. In the last few years, India and Iran have not been able to maintain strong bilateral relations due to certain geostrategic and international pressures (Pant 2011) but efforts are now being made to repair the traditional partnership. In this context, the observation of Ranjan Mathai is worth mentioning. He says that

“New Delhi acknowledges the centrality of Iran to regional security equations and openly encourages greater engagement on issues pertaining to Afghanistan. ... Indian Foreign Secretary at the time, Ranjan Mathai called on the international community to ‘add Iran to the list of countries needed to be discussed’ when looking at ‘the prospects for stability in Asia in connection with Afghanistan’. ... New Delhi is (thus) demonstrating its commitment to regional cooperation in Afghanistan (to the detriment to the US) and endorsing the regional project that involves all stakeholders. ... (“India is both a Land Rat and a Water Rat”, *Tehelka*, 2011, <http://www.tehelka.com>)

According to Norfolk

“The trajectory of India’s current Afghan strategy requires that it engage with its regional counterparts ... (though) it is unlikely that India has the capacity to persuade neighbouring states to rally around a broad political agenda. However, regional actors agree that alignment over Afghanistan is necessary ... (and) India’s historical linkages and increasing dynamic engagement with Afghanistan will be instrumental in coordinating a regional approach” (Norfolk 2011:21).

To sum up, it can be stated that political and strategic development in Afghanistan is of immense concern to India and these developments are hugely affecting security system in North Western region of the country.

CHAPTER 3:

IRAN-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS

Introduction

Modern day Afghanistan was once upon a time a part of the mighty Persian Empire. Geographical and ethnic-linguistic similarities are there even today between both the countries. Iran and Afghanistan share around 936 kilometres of land border. The Afghan provinces of Herat, Nimruz and Farah share this border with Iran. Rulers of Kabul too were in control of several provinces of Persian Empire, once the power of the mighty empire vended in the medieval period. It was only after sixteenth century, during the Safavids that Persians were able to re-establish their independence. However, it was only under the Nadir Shah (1698-1747) that Persians were able to counter the dominance of Afghans. The control over some north-western parts of Afghanistan by the Qajar rulers of Persia (1796-1925) kind of reversed the dominance of Afghans in Iran. This history makes it clear the links that existed between both the countries. Ever since the formation of Modern Afghanistan and Persia,¹¹ two countries have cross border links encompassing socio-cultural and ethnic identities. These similarities and their geographical contiguity have created a situation where both the countries are in a position to influence each other's political sphere. Ever since its independence Afghanistan has been in turmoil and despite the fact that Iran too has not been that stable, it is clear that politically and economically Iran was a greater power and hence, it was the one who dominated the relationship between both the countries. This chapter looks into the details of this asymmetric relationship between Iran and Afghanistan. This study is important for any comprehensive understanding of the role Iran plays in India's Afghanistan policy.

Ethnic Links

Since both the countries had been under the same political regimes for quite a long time of their history, it is very obvious that there are deep ethnic and cultural links.

¹¹ Modern Iran was formed from the independent state of Persia created by the Safavids (1501-1736), Nader Shah and Qajar Dynasty (1796-1925). Reza Shah Pahlevi Changed the name of the country from Persia to Iran in 1935. For a detailed history of the country see, Axworthy Michael (2008), *Iran Empire of the Mind: A History from Zoroaster to the Present Day*, Penguin: New Delhi.

The spread of Islam in the eighth century overwhelmed the entire region from the Persian Gulf to China. Modern day Afghanistan and Iran were inhabited by groups of people from same ethnic and religious history. During the Safavid rule in Iran in the sixteenth century, Iran overwhelmingly became a Shia country. This massive change of ideological inclination within Islam did not influence Afghanistan much because of the existence of a regime in the country hostile to Persian ruler's ideology. Afghans remained committed to whatever ideological inclination they had. They remained overwhelmingly Sunnis.¹² Today Persians as an ethnic group constitutes roughly around 51 percent of Iranian population, followed by Azeris 24 percent. Ethnically Iranians and Afghans commonly have Turkmen (2 percent of Iranian population) and Baloch (2 percent) (Hassan Hussain D 2008). Sunnis are around 9 percent of Iranian population. The Shais are around 89 percent of the population. The religious combination of the population is just other way around in Afghanistan.¹³

One of the most prominent ethnic links between Afghanistan and Iran has been the presence of Hazaras in Afghanistan. Unlike most of the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan, Hazaras are Shias who also speak Persian language and therefore have closer affinity with Iran than any other group. Hazaras have been persecuted for a very long period in Afghan politics. Afghans have an overwhelming opinion about Hazaras being the fifth columnists. They are considered to be close to Iran and harbingers of Iranian interest in the country. The traditional hatred towards Shias among a large section of Sunnis along with the above-mentioned apprehensions of betrayals makes the life of Hazaras quite uncomfortable in the country. The apprehensions however, have not been fully without base. Iranians have used Hazaras's Shia identity for its own purposes during the time of geopolitical manoeuvres. As we will see in the following sections during the Civil War in Afghanistan, after the fall of Communist regime, Iran was aiding Hizbi Wahdat Islam (Islamic Unity Party) led by Abdul Ali Mazari (<http://www.afghan-web.com/bios/yest/mazari.html>). Mazari and his group were predominantly Hazaras. Even today it is very much obvious that Hazaras have been getting both political and moral support from Iran whenever they are prosecuted or discriminated against. During the Civil War and even during the time of Taliban when Hazaras were treated

¹² See Chapter One.

¹³ See Chapter One.

as infidels, a large number of around 1.5 million refugees were Hazaras (Milani Mohsen). Even as late as in 1998 hundreds of Hazaras along with nine Iranians were killed by Taliban forces in Majare-Sharrif (<http://www.understandingwar.org/iran-and-afghanistan>). The large number of Hazaras living in Iran provides Iran an effective tool to influence the politics in Afghanistan.

“The story of Iran's influence in Herat throughout the past decade underscores Iran's potential to promote stability and moderation throughout Afghanistan. Herat (Afghanistan's third largest city) is situated within 100 miles of the Iranian border. Until the Treaty of Paris was signed---- which ended the Anglo-Persian War (1856-1857) ----- Herat was considered an integral part of Iran. Today, many Iranians view portions of western Afghanistan as within Iran's sphere of influence. Given the cultural, economic, historic, linguistic, political and religious bonds that connect the Afghans and Iranians on both sides of the border, an extension of Iranian influence in Western Afghanistan seems natural” (Wagner and Cafireo http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/the-paradoxical-afghanira_b_4277936.html Accessed on 05 July 2017).

Iran has a large population of Balochis living within its borders. The Balochis of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan have various ethnic and linguistic similarities. Iran has always been weary of Balochis within its borders due to a strong movement of separate Balochistan led by militant group Jundallah since 2002 (Baer Robert 2009). Though there is a large scale discrimination of Balochs within Iran due to their Sunni orientation and the popularity of separatist movement in the region (Elling Rasmus Christian 2013).The presence of Balochis, nonetheless across the borders in Afghanistan provides an important ethnic link between both the countries.

In the north west of Afghanistan border live a large number of Turkmen who share their common ethnicity with the Turkmen of Iran. The population of Turkmen is almost same in both the countries. The cross border links are not only confined to common ethnic origins but also in day to day relations and familial ties. During the Afghan Civil war Turkmen were quite stable and one of the reasons for their apathy to the war was their almost complete dependence on the cross border links not only in Iran but also in Turkmenistan.

Cultural Links

Iranian cultural influences in Afghanistan encompass religious and linguistic spheres. “Dari, the Afghan dialect of Persian, is one of Afghanistan's two official languages and is used by intellectuals and the elite” (Milani 2010). According to some estimates

around 50 percent of the Afghan population speaks Dari/Farsi. Persian itself is one of the important languages in Afghanistan. The linguistic similarities between both the countries led to links in literature and popular folklore as well.

There are around 20 percent Shias in Afghanistan and they are a vibrant link of Iran in the country. Apart from Hazaras there are small ethnic groups like Qizilbash and Farsiwan etc. who also are predominantly Shias. Because of its being the largest and most powerful Shia country in the world and also because it's in the immediate neighbourhood, most of the Shias in Afghanistan see Iran as their "religious centre" (Emadi Hafizullah 1995: 3). Many Shia festivals including the Iranian New Year Navroz are celebrated in a big way in Afghanistan. Herat and other border areas are 'Persianised' and a large number of migrant labourers go and work in different Iranian cities and towns. Either most of the religious leaders in the region get their education in Iran or the teachers who have their training and education in Iran train them. In this way the influence of Iranian ruling regime; namely the Islamic Regime, secured popular base in the western parts of Afghanistan. This situation is not a spontaneous development rather, it is a result of deliberate attempt to spread the ideas of the Iranian revolution across the border as To quote Emadi:

"According to the Iranian leadership, Islamic unity and brotherhood did not recognise any frontier and nothing could prevent the unity of Muslim people. Clerics pointed to the failure of nationalist, Marxist and liberal ideologies and politics and prescribed Islamic ideology as the only means of salvation for humankind." (1995: 2).

In the following sections, this chapter seeks to establish the cultural and ethnic links as well as the base of Iran's Afghanistan policy. It is common knowledge that Iranian policy towards Afghanistan in the Post-Cold war phase is guided by the geostrategic concerns of the country. It is guided by Iranian needs to create a strategic depth on its western border, to win more allies in order to counter the Saudi Arabian dominance among the Sunni countries in the region and to establish its inevitability for the future of the region. As be seen here, Iranian policies of aligning with the USA after 2001 in Afghanistan and its broader cooperation with Iran to provide land access to the land locked country, were motivated to establish this inevitability. However, before current events are discussed, there is the need to look at the history of the development of this relationship.

Political Links since 1919

After its independence from British dominance, Afghanistan tried to look for close allies in the region. Given the great historical and cultural legacy between both the countries; Iran under the Qajar Dynasty and Afghanistan under King Amanullah Khan, realised each other's importance. In 1919 when Afghanistan declared independence from the British, Iran recognised it and immediately established a close diplomatic relationship. In 1921 both the countries signed a treaty of friendship. Since both the countries were against all kinds of occupation from foreign powers they were looking for a broader cooperation. However, given the lack of initiatives on both sides the relationship remained a low-key affair. After the Second World War, the relationship between both the countries took a new shape, when both the countries had relatively modernist governments. Despite the fact that both the countries had a long standing settlement regarding the borders of the Afghan provinces of Herat, Nimroz and Hilmund (treaty signed in 1872), it remained an important issue between both the countries due to ethnic and religious affinity of these provinces with Iran. Iran being the strongest and richest country between the two the partnership however led to the suspicion among the Afghans about the intentions of the big brother.

Zahir Shah and Shah Regime in Iran

King Zahir Shah (1933-1973) came to power in 1933. He took to modernisation of Afghanistan and shared the vision of his counterpart in Iran Reza Shah Pahlevi (1941-1979). Afghanistan joined the Northern Tier Suddabad pact with Iran, Turkey and Iraq in 1937. This was a non-aggression treaty initiated by King Zahir Shah. This treaty was in force for ten years (Emadi Hafizullah 1995). Both the countries tried to resolve whatever issues they had through peaceful means and despite the dispute regarding the Helmund river's water which became a cause of brief disruption of diplomatic relationship between both the countries in 1962-63; they however maintained this principle of their foreign policy. The Cold War conflict in 1950 had already started souring the relationship between both the countries. For example, Iran refused to recognise the Afghan position vis-à-vis the Pashtuns and Baluch people in Pakistan. Afghanistan was opposed to the Durrand Line and was in favour of these tribes right to self-determination. Iran was a member of the Baghdad Pact and CENTO, along

with Pakistan and Britain which justified its position on the issue (Emadi 1995: 3). However, it was only during and after the Sour Revolution in Afghanistan that both the countries saw a thaw in the relationship due to ideological reasons. New rulers in Afghanistan were pro-Soviet however; the Iranian King was one of the strongest allies of USA. This ideological division created a rift between both the countries which was only undone after the 1979 Iranian revolution (Haji-Yousefi Amir M. 2011).

Sour Revolution and Iran

Four years before the Sour revolution there was a coup d'état against the King Zahir Shah in 1973 led by his cousin Mohammad Daud Khan. Daud Khan established a republic in Afghanistan which was dominated by the left inclined political parties and leaders (see chapter 1). Until the Sour Revolution of 1978 both the countries had almost no diplomatic ties due to Cold War factionalism and rivalry. The only meaningful cooperation between both the countries in this period, was the signing of a treaty related to the distribution of river Helmund's water in 1973. Iranian government also allowed Afghan migrant workers to come and work in the country (Emadi 1995: 3). In 1978 Afghanistan saw the coming of a communist regime to power. The ideological positions consolidated even further as the Shah Regime in Iran was totally committed to the American Cause and had even recognised Israel. Soon after the Sour Revolution in Afghanistan in 1978, Iran too went through its own revolution. The Islamic Revolution in Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini established an Islamic republic in the country.¹⁴ Since the ideological enemy of the new Afghan regime was the same US first as the enemy of the Iranian revolutionary regime under Khomeini, they both came closer and tried to rebuild the relationship. Hence till now we see two decisive phases in the Afghanistan-Iran relationship; first, in 1921 when they signed the treaty of friendship. This phase was a prolonged phase which, with minor up and downs went on till the ideological and political churning in both the countries. Second phase started with the systemic political changes in both the countries from 1978-79 onwards till the end of the communist regime in 1989. Apart

¹⁴ The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was led by Ayatollah Khomeini who after the success of the revolution became the Vilayat-e-Fiqh of the country and proclaimed it as an Islamic Republic. This revolution in Iran was anti-American, and Anti-Shah. The revolution was added and supported by left wing groups in Iran including the Tudeh Party (a Left party). This created a prospect of good relations between Iran and Afghanistan. For the history of the Iranian Revolution See, Moaddel Mansoor (1994), *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*, Columbia: Columbia University Press.

from these two phases there were two more distinct phases of Afghanistan-Iran relationship; first, starting from 1989 till the coming of Taliban in power in Afghanistan, and second, in the post-Taliban phase. The last two phases are dealt in detail in the later part of this chapter. The following sections are related to the second phase of the Afghanistan-Iran relationship, which is to say the years between 1978-79 and 1989.

Soviet Invasion and Iran

Soon after the Saur Revolution in Afghanistan there were internal disturbances in the country. The fall of old monarchy and establishment of republican government could not win the confidence of the people and lacked political legitimacy leading to its quick fall and the coming of yet another new system. The Saur revolution and the political system, which emerged out of it namely the government led by PDPA's Noor Mohammed Taraki (April 1978-September 1979) and Hafijullah Amin (September 1979-December 1979) too failed to win the confidence of the people of Afghanistan. In order to retain the kind of influence Soviet Union was enjoying under the PDPA regime it invaded Afghanistan on 29th December 1979 (Saikal Amin 2004). This occupation was widely criticised by all kinds of countries throughout the world including Iran. In fact officially Iran opposed communist rule in Afghanistan for it was ideologically opposed to communism. Khomeini regime had given its commitment in favour of Nonalignment with the slogan "No East, No West" (Milani Mohsin 2006). Despite its proclaimed position of non-alignment Iran soon after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, started aiding the opposition forces against the PDPA regime and Soviet intervention (Emadi Hafizullah 1995). The open support of Iranian regime to the Mujahideens created enmity in the Afghan government against Iran, and that was the reason for poor diplomatic relations between both the countries.

Iranian Revolution

According to Amin Saikal, one of the reasons of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan was the Islamic revolution in Iran and the rise of similar movements in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In his words,

"In addition to internal Afghan developments, a number of other factors entered the Kremlin's calculation in support of invasion. They ranged from an Islamic

resurgence in the region, with the advent of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic radicalism in Iran and Zia ul-Haq's assertive Islamist policies in Pakistan, and the growing ties between Islamabad and Beijing, which had rejected the PDPA regime from the outset, to the US naval build-up in the Persian Gulf with the 'Iranian hostage crisis', the flourishing Sino-US rapprochement, Washington's decision in 1979 to increase its military spending and NATO's decision to deploy Pershing II missiles in Western Europe" (2004: 196).

In other words, the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan was a well-calculated strategic move, in order to counter all the hostile developments in the region. This shows and reaffirms the strategic importance of Afghanistan in the region and why Iran should be bothered about its fate. The multilateral approach adopted by India in the post-Taliban phase reasserts the fact which is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Once the Soviet army was in the Afghanistan, Iranian regime looked for all those potential groups and individuals which were ready to fight against the Soviets. The fight against Soviets was supported by Iran not only because of ideological reasons, but was also an attempt to gain control over the crucial geostrategic location in the neighbourhood. It was also a move to secure its ethnic constituency in Afghanistan; the 20 percent Shias in the country along with Tajiks.

The strategic mistakes done by Soviets helped a lot in the Iranian mission to counter it. For example as Mohsin Milani observes:

"Ironically the, Soviet occupying forces did not dominate the Hazarjat region in central Afghanistan, the stronghold of the Shai community. It is not clear if this "hands off" policy was adopted by Moscow because of the growing threat emanating from the Pakistani based Islamic resistance, or if it was a concession to Ayatollah Khomeini. Whatever the reason, this policy permitted Iran to create a sophisticated network inside Afghanistan, reinvigorating indigenous organisations, and creating new, disciplined forces, such as Hizbollah. Iran's investments paid off when the eight Iran-based Afghan Shia groups formed an alliance in June in 1987" (2006:238).

Iran's open support to Mujahideens, however was not in lieu of the USA's policies of countering the "threats of communism" rather it was an independent move to secure its own interests as Mohsin argues,

"The most revealing aspect of Iran's Afghan policy was not what Iran did, but what Iran did not do. Iran refused to become a "frontline" state and participate in the "Washington-Islamabad-Riyadh" axis, that generously supported the Pakistani based resistance against the Soviet occupation. While Iran did not undermine the resistance and publically supported it as a legitimate movement against an illegitimate occupation, the leadership in Tehran made a precarious

distinction between the resistant's three main financiers and organisers" (2006: 238).

Iran's Afghan policy during the Soviet invasion was rooted deeply in its ethnic links and identity. When communist movements were, with the help of the state and Soviet Union were spreading in the country, Iran tried to counter it through sponsored movements apart from fighting on the military front. The Iran's Afghan policy during the Soviet invasion was hence a movement against all kinds of ideological challenges emanating from Eastern bloc or from the Western Bloc. For example, Mohsin observed that,

"Iran was particularly alarmed about the invigoration of *madrasa* system, which was spreading radical Wahabism among Pakistanis and Afghan refugees in Pakistan. While Khomeini considered Wahabism as "America's Islam", for Washington, Wahabism, with its uncompromising anti-Shai proclivities, was perceived as a deterrent against communism as well an effective counter-force against Khomenism" (2006: 238-239).

Apart from ideological positions of Iran in Afghanistan there some pragmatic moves as well. Iranian diplomats tried to use their influence in politics of Afghanistan to bargain with both the superpowers. Mohsin observes that,

"Iran played its "Afghan Card" as an effective means to gain concessions from Moscow, to limit the Soviet supply of arms to Iraq during the eight year Iran-Iraq war, to counter the looming US threat, and to tame the activities of the pro-Moscow Tudeh Party as Khomeinist consolidated power in Iran. The essence of Iran's policy toward Afghanistan was to create an ideological sphere of influence by mobilising and energising the Afghan Shiites, which comprised about 20 percent of the population, while barely dealing with the communist government of Afghanistan. Tehran's Shia centred and parochial policy transformed the historically oppressed and marginalised Hazaras, Quzilbash, and Farsiwans shiits into a disciplined and cohesive force. Tehran provided financial support to the Shiites, gave them hope, trained a generation of activities and established close links with the Afghan Ulema" (2006: 237).

Civil War in Afghanistan and Iran

During the civil war in Afghanistan Iran's role was limited for various reasons. First among that was the internal unrest in Iran. Its revolution which established an Islamic Republic in the country discounted all the possibilities of any intervention in Afghan affairs. The Shah regime was so weak that it was not able to handle internal unrest well. Its fading legitimacy prevented it to take much interest in the external affairs. The new regime under Khomeini needed time to settle down. However, immediately after their coming to power Arab countries in the neighbourhood reacted to it and

encouraged Saddam Hussain of Iraq to attack the newly established Islamic republic. Hence, apart from the revolution, the eight year long war with Iraq too prevented Iran from playing any crucial role in the Afghan civil war.

The effects of the civil war were serious for the Iranian politics and future Iran-Afghanistan relations. The events of the time were so similar in both the countries that it is impossible to look at one and ignore the other. The mutual hostility to US was one of the many similarities. In Iran where the radical students seized US embassy for almost one and half years between November 4 1979 and 20 January 1981(It is also known as the Iranian Hostage crisis) the ambassador of the United States was killed in Afghanistan in February 1979. The war between Iran and Iraq was replicated in Afghanistan in a war between pro-Soviet factions and Mujahidins supported by the US and its allies.

The Iran-Iraq war started in September 1980 and the Soviet Forces invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, the month in which Khomeini took charge of Iran as the Supreme Leader. After becoming the supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini's short-lived affection for the left leaning factions which had supported the revolution, kept him from overtly criticising the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, soon it was clear that leftists are not going to be satisfied with the Islamic Republic as there was a wide perception among the left leaning intellectuals that Islamic revolution is a first step towards the ultimate revolution of the left. As soon as the rift between the left and Khomeini was over the Soviet presence in Afghanistan was not acceptable.

The Iranian role during the Afghan civil war therefore against the Soviets and supported the Mujahideens. Open borders provided anti-Soviet forces a readymade shelter in the west too. In the south a similar sanctuary was available in Pakistan. A large number of Afghans took refuge in Iran during the civil war. These refuges became a link between the Iranian diplomats and Mujahideens. However, the pragmatic attitude of the Iranian regime was maintained throughout the civil war years. If Soviet presence in the neighbourhood was a problem, so was the strong nexus of US with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. However, the civil war in Afghanistan outlived the Iranian problems in its west. The relatively porous borders between Iran and Afghanistan and historical and ethnic links between the two became an asset for

the Iranian policy makers, to create a sphere of influence and nourish the regional powers aspirations.

The civil war in Afghanistan provided Iran an opportunity to inculcate political links inside the former. Iranian's limited financial support and occasion asylums made a significant number of Afghan *Mujahidins* loyal to it and for a longer duration. The leaders of future Northern Alliance, some of them became important political figures first after the 1991 regime and then again in the post 2001 political dispensation, and helped the Iranian cause of checking the US influence in the region and retaining Iranian influence.

Refugees

Hundreds of thousands of Afghans have sought refuge in Iran since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. They directly went either across the Afghan border or by a long detour through Pakistan. Due to open borders at some places between Pakistan and Iran at the time, it was difficult to have an actual assessment of the ethnic composition of the refugees in Iran. However, due to hostilities against the Shiite population in Afghanistan during the resistance against Soviet invasion, most of the Shiites from Hazarajat, the central, largely Shiite district of Afghanistan found it easier to cross the border to Iran. The Hazarajat province had been virtually autonomous since 1979 till 2001. Other major ethnic groups who sought refuge in Iran were Tajiks and Turkomen, from the northern provinces of Afghanistan. A large number of refugees came from the neighbouring province of Herat.

No one knows the exact number of the refugees. However, the Iranian authorities and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimate that there are between 1.5 and 2 million (compared to 2.5 million to 3 million in Pakistan). The number of refugees went down once the Soviet invasion was over and its troops made the withdrawal. However, it picked up again during the Taliban regime. According to UNHCR in 20015 there were around 950000 registered Afghan refugees in Iran and most of these refugees came in to the country before 2001 during the Taliban rule (<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486f96.html>). However, the unofficial sources argue that there are around 3 million Afghan refugees in Iran even today.

“The refugees are dispersed throughout Iran. According to UNHCR estimates, there are 600000 in Khorasan province ----- 250.000 in the capital, Mashad, alone---150.000 each in the provinces of Isfahan, Kerman, Tehran, Fars and Yazd, and 120.000 in Sistan-Baluchistan province. Many work, often for low wages, in construction, agriculture, or in factories or small shops”.
(http://www.chris-kutschera.com/%20A/afghan_refugees.htm)

Most of the Afghan refugees are living in adverse economic conditions and due to Iran's weak economy they have not much chance of enjoying a better standard of living. The movement of refugees inside Iran has been a constant source of conflict between the Afghan governments and Iranian authorities. Iran sees the large number of refugees as an economic and political burden. Due to the cultural similarities it is often difficult for the authorities to identify a refugee from the local population leading to the law and order and economic problems. In order to deal with the refugee problem Iranians have sought international help and have taken various steps.

In order to deal with the problem of the refugees in 1979, the Iranians created the Council for Afghan Refugees (CAR), which is a part of the Ministry of Interior. This is the main administrative body which in collaboration of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) tries to manage them (the refugees) inside the country.

“The CAR has grown increasingly alarmed at the growing number of Afghan refugees, and at the health and security problems they pose. The council runs a dozen transit camps near the Afghan border. Refugees arriving at the frontier, or found inside Iran without proper papers, are sent to these camps. Only after a medical check-up, and in accordance with local manpower needs, are they given an identity card and allowed to live and work in a specific Iranian city.”
(http://www.chris-kutschera.com/A/afghan_refugees.htm).

Most of the refugees in Iran are from poor economic background. These refugees are mostly from minority ethnic communities and therefore they have the least expectations from the Afghan government. Particularly most of the Shia refugees have tried to build links with the Iranian ruling class due to similarities in faith. This provides a great political tool in the hands of the Iran to manoeuvre Afghanistan's internal politics. Despite the strategic and political advantages, the large numbers of refugees create an economic and social burden for Iran. This has forced Iranian authorities to act tough against the refugees. In the recent years Iran has deported a large number of them. According to Rod Rondland:

“Iran is deporting thousands of Afghans to a country where the danger is both real and serious,” said Joe Stork, deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa at Human Rights Watch, as the group’s 124-page report was released. “Iran has an obligation to hear these people’s refugee claims rather than sweeping them up and tossing them over the border to Afghanistan.” (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/21/world/asia/for-afghan-refugees-in-iran-painful-contradictions.html?_r=0).

The Afghan refugees in Iran remain a source of potential conflict in Iran-Afghan relations, even though many have lived for decades in Iran and are now integrated into the economy at many levels. The refugees are a source of cheap labour and in some cases they are treated like slaves. Despite these obvious exploitative conditions most of the Afghan labourers working in Iran have been able to send home some money. It has estimated that they send about \$500 million annually, a 2008 UN study quoted. “This amount was equivalent to 6% of Afghanistan's gross domestic product at the time. When economic strains are on the rise, Iran faces pressure to encourage, or even compel, the refugees to return home. The international community is largely positive about Iran's absorption of refugees, but sometimes reminds it not to force refugees to return against their will and to normalize the status of refugees who cannot return”. In order to check the inflow of refugees in Iran the government of Iran fixed a date for the registration of the Afghans inside the country. This period ended in June 2012. It was officially called as ‘the registration period for Comprehensive Regularization Plan.’ This plan permitted some Afghans to legalize their immigration status. However, only “some 800,000 of the up to 3 million Afghans in Iran have recognized refugee status” (Laipson 2013).

Rise of Taliban and Iran

According to Mohsin Milani in the post-Taliban phase when the current Afghan dispensation were trying to build a peaceful atmosphere in the country, Taliban is still relevant for all the concerned parties in the region. Iran is no exception. To his words:

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has no official relation with the Taliban. Nor do the Taliban have an office or a representative in Tehran, as do many non-state actors, such as HAMAS. At the same time, Tehran has recognized that the Taliban have remarkable resiliency and are an integral component of the Afghan society that cannot be ignored. As there have been persistent reports that President Hamid Karzai, the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia all have opened their channels of communications with the Taliban, Tehran is determined not to become marginalized and seems to have tried to open its own non-diplomatic and secret channels of communication. But the Taliban are not monolithic, and it is not clear which faction Iran is seeking to establish relations.”

Iran opposed Taliban regime for various reasons. A Taliban-dominated government was clearly not in Iran's long-term interests. Ideological inclination and ethnic composition of the Taliban (Rashid 2008) was never pro-Iran. The Pashtun dominated, Pakistan trained and Saudi financed Taliban had no prospects for Iran. Hence, the understanding of Iranian policy makers was that Taliban would generate considerable tension and conflict between Iran and Afghanistan. This conflict would inevitably help Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to gain an upper hand in the region. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan seem to be becoming dominant foreign powers in Afghanistan would displace Iran as a regional power. Therefore, Iran vehemently opposed Taliban regime's rise and stay, through supporting Northern Alliance and other dissenting elements in Afghanistan.

Iran did not recognize the Taliban government when it came to power after a prolonged civil war in 1996. The Iranian government considered Taliban "an ideological nemesis and a major security threat that was created by Pakistan's ISI, with generous financial support from Saudi Arabia partly for the purpose of spreading Wahhabism and undermining Iran" (Mohsin 2011). In the initial years of the Taliban rule, in the 1990s, Iran was in the group of India and Russia which provided significant support to the Northern Alliance (NA). NA was the principal opposition force to Taliban rule and it eventually dislodged them in 2001 with the help of USA and other NATO allies. Iran also played a considerable role in dismantling the Taliban regime and in establishing a new government in Kabul in 2001. However, due to the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan, Iran feels threatened and finds the Taliban's resistance to it as helpful. According to Mohsin:

"The Taliban have evolved into a formidable armed organization fighting U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan. Ironically, the strategic interests of Tehran and Taliban have converged today, as each, independent of the other and for different reasons, oppose the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan and demand their immediate and unconditional withdrawal". (2011).

Iran has for many years maintained that political stability in Afghanistan could be achieved, only if the government reflects upon the rich ethnic and sectarian diversity of Afghanistan itself. For Iran, having a friendly government is more than anything else. It wants to see a stable and friendly government in Kabul. Instability in Afghanistan creates several socio economic and geopolitical problems for Iran. First, it deprives Iran from a market for its oil and other exports. Second, it creates refuge

problem burdening the already ailing Iranian economy and unstable Iranian society. Third, the instability in Afghanistan provides greater opportunities for rivals of Iran in the region, and at the global level to intervene.

Since 2001 the experiments to create a stable government in Afghanistan have failed and every day a new challenge posed by one tribal and ethnic group or the other to the ruling dispensation. The lack of legitimacy of the Afghan government is due to the lack of representation of all the stake holders in Afghanistan and that's why Iran now seems convinced that without Taliban's participation in the government, as a partner but not as the main force, stability would be unattainable. Hence, the Iranian regime would like to see a stable and peaceful Afghanistan, and that is why it has been a party of all the important deliberations related to the creation of stability in the country.

2001 War and Iran

There are various speculations regarding the role of Iran during the 2001 war in Afghanistan. Particularly some of the US media houses were of the view that Iran was instrumental in creating unrest in the country and was supporting Taliban (Nader and Joya 2011). Some have even seen the Iranian presence as a 'Great Game' in the region comparing its interference with the 19th century British and Russian rivalries for Afghanistan (Ferris-Rotman 2012). According to some sources, "members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards fought alongside and advised the Afghan rebels who helped U.S. forces topple Afghanistan's Taliban regime in the months after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks" (Selvin 2005). There is not much substantial evidence to prove all these reports. Nevertheless, it is more than clear that during the 2001 offensive against the Taliban, Iran was one of the main parties. It not only financially supported the Northern Alliance but it also provided some direct military aid to the campaign. It has been pointed out by some scholars that the 2001 Herat uprising, which broke the moral of the Taliban, was directly incited and aided by Iran.

"In an interview by e-mail, Mohsen Rezaie, a candidate in Iran's 2005 presidential elections claimed that the United States has not given Iran enough credit for its support to the NATO forces during the anti-Taliban fight. He argued that Iran played an "important role in the overthrow of the Taliban" in 2001. Even before U.S. forces entered Afghanistan, Iran backed the Northern Alliance, a loose coalition of warlords and militias from the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara minorities.

The alliance fought the ruling Taliban, a regime dominated by majority Pashtuns that imposed a harsh Sunni Islamic government.” (Selvin 2005).

Iranians never liked the Sunni dictators and therefore they had always been instrumental in organising rebellion against the Sunni regimes in Afghanistan.

“Current and former U.S. troops and officials confirm Iranians were present with the Northern Alliance as U.S. forces organized the rebels in 2001. They say U.S. forces had no interaction with the Iranians. They deny the Iranians made meaningful contributions on the battlefield. However, Rezaie was the first to claim that Iran played a key role in capturing the Afghan capital, Kabul, at the climax of the war” (Ibid)

This claim was made during the election. This is a sign of the common Iranian perceptions regarding the Taliban. The popularity of the anti-Taliban movement within Iran is a sign of the Iranian regimes’ priority in Afghanistan. These claims, however, were denied by the US. This is because of the explicit Iran-US hostilities, since the revolution which has increased in the intensity in recent times due to Iranian Nuclear programme. According to Selvin, “Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman says he has “no knowledge of (Iranian) assistance and the CIA refused to comment” when he tried to confirm the news” (2005).

However, according to Selvin,

“former CIA Afghan team leader Gary Schroen says there were two Iranian guard colonels attached to a Northern Alliance commander, Bismullah Khan, outside Kabul when U.S. Special Forces arrived in September 2001. Schroen, author of *First in: An Insider's Account of How the CIA Spearheaded the War on Terror in Afghanistan*, says, "There was never any (U.S.) interaction (with the Iranians), but we saw them." He downplayed the Iranian role.”

It is not only the few isolated officers who confirm the participation of Iranians during the anti-Taliban operations in Afghanistan. Several officials too confirm the point. For example, John McLaughlin, former deputy director of the CIA agreed, "We knew they [Iranians] were on the ground." The direct support was missing for domestic reasons. Iran was not willing to participate in a war at the time when it was facing instability at home. In addition, Iranians were not ready to be seen as an ally to the ‘great Satan’.¹⁵

¹⁵ The great Satan is a derogatory epithet for the United States of America in some Iranian foreign policy statement. The term originally used by Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini in his speech on November 5, 1979 to describe the United States, which he accused of imperialism and the sponsoring of corruption throughout the world.

However, the role of the Iranians during the 2001 war was not always positive for the USA and Northern Alliance. Since their long term presence in the country serves their national interest well, the Iranians tried to use the opportunity created by the war to win over some more long term allies in the country. Quoting the sources Selvin notes that, “Iranians in the Northern Alliance stronghold of Mazar-e-Sharif were sabotaging U.S. efforts by competing for the loyalty of local warlords” (Ibid). Iranian intelligence agents in different parts of Afghanistan were active and recruiting locals for the long-term Iranian cause. The lack of economic opportunity and political chaos in the country make the locals easy prey for any stakeholder to create fourth columnists inside Afghanistan. City of Herat in particular was the central target of the Iranian intelligence agents. Its cultural and geographical nearness to Iran and historical linkages provide ample scope for development of beneficial links. Local population has always been more positive about Iranian authority than the unstable Afghan power centres. The influence of Iran in the country therefore is strongest in Herat. During the 2001 war, Iranians consolidated that lead over any other country and interest in the region.

Iranians have always been patronising Shia population in Afghanistan. It has been argued that in 1998 Iran nearly went to war against the Taliban after the massacre of Afghan Shiites and nine Iranians in Mazar-e-Sharif by the Taliban. It is estimated that the Taliban massacred around 8000 Shiites in August 1998. Iranians, have always been critical of Taliban as a stooge of the US and western interest in the region. According to Michael Sheridan: “Taliban atrocities will embarrass western policymakers who still see the fundamentalists as useful players in a modern "great game" to keep Iranian and Russian influence out of Afghanistan and so ensure that the huge oil and gas riches of central Asia remain a prize for western multinationals” (1998). The Iranian enmity towards Taliban was incited by this incident, which was the reason that they acted vehemently in 2001.

During the 2001 war, the Bush administration was the prime backer of the Northern Alliance. It was seeking revenge for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The slogan of “global war against terror” gave the war efforts in Afghanistan legitimacy. The then Defence Secretary of the US, Donald Rumsfeld led the movement in the Afghanistan. In his various interviews, he acknowledged the presence of Iranians with

the Americans in the war against Taliban. He “told CBS' *Face the Nation* on Nov. 11, 2001, two days before the fall of Kabul, that there were places in Afghanistan "where there are some Iranian liaison people, as well as some American liaison people" working with the same Afghan forces” (Selvin 2005).

The global war against terrorism required other nations support for it to become truly global. In order to establish its credentials the Bush administration recruited Pakistan and some other countries in the war against Taliban in Afghanistan. However, according to some Americans such as James Dobbins, “a former State Department official who worked with diplomats from Iran and other Afghan neighbours to create the first post-Taliban government”, the Iranians were the most active among all the countries fighting alongside US in Afghanistan. He claimed that Iranians “were equipping and paying the Northern Alliance. Russia and India were also helping, but at the time, Iran was the most active” (Selvin 2005).

Though it is established beyond any doubt that Iranians were proactively working against the Taliban in 2001 for various cultural and geo-political reasons, “it is unclear how many Iranians were present at the fall of Kabul”. According to Selvin (2005), Rezaie, the presidential candidate in 2005 elections in Iran argued that there were few guard commanders were also there on the field. Specifying the nature of these guards Rezaie claimed that “They were special forces for urban warfare (with experience.” Most of these guards had experience of long Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) and knew how to fight in the wild and in remote areas developing local links. Rezaie regrets that the Americans taking the advantage of their superior propaganda machinery and Iranian hesitation to own the responsibility, usurped most of the achievements of the Iranian guards.

According to Selvin, “the Bush administration would have been loath to praise the Iranians, in particular the Revolutionary Guards. The guards are Iran's main vehicle for supporting groups the United States regards as terrorists, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon” (2005). The diplomatic tensions between Iran and US soon after the 2001 war became worse as in 2002 President Bush labelled “Iran a member of an "axis of evil" along with Iraq and North Korea”. It was like identifying the next targets of “global war against terrorism”. This statement made Iranians even more active in Afghanistan, as they wanted to create a strategic depth in the case of a war against the

super power. The gradual cooling of the tensions between Iran and Taliban in the post- 2001 scenario was a result of this threat perception.

However, much of the warming to Taliban was happening under cover. Meanwhile in the open, Iran, after the fall of the Taliban, offered to help train and equip a new Afghan army. Sensing the larger repercussion of this Iranian offer, the Bush administration rejected it and “accused Tehran of giving safe passage to fleeing members of al-Qaeda, backing Palestinian militants and trying to develop nuclear weapons” (Selvin 2005). These public utterances faded all hopes of a good Iran-US relationship and their cooperation in Afghanistan against the remaining influences of Taliban. It was obvious to all that Taliban had been defeated in the main cities but in rural Afghanistan, they still had a significant presence which could not be eliminated without waging a long term war on both military and socio-economic fronts. The war on socio-economic fronts required the Bonn Conference.

One of the most talked about incidents of the 2001 war against Taliban in Afghanistan was the November 2001 capture of the Herat city by a combined force of Northern Alliance, NATO and Iranian Qods.¹⁶ Iranian forces disguised as locals entered the city in November and led a public uprising against the Taliban rule. This uprising was used as an opportunity by the Northern Alliance forces and they attacked the city with the air support of the NATO forces. Due to this coordinated operation, Herat was liberated from the Taliban in November. The Herat operation was the only explicit sign of Iranian involvement in the 2001 war in Afghanistan.

Post-Taliban Afghanistan and Iran

After the fall of Taliban the bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Iran remained friendly. However, there are many problematic areas as well. Hamid Karzai (2001-2013) was able to manage simultaneously good relations with both Iran and US, despite the growing tensions between the two in the aftermath of the ‘Axis of Evil’ speech given by George Bush in 2002. Apart from political and cultural links, Iran “continues with its heavy involvement in Afghan reconstruction, and trade between the two countries has increased substantially” (Ferris-Rotman 2012).

¹⁶ Iranian Qods forces are a Special Forces unit of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards responsible for their extraterritorial operations.

Apart from aiding the coalition forces that overthrew the Taliban in 2001 politically and militarily there are also evidences that, Iranians used their cordial relations and cultural links with Afghanistan's Tajik minority to persuade them to share power with Hamid Karzai. In the aftermath of the war, the ethnic division of the country resurfaced and traditional Pashtun vs Tazik etc. rivalry for power once again threatened the prospects of peace. In this context Iranians used their influence to pacify Taziks and Hazaras to accept the Pashtun Hamid Karzai as the leader of the country. This crucial moment's help became the basis for sound post-Taliban relations between Iran and Afghanistan (Ferris-Rotman 2012).

Afghan-Iranian relations improved after the fall of the Taliban. Iran played an active role in Afghanistan's political and economic reconstruction. The help to rebuild Afghanistan is however not a benevolent act. Ferris-Rotman observes that: "the fragile political and security situation in Afghanistan has provided the Islamic Republic with an opportunity to extend its political, economic, and military influence" (2012). Iran has been wisely building covert and overt relations with important political links within the country. It is using the opportunity provided by the instability in Afghanistan by building ties with the government of Afghan President Hamid Karzai and other Afghan political leaders. It has been argued that Iran does to maintain a low-level instability, an easily manageable one, while helping the Taliban insurgency through its Qods Force. This is in order to legitimise the Iranian presence in the country and to strategically keep the US and NATO forces engaged militarily (Ibid, 2012).

Iran has also extended its ideological influence in Afghanistan through channels like the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee.¹⁷ According to the US State Department's 2009 Country Reports on Terrorism, Iran's Qods Force "has arranged arms shipments to select Taliban members, including small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107 mm rockets, and plastic explosives" since at least 2006, and "provided training to the Taliban in Afghanistan on small unit tactics, small arms, explosives, and indirect fire weapons." The Islamic Republic's strategy

¹⁷ The Imam Khomeini Relief Committee is part of Iran's larger goal of using soft power to gain influence in Afghanistan and throughout the region. An ostensible charity, it actively promotes Iran's ideological and political goals in Afghanistan, it promotes Schism and incites Anti-American sentiments.

thus far has been to disrupt attempts at creating a stable security environment while exerting its influence in the Afghan political sphere (Ibid 2012).

The success of Iranian diplomacy with Afghanistan can be seen on various occasions in last decade particularly when the US-Iran ties, after a brief spell of warming in 2001, slopped in the context of Iranian nuclear programme. Amidst heated exchanges between US and Iran, the Afghan Foreign Ministry has declared its policy toward nuclear proliferation in the West Asia “In view of the nature of modern warfare, we regard using most types of weapons of mass destruction as contrary to the international norms. We are seeking a universal disarmament of all nuclear weapons. We fully support an Asia and the Middle-East free of nuclear weapons” (Ibid 2012).

Series of declarations, policy decisions and statements made by the Afghan government proves the Iranian influence on the Afghan foreign policy. For example, On July 13, 2008 Hamid Karzai stated: “Afghanistan would never like its soil to be used against another country. Afghanistan would like to remain Iran's good friend as a neighbour as we share a common language and religion. Similarly, Afghanistan wholeheartedly wants to remain a friend, ally, and partner of America because this is in Afghanistan's best interest” (Ibid).

Even in the international forums Afghanistan came in support of Iran. For example, on July 27, 2008 in a Non-Aligned Movement it released a statement which praised Iranian support to the IAEA. It “welcomed the continuing cooperation being extended by the Islamic Republic of Iran to the IAEA” and “reaffirmed the basic and inalienable right of all states to develop research, production and use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, without any discrimination and in conformity with their respective legal obligations.” This is exactly what constitutes Iranian policy regarding the nuclear issue.

Iranians have been demanding the withdrawal of US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. They see it as a threat to Iranian influence. In June 2011 when the Iranian Deputy Parliament Speaker, Reza Bahonar met with his Afghan counterpart Ahmad Behzad, this issue was raised prominently. After the meeting Bahonar asserted that, “security in the region would improve if U.S. forces withdrew from Afghanistan” hinting the agreement of Afghans on the issue. (Mehr News 19 June

2011) When in April 2011 twelve Iranian engineers were kidnapped in Afghanistan's western Farah province who were employed by a construction company in the region, both the countries tried to build a joint operation against such attacks. The Iranians did not make it a diplomatic issue and gave Afghan government enough space to trace the kidnappers and resolve the issue amicably.

The betterment of relations between two countries was hinted at when in January 2011, "Iranian officials announced that they would permit fuel tanker trucks to enter Afghanistan from Iran. Iran had implemented a blockade on fuel trucks entering Afghanistan in December 2010 after Afghan officials refused to provide information on its domestic gasoline consumption to Tehran" (<http://www.irantracker.org/foreign-relations/afghanistan-iran-foreign-relations>) . This was a small but significant move to build economic relationship between two countries. The relationship between Iran and Afghanistan includes Pakistan as a major regional player. Apart from several other issues, which create hurdles in an otherwise cordial atmosphere between Iran and Afghanistan, is the issue of drug trafficking. The role of Pakistan, due to its geographical positioning and cultural closeness is also very important here. Apart from traditional rivalry between Pakistan and Afghanistan and Iran and Pakistan there are several global aspects related to the issue of Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan triangle. The issue of drug trafficking required a trilateral arrangement. The open drug trafficking has been a major source of funding for the Taliban and other non-state actors in the region. In order to curb the sources of funding and exercise greater control over the borders in "November 2010 Mostafa Mohammad Najjar Secretary-General of the Drug Control Headquarters of Iran, Minister of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan, Zarar Ahmad Moqbel Osmani and Federal Minister for Narcotics Control of Pakistan approved a tri-lateral cooperative plan to combat drug trafficking in the region" (Ibid). This agreement was facilitated by the UN Office on Drugs and Crimes.

In November 2010, Iranian Parliament Speaker, Ali Larijani proclaimed that "Expansion of ties with Afghanistan in all spheres is one of important priorities of Iran's regional policies." (Fars News, November 16, 2011) He met with Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul and discussed various relevant issues of diplomacy and geopolitics. The frequent meetings between the officials of both the governments

gave the signal that Iran is aggressively pursuing its regional aspirations and does not want US and other global powers to have a free hand as before. In the same year, Ramin Mehmanparast an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson held a news conference in which he accepted that Iran had “helped construction of Afghanistan and the preparation of its economic infrastructure,” and would continue to do so in the future. In the same year, Hamid Karzai too admitted the Iranian help. He stated that Afghanistan had received millions of dollars from the Islamic Republic. According to him, “the government of Iran has been assisting us with five or six or seven hundred thousand Euros [\$700,000 to \$975,000] once or twice every year, that is an official aid” (Fox News, 25 October 2010). The monetary help in both military and economic reconstruction is increasing in last few years despite the bad economic condition of Iran. It is a sign that Iran takes the relationship with Afghanistan seriously and avoids playing into the hands of the US and Saudi Arabia, its main rival in the region.

It has been seen in the post -2010 years that Iranian diplomats have tried to keep the US engaged in rivalry in Afghanistan; as the latter is a counter for Iran against US’s insistence on Iranian Nuclear Programme. In 2010 Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Undersecretary for Foreign Policy and International Security Affairs Ali Baqeri emphasized his country’s eagerness to be friendly with Afghanistan. Baqeri emphasized, argued, “the Islamic Republic of Iran will spare no effort to help the Afghan brothers and sisters and continues to abide by this policy.” He put Iranian force behind the demands of “rapid and full withdrawal of occupying forces”. He argued that this was a key to establishing security in Afghanistan (2010).

Military Cooperation between Afghanistan and Iran

The US has always been suspecting Iranian involvement in Afghanistan in terms of providing military aid to it. In 2010 there were several accusations against Iranians for being either the supplier of arms and ammunition to Taliban or being a facilitator and middlemen. It was one of the reasons cited for the numerous sanctions it imposed on Iran (Haider 2015). However, Iranians have always denied such allegations on the ground that it has ideological differences with Taliban. It is a fact that Iran has been hostile to Taliban for its clear pro-Sunni bias and anti-Shia stand. Taliban is also supported by Pakistan which is a well known fact. Iranian support for Northern

Alliance during its war with Taliban pre and post-0 2001 has also been documented well. For example, Mohsin Milani concludes:

“Iranian support for the Northern Alliance, the Taliban's most formidable rival, created serious animosity between Tehran and Kabul. They severed diplomatic relations in 1997. Iran accused the Taliban of being "narco-terrorists," whose antediluvian ideology and draconian laws made Afghanistan a huge prison” (<http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-afghanistan>).

On more than one occasion Taliban has targeted Iranian interests and Hazaras of Afghanistan terming them an ally of Iran. Therefore due to all these facts the US’ claims of Iranian support to Taliban looks unreal and baseless. Nevertheless, Iran has been involved in Afghanistan militarily in the past few decades. According to Ferris-Rotmen, Iranians have more than obvious case for being involved in the affairs of Afghanistan even militarily. According to him:

“The two countries share cultural, language and historical links – for centuries they were part of the ancient Persian Empire – as well as a long and porous border. Iran said in 2010 it has provided some \$500 million in official assistance for reconstruction projects. Tehran has built religious schools for Afghan Shi'ites, who comprise a fifth of Sunni-majority Afghanistan's 30 million people. Iran may even have MPs on its payroll. An Afghan official who declined to be identified told Reuters that up to 44 of the 249 members of the Afghan parliament are suspected of receiving money from Iran. Iran has not responded to those allegations, which have also been aired in the Afghan media” (2012).

Tehran did not abandon its support for its traditional allies among the non-Pushtun Afghans, notably the Northern Alliance and the Shiite Hazarats even during the period of Taliban rule (Milani 2011). Its support of the Northern Alliance in the 2001 war motivated by its hostility to Taliban rule in Afghanistan and it was also an attempt to build alliances with the future rulers of the country. In the post-Taliban phase, the NATO and US forces’ presence in Afghanistan and its ruling dispensation’s closeness with the US has created many strategic and political problems for Iran. Iran tried to influence Afghanistan’s President between 2001 to 2015 Mohammad Hamid Karzai , to press for the withdrawal of NATO and US forces from the country. The presence of the troops increased the tensions between both the countries during the periods when Iran was threatened with US military intervention on more than one occasion. For Iranians US military base in Afghanistan was a constant threat to its national security. It has been argued by some of the western scholars that Iranian support to Taliban was an attempt to keep US involved in a

proxy war in Afghanistan and created pressure on it to withdraw from the region (Stancati Margherita 2015).

“Sponsorship of the Taliban added to Iran's capacity to deter the U.S. from waging a military strike against Iran, while bogging the U.S. military down in Afghanistan at a time when the U.S. threatened a military strike on Iran's nuclear facilities. According to former U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Tehran has viewed Afghanistan as a "bargaining chip" against Washington. The Taliban has not been subtle about its preference for a continuation of a hostile relationship between the U.S. and Iran, and is clearly a beneficiary of this animosity. However, once NATO forces have departed, and if relations between Washington and Tehran thaw, it is plausible that Iran would lose interest in maintaining its alliance with the Taliban” (Wegner and Cafiero https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjllvC8jJLUAhWLro8KHSCaDPoQFggOAAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.huffingtonpost.com%2Fdaniel-wagner%2Fthe-paradoxical-afghanira_b_4277936.html&usq=AFQjCNEFq_vBJ20tluGEBtgnXXifqWfGLw Accessed on 05 July 2017).

In the post-withdrawal phase, Iranians are trying to create a long-standing military and strategic relationship with the government in Afghanistan to avoid any future possibility of an American intervention. In order to achieve that Iran is using its links with the war lords of the erstwhile Northern Alliance , and is ready to provide sophisticated weapons and training to the Afghan military and paramilitary forces. Iran is also using its petro-dollars to aid Iranian military establishment in order to stabilise the country.

Economic Ties

Iran has old economic ties with Afghanistan. Except for the decades of civil war in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s, Iran has been the most important source of commodities and investment in Afghanistan. This prime location however, has been taken away in last decade due to increasing trade with China and other countries. Nevertheless, Iran is one of the biggest trade partners of Afghanistan in the post-Taliban phase of its history (Milani 2011). “Tehran has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into reconstruction efforts throughout Herat and many private Iranian firms operate in western Afghanistan” (Wegner and Cafiero https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjllvC8jJLUAhWLro8KHSCaDPoQFggOAAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.huffingtonpost.com%2Fdaniel-wagner%2Fthe-paradoxical-afghanira_b_4277936.html&usq=AFQjCNEFq_vBJ20tluGEBtgnXXifqWfGLw Accessed on 05 July 2017).

afghanira_b_4277936.html&usg=AFQjCNEFq_vBJ20tluGEBtgnXXifqWfGLw
Accessed on 05 July 2017) .

According to one source, “up to 500 cars and trucks reportedly cross Iran's border with Herat province on a daily basis.” Most of the trade on the daily basis is to deliver “products into Afghanistan and Pakistan from Iran and the United Arab Emirates”(https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cd=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjMoYukxZLUAhUHR48KHajABNUQFgghMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.huffingtonpost.com%2Fdanielwagner%2Fthe-paradoxical-afghanira_b_4277936.html&usg=AFQjCNEFq_vBJ20tluGEBtgnXXifqWfGLw Accessed on 05 July 2017) “Iran looks to Afghanistan as a gateway akin to the Silk Road, as a pathway toward Greater Central Asia. Stability in Afghanistan would bode well for Iran's interests in establishing future pipelines linking Iran to the Central Asian Republics and China. In the near-term, however, Iran's security and foreign policy dilemmas will continue to drive Tehran's policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan” (Ibid). Iran is one of the largest producers and exporters of the energy resources including oil and gas. Any massive level reconstruction in Afghanistan will require constant supplies of oil and gas. Iran currently supplies almost 50 percent of all energy requirements to Afghanistan and it sees Afghanistan as a potential market for its energy commodity. In one of the attempts to secure the Afghan market of oil and gas , in June 2011 its national Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company signed “a Memorandum of Understanding permitting Iran to provide 300,000 tons of oil products to Afghanistan over the course of six months” (https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cd=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjf7sirxpLUAhWFNo8KHb1FBaoQFgghMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.criticalthreats.org%2Fanalysis%2Fafghanistan-iran-foreign-relations&usg=AFQjCNEH1mrYxGnq7W76nviFphNB2Dbotw). This is just one example of how Afghanistan can be a potential market for Iranian oil in future.

“Afghanistan represents a significant untapped export market for Iranian products. Therefore, Iran has sought to foster closer economic ties with its eastern neighbour ever since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. For example, Iran has attempted to reduce Afghanistan’s economic dependence on Pakistan (and thus increase its dependence on Iran) by allowing the land-locked Afghans to use the Iranian port of Chabahar to import and export goods as an alternative to the Pakistani port of Karachi. Furthermore, Iran has encouraged Afghan businesses

to relocate their international offices from the United Arab Emirates to Iran. In 2008, Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan agreed to form the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union” (DiSouza 2011).

There are around 2 million Afghan refugees in Iran. A large number of them were forced to migrate due to the Civil War. However, a substantial number work in Iran in different cities and sectors and send remittances to their homes in Afghanistan. According to one estimate, “remittances from Afghan labourers in Iran amount to about 6% (around \$500 million) of the Afghan GDP.” This is a very significant number as far as Afghan economy is concerned (<http://www.understandingwar.org/iran-and-afghanistan>). However, these Afghan labourers are significant for Iranian economy too as they provide cheap labour.

Though the overall volume of trade minus petroleum is not more than 5 billion dollars yet, it is estimated to go up rapidly soon. The demands for consumer and other commodities in Afghanistan would go up once there is some stability in the country and some of the major infrastructure projects are completed. Iran is involved in a “multi-billion-dollar project to connect Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan via rail.” Construction of a part of this project is already underway. Iran is also using its expertise in infrastructure building to win contracts in Afghanistan. In 2010 it won a contract to build a railway line in Afghanistan between northern Iran and Herat. This railway line also serves as a link line between Chabahar port and Afghanistan when completed. Such projects would end Afghan dependence on Pakistan and provide countries such as India direct access. This will cause boom in the economy. Summarising the Iranian economic involvements in Afghanistan Report of Institute of War and Study, US highlights that:

“One area in which Tehran has sought to exert influence over Afghan affairs is in the field of economic assistance. Iran pledged US\$ 560 million at the Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan in 2002, and an additional US\$ 100 million at the 2006 London Conference. Much of the Iranian aid to Afghanistan has been spent on infrastructure projects—mainly transportation links between Iran, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian Republics—something which is clearly in the national interest of Iran. A 76-mile (123-km) road linking Herat in western Afghanistan to the Dogharoun region in Iran has already been completed, and work is underway to link Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman, which would alleviate Afghan dependence on the Pakistani port of Karachi” (https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj22_Th0JnUAhWMQY8KHan5BGoQFggjMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.understandingwar.org

[%2Firan-and-afghanistan&usg=AFQjCNG3z5BcoQS5P54mrFv1ujjccHH6Jg&sig2=d4yCVAt68E1yG9cEJhMoVw\)](#)

Problem Areas

Though the future of Afghanistan-Iran relations looks very promising, there are some grey areas too. Any long-term engagement between these two countries must address certain significant issues. One of the most important problems between Afghanistan and Iran is the illicit drug trade originating in Afghanistan and passing through Iran. “Afghanistan is responsible for more than 90 percent of the world’s illicit opium production and more than half of that product is smuggled across the Iranian-Afghan border” (Gulati 2013:215). Apart from opium, a substantial amount of other drugs including heroine is smuggled from Afghanistan through Iran. Iranians blame Afghans for their failure in curbing the production of opium and other drugs, which are a substantial source of the funding of terror outfits such as the Al-Qiada. Iranian youth are getting affected because of this opium and other drugs traded in that region. It is also creating a law and order problem in Iran.

“Iran has committed itself to combating the drug epidemic within its borders, cracking down on domestic opium cultivation and interdicting drug shipments from Afghanistan. The Iranian authorities routinely make the largest seizures of opiates out of any country in the world. However, Iran realizes that it can never effectively deal with drug abuse among its own citizens unless something is done about opium production in neighbouring Afghanistan. Thus, the government in Tehran has developed a constructive relationship with Kabul in the field of counternarcotics, though questions remain about Iran’s role in impeding Afghanistan’s entry into the saffron market as an alternative to the poppy crops” (<http://www.understandingwar.org/iran-and-afghanistan>).

Apart from drug trade there are also issues related to refugees. As stated here, there are almost 2 million Afghan refugees in Iran who constitute a huge economic burden on Iran. A large number of them could be a source of menace for the law and order in Iran. These refugees are sources of illicit trade and smuggling and a source of constant tension. They also provide cheap labour force, which gives tough competition to locals in the job market creating hostilities and thus disrupt law and order. Afghanistan is still not in a position to take back all the refugees due to economic and ethnic reasons. For Iran-Afghanistan relations this is constant source of tension. There are other issue such as water and Afghanistan’s link with Pakistan. Iranians see Afghan attempts to control the flow of river water into Iran as an attempt

to sabotage Iranian agriculture. The river waters are also used for the illegal production of opium. Iran has constantly reminded Afghan officials about such problems. As far as Afghanistan's links with Pakistan are concerned, it has been already pointed out that Iranians are working to build better links within the ruling dispensation and it is a long drawn and one of the fundamental issues related to ethnic and sectarian biases. Iran is trying to counter it through building better links with both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

To summarise this chapter in the words of Sumitha Narayanan:

“In recent years, Iran has worked meticulously to expand its cultural and economic profile, particularly in the western border province of Herat, which feeds into its regional integration strategy. Iran has long advertised to its landlocked neighbour the availability of land and sea access through Iran to Central Asia and beyond. Tehran's regional vision also includes the growth of transit trade through its new Chabahar port in the country's southeast, with the participation of Afghanistan and India” (Narayanan 2014).

Iran Afghanistan relations have been very old foundation. In the 1980s and 1990s though they were on the downward slope in the post-Taliban phase, they are improving slowly it recovering slowly. There are various areas of cooperation between both the countries including the strategic goals of keeping the Super Powers away from the region, to counter the rise of extremism. Iran being a wealthier and more stable neighbour has been in a better position to help Afghanistan in its post-war attempts to revive and rebuild the nation. Iran has already seen the benefits of stability in Afghanistan and hence, it seeks to help Afghanistan in its attempts in numerous ways. Iran is seeking some obvious goals in Afghanistan such as economic benefits and strategic stability. Though there are some areas of conflict such as, refugees and drug trafficking. Iranians and Afghans both know that any such problem can only be addressed if Afghanistan is stable and in a better position to control its population and provide proper and effective governance.

CHAPTER 4:

INDIA- IRAN RELATIONS

The interactions between two ancient civilizations of India and Iran date back to centuries. The historicity of ties is evident in the confluence of traditions, religion and culture. In the contemporary era (post 2000), the fluctuation in bilateral relations between India and Iran is due to the swift shift in international environment and the naturally associated strategic imperatives which in turn shape their foreign policies toward each other. The international environment has gone through tremendous changes in last two decades. There are two specific points or changes, which has influenced Indo-Iran relations in particular; the fall of the Soviet Union or the end of the Cold War and the 2001 attack on USA. Both these changes have redefined the traditional boundaries of cooperation between these two countries. The cooperation traditionally was based on civilisational ties and basic developmental needs of both the countries. In the post-1990s the base might have increased but the intensity and warmth of the relationship have gone down. However, the future prospects are bright and power politics will decide the outcome.

Iran plays a prominent role in the foreign affairs of India because of its geostrategic location and abundant non-renewable energy resources like minerals, oil and natural gas. India through Iran can easily have access to Central Asia. The significance of Iran for India lies in the prominent role played by Iran in the regional configuration of Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea and Afghanistan. In the age of knowledge there is cooperation between both the countries in not only traditional areas but also in improvising tools to develop science and technology and information technology. The ties between the two countries have noted many ups and downs owing to regional power politics and changes in regimes of both the nations.

The significance of India and Iran relations is due to increasing influence of these two countries in world politics and economy as well as their growth as regional powers. Although Iran has bilateral ties with many other countries its ties with India are quite old and layered. It has both regional and global dimensions and the complexities of it suit the stature of both the countries. Here there is detailed description about India and Iranian relations right from the ancient times. In this chapter there is a brief

description given about the ancient anthropological and geographical relations between the two countries and the attempt has been made to establish their connections to the Indo-Iranian relations at the present time. The next part of the chapter deals with a brief description of the regional players in the neighbourhood of both the countries in shaping their relationships. The interest of the the major powers of the world are also explained in order to provide a context of the central questions of this thesis vis-à-vis Afghanistan. As is mentioned in the previous chapters there is clear impact of Pakistan, Taliban and post-Taliban Taliban on Indo- Iranian relations.

Following points are going to be discussed in detail below.

- The long term boundaries of Iran-India relations
- Their traditional areas of cooperation
- The points of conflict between both the countries
- Various factors having sway in India- Iran relations
- The impact of regional incidents on the relations between the two countries.
- Post-Taliban scenario of the relations of India and Iran.

The wide range of scholarly works done on Iran and India is used in developing this chapter. The available materials throw focus on political, economic, social and cultural aspects of India and Iran relations.

History of India- Iran Relations

India and Iran are ancient civilizations whose ties are marked by a unique continuity. The continuity is remarkable in more than one sense. The depth of relationship between both the countries is rooted in history. The bilateral ties and influences were so strong that they have influences on culture like art and architecture, language and cuisine (Jorfi 1994). The relationship has an origin in trade and migration. Though debatable, there are theories which argue that the Aryans, the ancient people of India came here from Iran and Central Asia (Thaper Romila 2002). The similarities between ancient language of India, Sanskrit and Persian is very well known and it has been observed that the dress, food and other aspects of the culture between both the countries have common origin. The trade between both the countries was significant in volume and varied in contents.

The relations between Iran and India dates back much before the coming of Aryans. It is argued that, “the Sumerian kingdom located in the down south of Mesopotamia, apparently had trade links with the Dravidian civilization of Indus valley” (Grishman 1954). Grishman has argued in his book that,

“The bronze work of the Kassites [the ancient Iranian inhabitants] is very famous and is used to establish links between the Sumerians, Minoans, Etruscans, and Dravidian civilization of the Indus valley/ Mohenjadaro. Linguistic research relates the Kassites to the Indo- Iranians, but these are mainly extracted from the names of the deities, mentioned later in the Kassite history. As with the case with Mittani, these gods might belong to a ruling class that could have had Indo-Iranian roots, but in general there is no strong evidence to suggest Indo- European roots of the Kassite. Other local inhabitants of Luristan¹⁸ and the rest of the south west Iran, Lullibis and Gutians, also do not show any Indo- Iranian characteristics.”¹⁹

The Mitanni’s treaty with the Hittites reveals that Mitanni belongs to ruling class and was from Indo-Aryan background. It was quite surprising for the historians to find a manual for horse training consists of Indo- European names, names of many of the Indo-Aryan deities were mentioned in the peace treaties. It’s puzzle for the historians because the Mitannis were located quite far from the Central Asia and Afghanistan. There are some ideas suggesting that Indo-Aryans from the Central Asia has moved to Iran and Indus valley (Leiden 1977). According to Jorfi (1994), before 3000-2000BC, it is believed that the inhabitants of modern Iraq, Southern Iran, North and North-West part of India were invaded by Indo-Aryans around 1500BC. This can be evident from the similarities found in the Kulli culture and culture of Susa (West Iran). The Bahruis²⁰ inhabiting Balochistan ethnically now a predominant Iranian spoke a Dravidian language (Basham 1956). He further argues that there is little doubt concerning links between Indus valley civilization and its contemporary civilizations of Iran and Mesopotamia. The seals are having striking similarities. Trade used to take place through Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea.

The language of the people of Iran is considered to be part of Indo- European family of languages. There is close relation between the Indo- Aryan and the Iranian languages. Scholars generally agree that from a notional view that Proto- Indo-

¹⁸ Luristan is located in Zagros Mountains which are in Iran and it is famous for Bronze statues of Iron age.

¹⁹ The Kassites are the people of Near East who controlled Babylona after the fall of the Old Babylonian Empire.

²⁰ They are known after their tongue known as Bahruis and they inhabit southern part of Balochistan.

European language grew an Indo- Iranian language that later divided into Indic and Iranian branches (Mallory 2010: 30). Ferrey (1989) says that Old Persian language was a member of the Indic branch of Indo- European languages which was related to Zend of Avestan (the language of the earliest Zoroastrian text) and later divided into two languages namely Persian and Sanskrit. According to Davaran (2010),

“By 3000 BCE, Indo- Iranian languages had evolved over a wide area bordered by the Volga to the West and modern day Kazakhstan in the east, and the formerly unified group began to split. It is generally accepted that one group left its original Central Asian homeland to migrate into north- central India mid second millennium BCE, while the Iranians stayed in Central Asia, whence some tribes move westwards towards present day Iran late in the second millennium.”

Curtis (1993) says that on the basis of linguistic evidence, there was resemblance between people from the Southern slopes of Albroz Mountains north and western parts of Iran and nomads of Central Asian Steppes who were along the line of Indo- Iranians. It is believed that in the beginning of the Indo-Aryan civilization Indians and Iranians belonged to the same families who lived around the steppe land of Oxus valley in Central Asia (Said Nafisi 1949). According to Roberts (1987), the migration of Aryans to India first took place around 2000 BC. Gradually they have established long and enduring traditions shaping India. These Aryan people are attributed to initiate matrilineal system and a whole new range of gods. The new ways of worship, horses and chariots are some of the greatest contributions of Aryans to India. The gradual intermingling went on for centuries and by the end of first millennium BC there were strong similarities between Indians and Iranians on several fronts, which includes language and mythology (Schilpp Paul Arthur 1992).

The religious texts of both the countries have so many similarities. These books are important in establishing the early links of Indians and Iranians. There are so many similarities which the texts say like Aryans migration was because of natural disasters like floods, snow and frost. In second millennium BC the worshippers in Syria were found to worship the same deities as of Indo-Iranians.

Prof. S.A. Cook writes,

“In what may roughly be called the ‘mosaic age’, viz, that illustrated by the Amarna letters and the ‘Hittite’ tables from Boghaz- Keui, Palestine was exposed to Iranian or Indo- European Persian empire... in the Mosaic age, Varuna, the remarkable ethical god of ancient India was known to North Syria”.

The terms 'Iran' and 'Iranian' were derived from the old Iranian ethnic adjective Aryana.²¹ Thus the group of Indo- Iranians who came to settle in north central India are came to be known as Indo- Aryan. From this the Sanskrit texts also connote the region as 'Aryavarta' or the land of Aryans. Avesta has a mention regarding Aryans and Rig Veda has a reference of Persians. Nehru in his *Discovery of India* describes that Persians were known as Parshavas and Parasikas, from which the modern word Parsi is derived (Nehru Jawaharlal 2012).

Religion has played a prominent part in Indo-Iranian relations. Historically, continuous changes in patterns were witnessed in heritages of people of both countries. Davaran (2010) revisits the idea of an early compilation of oral religious traditions in Persia paralleling with that of contemporary India. The parochial relationship between two ancient texts Rig Veda of India and the Avesta of Iran, suggests that Indo- Aryans and Iranians were once the people of same origin. This is evident from various religious compilations of ancient India and Iran, mainly Rig Veda and Avesta where one can establish easily the thematic and linguistic relationship between the two. They used similar language for worship of a house of gods. Boyce (1990) has observed that, "the beliefs and observances of the old Iranian and Vedic religions were evidently shaped by the physical and social background shaped by the Indo-Iranian peoples."

According to Malandra (1983), the similarities between the two ancient religions of India and Iran include prayers and ritual practices like hymns and yagnas, worship of natural forces and even gods represent the social and moral concepts which in turn were reflected in people of those times. Thus they have established a spiritual relationship between their myths led by spirits and corresponding abstract ideals. Their myths even reveal the technological advancements of Indo- Iranian groups. According to Davaran (2010), an important characteristic of societal structure of Indo- Iranians is no shrines for the deities except the presence of fire temples where fire is being protected from other elements. Worshippers used to sing hymns in open and there was a ritual of sacrifices and food offerings. There is lack of cult images in their worship which might have led to the existence of abstract and metaphysical thought

²¹ It is based upon the Proto- Indo- European root word 'ar-yo' from "Davaran, Fereshteh (2010). *Continuity in Iranian identity: Resilience of a cultural heritage*. New York: Routledge.

(Schwartz: 1985). Apart from this the hallucinogenic plant named 'haoma' was part of the rituals and also an important religious symbol (Boyce: 1984).

These ancient links were revised during subsequent periods. Indian sub-continent remained a major trading hub for Persians and during the medieval times when Islam spread in Iran a large number of Muslim influences invaded India. Muslim rulers were of Turkish-Persian origin and later Mughals were Persians in more than one sense. During the Mughal rule in India Sufi influences were also observed which had their origin in Persia. In the late medieval and early modern period Persian king Nadir Shah and Ahmed Shah Abdali came to India as aggressors. However, they also left many influences in India. During the British rule, Indo-Iranian links were witnessed during the Anglo-Afghan and Anglo-Persian wars as described in the previous chapters. After the Iranian revolution of 1911, a modern state was established. India at the time was fighting for its independence from the British rule. Since Iranians were under pressure of both British and the Soviet Union during the Second World War their position regarding other countries were not significant. Nevertheless, Iran was one of the centres from where foreign help were mobilised for the Indian freedom struggle (Bajpai 2014).

Indian leadership gave importance to Iran during the struggle for independence for more than one reason. During the Second World War when alleging the linkages between Persian king and Hitler Anglo-Soviet armies invaded Iran in 1941, Indian leadership condemned it as imperialist attack. It believed that both British and Russians are fighting to get hold over Iran's oil resources. Jawaharlal Nehru was vocal about withdrawal of armed forces from Iran and maintaining Iranian independence and sovereignty (Nehru Jawaharlal, 2012). Nehru's vision about ancient and rich relationships between both the civilisations however, suffered in the 1950s and 1960s. India chose the path of non-alignment after attainment of independence in 1947 putting the independence of the new state over and above any other interest. However, Iran chose a different path and became a close ally to the West in the Cold War between the socialist Russia and capitalist USA. This changed the equations in bilateral relationship both globally and regionally.

Despite the continuous efforts on both sides through high level visits by heads and even Iran's participation in the first Inter-Asia Relations Conference held in New

Delhi in 1947, relations were never warm enough. Iran's alliance with China and Pakistan on one side and with United States created several issues between India and Iran. The Shah regime in Iran was ideologically aligned with countries with which India had problems. Iran supported Pakistan on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, which India did not like. In 1971, war between India and Pakistan, Iran took positions which were truly in favour of Pakistan, which antagonised Indian leadership. Iranians were opposed to India's pro-Soviet move in 1970s too. Iranians were furious with India's support to Iraqi regime, which Iranians considered as anti-Shia (Pradhan Bansidhar 2004). Apart of these, bilateral issue there were many other issues related to international politics on which both the countries did not have similar positions. For example, Iran under Shah was pro-Israel whereas India was opposed to it and more vocal supporter of Palestine. Iran was opposed to Soviet invasion to Afghanistan. However, India never took a formal position on the issue keeping its growing links with Soviets. Iran's closeness with the USA was always a dampener between Indo-Iranian relations during the Shah's time.

There was renewed development in bilateral ties between India and Iran only after the Iranian revolution in 1979. This revolution brought a new regime in Iran, which was opposed to the USA and distanced itself from the cold war rivalry (Ansari Ali M 2014). The aggressive stance taken by Iran in supporting Islamists throughout the Muslim world distanced it from other neighbouring countries including Pakistan in the 1980s (Vatanka Alex 2015). However, the relations between Iran and India did not grow as per the expectations due to the war in Afghanistan and Iranian involvement in the Iran-Iraq war.

It was only after the death of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 when a new leadership emerged with the end of the eight year long Iran-Iraq war that Iranian diplomacy took a new and decisive turn. Other important development which had a great impact on the Iranian foreign policy were the 1990-91 Kuwait crisis, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union and end of the cold war. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of the cold war paved the way for a unipolar world. The United States remained the sole super power and liberal democracy became hegemonic. Some of the scholars in the west proclaimed the 'end of history' where each dissenting voice would be forced

to accept the western liberal notions of the economic, political and social organisation (Fukuyama Francis 1992). Due to its hostilities with the United States, Iran was forced to look for new allies in the world politics and India became a natural ally.

The identical threats to their sovereignty and security had brought Iran and India together. The early 1990s has witnessed a mercurial rise in bilateral relations between both the countries. The visit of Iranian president has added momentum for these bilateral relations. These increasing ties had an impact on regional political dynamics of the Southwest Asia and West and Central Asia which propelled the fears that it may run counter to the interests of United States of America (Pant 2004). The ties were enhanced with the visits of Prime Ministers of India in 1993 and 2001 respectively. The ties were strengthened with the 'Tehran Declaration' during the visit of Indian Prime Minister A B Vajpayee in 2001. Economic and trade cooperation agreements were also signed and further it was stressed for cooperation between the two nations to intensify the efforts for establishing of strategic links. Iranian President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) had stressed for better relations between the two countries for establishment of peace and stability in the region. With the signing of 'New Delhi Declaration' between the two countries during the visit of Iranian President in January 2003, the strategic engagement between the regional powers has been intensified. This strategic agreement between Iran and India points out the common interest areas in Afghanistan and Central Asia along with terrorism.

With the prominent role played by Iran in the world energy market, India has showed interest in deepening its ties. The bilateral relations have forayed into other sections of foreign affairs like commitment towards multilateral negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The significant parts of these ties are India's view on right of Iran for peaceful nuclear development. The trilateral or multilateral agreements of these two countries with the presence of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries facilitate regional economic cooperation through trade and economic prosperity. In the post 1990s globalised world ties between countries are well marked by strong economic links and this is reflected in increasing trade between the two countries.

Traditional Areas of Cooperation

Foreign policy is an important tool for any country for protecting one's own national interests. It depends on certain national values like identity, contrivance in methods and communications and diplomacy. The same conditions were present in the Indo-Iranian relations. After signing the treaty of friendship with Tehran on March 15, 1950 which has called for "Perpetual peace and friendship", there was a period of warmth in India-Iran relationship.²² Though in later years it could not grow much for the reasons mentioned above. Iranians were busy in their internal problems and neighbourhood issues. They had inclined towards their west, towards the Arab countries ignoring their eastern neighbours and countries such as India.

The end of cold war and disintegration of Soviet Russia led to the emergence of 'Pan Americana' in the West Asian region as well as security threat perceptions to India and Iran. This has brought them closer. India and Iran from times immemorial share strong bond and now it is security which has brought them together. They have realised that they must exercise autonomy in the conduct of their international relations. This may be due to the hegemony of the west especially America. These are some of the vital factors in strengthening their bond. The largest factor that always governs their relations in this less resource and energy driven world is partnership in energy sector (Dixit J N 2000). Apart from the concerns of security there are other issues on which both Iran and India have mutual interests and they have tried to create a mutual understanding.

Strategic Relations

Both India and Iran have worries regarding their neighbouring countries like Afghanistan where ethnic conflict is going on for last three decades. Both the countries have devised a plan favouring peaceful settlement with representation from all ethnicities. The great economic potential, which Afghanistan has in its rich mineral and oil resources, lies unexplored due to continuous violence and instability. The turmoil because of ethnic strife, instability of governance and religious

²² The treaty of friendship between the two countries were signed by the president of India and shah of Iran in commemoration of mutual ties from centuries and the need to develop these further for mutual cooperation and development of both the countries. (From Bilateral documents, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, March, 05, 1950.

fundamentalism has made Afghanistan one of the poorest countries of the world (Griffiths John C 2011). With this, the West Asian region itself is in turmoil and there are severe security threats to neighbouring countries. The terrorist groups have leverage and they work freely in the country. The September 2011 attacks on the USA are one example of how these terrorists can harm any country in the world. It provided the US to intervene in Afghanistan in 2001. The US army remained in the country till 2016. India and Iran both fall in the neighbourhood and have fear from terrorist groups as well as from the presence of super powers like the US in their backyard. Hence, their mutual interest lies in the stability of Afghanistan (Pant, Harsh 2012).

Individually both the countries are facing a number of problems. India is troubled by regional situations like threats to its security, nuclearization of its neighbours. There is a trouble in the province of Jammu and Kashmir which has borders with a hostile neighbour Pakistan. These and other threats have propelled India to increase vigil on its borders. These and other issues guide the direction of India's policies vis-à-vis Iran apart from the economic concerns. As is well known due to the fall of the Soviet Union and pressures put by world monetary organisations such as World Bank and IMF many countries were forced to open their markets and change their economic regimes. After 1990s, India too has chosen to take a different route to stabilise its economy. India became a part of the globalisation process and integrated itself with the world economy. This has to have an impact on its relations with Iran in more than one way.

The then Prime Minister of India P V Narasimha Rao also started a reorientation of India's long term commitments to the policy of Non-Alignment. Generally India's foreign policy is based on cooperation and peace among the basic issues and needs of humankind. However, the challenges faced by the Government of India in forms of territorial instability, geopolitical security and ensure durable peace and harmony within the region has forced it to adopt a more pragmatic approach. Now apart from maintaining peace and stability India also wants to have a political and economic policy which will lead to its economic development (Ganguly Sumit 2015).

India initiated a new approach in its foreign policy in the 1990s realigning its preferences and attitudes towards the neighbouring countries. The economic crisis in

1990s has led to the introduction of economic reforms. India's fiscal deficit and foreign exchange reserves crisis forced it to take help of international financial institutions like the World Bank, International Monetary fund etc. All these institutions work under the shadow of US hegemony. To bail it out of the looming economic crisis, India allowed foreign direct investment and intimidated to surrender its patents and intellectual property rights. Even Russia was threatened with US sanctions if it supplies any nuclear material to India. This is the background why India has expanded its foreign policy into the deserts. India looked forward towards Persian Gulf for a geostrategic advantage where America is having less influence (Dutt V P 1999).

Iran has also faced a hostile international environment in the 1990s. US hegemony is also felt in that region as there is no any other superpower. Iran's hostilities towards the US and Israel had made it an easy target for attacks and sanctions. U.S. has tried to isolate it in the world politics while calling it one of the Axis of Evil. It has also vilified it for its support to Shia groups in different parts of the West Asia (Mousavian Seyed Hossein and Shahir Shahidsaless 2015). Indian attempt to address its economic concerns made it compromise with its traditional aversion to the US. This pushed the bilateral relations between these two countries on a difficult terrain.

Owing to its failing economic condition, Iran has been aspiring to have bilateral ties with new countries where it can feel the minimal presence of US. With the two Gulf wars, Iran had lost its regional influence whereas US had consolidated ties with West Asian countries. Iran was encircled by all sides with the efforts of America. This is evident from the bases of US throughout the region of Central Asia. To impair economic development of Iran, America launched a 'dual containment policy' targeting both Iran and Iraq. Iran suffered with the encirclement in north and south, economic and trade sanctions which have choked its economic development.²³ Adding to the woes of Iran, neighbouring countries of Iran are politically unstable which has faced a threat to its internal security. The spill out of ethnic conflicts is threat to Iran's internal security. Meanwhile keeping in view its inland security, Iran has its interests vested in Russia and Persian Gulf states. So it wants to promote

²³ Dual Containment was an official United States foreign policy aimed at containing Iraq and Iran, Israel's and the United States two most adversaries in the Middle East.

regional cooperation and consolidate its relations with countries in the region (Chubin Shahram 1994).

These changed dynamics along with consequent emergence of “Pan- Americana” in the West Asian region has security threat perceptions to both the countries and these perceptions have brought them together. Both the countries have decided to share the perception and threat of security and both sought to change the course of their foreign policies (Bhaskar Uday 1999). When Mohammad Khatami became the President of Iran in 1997 he tried to improve Iran’s relations with the US with the famous speech of “dialogue of civilisations” at the United Nations conference at New York in 2001 as an attempt to placate the hostilities between the US and Iran. He also tried to improve Iranian approaches towards other countries. Under his regime Iran’s relations with India blossomed. Iran’s approach was favoured by Indian government. The first structural mechanism was started with the establishment of “The Indo- Iran Joint Commission.” This relation was institutionalised with the signing of Tehran Declaration. The visit to Iran by an Indian Prime Minister in April 2001 was claimed as “a new chapter in the field of human and international relations” by the then Iranian president Mohammad Khatami (Afzal Mahmood 2003). During the visit of A.B Bajpai in 2001, ‘Tehran Declaration’ was signed between Iran and India. This emphasised on launching a new phase of constructive and mutual beneficial cooperation, especially in the areas of energy, transit and transport, industry, agriculture and service sector. Two sides have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation in transport sector as well. Along with this there was an agreement to actively promote scientific and technological advancements, to initiate joint research projects and training in courses relating to these sectors and exchange of information related to these sectors. This agreement’s main focus was its heavy emphasis on energy and commercial ties between the two countries. There was an effort to increase the momentum for the construction of a gas pipeline and the finalization of the agreement for the supply of liquefied natural gas to India from Iran. Under this declaration there was strong commitment to develop the North- South Corridor and to encourage individual enterprises to utilize this corridor (Hunter Shireen 2010).

Strategic dialogue between the two countries was also an important factor of this visit. The first meeting between the foreign secretaries focused on three areas of strategic importance. They are related to security issues related to regional and international levels, security and defence strategies of India and Iran and lastly agenda of the international actors regarding nuclear disarmament. After consecutive meetings the meeting convened by Aminzadeh, deputy foreign minister for Asia and Pacific region and undersecretary of Indian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, agreed for an bilateral treaty over LPG supplies as well as construction of gas pipelines (India-Iran: From Dialogue to a Convergence of Views' at the India- Economic Summit, 2001).

The friendship took a new zenith with the visit of Iranian president Khatami's to India in 2003 January as chief guest at the Republic Day Parade of India. During this visit, the famous 'New Delhi Declaration' and the 'Road map to strategic cooperation' were signed by the two leaders. Along with these seven other documents were signed for cooperation in various fields by the two countries like economic coordination, science and technology, information technology, training in vocational training, reconstruction of Afghanistan, war against terrorism and defence agreements relating to imparting training, cooperation and joint exercises (Nuri Maghsud Ul Hasan 2003). This document was built upon the 2001 declaration between the countries. The focus of this document was the joint stand of both the countries on the issue of Iraq. Both the countries opined that the crisis in Iraq has to be solved with the help of United Nations. International terrorism was another major issue which occupied the major chunk of discussion at the meetings of the head of governments of both the countries. The other key issue was regarding cooperation between two countries in the reconstruction and rehabilitation in Afghanistan. Both the countries agreed that without stability in Afghanistan their stability is difficult to be maintained (Nuri Maghsud Ul Hasan 2003).

One of the important areas of cooperation of the New Delhi Declaration is the "Road Map for Strategic Cooperation". It envisages strong defence cooperation between the two countries which includes training and exchange of visits. There is also an guarded secret regarding this agreement that India will help Iran in upgrading the latter's Russian supplied Weapon's system, supply conventional military equipment and spare parts, to provide advisory for development hardware for military and to train

Iran's armed forces. There are also some reports that in an event of war with Pakistan, India has to be allowed by Iran to use its military bases. If this is genuine then there will be a visible change in regional level ties. The joint exercises by the two navies have added new angle to India and Iran relations. This was a sign of increasing trust between both the countries in the post-cold war era. According to Desai and Dormandy (2008) this will have a large impact on regional power alignments. According to them,

“The first joint naval exercise in the Arabian Sea in March 2003 reflected Indo-Iranian disquiet over mounting presence of American military in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. It was significant, more so, because the military exercises involving the armies, navies and air forces of India and the US had been burgeoning since the mid-1995. The second Indo-Iranian naval exercise took place on 3–8 March 2006, coinciding with President Bush's visit to India and weeks before Congressional hearing of the proposed US–India civilian nuclear deal. The conduct of the exercise signalled to both Washington and Tehran that New Delhi's bilateral relations would be independent of pulls and pressures of a third party. Several analysts speak of close security ties between New Delhi and Tehran, inferring from the presence of an unusually large number of Indian consulates at strategic locations in Iran. The Indian consulate in Zahedan indicates a possible intelligence presence. India's consulate in Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas, established in 2002 amidst protests from Pakistan, permits it to monitor movement of ships in the Persian Gulf and the straits of Hormuz. Observers in Pakistan note that the Indian engineers working to upgrade and develop the Iranian port of Chahbahar can easily monitor their country's activities at Gwadar port, currently being developed as a naval base with Chinese assistance. Cooperation in this area appears to indicate a reinforcement of ‘strong Indo-Iranian political relations rather than a broader defence alliance’.” (Desai and Dormandy: 2008).

In spite of all these collaborations and possibilities there have been political compulsions which have dictated the direction of this relationship on a road bumpy. Decisions regarding some requirements like cooperation on areas such as nuclear energy and space have been put on hold due to international pressure. New Delhi has cooperated with Tehran in its civilian nuclear programme during 1990s by agreeing to sell two nuclear reactors which are to be placed under IAEA safeguards. The sale was given up because of undue pressure from United States of America. With this US pressure, there was censure of two Indian scientists for providing technical assistance to Iran's nuclear programme and thus cooperation in the field of space technology came to an end.

Trade

One of the important aspects of Delhi Declaration of 2003 was mutual agreement for energy cooperation. Their strategic needs became an important source for cooperation in other areas including India's energy needs. Growing energy needs of India, a result of high rate of economic growth in the 1990s and 2000s, were met with the abundant sources of Iran. Iran got a source of much needed revenue in India. This naturally made both the countries allies. The Delhi Declaration includes mode of transit for other resources as well as tie ups in all sectors beyond energy. The key areas which were marked for mutual cooperation and concrete steps to be taken were the issues regarding oil and gas pipeline projects which are so challenging to implement because of the existing issues like terrorism and border disputes. In 2009, a deal was reached between India and Iran to supply liquefied fuel to India for twenty years. This agreement paved the way for the development of Farsh and one another oil fields with an amount of trade in billions of dollars annually. The scope of the commitment has been expanded since then to have a firm and long term economic cooperation. Both the countries have also signed agreements to the development of Chahbahar port complex, the Chahbahar- Fahrenj- Bam railway line and the Marine Oil Tanking Terminal (see below).

To be more specific on India- Iran relations, we must take an elaborate view regarding energy cooperation between the two countries. Energy ties between these two countries depend on the principles of economy, where market is always run with two forces of supply and demand. Both the declarations, Tehran and Delhi, have identified the area of energy cooperation as their main interest. They want to make their ties stronger through this cooperation. With this tie up both India and Iran can have mutual benefits like it fulfils, to a large extent, the energy goals of India whereas Iran can enhance its economy through the finances coming from such export of the oil and gas to India. India is one of the fastest growing economies with high growth rates. It is also the second most populous country in the world. Thus India has become a significant consumer of non-renewable energy resources. To meet its goals for eradication of poverty, Government of India aims at have 8-10 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate over the next twenty-five years (Cheema Sujata

Ashwarya 2010). According to the government sources for achieving and maintaining the level of growth India needs to triple its primary energy supplies (Tuli Vipul 2006).

According to 2006 estimates, India was the sixth largest oil consumer in the world and some observers believe that by 2025, India may be the fourth largest consumer of crude oil following the US, China and Japan.²⁴ According to the Planning Commission of India's report, crude oil imports of India are two thirds of its hydrocarbon requirements and further escalation in energy requirements will have adverse impact on its energy security.²⁵ The policy makers of the country are aware of this situation and they need different sources of crude oil suppliers. Here comes the role of Iran, as it accounts for ten per cent of the world's crude oil resources.²⁶ Iran accounted for seventeen per cent of India's crude oil imports after Saudi Arabia which supplies twenty three per cent of crude oil to India in the year 2005 (Cheema Sujata Aishwarya 2010).

Energy security doesn't include only crude oil resources. In order to have an energy security regime a country needs to diversify energy sources (Winzer C 2011). It has made India look for other forms of energy. After crude oil the most used energy form is natural gas as it is used vividly by power sector and fertilizers industry too. Both power sector and fertilizer industry together consumes three fourths of natural gas. Since 2004 demand for natural gas has increased many fold. However, the demand is not been met due to several reasons. India does not produce enough gas to fulfil its domestic demands and due to political reasons supplies from Iran has gone down. Iran stands second to Russia (according to 2008 estimates) in having enormous natural gas reserves (Cheema Sujarat Asihwarya 2010).

Iran has tremendous potential to export natural gas to India but the deal has yet to materialise. The deal is still at the level of negotiations for construction of a pipeline through Pakistan for the transport of natural gas. The Plan is known as Iran- Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline project which covers a distance of 2600 kilometres from the South Pars fields in Iran via Pakistan to Gujarat in India. This project is beneficial for all the

23 Country Analysis Briefs (2009), 'India', Energy Information Administration Official Energy Statistics from the US Government, March.

24 *World Trade Atlas*, quoted in, Country Analysis Briefs (March 2009).

three countries but there are inadvertent delays owing to several political and economic issues. The concerns of security between India and Pakistan is major obstacle for this proposed project as Indian security authorities are questioning the performance of the deal and the commodity like natural gas which is to be imported through the Pakistan Corridor. They are reiterating for an assurance from the Pakistani security officials for finalising the gas pipeline.

Although the Government of India may look at reviving the IPI pipeline project, the problem looks to persist, thereby jeopardizing energy security and further deteriorating the relations between the two. However, at this juncture, the project seems to be next to impossible. Hence, other options should be looked at, for e.g., TAPI. "the current bilateral trade between the two countries is about \$14bn, while Indian exports to Iran were around \$4.2bn in 2014" (Jahanbegloo 2016 The Indian Express 02 June 2016). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Iran and the Chabahar port deal also reflects on the fact that the relationship is reviving. "India set to invest \$500m for the trade transport corridor that would entirely bypass Pakistan" (Ibid). Apparently, after the nuclear deal, these ties further look prosperous, as apart from energy trade, the two also share historic ties. Nevertheless, there are some very pertinent political problems in the materialisation of this pipeline project. Indian vote against Iran in the IAEA in 2006-07 has created distrust among the Iranians about Indian commitments. Indian support to the US proposed sanctions against Iran has forced Iranians to sign deal with China instead. According to Atul Aneja, the IPI pipeline has now become IP pipeline and China has become the real buyer of the gas supplied to Pakistan (The Hindu 01 August 2011). In yet another move Indians are working on another gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is called TAPI in short. This has been mooted as an alternative to IPI under the US pressure (Dadwal 2011 The Diplomat).

Meanwhile there is another angle to this story. In 2009 Pakistan signed an agreement with Iran to secure 750 million cubic feet of natural gas without any consultation with India (Gaud and Manisha Mukherjee 2014:125). Analysts argue that this move by Iran is primarily a hint that the project is essential for Iran and though India can join the deal whenever it likes, the project cannot wait indefinitely for it. India's indecision

and status quo on the IPI issue is related more or less to the influence of US. The US is in opposition to this project because it neutralises the impact of the sanctions imposed by it on Iran (Mafinezam and Mehrabi: 2008). The opposition from America is as expected because of the economic sanctions imposed on Iran for the latter's nuclearization programme. In 2010 there was no active/direct opposition in India towards this deal. However, the US secretary of foreign affairs at the time, Hillary Clinton has revealed that she campaigned for India's withdrawal from the project when she visited India in 2008 (Kaura 2015). The fresh sanctions under the Comprehensive Iranian sanctions, Accountability and Disinvestment act of 2010 (CISADA) further reduced the chances of any materialisation of the deal soon.²⁷ For a very long time Indian government was caught between its needs of energy security and opposition from the US, which has an important role to play in the economic development of India. The recent deal between the US and Iran on the nuclear issue (2015) has created a hope of the revival of the project in some way or the other (Ibid). However, it might take more time than expected.

India has an international energy strategy i.e. in addition to diversifying of its sources of supply, India wants to acquire stakes in energy production facilities in Iran which can help to extend its services in shipping back liquefied natural gas. India's investment in Iran's energy sector stands around \$ 100 million (Cheema Sujata Asihwarya 2008). According to Business Standard Report (2009),

“In November 2009, the overseas arm of state run Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) and Ashok Leyland Projects services, a private company, signed agreements to take 40 per cent stake in South Pars field- phase 12 (SP-12), offered by the state run National Iranian Oil company (NIOC). OVL has also submitted a \$5.5 billion plan to bring to production the Farzad- B gas find in Farsi gas fields in the Persian Gulf. Besides, in December 2009, OVL agreed to take 20 per cent stake in the LNG gas export facility that Iran LNG (a subsidiary of NIOC) is building at the southern Iranian coast. Though this plant is to turn gas produced from phase- India is eyeing it for turning gas from the Farzad-B gas field into LNG. The Indian Company is expected to receive up to 6 million tonnes per annum of LNG for its efforts in both the gas fields”.

Thus “Natural gas is set to become the major component of India's import from Iran, especially as domestic demand rises and India begins to face higher prices in the

²⁷ The act imposed severe limits on any kind of investments in Iran by a foreign company. It also had provisions for the penalty in case of trade links beyond a certain amount. See for details, The Library of Congress. 24 June 2010. http://thomas.loc.gov/home/gpoxmlc111/h2194_enr.xml .

international market” (<http://fprc.in/pdf/IRAN-Pragya.pdf> Accessed on 05 July 2017). After Delhi Declaration there was a remarkable rise in trade between the two countries with India having exports worth US\$1.937 billion to Iran and imports worth US\$ 11.049 billion from Iran and Iran having exports worth US\$ 10.06 billion and imports worth US\$ 850 million as quoted by Indian Embassy. Thus the trade volume between Iran and India has increased eight fold (The Press TV).

One of the important areas of cooperation between the countries is in defence sector. Even early 1980s can be treated as years which can be termed as ‘age of cooperation’ in defence sector. In 1983, an Indo- Iranian Joint Commission was formed and there was steady progress in defence and military ties. When Iran has started arming itself it has purchased armoury from Russia and China. To assist it in developing defence mechanisms Iran sought India’s help. For submarines which are acquired from Russia, Iran sought help from India in manufacturing of batteries for submarines which are capable of working in warm waters (Christine 2007). Through New Declaration both the countries hoped for a new cache of conventional weaponry to Iran from Russia.

“The Delhi Declaration had perpetrated both sides to explore political dialogue and modalities of cooperation on issues of strategic importance through the mechanisms of the Indo- Iran Strategic Dialogue, foreign office consultations and the institutional interaction of both national security councils” (Rajamohan C 2003). After this the visit by the then Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2008 was a positive step in the right direction for improving bilateral relations. This is because a good number of Indian politicians and policymakers are of the opinion that diplomatic and friendly relations with Iran has been good to India right from historic times and it has been key to regional stability and security throughout and more than that an good source of hydrocarbon energy.

The hospitality shown towards Iranian President in 2008 is considered as part of an insightful strategy (Dadwal 2008). The visit was strongly opposed by US and it demanded harsh position towards Iran by India. It was a part of US’s policy of containment of Iran. However, India’s foreign ministry at the time, Pranab Mukharjee in a response to the US objections issued a statement which emphasised the ancient roots of Indo-Iran relationship. The statement reads as follows:

“India and Iran are ancient civilizations with relations that date back to centuries ago. India and Iran have the necessary capacities to properly manage all aspects of their relations. The situation in the region has always attracted the attention of both nations. Clearly it is evident that all these issues have been resolved through nonstop dialogue and exchanges of different delegates”.

The statement by the Indian Foreign Ministry also indicated that none of the sides needed any guidelines from any third party regarding the nature of their relations. Peace and tranquillity can be achieved only with enhanced ties and dialogue (www.afp.google.com/article 22 July 2008). The conflict between the US and Iran were related to Iranian nuclear programme. India has always been a votary of nuclear disarmament especially in its neighbourhood. However, it also supports every country’s right to have peaceful nuclear technology and civilian nuclear energy. Commodor Uday Bhaskar, the former head of the Indian Institute for Defense Studies and Research, New Delhi, while talking about the strengthening of Indo- Iranian relations said that “although it is true that over the years India has got itself closer to the United States; India never desires to see the improvement of its US ties destabilize New Delhi’s relations with Iran” (IRNA April 2008). Indo-Iranian relations have always had popular support in India as well as Iran. One of the examples of this is the kind of reporting Mahmud Amhadinejad’s India visit received. *Sahafat* an Urdu daily in India wrote an article on President Ahmandinejad’s visit to New Delhi stating that it’s a very important and strategic visit to India. It added,

“Ahmadinejad is different from all other Muslim leaders. He is the biggest supporter of unity among Muslims and since he does not yield to the US pressures, he enjoys full respect among the third world nations. Ahmadinejad supports the oppressed Muslims of the world and has proven that the reason the United States bullies others is not because it has supremacy but because Muslims lack the power of faith. For that reason, from the people in Palestine to those who have been afflicted in Lebanon, all have cast their hope on Ahmadinejad” (IRNA April 2008).

India and Iran ties date back to century owing to cultural and historical commonalities. Apart from this Iranian and Indian traders play a key role in blossoming multilateral ties. The continuity in relations between the two countries is as a result of culture and trade. Some of the outcomes of the various accords signed between the leaders of both the countries pertaining to energy sector. India’s role in development of Iranian oil fields has been a significant aspect of the relationship between both the countries. In the words of Iranian ambassador to India, Sayyad Mahdi Nabizadeh,

“The value of Tehran-New Delhi trade is \$9 billion mark and exceeding. There is no doubt whatsoever that oil and gas agreements reached between Iran and India have built a strong foundation for India to ensure its energy security and safeguard its economic and industrial development and growth” (Blank Stephen 2013).

The best way to boost cooperation between two countries is to implement the construction of the proposed Iran- Pakistan- India gas pipeline. This might fulfil the needs of both the countries. Another example for exemplary show of relations between the two countries is the proposed North- South corridor, an international transportation route signed by India, Iran and Russia. The transportation corridor passes through eight countries and also acts as a bridge between the two continents: Asia and Europe. It will facilitate exchange of commodities as well as transportation between the two continents at much lesser costs. There is another plan to set up a West corridor in collaboration with Iran, Afghanistan and India and connecting this corridor to Uzbekistan (IRNA 20 April 2008). This is a positive development in the bilateral relationship between Iran and India in 2016 when Indian Prime Minister visited Iran and signed the long delayed Chahbahar Port agreement. There is a detailed discussion on the subject in the chapter four. However, the clinching of the bilateral agreement on Chahbahar has ended a long wait and much credit for it should go to the ending of the Iranian Nuclear Issue. Sujata Aishwarya Cheema (2010), referring to the original agreement between both the countries signed in 2003 argues that,

“As part of the agreement, India is due to help expand the Iranian port of Chahbahar and lay railway tracks that would connect Chahbahar to Afghan city of Zaranj on the Iranian border. Unfazed by the attacks of a recrudescing Taliban, India built a strategic highway linking Delaram in southern Afghanistan to Zaranj. This enables Indian goods to move into Afghanistan via Delaram and beyond. It opens up an alternate route into Afghanistan, which now relies mostly on goods transported overland from ports in Pakistan and provides a supplementary access of Afghanistan to the sea. With Chahbahar open to Indian goods, India would be able to sidestep Pakistan’s dominance of mainland trade routes to the Afghan territory. New Delhi’s expansion of trade into Afghanistan is part of a trilateral agreement signed by India, Iran and Afghanistan in January 2003. This agreement and the North-South Corridor initiative have become key milestones in the promoting India’s trade with Iran, Central Asian countries and Afghanistan”.

Iran has a regional market with 300 million consumers. This is like an incentive for India for having closer economic and technical cooperation with Iran. If there are cordial relations between the two countries then with the help of trading companies and traders of the two countries, there can be a construction of cement, steel and

aluminium factories and power plants using Iran's rich energy resources. These relations can be taken much forward into other field for cooperation like IT, environment and tourism. India's National security adviser M.K. Narayanan laid equal emphasis on the importance of these issues by stating that

“Iran is not just an international political issue for India; rather it is also an internal matter. This is because the second largest Shia population resides in India which has ties with Iran that go back to hundreds of years ago. Iranian developments have major impacts on India” (2008 IRNA, Tehran).

Traditional Areas of Divergence

There are many areas of conflict between two countries in spite of many areas of cooperation. Some of the most prominent of them are listed below.

The United States of America

The role of the United States is the most crucial one as an area of conflict between both the countries. The issue of Iran's attempt to develop nuclear technology and its disputes with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is one of the latest of such issues related to the US. International pressure, in particular of the USA has strained relations between two countries. Sujata Aishwarya Cheema describes the issue in detail (2010),

“In September 2005, India voted for the IAEA resolution finding Iran to be in ‘non-compliance’ of the safeguard obligation under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and then it voted to refer Iran to the UNSC in February 2006. The votes stirred fierce controversy in India but went a long way in placating those policy makers, who questioned India's engagement with Iran in the backdrop of the Congressional debates on the US–India civilian nuclear deal. Even though at the time the government defended its vote as an ‘independent decision’ by saying it worked actively to help Iran during stand-offs in the negotiation process and ensured that the issue remained with the IAEA instead of immediate referral to the UNSC, New Delhi understood that the failure to take a clear stand on the Iranian imbroglio would thwart the much sought-after nuclear deal with the US.”

According to Aziz Haniffa, USA also questioned and objected India's strategic relations with Iran. It used Indian desire to have a civil nuclear deal with the USA. The long standing naval exercises, for example, became an important issue of rebuff. According to Haniffa,

“[When] India conducted its second naval exercise with Iran in 2006 at the time the US Congress was considering a civilian nuclear deal [with India], [the naval exercise] invited the ire of the Chairman of The House Foreign Relations

Committee, Tom Lantos, who opined that relationship with “the current terrorist regime in Tehran” is unacceptable behaviour by any country seeking to be our strategic ally” (6 April 2006).

The September 2005 and November 2009 India voted twice in IAEA against Iran which led to the imposition of sanctions. These votes though had domestic opposition in India. In 2005 the left parties which were supporting the government from outside at the time vehemently opposed the vote and “they have accused the government of bowing to the pressure of US and compromising with the autonomy of the India’s foreign policy.” These votes were not also taken positively by the intelligential in India. They argued that it India’s vote is “dovetailing with the US policy of isolating Iran.” They also vehemently reminded old Indian position that all the countries have right to “develop civilian nuclear technology (Cheema 2010).²⁸

This forced Indian government even after voting in favour of the US and its allies in the IAEA twice pertaining to Iran’s right to peaceful use of nuclear energy under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was despite some hawks and rightwing think tanks in India arguing that a nuclear Iran is not in India’s favour in the region. Indian policy makers emphasised the point that there should be no unilateral action against Iran and all the actions should be according to international covenants and agreements for example, UN resolutions, and NPT etc. recently. Nevertheless, overall direction of India’s policy towards Iran was guided by realism which was interpreted in preventing Iran from getting technology for nuclear arsenal as an eventuality as a nuclear Iran is harmful for Indian interest in the region. It was also guided by the zeal to come closer to the US in international politics at any costs (Alafrangi 19 October 2009; Mishra January 2006; Samanta 2009).

For relinquishing the equities it had with Iran, India has kept aside the IAEA votes and it signalled a little inclination towards Iran in the years after the successful signing of civil nuclear deal with the US. However, there are several limitations for India before it extends hand to Iran. Firstly, it redefines the friendship of India with US. Iran suffered because of four rounds of UNSC imposed sanctions. The US sanctions under CISADA restricted investment by third countries in Iran’s energy sector. This pushed India into such a condition where it was not able to fulfil its

²⁸Manmohan Singh was criticised by the Opposition parties for bowing to the dictates of the US on Iran and ignoring the national interests associated with India–Iran ties. For example, see *The Hindu* (27 September 2005), *The Hindu* (26 September 2005) and Cherian (2005).

obligations under the Delhi Declaration as discussed above. Despite the fact that it hampers India's energy security and trade relations with Iran, Indians could not pull himself or herself to deny the opportunity to become a strategic ally of the sole superpower of the world. It was a zero sum situation or rather made like that by the poor imagination of the Indian diplomats. Highlighting the importance of US in India's scheme of things Bhattacharya (2010) comments that,

“In the last two years India has made substantial gains in areas such as military-to- military ties and counter- terrorism: defence trade between India and US has expanded to 3 billion worth and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been coordinating with the Indian intelligence on Mumbai terrorist attacks. The nuclear deal with India is also poised to have access to high technology in areas of energy, space and communication”.

India wants to have a parallel relationship with both US and Iran, unfortunately it's not happening. The IAEA votes and the volatile ground on which the prospects of the IPI gas pipeline are illustrate how strong the 'US factor' can be in the future of India-Iran relations. The mutual dislikes between the US and Iran rooted in Iranian Islamic Revolution makes India's tasks in developing relations with either of them a challenging task as it has to make sure that none of them are antagonised.

Israel

While Iran is important on one side, India also wants to maintain its relations with Israel. India- Israel relation has widened with the defence cooperation between them like over the years there is increase in supply of defence equipment, intelligence sharing, counter terrorism and joint defence- related research. The possibility of Israeli technology reaching to Iran through India has exercised an impact on Israeli political establishment from time to time. Former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon sought explicit guarantees from India on this issue during his visit to India in September 2003 (India News Online, 15 September 2003). Israel has been stressing India again and again on this issue during a meeting of an Indo- Israeli joint working group on counter terrorism in November 2004. India's impressive record in containing illegal transfer of technology received from a third country Israel is a concern as the largest arms supplier and this will remain as one of the salient features in India and Iran bilateral defence mechanisms.

The Saudi Arabia and Gulf

There are so many other factors that prove constrain in India –Iran relations like India’s ties with the Arab Gulf states, especially with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is an important country to set up ties with India because of its capacity to hold 4.8 million strong Indian diasporas. Most of these people are working in the Gulf and a better bilateral relation between India and Gulf countries secures the security of these people and assures a constant supply of huge remittances. Moreover, the region is important for energy security and bilateral investment and trade. The largest suppliers of Petroleum and natural gas are Saudi Arabia and Qatar to the subcontinent. India figures as a major trade partner for all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. On the other hand Iran has a very distant relationship with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. There is a territorial dispute between Iran and UAE over Tunb islands in the Gulf. It was controlled by Iran but claimed by UAE with broad Arab backing (Jill 1995 165-166). The relationship between Bahrain and Iran are also at low. Bahrain is one of the few countries which have a Shia majority population. However, like Iraq the rulers in Bahrain have always been the Sunnis. Iran, a Shia majority country considers itself as a guardian of world Shiism. The rulers of the GCC have feared Iranian intervention for long and Bahrainians have accused it for a plot of a coup to establish a Shia theocracy in the country (Ibid). It is obvious that with the seventy per cent of the Shia Muslim being ruled by a minority Sunni ruling family, Bahrain accuses Iran of sectarian troubles in its land and this spoils any constructive relationship between the two countries.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have a hostile relationship since long, full of mistrust and suspicion. During the Iran-Iraq war Saudis supported Iraq financially and politically which made Iran more aggressive in the region in its aftermath. The Saudis and GCC countries were worried about the spread of republicanism inspired by the successful Islamic Revolution in Iran and wanted to content it anyhow (Roy 2014). “Iran’s control over Southern Iraq, incursions into Lebanon with the help of Hizbollah, interference in the Palestinian issue through Hamas, interfering in the affairs of Yemen and the nuclear issue have also created a sense of hostility with its Arab neighbours” (Al- Shayeji 2010, Fandy 2010, and Ehteshami 2002). This strained relations between two important partners it is easy to guess its impact on India ties with GCC and Iran. GCC may be cautioning India over its relation with Iran and this

will overstretch the bilateral ties between the two countries. It tests the Indian capabilities to balance.

Pakistan Factor

The complexity of the relations among the countries of South and Southwest Asia is evident through the political scenario of the particular region. Various factors have played an important role in the bilateral ties of Iran with India and Pakistan. Religion is an important factor in India–Iran relations. (Ramana 2012) There are different facets to these relations. India and Iran have traditional and continuing relations. However, Iran and Pakistan also have shared very close relations right from the time of the birth of Pakistan in 1947. At the same time there were tensions between Iran and two the countries at individual levels. The relations between these three countries stood test to many political issues. Till the partition of Indian Subcontinent, under British Empire colonized India experienced a different kind of relation with Iran which changed dramatically with the Independence and partition and the birth of Pakistan. New issues have come up and old structures and bases of the relation have become futile to say the least. Partition was a bitter pill for India as it divided its own people on the lines of religion. Post-partition India's relationship with Pakistan has never been normal for more than one reason. The bitterness between the two countries which came up during partition remained forever. It made the leaders of Pakistan to view India with suspicion. This also encouraged them to try and forge strong ties with its western neighbours as a strategic move (Paul 2006).

India was viewed as permanent threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Afghanistan is the western neighbour of Pakistan. Afghanistan was worst sufferer of British Imperial policies. Under these policies, the North West Frontier province was ceded to British India and after partition it has become part of new nation i.e. Pakistan. Afghanistan has denied recognising the borders which has pushed Pakistan into a terrible situation where it cannot have peace on its Western borders (Bajoria 2009). Nevertheless, Pakistan has tried to shape its relations with Afghanistan in a way that it suits her geo-political ambitions of a secure western border. During and after the Cold War it has tried to establish links with the ruling groups in the country and where it has failed to do that it has tried to put its own people in the power. The

Taliban was trained aided and abetted by Pakistan which supplied and ammunitions to establish a theocratic state. (Rashid Ahmed 2009).

In the post-Taliban phase, the leakage of classified files through Wiki leaks has proved it; Pakistan highlighted the dominating intricacies and complexities of the conflict in Afghanistan. Pakistan offered to negotiate a deal between Taliban and Haqqani network and it has grown prominent. Former Canadian diplomat has disclosed that Pakistan is planning to demolish Indian Consulates in Afghanistan. This has reemphasised the importance of Afghanistan (Malhotra, 2012). However, unlike Afghanistan Pakistan's attempts to forge a strong relationship with Iran bore fruit in the pre-revolutionary phase. On the one side both Iran and Pakistan found similarity in their opposition towards expansion of Soviet Russia. On the other, they came together to accept the military alliances of the US. This made them support each other in their foreign affairs. In the early fifties Pakistan was supported by Iran over the issue of Kashmir. "Iranian Majlis has declared Kashmir as inseparable part of Pakistan party" (Bahadur 1998:224). Even "Iranian Parliament discussed Kashmir as inseparable part of Pakistan" (Pattanayak 2011: 21) Despite protests from India Iran supported Pakistan over adding the issue of Kashmir to the communiqués of Baghdad Pact (Sundararajan 2010). During Cold War there were turbulent relations between India and Iran as the Shah of Iran allied with the US and Pakistan. On the other hand India preferred to remain non- aligned. The Pakistan-Iran ties were based on their mutual closeness with US and their hostilities towards "godless" Soviets. India which was closer to Soviet Union thanks to the 1971 treaty, and still proclaimed its commitment to Non-Alignment remained an outsider. According to Vinay Kaura

"However, the end of the Cold War and the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini opened a window of opportunity for India to clear away misunderstandings and upgrade its relationship with Iran. Islamic ties with Pakistan notwithstanding, Iran began to cultivate a strong relationship with India" (Kaura 2015).

They vied for strong relationship. Bilateral relations between India and Iran remained cordial during the years when Iran faced severe reprimanding for its nuclear program with the exception of deviation from the path by India owing to the American pressure. India has to deal with the Iran- US divergence during

this period (Yazdani 2007). It is noteworthy to emphasise upon India's interests in Central Asia which are substantial and it needs to bolster its presence in the region. India wants to reclaim its influence and cultural ties it once enjoyed with the Central Asian countries before the dawn of colonialism. This can be reasonably realized through Iran. There are many similarities between India and Iran. The common traits of the foreign policy of the countries are pursuance of extra-regional ambitions particularly in the Central Asia. For all practical purposes Iran needs India and vice-versa to penetrate and make effective gains in the region (Hiro 2011). They have internal political dimension as well to their relations. India's large Shia population has been an important variable in continuing interaction between India and Iran.

As described above Iran and the US are hostile to each other and this has affected India's relationships with Iran. This has also delayed realisation of its ambitions in the Central Asia. Same goes with Iran as well. India will be seen as a major beneficiary of the Iran nuclear deal. India has been rigorous in its efforts in

“pursuing the Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) gas pipeline project for the last decade. The operation of the IPI project would be reinforced by the trilateral “Framework Agreement,” in which the three governments would be committed to the provisions of the Energy Charter Treaty. The ownership of the project by an international consortium and the fact that Pakistan itself would be a major consumer of the gas would greatly restrict its ability to tamper with the pipeline. The IPI – which could have included Chinese and Russian participation – stalled under pressure from the U.S., which prodded India into working towards an alternative gas transport line from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hillary Clinton, then U.S. secretary of State, has disclosed in her book *Hard Choices* that the main purpose of her short visit in May 2012 was to convince India to reduce its reliance on Iranian oil. Obliging, India subsequently downgraded its commercial ties with Iran. India has found it difficult to balance the imperative of improving its ties with the United States with the need to have a sound relationship with Iran.”(Kaura 2015)

Despite all these apprehensions, India has been clear its stand that it wants to rebuild the dialogue for Iran- Pakistan- India gas pipeline project (Ibid). Iran and Pakistan are supposed to have a far more balanced and cooperative relations as it have been until date.

Kaura further argues that

“Pakistan has every reason to assume that antagonizing an Iran whose geopolitical stock will soon rise would be strategically counterproductive with the potential decline of Pakistan’s importance to American objectives in the context of U.S. outreach to Iran and the drawdown in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s rapprochement with Iran is in fact an outcome of a strategy that has been well thought through. To maintain neutrality in the Iran-Saudi tussle, Pakistan has already decided to distance itself from the regional sectarian war. The issue of stability in Afghanistan has brought Iran and Pakistan together: Iran has expressed support for the reconciliation process in Afghanistan, in which Pakistan has been playing the role of mediator. The threat emanating from the Islamic State is being seen as a challenge by both Iran and Pakistan. Visiting Pakistan in August, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif called on Islamabad to work in unison to eradicate sectarianism, terrorism and extremism. Thus, both countries would like to avoid the revival of former animosity as neither stands to benefit from it”.

There are several issues, which are pushing India and Iran to have closer and stronger ties. There are so many instances to prove this. For example, Iran, Russia and India worked together with Northern Alliance against Taliban regime in Afghanistan. . The geographical space from Pakistan to Mediterranean has become home to some of the most vicious *Jihadi* terror organisations. These organisations are linked at regional, national and global levels. This can be an opportunity for the two countries to come together and extend cooperation to each other in tackling the threat of terrorism (2015). As Vinay Kaura said

“Chabahar port is viewed as a symbol of Indo- Iranian economic and strategic cooperation. Through this port India can have access to Afghanistan, without passing through Pakistan. Chabahar port is also linked with India’s receiving natural gas imports from Iran as well as a serving point for origin of the proposed Iran- Oman- India pipeline. India’s strategic thinkers also view the port as a strategic counterweight to China’s pursuit of a port in Pakistan’s (Gwadar)” (2015).

There are definite similarities between Indian and Iran as far as their strategic outlook are concerned, particularly their pursuit of regional power and influence being one such common factor. Relationship between Indian and Iran has not always been smooth. There have been occasional frictions and flare-ups. In the recent past, the relation between the two states has been acrimonious. India will have to face certain unpleasant realities in its relation with Iran due to change of India’s stance on Iran’s right to develop nuclear energy for developmental purposes. India has certainly

strained its relationship with Iran as well as its prospect in Central Asia by voting against Iran on its nuclear policy at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Kaura (2015), observes that

“There are valid reasons to suspect that Iran might not show too much enthusiasm in responding to India’s economic or strategic overtures. Inevitably, as so often in international politics, there is a temptation for states to be on the “right side” of a thorny issue. India was faced with what looked like either/or question on Iran’s nuclear program. It was the outcome of Indian policymakers’ failure to conceptualize a grand strategy went beyond narrowly defined national interests. How can New Delhi be sure now that Tehran will overlook India’s vote at the IAEA? Will a “realist” Iran opt for the long-term benefits of mutual cooperation? A lot depends on what counts as “long term” in Iran’s strategic calculations”.

Other factors suggest that India-Iran relationship might be in turmoil in coming days. The fact that many of the European countries as well as America has lifted the economic and trade ban on Iran has given Iran a upper hand in its relation with India. Iran need not depend on India as it has better investment opportunities at hand. Important international players like America, European countries, Russia, and China see a great opportunity for their stagnating businesses in the Iranian market. On the other hand, India’s growing nearness to Israel and states of Gulf Cooperation council will also cause considerable harm to India-Iran relation. *China*

China’s energy needs have become an economic lifeline for Iran during the time of the US sanctions. Growing bilateral ties between Iran and China shows this fact. Iran exports fifty percent of its oil export to China which imports tenth of its energy needs from Iran. Growing energy cooperation between China and Iran has good scope of strategic relations between both the countries. For strategic influence in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean Region and Central Asia, China seeks to use Pakistan as counterbalance to India. India’s concerns towards China remained important due to continued Chinese claims over its territories in Kashmir and Northeast. There is a historical territorial dispute between India and China. Some scholars have apprehensions that this dispute may reflect over claim for energy resources in Iran. There is also a competition for access to energy in resource-rich countries in Central Asian region. Involvement of China will lead to conflict of interest between New Delhi and Beijing. “Iran as a net exporter of energy would like to manage its resources to influence its relationships with India, Pakistan and China

without getting entangled in their bilateral differences” (Kaura 2015). The depth of the strategic bond between Pakistan and China are well known. Indians have already provided enough reasons to Iranians for not trusting it in the time of crisis through its joining the American bandwagon on the nuclear issue. Chinese know this weak link between Indo-Iranian relations and they might use it for own advantage.

China is a large market for energy and its demands for energy security will make it an attractive destination for oil and gas exporting Iran. Pakistan is still an underdeveloped economy with a lot of potential for growth in the near future. This assessment of an ever-growing market will have a positive impact on Iran’s perceptions about Pakistan.

Kaura has noted that

“China has anticipated the lifting of sanctions on Iran and it has revived the Iran-Pakistan pipeline. China has signed an agreement with Pakistan in April 2015 to construct a pipeline from Pakistan’s Gwadar port to Nawabshah. The Iran-Pakistan pipeline is expected to supply gas from Iran’s South Pars field sufficient to generate 4,500 MW of electricity, covering Pakistan’s current shortfall in power production” (Ibid).

According to Kaura (2015), the improvement of relations between the two countries with the help of energy has grown as

“Energy cooperation between Iran and Pakistan goes a long way to mitigating historical suspicions that have separated Shia Iran and predominantly Sunni Pakistan. The energy projects will not only alleviate Pakistan’s crippling energy shortages but also produce hard currency for Iran’s hard-pressed economy. Iran has already built its section of the pipeline to the Pakistani border. Pakistan will build the remaining 80 km of the pipeline from Gwadar to the Iranian border once sanctions on Iran are formally lifted”.

China has followed a well-knit strategy. Due to its geopolitical potential, China is in favour of the IP pipeline. If implemented the IP pipeline will be important factor in China’s ambitious Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road (OBOR) project.

“The IP pipeline agreement is also a part of a \$46 billion infrastructure package to establish the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), being financed and constructed by Beijing. The CPEC, which is aimed at building critical infrastructure that could kick-start economic growth, will extend from Pakistan’s Arabian Sea Port of Gwadar to China’s Kashgar city in Xinjiang province, one of the principal launching points for China’s OBOR initiative”(Kaura 2015).

Iran expressed its willingness in expanding the Pakistan gas pipeline to China. This pipeline is supposed to pass through the Indian territory. It has to be seen on what condition India will allow this pipeline to go through from its area. The proposal to extend the Pakistan gas pipeline to China through Indian territory will definitely effect the India-China and India- Iran relations.

“For India, energy pipelines have always been a lucrative prospect whose advantages are seemingly tangible but always just out of reach. Fringed in as it is by China and Pakistan, India has felt constrained by its lack of land access to energy-rich Central Asia. With the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline still in fix and the Turkmenistan- Afghanistan- Pakistan- India (TAPI) pipeline, yet to take off as the countries have failed to appoint a consortium leader that will build and maintain the line. India is very keen to kick-start an undersea pipeline project that would bring Iranian gas to India via the Arabian Sea, eluding Pakistan” (Kaura 2015).

The Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India has also told that,

“Lifting of western sanctions on Iran throws up a great opportunity for India to transport natural gas from Iran to Porbandar port in Gujarat, bypassing Pakistan – the main sticking point for other multilateral projects of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) and Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI)” (Economic Times 30, August.).

Geostrategic location of Iran provides a good prospect for oil and gas pipelines to pass from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. Since Pakistan does not provide India any physical access to Afghanistan, Iran route could provide a stable solution in overcoming its dependence on a hostile country like Pakistan. The Iran route will give India a henceforth-denied physical access to Afghanistan. It also gives India an opportunity to overcome its geographic isolation from energy-rich Central Asian States. This is the reason India’s PM in a visit to Turkmenistan asked to explore potential to develop a land-sea route passing through Iran for transporting Turkmen gas to India. If implemented this route will be a defining moment for India’s energy security.

“New Delhi’s efforts to secure the Iran-Oman-India pipeline can be interpreted as a smart diplomatic gesture aimed at China’s latest agreement with Pakistan to construct most of Pakistan’s segment of the Iran-Pakistan pipeline as well India’s desire to reverse the economic and strategic setbacks that New Delhi suffered from its withdrawal from the Iran-Indian-Pakistan pipeline” (<https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiSj5zYx5fUAhWENo8KHTo1DAsQFggqMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fsmestreet.in%2Findia-iran-a-dawn-of-south-asias->

[transformation%2F&usg=AFQjCNEedpqr9k5YT2vGcUF1RXfWtTJNmw&sig2=7rWSEQ83fJQa5BYkwsfgYw](#).

There is a possibility of new great power rivalry in Central Asian region. In this regard, Indian policy makers cannot remain a mute spectator. India must take a proactive and leading role in the ensuing new Great Game. But, it seems Indian policy makers has not given proper thought to this subject. This is not well calculated in India's foreign policy and will depend on many factors such as its relations with other regional powers and Iran. In this regard, India is carefully trying to balance its relation with countries in the region taking lot of factors into account.

Some scholars suggest that in coming days China and Pakistan will try to bring Iran into their strategic fold. This will give them an upper hand in strategic matters as far as India is concerned. Apart from these issues, Iran's growing proximity towards Pakistan is a serious concern for India. Given the circumstances, India must maintain good diplomatic and economic relations with Iran. India must convey Iran that in Pakistan political stability is in a shaky condition. Though, at present, there is a democratic government in Pakistan but in reality country's defence and foreign affairs is largely controlled by the military (Paul 2006)

India needs to problematise Iranian reliance on Pakistan. It can point out the fact that Iran cannot "trust Pakistan as a partner in the fight against terrorism when the Pakistani military is prone to view jihadist and violent extremist groups as a means of countervail India" and use terrorists "as a safeguard against an American exit from Afghanistan" (Kaura,2015). In the situation where "the Taliban still represents a severe threat to regional stability and security", Iran cannot realistically, "hope to prevent the dangerous repercussions of anti-Shia Taliban returning to power in neighbouring Afghanistan." This is "particularly when Pakistan has not been able to deliver on the grand promises made to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani" (Ibid).

Afghanistan Factor

The bilateral relations between Afghanistan and India are very strong traditionally and in fact India is the only country which had recognised the sovereignty of

Afghanistan under the Soviet backed government in 1980s. But the relations strained with the Afghan civil war and the Taliban regime. India has played a very important role in throwing out the Taliban regime and establishing democracy in Afghanistan as well as aiding the country for reconstruction and rehabilitation. As part of Indian reconstruction and rebuilding process in Afghanistan, India became the largest power in the region in supplying aid to the latter. Indians are working in large numbers in reconstruction and rebuilding activities. Pakistan alleges it as Indian Intelligence agency working in the guise of reconstruction aid workers and it is against its territorial integrity (Pakistan Times 2010).

As stated above, India was the only country, which recognised the Soviet backed Afghanistan and the Soviet Union's military presence in Afghan territories and provided humanitarian aid to president Najibullah's government (The World Reporter 2014). After the fall of Najibullah's government, India together with the international community supported the coalition government that took control, but relations and contacts ended with the outbreak of another civil war, which brought to power the Taliban, an Islamist militia supported by Pakistan. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were the only countries which recognised the Taliban regime in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. Taliban's regime caused much destruction in Afghanistan including the world famous Bamiyan Buddha monuments. This led to protests and outrage in many parts of the world especially in India. India was one of the key supporters of anti-Taliban movement led by the Northern alliance (Ahmed 2010).

During the invasion against Taliban in 2001, India had offered intelligence and other forms of support to the coalition forces led by America. After the Taliban government was overthrown India established diplomatic relations with the elected democratic government, provided aid and participated in the reconstruction efforts. India's humanitarian and economic aid to the country is huge at the regional level. India's aid to Afghanistan extends to rebuilding of air links, power plants and investing in health and education sectors as well as training bureaucracy. India is helping in establishment of infrastructural facilities (See chapter 2 for details).

The Border Roads Organisation an auxiliary of Indian army has constructed a major road in 2009 in the remote Afghan province of Nimroz connecting Delaram to

Zaranj. This has proved to benefit both India and Iran as this highway will act as an alternative route for the duty free movement of goods through the Chabahar port in Iran to Afghanistan (Ibp Usa 2008). This was one of the measures undertaken to reduce the dependency of Afghan's economy on Pakistan. It was an important strategy for India to bypass Pakistan in its dealings with Afghanistan. This was an attempt also to build joint interest areas between Iran and India in Afghanistan (Global Bearings 2011).

India proposed Afghanistan's membership in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 2005. Together two nations have developed strategic and military cooperation against Islamic militants. After the killing of an Indian national by the Taliban, India deployed 200 soldiers of the Indo- Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) to provide security for Indian nationals and the projects supported by India (Indian's Northern Exposure, Council on Foreign Relations, 30 May 2008). Afghanistan is in favour of strengthening ties with India. It has persistent problems with Pakistan. Afghans suspects Pakistan for sheltering and supporting Taliban. India pursues a policy of close collaboration with countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan and Iran in order to bolster its standing as a regional power.

Since the fall of Taliban in 2001 and formation of the new democratic political system in Afghanistan, India has established various missions and has reopened its embassy at Kabul. However, due to persistent unrest and instability in the country the Afghan government has been unable to maintain the law and order. There was a deadly attack in 2008 on Indian embassy in Kabul which killed 58 people and wounded 141 (Indiangovt.in 2006). The official sources accuse Pakistan's ISI as part of the attack. This has been supported by Wikileaks information from the classified documents. During the SAARC summit in Colombo India pledged another USD \$450 million along with a further US\$750 million already promised for on-going and forthcoming projects. With the visit of Afghan president to New Delhi, it has further strengthened the bilateral relations and further aid was pledged to Afghanistan (see chapter 2). Again there was a car bomb attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul in 2009 October. There was attack on all possible Indian targets. After Manmohan Singh arrived in Afghanistan for his visit in 2011 an aid of US\$2 billion for rebuilding Afghanistan was pledged by the Indian government. In addition to this, in the same year India

donated 250,000 tonnes of wheat under humanitarian assistance programme to Afghanistan (Archis Mohan 2011).

In September 2011, former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated. This was condemned by India in a strong voice against the terror elements. In this way India has reiterated its support to the people and government of Afghanistan and the latter's quest for peace and development. After the withdrawal of international forces in 2014, India has promised Afghanistan and its people that it will stand by them when they will prepare to assume the responsibility for their governance and security (Archis Mohan 2011). Afghanistan signed its first strategic pact with India in October 2011. Afghan security personnel are trained as a military assistance programme by India under this pact. In order to calm the apprehensions raised by this strategic agreement in Pakistan, Ahmed Karzai, the then Afghan president, stated that "this strategic partnership is not directed against any country. This strategic partnership is to support Afghanistan." He further clarified that "Pakistan is our twin brother, India is a great friend. The agreement we signed with our friend will not affect our brother" (The Indian Express 5 October 2011).

After the attack on Indian consulate in Herat in 2012 India reassured Afghanistan that in spite of these attacks India will continue its support for the development work in the country. India reiterated that these incidents don't have much impact on India's development assistance and its contribution to rehabilitate and reconstruct Afghanistan (The Gazette of Central Asia 24 March 2013). India has supported reconstruction of Afghanistan in more than one way. For example, it has rebuilt Afghan parliament along with several other basic infrastructure projects. Indian relationship with Afghanistan has a crucial link with Iran and India has taken every possible step to maintain good faith of Iran in its dealings with Afghanistan.

India seeks to expand its economic interests in Afghanistan as the coalition forces under NATO combating Taliban withdrew in 2014. India wants to improve its infrastructural facilities like road connectivity and through that improve economic ties with Central and South Asia. After NATO's withdrawal India has increased projects for rebuilding the country. These projects includes setting up of a steel plant by Steel Authority of India Limited, power plant, hydroelectric power projects etc. Afghans

has reconstructed Salma Dam on Herat province with India's aid. All these schemes are enacted with keeping Iran in mind. India and Iran signed an agreement on transit for transporting goods to landlocked Afghanistan. Chabahar port in the south-eastern Iran with the capability to serve as a point for transportation of transit goods is being developed with the cooperation of India (Dawn 23 May 2016).

The relations between Afghanistan and Iran date back to centuries. However in the modern times they were formalised in 1935 during King Zahir Shah's reign in Afghanistan and the Pahlavi dynasty of Persia. During the Soviet Invasion (1979-1988) Iran provided some support to Mujahedeens for strategic reasons. It was related to the regime change after 1979 Iranian Revolution which changed the outlook of Iranian foreign policy. During the civil war Iran has been able to build working relations with some of the most important factions in Afghanistan. Though there are some outstanding issues such as water disputes, the influence of America on Afghanistan and the execution of thousands of Afghan prisoners in Iran and Afghan refugees in Iran, Afghanistan play a very important role in the Iranian scheme in the region.

In 1996 when Taliban came to power they were very harsh towards minorities in Afghanistan particularly Shias. In opposition to this Iran supported Northern Alliance and 2001 war against the Taliban initiated by the US after the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Iran was also very upset due to seizure and execution of Iranian diplomats in northern Afghan city of Mazar e sheriff by the Taliban. Since 2001 the new government in Afghanistan had engaged in diplomacy with Iran. Iran has helped in overthrowing Taliban government and in reviving Afghanistan. It has reopened the Iranian embassy in Kabul and other associated consulates in other Afghan cities. Meanwhile Iran joined in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Most of its services are to the minority Shia groups like Hazaras and Qizilbash (Esfandiari Golnaz 2005). Whatever the specific interests Iran has in Afghanistan there is a similarity between it and India. India wants to counter Pakistani influence in the country and Iran wants to counter the presence of the US and Taliban. Though, many Afghan politicians claim that both Iran and Pakistan are working towards weakening of Afghanistan, Iran wants it to be strong and stable as India for obvious reasons (see chapter 5).

A stable Afghanistan is seen as a cure for many Iranian problems including drug trafficking, refugees and fear of US presence in the neighbouring country. Though there are accusations against Iran that it is fanning ethnic, linguistic and sectarian tensions in Afghanistan labelled primarily by the politicians and leaders supported by Pakistan and the US, Iranians are working for a stable Afghanistan. If one sees in the post-Taliban phase, Iran is one of the biggest trade partners of Afghanistan and it is one of the largest donors. The Iranian capacity to donate and play a more constructive role in Afghanistan was curtailed due to the financial crisis created because of the US sanctions. However, in the post sanction period this concern would be addressed largely. According to Outlook Afghanistan:

“Trade has increased between two countries since the overthrow of Taliban government in late 2001. Both the countries plan to build a railway line between Mashhad and Herat. In 2009, Iran is one of the largest investors in Afghanistan, especially taking part in infrastructural development of the latter. According to the chairman of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Iran’s exports to Afghanistan stood at \$800 million. Iran has imported \$4 million worth of products like fresh and dried fruits, minerals, precious stones and spices from neighbouring countries. Iran has exported oil products and manufacturing materials along with carpets, home appliances and detergents. Iran has imported nuts, agricultural products as well as handicrafts from Afghanistan” (2015).

India and Iran have cooperated in the past in Iran when they both supported the Northern Alliance in the war against Taliban regime in 2001. Both the countries have similar concerns and interests in Afghanistan and it would be a great thing if they both keep cooperating in future (see chapter 5 for a detailed list of issues of potential cooperation between both the countries in Afghanistan).

Taliban Factor

Terrorism is an important security factor in the international politics in recent times. Iranians are in discussion with India ever since Taliban’s emergence in the region. Even in the 1990s the official visits of leaders highlighted the issue of terrorism and its impact on their bilateral relationship and the stability of the region ([https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj35Ib67ZfUAhUKNI8KHdBvBMwQFggiMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cassindia.com%2Finner_page.php%3Fid%3D103%26%26task%](https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwj35Ib67ZfUAhUKNI8KHdBvBMwQFggiMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cassindia.com%2Finner_page.php%3Fid%3D103%26%26task%26%26)

[3Ddiplomacy&usg=AFQjCNGyjNAS1uoBJoVYbW6okbQ5gyEJtQ&sig2=-wM8WodSQTXgmzSd0MEafg](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333333333)). As stated above both Iran and India have been the victims of terrorism. They also cooperated against Taliban in 2001 war in Afghanistan. When the war in 2001 failed to tackle the issue of Taliban in Afghanistan both the countries kept on looking for novel ways of cooperation. During the Iranian Foreign minister's visit to India in November 2009 the issue related to Pakistan based terrorism was discussed. Though it would be wrong to assume that both the countries have similar notions regarding Pakistan on the issue of terrorism "that it is nurturing and harbouring a large number of terror outfits including Al Qaeda on its soil and providing support and safe haven to Taliban on its Western and Southern borders with Afghanistan", it is safe to decipher that both the countries have some basic understanding on the role of Pakistan in the rise of Taliban (Agarwal,2014). Similar to India, Iran is also facing problem with the Sunni radicalism and fundamentalism in its neighbourhood. The frontier city of Iran alongside the border with Pakistan has witnessed a spate of terror attacks. According to Slackman (2009), the attack on Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is attributed to the Pakistan based Jundallah which is possibly linked with Taliban or Al Qaeda or elements within Pakistan government. When Taliban was defeated by the Northern Alliance in November 2001, both the countries welcomed its fall and made a goal to reconstruct and rehabilitate Afghanistan together. However, in the last 15 years and particularly after the withdrawal of the NATO forces the chances of elimination of Taliban has faded. Americans have adopted a novel approach to solve the menace of Taliban through incorporating them in the Afghan government. For a very long time both Iran and India were opposed to any such move for the simple reason that there is no moderate Taliban as proclaimed by some of the western scholars and Pakistan. Nevertheless, in the interest of Afghanistan both the countries have changed their stance on the issue (Parashar (7 March 2010); Rashid (12 March 2010)).

According to Ahmed Rashid

"Iran has joined India in opposing the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' Taliban, dismissing the adoption of a \$ 500 million 'Peace and Reintegration Trust Fund' at the London Summit in January 2010, to bring Taliban fighters into the civilian fold, as absurd and destabilising. Taliban and other associated terrorist groups, at the behest of their masters in Pakistan, have been carrying out attacks

and issuing threats to compel India to close down its developmental activities and leave Afghanistan. Any push to reintegrate the Taliban into the government would redouble Islamabad's leverage in Kabul to New Delhi's detriment. Iran is an important ally here and its help is crucial in ensuring that elements hostile to India do not have a free run in Afghanistan (allowing Pakistan the 'strategic depth', which it so dearly seeks over India, by being in a position to control the regime in Kabul) after the NATO forces leave the region" (2010)

The change in the stance was a pragmatic move as both countries were isolated in their attempts in the American search for an Afghan settlement. Ashwarya argued that

"The interests of the two countries have intensified coordination with each other and with other regional actors such as Russia and Central Asian Republics. To stabilise Afghanistan an Indo-Iranian Joint Working Group on Terrorism is ready instrument to begin renewed cooperation on combating Taliban and the Narcotics trade" (Ashwarya 2017)

Iran is seriously concerned with the Afghan refugees it hosts. Iran feels that some of them may have connections with Taliban and may use Iran as a safe haven in place of Pakistan as it ensures safety in view of strained relations between Iran and America.

According to Aditi Malhotra

"On the other hand India is worried about Pakistan's military and ISI nexus which in turn raging the fire of insurgency in Afghanistan and using the Afghan Taliban, the Lashkar and the Haqqani network as proxies to target the Indians in Afghanistan. Although India has set terms for reintegration of Taliban, it remains quite ambiguous about the result. There is another suspicion that Pakistan and Taliban nexus will obstruct India's access to Central Asia" (2012).

"Pakistan holds the main key to Afghanistan's future, which visibly remains an unpalatable fact for the New Delhi administration" (Ibid). It is pointed out that because of the lack of any other viable option India need to work. Aditi Malhotra argued that

"with Iran to counteract Pakistan's influence However, Interestingly, Islamabad is working towards a better relation with Iran as well and has even highlighted its "good" deed of helping Iran in the arrest of Abdolmalek Rigi, the leader of the Baluch Sunni rebel group Jundollah. Despite this step, Iran-Pakistan relations continue to be plagued by tenuousness. This is more so because of Pakistan's comfortable equation with Saudi Arabia and Iran's rival, the United States, both of whom are opposed to Iran's nuclear program". (Malhotra 2012)

Prospects of Deepening of Cooperation in Afghanistan

Iran is strategically essential player for India in the Central Asian region. The strategically location of Iran will help it to engage continuously with Afghanistan. “Iran’s long border with Afghanistan and its historical cultural ties are imperative to exercise geo- political and geo- strategic influence in the region. India’s positive point in this situation is Iran’s Chabahar port” (Ibid). As discussed in detail in the next chapter, Indian investments and support in building this port will provide India direct access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. If this port becomes active then it will minimise India’s need to negotiate with Islamabad for any access to Afghanistan. Acknowledging this fact, India and Iran have highlighted the need to expedite the operationalization of the India- aided Chabahar port in the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Iran. As noted by experts, the port is having strategic importance because of its location near to Pakistan’s Gwadar port which is built with Chinese assistance. The already built Zaranj to Delaram road in Afghanistan, when linked with the Chahar- Milak road which is upgraded with Indian assistance and will connect a bridge on the way to Zaranj, would allow both India and Iran to have a higher degree of access to Afghanistan ensuring greater influence in the region and also bypassing Pakistan (Ibid).

India is always emphasising on having a structured, institutionalised and regularised consultations with Iran. In the recent past India’s relations with Iran are strained because of India’s support for American pressurised IAEA resolution that condemned Iran over its nuclear programme and led to sanctions. Another issue which was a bone of contention between India and Iran was the presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan. Both the countries had somewhat contrary opinions on the issue. According to India, American presence in Afghanistan provides a guarantee of a reasonable degree of stability whereas Iranians wanted an immediate withdrawal of the US-NATO coalition forces due to the its hostile relations with the US. The onus is on India to find some middle ground which favours both India and Iran. The perennial issue which will overshadow the India- Iran relations is continuous US pressure on India to support its Iranian policy (Jahanbegoo 2016).

At this critical juncture India needs to redefine its national interests and choose options to safeguard them rather than keeping its potential partners at bay in order to

get near to Obama administration. India must understand that even in future Pakistan will remain as the favourite country for the US in the region. If India takes its own decision regarding its diplomatic proximity with Iran, it will stimulate America to have a relook into its policy and priorities in Afghanistan and may stimulate the the future administrations in the US to think about India. It is too idealistic for America to undermine the role of Pakistan in the Afghanistan- Pakistan region and take a reverse direction towards India. Therefore, India should take a firm and strong decision both militarily and strategically. India should realise that practicality works and with a sense of reality it has to bring into shape its own Afghanistan- Pakistan policy, one that safeguards its own interests.

Afghanistan is in a state of transition. In spite of the international support pouring in, both in terms of financial aid and military assistance, the role to be played by the regional level players is always considered important. It is important to the countries' future. Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian Republics (CAR) share borders with Afghanistan, forming the immediate neighbourhood, while China (though connected directly via the narrow Wakhan corridor), India and Russia form the extended neighbourhood. Russia does not want to get involved directly into the affairs as it has already had bitter experience with its occupation during 1979- 89. China is more focused only on economic arena. The Central Asian Republics are themselves feeble that they are prone to all kinds of threats rather than providing any direct help. Pakistan with its own affairs with Taliban and its role in terror attacks on Afghanistan, its wish for a pro Pakistan regime in Afghanistan and its involvement in harbouring top leaders of Taliban does not instil confidence amongst Afghan policy makers (Rashid 2008).

This leaves India and Iran having cordial relations with Afghanistan to be counted as reliable allies. It has been well established that despite strong backing from the US the governments in Kabul have failed to fulfil basic expectations of the people in terms of bringing stability in the country and countering Taliban. Strong presence of Taliban in remote areas and its capability to attack central areas from time to time puts a question mark on the legitimacy of the governments supported by the US and other donors. Taliban has also rejected peace talks by saying that as long as foreign troops are present on Afghan soil there won't be any talks. This makes people opposed to

the US presence in the country for long annoyed. These people propose a long-term option for cooperation with India and Iran. Afghanistan still considers India as its most trusted ally and Iran as part of its political and cultural history. Both the countries share similar interests and views with regard to Afghanistan. The fact that there are good relations between Iran and India helps the prospects of this formulation. The minor hiccups generated by the differences over the nuclear issue can be overcome with diplomacy. Afghanistan can be a crucial link in Indo- Iran relations as well as it can seek support from these two countries in the region.

The close ties between Afghanistan and Iran in the post-Taliban phase is based on the Iranian political and economic investments in the country. It supported the Northern alliance and subsequently proved significant actor in establishment of an interim government in Afghanistan. Most of the aid is spent on rebuilding process especially in Herat. There was a project for having transit between Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian Republics. Along with this the process of linking up of Chabahar port with Afghanistan is in process. It helps Afghanistan to have maritime routes as well as lessen its dependence on Pakistan. As a result of its support to the Northern Alliance, Iran has cultivated good relations with the Tajiks in Afghanistan who became support base for Iran in Afghanistan. All this makes Iran a strong player in Afghanistan second only to the US. The projection before 2012 was that the withdrawal of NATO forces in 2014 will gradually weaken the US' hold on Afghan politics leaving Iran to play even greater role as was visible in the last presidential elections in 2015 (Joshi 2014).

Iran and India share cordial relations and they are likely to have extensive bilateral engagements in the coming years. India can bypass Pakistan through Iran and reach Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics. Both countries acknowledge that their national interests can be better served with politically stable and secure Afghanistan. These concerns and interests have coordinated both Iran and India and will stand as a major motivation for both the countries. Iran's recent backing to the Taliban is a little discomfort in its endeavours to build better relations with India. It is an anomaly that Iran backed the Taliban, given Taliban's anti-Shiite ideology and the fact that the Taliban had killed nine Iranian diplomats in 1998, almost bringing Iran to war with

the extremists. However, the Tehran-Taliban relationship had more to do with Iran despising the presence of the US to its Eastern flank.

In spite of huge amount of economic aid and reconstruction projects undertaken by Iran in Afghanistan, the latter is still having apprehensions about the former's support to the Taliban. This has brought inconsistency in the relations between two countries. Another reason is Iran- US escalating standoff as a result of nuclear issue. There is lack of strong security cooperation with Afghanistan and this is a hurdle in developing better relations. Only in 2013 both the countries have signed border and security agreement. The Iran US relations can be used as an opportunity to enhance Iran's engagement in Afghanistan. Better ties with US will open safer routes for aid in all forms instead of choosing tenuous path. It has advantages like it can save the revenue for US and its allies as well as generation of transit revenue to Iran and ensure a good rate of supplies in Afghanistan. Iran is necessary to economic revival of Afghanistan and Iran can utilize this opportunity to create goodwill among Afghans.

Iran can use its ties with Afghanistan to enhance its energy ties with China and the Persian Gulf. It can use the territory to enhance cultural ties too. Another concern for Iran is threat from Taliban to security and welfare of Shiite population in Afghanistan. If Taliban returns again there will be persecutions of Hazaras. Afghan refugees in Iran are also a point of concern. It is said to have adverse social and economic impact on the Iranian society by draining Iran's economy and also the threat of Taliban infiltration.

Water sharing has been another point of contention between two nations with the number of dams built on Helmand River, the water supply into Iran is threatened. Drug trafficking is another source of friction between the two countries. Opium is the largest grown drug and it can be easily transited to Europe and Turkey through Iran (Calabrese, 2007). It became a major social problem and billions are to be spent on anti- drug campaign. As Iran hopes to evolve from the obscurity of international sanctions, Afghanistan can be a promising destination to not only stretch out its agency eastwards but also be seen as a reliable regional player.

If one sees and reads Iran-Afghanistan relations carefully one realises that the threats, though significant, are not big enough to derail their bilateral relationship. On the

contrary, Iran, building on its existing strengths, has a host of opportunities to be viewed as a major ally in Afghanistan. Agarwal has noted that

“Like Iran, India supported, funded and armed the Northern Alliance in the fight to overthrow the Taliban in 2001. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has called India as the “most trusted ally and an all-weather friend,” and giving credence to the confidence that Kabul has in New Delhi, India was the first country Afghanistan signed its Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) with. India is popular not only among the Hazaras and Tajiks, but also among a large number of Pashtuns. It’s over \$2 billion aid to Afghanistan in reconstruction and welfare projects too have been well received. Both nations share their concerns over terror and have been equally inflicted by it in the past decades; Afghanistan through the Taliban and India through Pakistan-sponsored terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir. Despite not committing militarily in Afghanistan, India has suffered from Taliban terror more than once, whether it was the hijacking of the Indian Airline flight IC814 to Kandahar in 1998, the multiple times the Indian embassy and missions have been targeted in Kabul, or even the attacks on Indian engineers working on reconstruction projects in Afghanistan”(Agarwal 2014) .

After the withdrawal of NATO forces in 2014, Afghanistan turned towards India as a major source of coordination. Similarly, India is aspiring to see a change in Afghanistan through peaceful ways and environment. India has many occasions to improve its engagement with Afghanistan, building on its goodwill and support and create a new partnership. It will be a tumultuous exercise with no sharing of borders and having Pakistan in between them.

India’s support and cooperation in peace keeping efforts along with its active role in aid and construction of the country in Afghanistan is acknowledged and valued highly by the people and government of Afghanistan. India’s perseverant stance in relation to the Taliban is another important issue which strengthens the bilateral relations. India’s stance on identifying the demarcation of Taliban into good or bad had resulted into itself being sidelined in the London Conference in 2010, but on the other hand its stance of strong opposition towards Taliban has been well appreciated by Afghanistan. “India is the fifth-largest donor in Afghanistan after the US, UK, Japan and Germany, and is the largest non-traditional donor in Afghanistan. This, coupled with the sacrifices made by Indians in building these projects too is great source of strength” (Ibid).

There is no direct road or maritime transport with Afghanistan which is truly a hurdle to increase bilateral engagement between India and Afghanistan. With the prevailing conditions like Pakistan’s absurdity and international sanctions on Iran which has

isolated it in international spheres made India hapless in supplying and responding to basic needs or help for rebuilding process in Afghanistan. Another weakness highlighted against India is that India is unable to take advantage of the prevailing goodwill in Afghanistan.

“India’s failure to protect its embassy and missions in Afghanistan too has often been quoted as its weaknesses. India’s reluctance to send regular troops after attacks on its embassy in 2008 and 2010, even to protect its mission, has been interpreted as a weak Indian stand” (Ibid). Noted Expert Rajiv Agarwal stated that,

“India’s investments in Afghanistan are another great opportunity in enhancing bilateral relations. The winning of the contract for estimated reserves of 1.8 billion tonnes of iron ore at Hajigak by a consortium of Indian firms led by the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), as well as other projects and investments are ideal opportunities to galvanise Indian support in Afghanistan. The ‘Heart of Asia’ initiative by India to draw global finances and investments for Afghanistan presents one such opportunity. India has for long sought good relations with the CAR. With Iran under sanctions and Afghanistan embroiled in war, India found it difficult to enhance its engagement with the CAR. With the possibility of both the issues to get resolved in the coming years, it presents an excellent opportunity for India to enhance its engagement with the CAR, especially in the context of energy supplies. The ‘New Silk Route’ initiative proposed by the US to make Afghanistan a bridge for trade and transit between South, Central and West Asia offers a great opportunity for India. India has always felt left out in the great game of energy trade and transit of Central Asia, especially as the China-funded Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) corridors (roads and pipelines) bypass India. If and when the New Silk Route initiative takes off, it would provide India an opportunity to seek its share in the Central Asian energy resources. India has major concerns regarding the future of peace and security in Afghanistan. A weak government in Afghanistan is a threat to Indian interests. It may result in fragmented control of the government over the country, with parts of the country, especially the South and East under the Taliban influence. In the absence of US-led troops in the country, an unrelenting Pakistan and a resurgent Taliban, it could become a major concern for India, not only for its assets in in the country, but also its spill over effect on Indian Territory. A political and security vacuum would thus constitute a direct threat to India. Any major attack on Indian

missions or projects akin to the July 2008 attack on the Indian Embassy may force India, under pressure at home, to send an armed force contingent for protection or a decision to decrease its presence in Afghanistan. Both will not be in long term Indian interests in Afghanistan. A return of the Taliban to power, though rather unlikely, could threaten Indian interests and result in an influx of foreign fighters and an upsurge in violence in Jammu & Kashmir, like in the 1990s. Also, any collaboration between the Taliban and Pakistan could relieve Pakistani forces deployed along the Af-Pak border, enhancing Pakistan's conventional military readiness and availability across Indian border. India, like Iran does not have the option of abandoning Afghanistan. Despite the potential threats listed above, it is unlikely that the threats would manifest in the stated manner in near future. Afghanistan has come a long way since the days of the Taliban rule of the 1990s. The US and its allies are unlikely to abandon the country, and more importantly, Afghanistan as a nation has moved up in improving its socio-economic indicators to a degree that the return to the dark days of the Taliban rule is an unlikely option. India has the advantages of numerous opportunities, some already being implemented and some in the offing. The SPA with Afghanistan and the prospects of India and Iran jointly assisting Afghanistan hold promises for the future". (2014).

Conclusion

The conceding of nuclear pact between Iran and other powerful actors of the world has implications in its bilateral relations with India in terms of economic security and regional politics. After the change in regime in India there were clear signals from Iran to accelerate their strategic ties. Iran's persistent fight with religious terrorism and its regional level integration politics made India to expand its horizons of bilateral relations. There will be revolutionary changes in economic scenario of Iran with the lifting of UN sanctions. Virtually there is a need of enhancement and up gradation of economic and technological mechanisms in Iran with massive infrastructural changes. All the restrictions over international trade will come down and it will unfreeze the billions of dollars. With this for India a new avenue is located. It can create an economy and trade depending on its rich oil and mineral resources. After lifting of sanctions, there is tough competition between other countries to grab the major chunk of commercial relations with Iran. India has to face stiff competition from China and Western countries. Iran is focused in balancing its ties with both Western Europe and

India and China. Iran is interested in gas pipeline project which lay on papers because of other international pressures as well as regional level politics.

India's relations with Iran will enter a new phase and will be renewed if the attempt to forge an alliance in Afghanistan becomes successful.

CHAPTER 5: IRAN FACTOR

India's relation with Afghanistan is influenced by several factors. The nature of such factors range is diverse; from economic and historical links to nation states such as Pakistan and China. All such factors have contributed in shaping the specific nature of the relationship between the two countries. One of the least explored countries in such category is Iran. Though both India and Afghanistan have long term bilateral relationship with Iran its significance also lies in the fact that it is an important link between the two. Present chapter is exploring the possible influences of Iran on the Indo-Afghanistan relationship. Due to geographical proximity and cultural historical links with Afghanistan Iran remains one of the most important players in both its domestic and external policies. In several matters only Pakistan and China can claim to have similar influence on Afghanistan. As a preliminary observation, due to lack of geographical access to the country India had to look for Iran for a crucial link. The Indian policy makers have always seen it as the second best easiest route to Afghanistan. Its second best because Pakistan would be much had better land link to Afghanistan. But, due to political reasons that route is not reliable. Smruti S Patnaik (2012) argues that "the India–Afghanistan relationship is not a simple bilateral engagement. India's Afghan policy is driven by, and is dependent on, many extraneous factors such as India's troubled relationship with Pakistan, its search for a land transit to Central Asia through Iran and Afghanistan and its concerns regarding use of Afghan territory by Pakistan to the detriment of Indian interests." In order to understand the Iranian factor in India's Afghanistan policy it is necessary to have a brief introduction of Iran's influence in Afghanistan first. Once it is established the ways and strategies adopted by Indian policy makers to tap the opportunities provided by Iran have been discussed critically.

IRAN AND AFGHANISTAN

As described in chapter three Iran has a very close and long lasting links with Afghanistan. Historically, the boundaries between two countries were not defined and Persian kingdoms ruled a large part of current Afghanistan at some moment in history

and vice-versa. This resulted in the presence of cross border family and cultural links. Before the modern day demarcations of the territories between the two countries, one of the earliest attempts was the Treaty of Paris signed between Persian Empire and Britain to end the Anglo-Persian War (Ward Steven R 2009) in 1857. This treaty put Herat under Afghan suzerainty which was till then a part of the Persian Empire. This treaty hence established the 930 kilometre long border between the two countries. This border, however, remained porous as there remained cross border familial ties among the majority Shia community in the region. The Hazaras living in the bordering region between two countries along with some others in other parts of the Afghanistan constitute around 19 percent of Afghan population. Most of the Hazaras also speak Persian. Even one of the official languages of Afghanistan, Dari has close links with Persian. Kayhan Barzegar argues that there is hardly any difference between the Afghan and Persian nations. According to him,

“The two nations share a rich history that saw the spread of classical empires, Islamic conquest, and the rise and fall of many dynasties. Today's Afghanistan was part of Iran's greater Khorasan Province, which historically was called Greater Khorasan and referred to a much larger area of the Persian Empire. It contained Iranian-origin sects and ethnicities, thereby making it part of the historical and cultural territory of Iran” (2014).

Given the closeness of the two countries it is but natural to consider that there are several cross border concerns particularly for Iran because it has regional ambitions. Some of the major concerns of Iran in Afghanistan are political stability, rise of *wahhabism*, cross border migration and trafficking of drugs and presence of super powers in the region. As listed and described below to address some of these concerns Iran is looking for partners and India, given its own set of concerns, as listed below; becomes one of the potential partners. These concerns also raise the importance of the Iranian factor in India's Afghanistan policy.

Iran's Afghan Conundrum

Iran is hub of one of the oldest empires in the world. It is a Shia majority country. It is also the most powerful Central Asian nation. After the Islamic revolution in 1979 it also claims for a spiritual authority on the worlds Muslims and in particular Shias (Milani Mohsen M 2000). It has one of the world's largest reserves of energy resources. All these facts make Iran one of the important players with stakes in all the countries in the region. Most of states on the eastern front have had friendly relation

with Iran (Pakistan is an exception) and they try to maintain it unlike the countries on Iran's western front. Afghanistan, at least since the 1990s has remained a problematic sphere for Iranian diplomats. Rise of Taliban, added and supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (ibid), both rivals of Iran, questioned the meticulous diplomatic presence of Iran in the Afghanistan. Iran has seen Taliban and similar organizations as a threat to Iranian interest for more than one reason (see chapter 3) and hence has opposed them and added their rivals. This hostility to Taliban and Al-Qida was the reason that Iran supported both Northern Alliance and United States in 2001 war.

Iranian support to the Northern Alliance was based on both its ideological commitments towards moderate government in Afghanistan and its historical and personal links with the constituent members of the group. Iran, despite its inclinations towards political Islam, does not support an outright theocratic state in Afghanistan because of multiethnic nature of the society there. The presence of Hazaras as minority ethnic group makes Iran considerate towards the rights of the minorities which cannot be saved under the hardcore *Wahabi* ideology of Taliban. Also Taliban is a Pashtun dominated pro-Pakistan group. Pashtuns are generally Sunnis with no affinity towards Shia Iran (Rais Rasul Baksh 1993). During the period when Taliban was ruling Afghanistan (1996-2001) the persecution of Hazaras and other minorities forced a large number of them to migrate to Iran creating both social and economic problems (Rashid 1999). Also the political instability in Afghanistan breeds cross border drug trafficking. The most important problem with political stability in Afghanistan for Iran is presence of hostile super power in the region. The United States forces and Saudi alignment with US threatens Iran's security directly. All these reasons have shaped its policies towards Afghanistan making Iran one of the most active players in the affairs of the country. It played a very significant role in the Bonn I conference which was instrument in the establishment of an interim government in Kabul in 2001. In all the conferences since then, Iran has pledged a large amount of financial aid for its reconstruction. For example, it "pledged \$560 million at the 2002 Tokyo Conference on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan, and \$100 million at the 2006 London Conference" (Agarwal Rajeev 2014). Iran firmly believes that without economic development it is difficult to revive Afghanistan. It has attempted to create multilateral arrangements to built infrastructure for example a roads linking Iran with Central Asia through Afghanistan and construction of

Chahbahar with India. Security for Hazaras, cross border migration due to war in Afghanistan and protection of its economic interest in the region are some of the important concerns of the Iran. Apart from this due to its rivalry with Pakistan and China in the region, it needs a partner both to balance these rivals' rise and to create an alternative route to Afghanistan.

Following are the descriptions of the specific problems identified by Iranians and how it has tries to deal with them.

Geostrategic Concerns

According to Mohsen Milani, through its support of Taliban “the Saudis wanted to use Afghanistan as a springboard to spread its version of Islam throughout Central Asia and to neutralize Iran's revolutionary message” (as quoted in Kutty Sumitra Narayan 2014). This could have long lasting strategic and political impact on Iran. The spread of *Wahabism* would create immense existential threat for Shias in Afghanistan. Taliban has attacked Shias, in particular Hazaras on more than one occasion calling them heretics and anti-nationals. They are targeted for their links with Iran by the Pakistan supported Pashtun militias and Taliban. Mohsin Milani perceives

“The Taliban as a threat in two ways: first, from an ideological perspective (the Taliban is anti-Iranian and anti-Shiite), and second from a security and national interests perspective (the Taliban is exclusivist, spreads religious extremism, is against the existence of the state system, and doesn't recognize political borders). The Taliban's identity is based on the Pashtun ethnicity and Sunni Salafi mentality, which is contradictory to Persian culture and the Shiite mentality”.

Living up the expectations in 1998 Taliban massacred Hazaras in Mazar-e-Sharif. It also attacked Iranians working in Afghanistan during the reconstruction works post-Taliban regime. They were consistently targeted and persecuted for their faith and belief system till Taliban remained in power.

“Iran primarily perceives the Taliban as a Salafist violent faction, against human and women's rights, and paying no respect to international norms and human heritage (for example, Iran saw the destruction of the Buddha Statues in Bamiyan by the Taliban as an outrage). Iran does not favour an Afghan government in which the Taliban might play a key role—such a situation will lead to a conflict of interests and consistent tension between Iran and the Afghan government, while also giving a dominant role to other rival regional players—Pakistan and to

some extent Saudi Arabia—in Afghanistan's political-security scene” (Berzegar 2014).

The danger to Hazaras will increase if there is any possibility of the emergence of Taliban and any such force in Afghanistan and Iran wants to block that possibility. In March 2016 newly elected president of Iran Hasrat Rouhani said that “Iran is determined to protect the Shia community through intervention in any part of the world” (Saifi Saleem 2016).

The September 2001 attack in United States changed the world politics and provided legitimacy to global War on Terrorism waged under the leadership of United States. Taliban being the sole protector of al-Qaida was targeted and American forces were deployed in Afghanistan. Presence of US forces in Afghanistan, given the already hostile relations between Iran and U.S., created an immediate threat to Iranian national security. United States has a long history of hostile relations with Iran starting with the fall of Shah Regime and Islamic revolution in 1979. Even during the cold war years when US was fighting through its proxies in Afghan war against the Soviet Union there was hardly any direct link with Iran despite the fact that even Iran was fighting against the Soviets (Rais Rasul Baksh,1993). Though Iranians did support the U.N. bid to overthrow Taliban from Afghanistan the U.S. administration did not shed its hostility. In the post-Taliban phase George Bush, the then US president named Iran as an enemy country in the War on Terror calling it an Axis of Evil (Milani Mohsen M, 2006: 249). Iranian nuclear program was yet another issue. Americans had imposed sanctions on Iran crippling its economy and foreign relations. The Americans claimed that Iran is developing nuclear bomb in the disguise of peaceful nuclear energy technology development and hence violating the norms of Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran has always rejected such allegations. It consistently insisted that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only (Majid Hooman 2010) Nevertheless, because of the prevailing tension between two countries it was always a dangerous proposition for Iran to allow long term presence of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. The presence of foreign forces was a matter of concern of another reason. Iranians believe that due to the presence of these aliens the extremists in Afghanistan are getting legitimacy and popularity as resistance. This legitimacy is harmful for any future de-radicalization of Afghanistan and harmful for Iran in more

than one way. The longer the foreign forces led by NATO remain in the country the greater the risk of prolongation of the unrest and instability in the country.

President Hasan Rouhani proclaimed in 2015 that Iran “is opposed to the presence of any foreign force in the region, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and particularly the Islamic country of Afghanistan. They should all leave and leave the security of Afghanistan to its own people” (Barzegar Kayhan 2014). In this context, partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2014 provided much needed relief to Iranian policy makers. However, in the meanwhile Afghanistan has signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) with U. S. in 2012 providing U.S. certain privileges. Iran sees the agreement as a breach of traditional balance of power in the region as it provides U.S. opportunity to intervene whenever it thinks there is a danger of the world peace and internal stability of Afghanistan even after 2016. The agreement as per Iranians would minimize the role of Iran in its own backyard and strengthen U. S. strategic position in the Central Asian region (Ibid). Iran wants to have a more active role in the affairs of the region and Afghanistan.

During the Bonn Conference II which was held in December 2011, Ali Akbar Salehi, the then Iranian Foreign Minister “reiterated Iran's opposition to any U.S.–Afghani agreements” underscoring “the necessity for foreign forces to completely withdraw from Afghanistan” (Ibid). Any political instability and weakness of the central government in Afghanistan is against the interests of Iran. Instability in Afghanistan creates direct threat to Iranian security. The free reign to terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda or Taliban threatens massive investments and personnel working in the country. This provides a safe heaven to drug traffickers and illegal trading in goods across the border. The lawlessness in Afghanistan also provides opportunity for Iran’s rivals to set foot in the country. Instability provides grounds to several extremist anti-Iranian groups which want to create instability in Iran. One such example is Balochi group Jundallah which is fighting for the creation of a separate Baloch state against Iran. Iran would like to have a friendly and strong state in Afghanistan which will help it controlling these elements and blocking any attempt by the foreign powers to set foot in the region.

Cross Border Migration

As stated above Iran and Afghanistan has a long border. This border created during the nineteenth century has remained without any major conflict despite the fact that there are cultural and ethnic overlaps between the two countries (Wietz Richard 2014https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwi2iqTLqejNAhVKMY8KHcsQAYAQFggdMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cacianalyst.org%2Fpublications%2Fanalytical-articles%2Fitem%2F13002-iran-and-afghanistan-more-of-the-same.html&usg=AFQjCNHEA5sCSOX3vGofn_a3eSMReovhKA&sig2=giIsnA5s7ti-JZ2KaSt_aA).

However, from time to time Iran has to open its border with Afghanistan for the people seeking refuge from war and sectarian violence. It has also been a tacit route for drug traffickers and smugglers. The presence of Afghan refugees in Iran has created several law and order problems. It has long-term economic impacts too. Afghan refugees, due to their poverty compete with already poor eastern Iranians for jobs making the life harder for them and in turn creating hostilities among the locals. Iranians were unable to provide enough jobs and economic support system for most of the refugees in last year's due to fall in the income from energy exports. The sanctions imposed by the U.N. have crippled the economy. According to the latest United Nations report there were around 2 million Afghan refugees in Iran (Agarwal 2014). These refugees share resources and disturb the ethnic balance of the region. According to Agarwal these refugees have an "adverse social and economic impact on the Iranian society by draining Iran's economy by a sizeable measure, coupled with the threat of Taliban-like elements infiltrating into the country" (2014).

Iranians know that the repatriation of these refugees will not be possible until there is stability in Afghanistan. Most of the refugees are illegal in a sense that they do not valid visas issued by competent authorities. This makes the task of their repatriation even more difficult. In order to make these refugees return Iran has to first make sure the safety from any kind of sectarian violence which is not possible in the present scenario due to political stability. Also Iranians are of the view that a long term solution to refugee crisis in the region would require creation of enough economic opportunities in Afghanistan so that illegal immigration becomes less economically

attractive. This requires heavy economic investment in the border regions. Iran is willing to do that but due to instability and hostilities in Afghanistan against minority Shias it has become difficult. Collaboration with India can be handy in addressing this particular issue. Iran is also trying to develop better links with local population in order to secure the Iranian investment in the region.

Along with cross border migration the illegal drug trafficking is yet another problem which Iran faces due to geographical contiguity with Afghanistan. Due to three decades of lawlessness in the country a large part of its land has been converted into poppy and other drug producing plant fields by the warlords. The money coming from the drug trafficking is a vital source of the finance for terrorist groups and private armies. The border with Central Asian nations provides an easy access to the illegal world market. However, the drug traffickers creating massive loss of human and financial resources for Iran use even Iranian border. According to Kayhan Barzegar the figures are mind-blowing for any policy maker.

“Based on the latest statistics, some 15,000 Iranians have so far been killed or injured in fights against drugs, and 89 percent of the world's opium as well as 41 percent of its heroin and morphine are found in Iran, which are the highest figures in the world. Additionally, 60 percent of the Afghan narcotics in 2007 passed through Iranian borders, although this figure has dropped to 30 percent in 2010” (Barzegar Kayhan 2014)

According to another source,

“A leading country in combating narcotics smuggling (more than 89 percent of the world's total opium seizures occur in Iran), Iran has already contributed more than \$50 million annually to Afghan anti-narcotics efforts in the last 8 years, and hundreds of Iranian security agents have been killed in clashes with traffickers” (Kaura 2015).

Iran cannot seal the border and end the trafficking. This menace can only be solved through destruction of bases of drug production in Afghanistan and for that the instability and weakness of the central Afghan government need to be addressed. This is related to the stability of Iran as well. Iran is looking for partners in the field and India can be a vital partner as both are suffering from illegal drug trafficking and terrorism.

Trade Benefits

“One of the main objectives of Iran is to create an “economic sphere of influence” in Afghanistan, with ultimate goal of becoming the hub for the transit of goods

and services between the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, central Asia, china and India. Clearly, the economic sphere of influence would also enhance Iran's political and security objectives". (Milani Mohsin M 2006: 251).

Iranian engagements in Afghanistan have an economic angle as well. Its efforts to help in the "state-building efforts in post-Taliban Afghanistan" in the last two decades is inspired by its greater goal of building a market for its goods and a peaceful transit route for them to the Central Asia and China (Kayhan Barzegar 2014). According to Vinay Kaura (2015)

"Herat lies at the heart of Iran's "economic sphere of influence" in Afghanistan and plays the role of a convenient "buffer zone." Reflecting the importance of Herat, Iran has concentrated the bulk of its investments here since 2001 including infrastructure projects, road and bridge construction, education, agriculture, power generation, and telecommunication projects. The Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry also established a joint Iran-Afghan chamber of commerce in Herat in 2009. Iran's largest (global) charity organization, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC), is very active in Herat. The group has over 45 offices, about 30,000 employees in Afghanistan".

This approach towards Afghanistan is a part of Iranian foreign policy which is primarily based on economic development of the country. As discussed in chapter 3 Iran is the largest supplier of oil and gas to Afghanistan in the post Taliban era. Iran has signed a deal in 2011 to supply required energy resources daily. Iran was the fourth largest trade partner of Afghanistan with over \$3 billion trade mostly in favour of Iran (Ibid). Iranians, due to geographical contiguity with Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries and China are looking for a long-term economic investment in the country. In this plan Afghanistan would be a hub of pipelines passing through it to countries of Central Asia and China (which is already the largest importer of Iranian oil). This will not only provide Iranians trade benefits but it will also provide Afghanistan much need cash for investment and economic development. All this will depend on the political stability in Afghanistan.

It is argued that most of the political and social unrest in Afghanistan is due to the absence of enough economic opportunities to majority of its population. The lack of economic opportunities has made the war a lucrative business. The desperation of the Afghans is used by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to perpetuate the instability in the region in order to trouble the Iranian plans. Hence, the best way to counter the games of its rivals in Afghanistan is the creation of economic opportunities in the country. Until the poverty and other economic issues are addressed any attempt to prevent the

revival of Taliban and other such force in future is destined to fail. Iran has got this clue and its enthusiasm in providing aid, building infrastructure in the country and providing basic energy and social structure is a sign of that. Iran played a very significant role in the Bonn I conference not only in terms of providing vital political support to an interim government in Kabul but also in terms of pledging a huge sum for the reconstruction of the post-Taliban Afghanistan. In the subsequent multilateral conferences too Iran maintained its financial aids pledging “\$560 million at the 2002 Tokyo Conference” and “\$100 million at the 2006 London Conference” (Aggarwal Rajiv 2014 a). Since Iran is primarily concerned about the safety and well-being of Afghanistan’s Shia population and its border areas, leaving rest of the Afghanistan to other donors, most of the money is committed to the reconstruction of Herat province building roads, schools and other important social and economic infrastructure. Iran is building a “120 kilometre-long road linking Herat in Afghanistan to Dogharoun in Iran”. It is apart from building and developing road links between it’s under construction port at Chahbahar and Afghanistan border (Aggarwal Rajiv 2014 a). This will provide an important link for Afghan goods to world market as it is a land locked country. This project as will be seen below is built with the help of India.

Pakistan

Iran’s Afghan conundrum also involves it’s another eastern neighbour Pakistan for more than one reason. Pakistan does not only support Taliban it also provides it fund and training (Jenkins Simon 2015). The reasons for the support are both religious sectarian and political. Taliban are mostly Sunnis Pashtuns and Pakistan wants them to control power in Afghanistan to have a lasting influence on its policies towards India and Iran. A favourable government in Kabul means a balance of power in the region because Pakistan fears that if the government in Afghanistan is pro-India or Iran then it loses any strategic depth and support. Iran and Pakistan have had no good relationship due to Pakistan’s closeness to U. S. and its Sunni majority. Persecution of Shias in Pakistan and latter’s support to Jundullah a Balochi terrorist group which operates in Iran (Kutty Sumithra Narayanan, 2014) has created a distrust about Pakistan among Iranians. It is, however, pertinent for Iran to develop good relations with Pakistan because it hold the key for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan and Iran has tried in this direction when despite the provocations it has maintained a

working relations with Pakistan even during the heydays of Taliban. Ever since the fall of Taliban government the influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan has come down due to Hamid Karzai's pro-India stands and the new government's distrust to Pakistan.

In the post-Taliban Afghanistan Pakistan still is an important player because of its constant support of militant and terrorist groups such as Haqqani network. It also provides a transit route for different kinds of drug trafficking. Despite all attempts "the war on terrorism" has not been able to completely wash out Taliban and Pakistan holds a strong control over its factions. In this scenario it is necessary that Iran builds good relations with Pakistan and tries to persuade it to stop its support to Taliban. The reason for Pakistan's reluctance to let go its grip and support for Taliban is its insecurity about its role in Afghanistan. Since Iran has good links with ruling leaders in Afghanistan developed during its support to Northern Alliance, it can assure Pakistan about its interests being taken care of without any destructive agenda. Iran along with India can build that confidence easily as these two countries are the primary concern for Pakistan. Iran's "Look to the East" policy includes Pakistan as a major market and given its centrality for the stability in Afghanistan, it's pivotal for the success of the policy, it needs to think of the ways to bring it on board.

Iran's Strategic Options

In 2015 Iran finally was able to put behind its handicaps in international politics in the terms of signing an agreement with U.S. ending the hard sanctions. This Iran-US rapprochement on the Iranian nuclear program is a good opportunity to come out from the hibernation and play an active role in Afghanistan. The rapprochement with the U.S. will provide enough economic and diplomatic space for Iran that it could pursue its ambitions in the Central Asia. The lifting of the sanctions from the trade in oil and gas makes Iranians more capable economically to aid and finance the reconstruction in Afghanistan. It also provides the opportunity for the U.S. to open new "routes for international aid and supply via Iran as an alternative to the presently used circuitous route through the CAR or the terror-infested routes in Pakistan" (Agarwal 2014). This will make Iran an indispensable player in the region and the world politics.

In the last few years Iran has also modified its policy in Afghanistan. Earlier it was completely against any role for Taliban in the future Afghan government for the reasons described above. In the wake of U.S and international community supportive of the reconstruction and stability in Afghanistan support for the policy of differentiating “good Taliban from the Bad Taliban” adopted on the insistence of Pakistan (Pant Harsh 2011) to accommodate “moderate” factions of Taliban Iran also was forced to change its policy towards Taliban. This support and openness provides Iran more scope for manoeuvring in the international negotiations. However, it makes Iran’s attempts to rope in India into its ventures in Afghanistan a little weak (Ibid). Some of the scholars on the Iran-Afghanistan relations see it as a weakness. According to Rajeev Aggarwal,

“Iran’s support to the Taliban is a major weakness in its efforts to coordinate efforts with India in Afghanistan. It is a paradox that Iran supported the Taliban, given its anti-Shiite ideology and the fact that the Taliban had killed nine Iranian diplomats in 1998, almost bringing Iran to war with the extremists” (2014).

However, one should not forget that Iranian willingness to accept Taliban’s presence in a future Afghanistan government is also guided by pragmatic impulses. No matter how much one despises the Taliban they have been able to hold their positions in the country despite all odds and have been inflicting destruction and threat of war. If the U.S. and NATO forces combined with Afghan troops have failed to control Taliban it is very important that they try to incorporate it through negotiations and end the war. Another consideration is related to the realization of the fact that conceding in front of the international community to incorporate Taliban in talks makes it a mainstream player and reduces the chances of its isolation which will only help Pakistan. Knowing well that Taliban would not be able to join the government given the practical obstacles in form of hostility among the present ruling classes against it and Taliban’s inability to find a common cause with the local rulers acceding to the demands of Taliban being part of the negotiations strengthens Iran’s position. Nevertheless, for countries like India “the absence of a consistent policy towards Afghanistan has been a weakness of Iran” (Ibid).

Iran needs allies which it does not have at the moment. In the entire West Asia Iran can vouch for only Syria as an ally and if leaves China, which anyway does not have any political ambitions and more, concerned about economic gains Iran is practically

left with no country. Hence, if it wants to develop and deepen its economic interests in the Central Asian region and wants to counter the super powers it has to develop friends and allies. One of them of course could be Russia but more important and willing friend can be India. India too is looking for similar kind of role in Afghanistan and looking for allies. With the withdrawal of sanctions and Iran-U.S. relations in a better condition Iran is freer to look for more allies in the region.

There is gradual realisation of the fact that Iran needs to change its priorities and tactics which are so far grounded in old fundamentals of insecurity from the U.S. and assert its significance. The situation has changed fundamentally since the days of the 1979 Islamic revolution. After the end of the Cold War Central Asia has become a vital play ground for U.S. The 2001 attacks and 2003 war in Iraq have challenged it's hegemony in the world politics and the world has seen a more assertive Russia and China. The failure of U.S. to curb Pakistan from its support to different kinds of terrorist groups has made its claim in the region weaker. If Iranians play their cards well there is a greater chance that with countries such as India it would be a major player in the region. The withdrawal of NATO forces and relative stability in Afghanistan provides perfect opportunity to both the countries to cooperate and create an alternative power block in the region. According to Atul Aneja it seems Iranians have sensed the pulse of the situation in the post withdrawal scenario. He argues that,

“While the exit of foreign forces would mark a substantial advance, the Iranians have been looking further ahead to a post-exit scenario, in anticipation of a political vacuum that is likely to emerge once the American troops depart. Viscerally opposed to any repositioning by extra-regional players, Iran is working vigorously to establish a de facto alliance of regional countries that will dominate the geopolitical arena stretching from Turkey in the west to China in the east” (Atul Aneja).

It seems that the fundamental of Iranian policy is coming to place in the last few months. During the sanctions most of the potential allies were in dilemma. Now in the post sanctions era they have shed all inhibitions and now it depends on the Iranians to weave their policies in right way to attract more and more allies.

To conclude this sections it can reiterated that,

“Iran maintains that political stability in Afghanistan depends on the advancement of ethnic and identity plurality in the central government's power-sharing system. Iran favours the presence of a stable and friendly government in Kabul. Iran, like other players involved in Afghanistan, has reached the conclusion that upholding

stability in contemporary Afghanistan without the participation of the Taliban in power would be infeasible, but what Iran wants is a minimalist participation of this group in Afghanistan's power” (Barzegar 2014).

This position is similar to that of India and hence Iran becomes an important factor in its policies towards Afghanistan.

China

In its policy to have access to Indian Ocean and create global commercial interest China has helped and built a port at Gwadar located on the Makran coast in Pakistan. It is a “strategic maritime outpost” claimed by strategic analysts (Shakuja, Vijay, 2013). It is located close to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf which is crucial export route for Iranian and Saudi oil and gas.²⁹ It is linking the Gwadar port with its Xinjiang province through pipeline for the supply of Iranian oil which will come to Pakistan through Iran-Pakistan pipeline. China has invested up to US \$ 300 million in the Gwadar project because it offers it several military advantages along with economic ones. Apart from the Gwadar China is also making inroads in the region through heavy investments in Afghanistan and other Central Asian Countries. It is already a major player in terms of contracts to rebuilding infrastructure and industry in Afghanistan. Iran sees the building of Gwadar as a competitor port of its own attempts to become the sole access to Central Asian region through Chahbahar. India does not want to be left behind too. It has a geostrategic rivalry with China and hence looks for opportunities to counter it. The building of ports and massive investments in and around Iran by one of the super powers of the world creates natural apprehensions in the mind of Iranian policy makers. As in the case of United States, Iranians are worried about the possibilities of intervention in the future and restriction on their power to manoeuvre things in the region (Majid Hooman 2010). Hence, there is a necessity to build a counter as a precaution. Given the hostilities with Pakistan Iran can be an alternative route to both geographical links as has been seen above and other economic enterprises in the region for India. Iran in particular is a significant third party in the Indo-Afghan relations.

²⁹ According to the recent data the Strait of Hormuz sees daily of nearly 16 to 17 million barrels of oil export. Due to lack of any other sea route soon Iraqi oil will also pass through this route making it even more important. It is estimated that daily about 30 tankers pass through the strait.

INDIA'S STRATEGIC CONSIDERATION AND IRAN

From the above discussion the Iranian need for a partner in Afghanistan is obvious. In the following section the mutuality of the interests between India and Iran would be examined in detail. This examination would establish that India could be that partner. This examination would highlight the Iranian factor in India's policy to Afghanistan.

Mutual Interest Areas

“Afghanistan presents a good opportunity for India and Iran while India looks at Afghanistan from the prism of regional peace and security, for Iran, Afghanistan presents an opportunity to establish its credentials as a responsible regional player” (Aggarwal Rajiv 2014; 7).

One of the major concerns of India is the absence of a direct land route to Afghanistan. This makes Indian plans to be a major player in the rebuilding of Afghanistan difficult. The only country through which India can have a direct land route to Afghanistan is Pakistan and it is very unlikely that it will provide India that access. The relationship between India and Pakistan is a major hurdle. Pakistan's interest lies in preventing India from playing any major role in the affairs of Afghanistan. Minimal Indian presence serves Pakistan interest (D'souza 2008). In this context, “Iran becomes crucial for India's engagement in Afghanistan” (Aggarwal Rajiv 2014; 7). Though it would be a circuitous and long route through sea Iran's geographical contiguity is the only alternative land route to Afghanistan available for India. The mutuality of interest begins here. However, it does have other points too. According to Rajiv Aggarwal, if all the issues are weighted right by all the three countries “Iran India and Afghanistan could engage fruitfully in a constructive regional engagement in the Afghan context” (2014: 7). They, India and Iran have convergence of interest in Afghanistan. Both the countries want peace and security in the region. “Both countries acknowledge that their national interests are better served with a politically stable and secure Afghanistan” (Aggarwal 2014). They do not want any major power to have a permanent presence in the region. They see Pakistan-U.S. collaboration as threat to their national security and their economic interests are not contradictory. Hence, “India and Iran could extend cooperation in Afghanistan as both

of them have common economic, strategic and commercial interest in this war torn nation (Ashfaq Masood Ali & Tabassum Firdous 2015).

Chabahar

Iran is trying to build an alternate port in the Persian Gulf at Chabahar since 1973. With the fall of Shah Regime in 1979 and long Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) Iran however could not concentrate necessary financial and political resources in the building of the port. The need of the alternative port arrived due to overload on the only port in Iran at Bandar Abbas.³⁰ Iran also needs a new port for strategic purposes in case the Bandar Abbas is under the control of enemy during a war or inoperable due to some other reason. “During the war between Iran and Iraq, the Iranian government noticed the important role of the port of Chabahar in Iran’s imports and exports.” It is located at the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf (Alahmad and Arang 2010).

Chabahar has several sub-ports and one of them is named Shahid –Kalantary port. This is the oldest port in operation at Chabahar since 1983. Unlike Bandar Abbas, Chabahar has the ability to handle cargo ships bigger than 100,000 tons. . The port of Bandar Abbas handles 85% of Iran's seaborne trade and is highly congested whereas, “Chabahar has high capacity with plans to expand it from its current capacity of 2.5 million to 12.5 million tons annually” (Ved 2016). It is obvious that economically Chabahar is important for Iran. However, due to its needs of geographical access to Afghanistan and Central Asia it becomes important for India as well.

Though the present government in Delhi is open to explore the possibilities offered by Chabahar and has signed a historic deal with Iran to develop it (Swami Praveen 2016), the attempts to put India in the project were initiated by Iran in the 1990s itself even before the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. However, it was only during the war against Taliban Regime in Afghanistan waged by the NATO that urgency of the port and land route to Afghanistan became important. India and Iran signed an agreement in 2002 “to develop Chabahar into a full deep sea port” (The Central Asia Caucasus Analyst 2014). In 2016 the agreement has been finalized which specifically says that the development will be done by floating a Special

³⁰ It was built on the southern coast of Iran, on the Persian Gulf.

Purpose Vehicle which is aimed at investing \$85 million for the development of the Chahabar.

Though, "India is also eyeing trade with Europe via the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor" (The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst 2014), its primary use for India is limited to economic and strategic benefits it has from developing links with Iran and Afghanistan and Central Asia. It is also seen as an Indian and Iranian collaboration against Chinese and Pakistani joint venture at Gawader. For India Chabahar port provides alternative link with Central Asia. This is central to India's effort to thwart traditional rival Pakistan. Pakistan denied India physical access to Afghanistan which is a land locked country. Hence it is important for India to explore alternative route to Afghanistan where it has political, economic and strategic interest. After completion of Chabahar project India get access to Afghanistan through sea route. It is also a counterweight to China's pursuit of a port in Pakistan's For Gwadar. "Beijing signed an agreement with Islamabad in April 2015 to construct a pipeline from Pakistan's Gwadar port to Nawabshah" (Kaura 2015).

The Chahbar port is also an attempt to create mutual stakes in the region. In order to make the project more viable and fruitful in 2012 even Afghanistan was invited by Iran and India to be a party of the project in order to make it a multilateral project. All the three parties will benefit from the project one way or the other. Afghanistan will get cheaper goods from India and will have access to the world market for its goods. Iran will have an alternative port, its exports would be see positive rise, and India will have access to Afghanistan and Central Asian market where it has plans to invest heavily in the future.

There are plans to link Chabahar through,

"Rail and road networks to the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multinational project involving India, Iran and Russia. It can serve as trans-shipment hub for Zahedan, Afghanistan through a 600 kilometre connecting road and also as a transit point for the landlocked Central Asian Republics" (CARs) (2016).

India has a “Connect Central Asia Policy”³¹ and Chabahar and road and rail links proposed would a right move in that direction. It will provide Afghanistan a relief from its dependence on Pakistan for the supplies from India. Pakistan often creates hurdles which either delays the essential supplies from India such as important parts and machinery for Salma dams had to be air lifted due to Pakistan’s refusal to allow its passage. Pakistan has refused the passage to even essential commodities such as wheat despite the fact that there is a Trade and Transit Agreement signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan (2012). As Shruti Patnaik notes,

“Keeping in mind the distance and time factor to send goods to Afghanistan through Iran, India had to convert wheat into fortified biscuits to prevent it from rotting during transportation. Even India had to move five mega transformers for Salma dam project by air. Thus Iran remains crucial for India’s engagement with Afghanistan and central Asia”.

These were desperate measures which cannot be repeated every time. This highlights the need of a better and more reliable alternative. It is a common knowledge that both Iran and India see “Chabahar port as a means to improve their geopolitical leverage vis-à-vis Pakistan and pursue their common interest in providing Afghanistan and Central Asia alternative routes to the Indian Ocean” (Raja Mohan 2014). It is also a counter to Chinese investments in Gawader in Pakistan. Iranians see it as an attempt to develop a base near its borders and as competitive enterprise to its attempts to Chahabar. Chahabar project has got boost due to the lifting of sanctions which Iran faced for decades after its rapprochements with the U.S. over nuclear issues. Even the U.S. authorities see the coming up of the project positively. Once developed it would provide easy land access to the Central Asia and Afghanistan. It will also provide greater economic opportunities to Afghans. The land route to Afghanistan would help international community to fight the extremist and fundamentalists forces better. Chahabar, if completed would create greater opportunities to bring peace in the region.

For India, due to its deteriorating bilateral relationship with Pakistan the possibilities of having a land route through it is very difficult. Pakistan’s lawlessness and hostile

³¹ India’s ‘**Connect Central Asia**’ Policy is a broad-based approach, including political, security, economic and cultural connections

territory anyway does not provide much prospects. Pakistan is also very sceptical of growing Indian involvement in Afghanistan. It sees the growing relationship between Afghanistan and India as a threat to its interests in the former. Due to all these regions Chahabar become a very good option for India. However, there are critiques to the project as well. According to Happymon Jacob, “it is delusional to think we can develop the port complex and the land access to Afghanistan onwards to Central Asia all on our own and maintain them”. He further argues that for multilateral cooperation to build and operate Chahabar. He is of the view that Iran is not very enthusiastic about the exclusive role for India in the project and terms the reactions in Delhi over the signing of the deal hype (The Hindu, June 3, 2016).

However, from another perspective building of Chahabar is a great moral booster for India. P R Kumaraswamy argues that though the economic benefits coming from the port might not be too great but it is still worth the attempt. He says that the “port will be more important for Iran than for India. India’s total trade with all (Central Asian) countries is less than \$1billion. The real benefit will be that we were able to build a port in a foreign country in the face of international competition. India would be attempting this for the first time.”(The Hindu, 18 January 2016). It is difficult to predict the future and the benefits projected from the port would in future so it is too early to say anything. As C Raja Mohan argues, “Delhi and Tehran must now sit down with the new government in Kabul to negotiate trilateral trade and transit agreements that will ensure an early realization of all economic and strategic benefits that the Chabahar project promises.” (Indian Express, 20 October 2014).

The New Delhi Declaration and Terrorism in Afghanistan

In his 2003 India visit the then president of Iran Mohammad Khatami was the chief guest of the Republic day celebrations. During the visit both the countries signed a Delhi Declaration listing mutual areas of cooperation. Afghanistan and fight against terrorism were identified as two such common issues. Also a “Road Map to Strategic Cooperation” was signed (The Republic of India and Islamic Republic of Iran: The New Delhi Declaration, Ministry of External Affairs 2013). As stated above, Iran sees rise of Taliban and other terrorist organizations in Iran as a threat to Iranian security. It also sees instability in Afghanistan harmful for the entire region. India shares the

concerns as a victim of terrorism both inside its own territories and in Afghanistan. Its councils and embassy in Kabul have been attacked by Taliban more than once. Some of Indian workers and professionals working in Afghanistan have been kidnapped and killed in the past. India also wants a stable government in Kabul. It is obvious that these are mutual concerns. As Rajiv Aggarwal rightly points out,

“Despite not committing militarily in Afghanistan, India has from Taliban terror more than once, whether it was the hijacking of the Indian Airline IC814 to Kandahar in 1998, the multiple times the Indian embassy and missions have been targeted in Kabul, or even the attacks on Indian engineers working on reconstruction process in Afghanistan” (2014).

The instability in Afghanistan is harmful for not only security but also for economic investment in the region. One area where both Iran and India collaborated was their mutual support for the Northern Alliance in the war against Taliban in the 1990s and early 2000. As Ashfaq Masood and Tabassum Firdous argue, “the dominance of Taliban in Afghanistan during 1990s concerned both India and Iran and common challenges of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan and Pakistan brought them together” (2015). The collaboration during the war with the Northern Alliance created links with the leaders who are at the helm of affairs in the post-Taliban period in Afghanistan. These links were based on the experience of the past. Indians remember that during the Taliban years Iran had refused to recognize its government in Kabul. During the hijacking of its civil airlines in 1998 Iran had provided crucial support to India. Iran is as much threatened by the rise of al-Qaeda as India was. These links can lead towards the development of a trilateral understanding between India, Iran and Afghanistan for long-term common front against the Taliban and other terrorist groups in the country.

A lawless country can breed different kinds of terrorists. The production and trade of opium in Afghanistan provides enough financial support bases to terrorists which is harmful for both the countries. In this context both the countries provide training to the police and army of the new government. They can both have a common understanding in this field. Iran is already supplying armament to the Afghan government and India is training their police. However, they need to cooperate and coordinate in this affair so that a better service is provided. This will also reduce the dependence of Afghans on the U.S. forces.

“At the moment, a confident India is moving ahead with its plans to provide necessary training to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in order to make them combat-competent. Ensuring smooth security transition is the key to larger political stability of Afghanistan. India’s Afghan policy is driven by the twin themes of stability and development. A stable Afghanistan is less likely to act as a sanctuary for terror, and pose security threats to the countries in the neighbourhood. In addition, India has other geo-political interests; Afghanistan can provide it with the crucial link (via Iran) to central Asia” (Kaura 2015).

Cultural linkages and Ethnic Balance

Iranians have a common historical and cultural links with Afghanistan. This links is extended till India also in terms of the presence of a large Shia population in all three countries and their common origin. The cultural links are useful in creating confidence building measures among the groups in Afghanistan. Some of the leaders of Afghanistan were educated in Iran and India and during the time of Taliban a large number of them took shelter in these two countries. These links make the work of a diplomat easy. Iranians are well aware of this and Indian diplomats are learning to use it.

Both Iran and India support a settlement of the ethnic dispute in Afghanistan peacefully. They have advocated the “establishment of a broad based government representing all ethnic groups” in Afghanistan. Their links with erstwhile leaders of Northern Alliance helps them to persuade them to accommodate all the ethnic groups. Iran has a better link with both Hazaras and Tajik leadership in Afghanistan (Therme, 2007). India has links with Pashtuns. Both the countries are trying to use each other’s links to create peaceful atmosphere in the country. As Ashfaq Masood Ali & Tabassum Firdous argue “both the countries, as a joint venture, can help stabilizing Afghan crisis and assuring an inclusive democracy capable of representing all ethnic groups therein” (2015). Iran would like to preserve the interest of Hazaras in particular given their Shia roots; however, the minority Hazaras need the good will of majority Pashtuns in Afghanistan for their long term survival and prosperity. Pashtuns fear that Hazaras are alienating with Iran and trying to get greater share in the country’s economic and political resources. If India plays a constructive role it can convince Pashtuns about the insecurity of the minority sect and help build a channel for

dialogue between them. In return Iranians can pacify any Hazara or Tajik resistance to the central government at Kabul.

Economic Links

There is high possibility that Iran and India can cooperate economically in Afghanistan in the form of building infrastructure and establishing joint venture projects. Iran is looking for building roads across Afghanistan to reach Central Asian market. India too has the same objective. The Chahabar provides the opportunity to collaborate in exploring the underdeveloped Afghanistan economy. Apart from Chahabar and perhaps linked to it as well is the proposal to build a rail link between Chahabar and Afghanistan. According to Rajiv Aggarwal (2014),

“India and Iran could also develop a rail link from Chahabar to the Afghan border and further on to Hajigak mines in Bamiyan province. This 900-kilometer rail link would help India transport iron ore from Afghanistan and earn Iran substantial transit revenue.”

India is trying to initiate multilateral engagements in Afghanistan particularly in the field of economy. “Recently, India also held Delhi Investment Summit on Afghanistan to encourage private sector investment there.” Indian companies such as the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) have won some contracts in Afghanistan. They are going to build heavy industries in the field of mineral exploration and manufacture. Due to the weakness in Afghan economy it would be very difficult for these companies to sell their products locally. They will need to export their products and for that they need to have a good relation with Iran which can provide the only its land and sea access to Afghanistan to Indian companies.

Iranians have always looked to create enough economic opportunities for Afghans and Hazaras in particular and facilitation of multiple investments in the country can achieve this goal. Iranians would love if Indians are investing in the country. It will also have a beneficial effect on Iranian economy. Indian investment will not even create the fear those investments from U.S. or any other super power might have. Hence, Indian investments in Afghanistan would be both safe and beneficial for Iranians.

Strategic Partnership

Though Iran and India have been long-term partners in international politics in the last decade there had been some problems between them. One of the main hurdles was Indian attempts to get closer to the U.S. and the U.S. hostility towards Iran for historical and political reasons. On more than one occasion U.S. has demanded Indian compliance to its policy of isolating Iran. Due to American insistence India had to downgrade its relationship with Iran. According to Binay Kaura “Hillary Clinton, then U.S. secretary of State, has disclosed in her book *Hard Choices* that the main purpose of her short visit in May 2012 was to convince India to reduce its reliance on Iranian oil.” This was in the background of Indian attempts to address its energy needs in the form of negotiations around a gas pipeline from Iran to India passing through Pakistan (IPI) project. This was to be a multilateral project with the active involvement of China and Russia. However, due to American pressure India had to suspend the negotiations. The project is now under way without India (2015).

Meanwhile Iran’s trouble with the U.S. on the issue of its nuclear program also had an effect on Indo-Iranian relations. In 2009 India voted against Iran and with the U.S. in the International Atomic Energy Association. IAEA and United Nations were later pressured to put sanctions on Iran due to this vote. Due to American pressure India also reduced imports of Iranian oil and stopped the payment to the earlier imports (The Economic Times 31 March 2015). According to some reports “India reportedly owes Iran \$ 6.5 billion dollar for crude oil purchase, the payment of which has so far been held up due to the sanctions” (The Indian Express 1 May 2016). All these instances were the dark days of Indo-Iranian relations. However, in July 2015 due to change in the government in Iran and their open policy on the nuclear issue there has an agreement between Iran and the countries of P 5+1.³² This deal has opened possibilities for the renewal of the negotiation for the IPI project. It is also a sign that now both Iran and India can go ahead with their plans in Afghanistan without any hitch. Iranians have bargained hard for the lifting of the sanctions for their economic survival as their exports were getting plummeted and also for their strategic

³² P 5+1 refers to the security council’s five permanent members namely China, France, Russia,, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Germany.

requirements in Afghanistan and in the greater Central Asian region. According to Vinay Kaura,

“The strategic map of Iran’s immediate neighbourhood will change dramatically following the landmark nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1. Given the tremendous geostrategic stakes involved, Iran has already begun to explore greater opportunities for economic and security cooperation in the region. This has implications for both India and Pakistan, which are tied to Iran strategically but bitterly opposed to each other” (2015).

The deal has also a positive sign for India. Due to the deal the pressure of the U.S. to downgrade its relations with Iran has gone down. Since the lifting of the sanctions Iranians and Indian diplomats have met several times. “The Iran nuclear deal has perhaps unshackled some of the constraints India may have felt seeking Iran’s support in finding an optimal solution for Afghanistan” apart from other bilateral benefits such as lower priced and more efficient oil supplies and more opportunities for trade in other commodities. The withdrawal of NATO forces in 2014 and Iranian rapprochement with the U.S. has created a much favourable situation for both India and Iran to become organized in Afghanistan. The Indo-Iranian Strategic Partnership was first envisioned and documented during President Khatami’s visit to India in 2003. The signing of the Delhi Declaration, a vision document was preceded by December 2001 Tehran Declaration when Vajpayee went to Iran. One of the central points in the strategic partnership between Iran and India is the fate of Afghanistan. As stated above both the countries have significant stakes in Afghanistan and Central Asia. In this context, Subhash Kapila (2014) rightly points out that,

“Both Iran and India have significant stakes in the security and stability of Afghanistan and both these nations involvement in Afghanistan in the past decade and a half has been a benign one. Strategic logic therefore dictates that both Iran and India join hands to ensure that they make concerted efforts to ensure that Afghanistan rises as a successful nation-state and stands on its own two legs to confront disruptionist threats. The vehicle for both Iran and India to achieve their common strategic objectives in Afghanistan would be a well-bonded Strategic Partnership.”

The relevance of the partnership is already tried and tested. The hostility of Pakistan to Indian interests in Afghanistan and towards any attempt to create stability in the country without Taliban or its allies has been stated many a times above. It is also accepted that “all these years if India could succeed in completion of billion dollars development projects and economic activities in Afghanistan it was facilitated by

access given by Iran” (Kapila Subhash 2014). Iran has stakes in the stability of Afghanistan and it has been proven more than once. Iran supported America led war in Afghanistan in 2001 despite all its differences with the U.S. in the past. It also played a very constructive role during the reconstruction and peace building measures in Afghanistan post-Taliban. Unlike Pakistan Iran has never tried to gain mileage from troubles of Afghan people. Indian policy makers find this as a great virtue and this makes the strategic partnership in Afghanistan between the two countries most viable.

The points of strategic partnership between Iran and India in Afghanistan could be the following, **first**, political stability in Afghanistan. The links both the countries have developed with the leadership of different factions of the present ruling dispensation in the past decades, during the civil war through their support of Northern Alliance, would give them both enough space to pull some strings at the crucial moments. However, the links are not strong enough for either Iran or India to play a decisive role. Iranians can at most influence Tajik and Hazara leadership which together constitute a minority (Saikal 2012). For example, “Afghanistan's leading Shia cleric and leader of the Harakat-e Islam-i Afghanistan (Islamic Movement of Afghanistan), Ayatollah Mohammad Asef Mohseni, has maintained very close ties with Iran since the Soviet invasion” (Kuty 2014). Leaders such as Abdullah Abdullah who contested for the post of President and a prominent Sunni leader and Hakim Khan a prominent Shia leader, Tajik Mohammad Yunus Qanooni are some of those individuals close to Iran (Ibid). India, though have links with Pashtuns they are not too many. Indians know that without the confidence of the minorities in the central government there cannot be any peace in Afghanistan. One can see that if both minorities supported by Iran and majority supported by India come together the chances of greater and long term peace in Afghanistan is better.

Indian attempts to create peace in Afghanistan are countered by the Taliban and other factions as an intervention of a non-Islamic country into the affairs of Islam. The propaganda against India is similar to that against Soviet Union's intervention in 1980s and American intervention in 2000s. Both the countries, non-Islamic and super powers were seen as intruders and imperialists. India, due to its emerging great power status in the world politics and its non-Islamic majority population is targeted in a

similar manner. The attacks on the Indian embassy in Kabul and Indian consulates in Herat, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif do often face security threats from Taliban and other terrorist groups. In fact, Indian consulate in Herat was attacked in May 2014 and in Jalalabad in March 2016. It was preceded by the attack on Indian Parliament in Kabul in July 2008 killing over 50 people. There were numerous other attacks on Indians working in different parts of Afghanistan. All these attacks were justified by the rhetoric of resistance to un-Islamic interventions in the country. Indian collaboration with Iran, which is a Islamic country might address the issue in a limited way. Though Pakistan would like to maintain the rhetoric against India in Afghanistan Iranian involvements with India will reduce the popularity of the rhetoric and snatch away the legitimacy.

For a very long time, both India and Iran have been averse to the idea of Taliban being a part of any Afghanistan government. This reluctance to engage the so called ‘moderate Taliban’ had a root in both the countries distrust in the organization’s stated goals and their history. However, given the fact that despite all the efforts put by combined forces of NATO in last fifteen years Taliban has survived and is still able to operate directly in the remote areas and indirectly even in Kabul, both Iran and India have moderated their hostility towards the idea of engaging Taliban in the dialogue process. It is a pragmatic move. Taliban’s involvement in the dialogue process and its participation in the future Afghanis government would increase the chances of peace in the country. It will also provide Pakistan a much needed assurances about the protection of its interest in the country. Smruti Patnaik has stated Indian understanding on the issue of Taliban in perfect phrase. He argues that,

“As the date of withdrawal of foreign combat troops from Afghanistan draws nearer, New Delhi is determined to play a larger role in the conflict-prone country, in spite of reports of expanding Taliban influence. While some analysts are emphasizing the threat of Taliban and cautioning India to lessen its engagement in Afghanistan, unlike in the 1990s, India is no longer considering ‘withdrawal’ as an option. Moreover, because of continued American presence and long-term assured international engagement in reconstruction activities in Afghanistan, it would be difficult for the Taliban to repeat their performance of the 1990s” (2012).

Knowing the weaknesses of Taliban and strength of multilateral involvements in Afghanistan India and Iran would do good to join hands and provide an alternative

path for reconciliation and peace in the country. India's refusal to withdraw under the constant threats from Taliban and other terrorist groups is a sign of that confidence it has got due to its partnership with Iran.

Second major area of cooperation in Afghanistan between India and Iran is building the economy and social infrastructure. As stated and noted above both the countries have massive stakes in the revival of the Afghan economy. The political stability would be sustained only if economy in Afghanistan gives enough opportunity to unemployed youth which are today foot soldiers of terrorist groups. De-radicalization of the youth and general population is possible through creation of jobs and promises of better living conditions. Iran and India, through their investments can do that. In terms of environment of investment both India and Iran are better placed than any other country. People of Afghanistan know the people from these two countries. There are historical and cultural links. Iranians have direct links with common people in the country as a close neighbour. Indians have a positive image among the Afghans. So Taliban's attempt to create popular hostility against India is difficult to get popular support. Iranians have this faith and therefore are they are ready to share the risks and profits with India.

As stated earlier "Indian investment is aimed at providing critical developmental support and generating goodwill which can be converted into political capital to boost its staying power in Afghanistan" (Ibid). India has also attempted to create a multilateral group while keeping Afghanistan in the centre. The involvement of Afghanistan in the Chahbahar project after the American withdrawal from the country, earlier it was reluctant to join Iran and India due to the fear of American reprisal is the beginning of the era. This readiness is an admittance of the close relationship which Afghanistan had maintained throughout with Iran despite all the sanctions and hurdles imposed by the U.S. The willingness to be a party of projects undertaken by either of the two countries shown by Afghan governments is a sign that it trusts these two better than any other country in the region.

The **third** area of cooperation between India and Iran would be fight against global terrorism, which has a deep root in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. If they come together they both can build a strong network in Afghanistan and put an end to all the major sources of support such as finance and men power. As pointed out above

a production and trafficking of drugs is the most important source of finance for the terrorists and Afghanistan is a hub of both. Terrorism is a menace for all the governments including India and Iran and there coming together has greater chances that it can be tackled forever. As Vinay Kaura argues, “with territory from Pakistan to the Mediterranean becoming home to some of the most vicious Jihadi terror groups, with global, national and regional linkages, India and Iran could well be motivated to return to cooperation in tackling the threat of terrorism” (2015).

In order to fight the menace of terrorism all three countries can have a joint understanding in the form of strategic agreements. Both Iran and India can provide training and equipments to Afghanistan’s army, Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) and fund the constant supply of armaments. As Rajiv Aggarwal suggests,

“India and Iran could then jointly work out a security cooperation arrangement for Afghanistan which could entail training, equipping and maintenance of the ANSF. With Iran in the loop, the question of connectivity would be overcome while India could get the required space to assist Afghanistan as per the SPA. Any tacit or overt support from the US would be welcome too. It could also result in exerting pressure on Pakistan in its support of the Taliban or efforts to undermine future Afghan governments” (2014).

The **fourth** and most important aspect of Iran-India relations in Afghanistan is the common interest in keeping the U.S. away from the region. The instability and terrorism will invite U.S. back to Afghanistan which will be a strategic loss for both the countries. Even Afghans would not like the Americans to come back as it threatens their regional allies and creates tensions among the population. It has both economic and cultural reasons. Any long-term presence of the U.S. in Afghanistan would be harmful for Iran’s national security and India’s independence foreign policy. It would also be a reason for the legitimacy for the presence of terrorism and war lords in the name of resistance. India would try hard to stop this as it might also create ripples in Jammu and Kashmir. The terrorists in Afghanistan can move to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and from there to Indian part of it both as a safe heaven and as an alternative field of action. Hence, presence of the U.S. is a common loss for all the three countries and they will ally to keep it out.

Challenges

Indo-Iranian collaboration in Afghanistan has many prospects in terms of economic and political interests of all three countries. However, there are various challenges too. In this section of the chapter some of the most pertinent challenges have been identified. Any long-term multilateral cooperation among all three countries depends on how they deal with these challenges.

One of the foremost challenges facing Indo-Iranian cooperation in Afghanistan is Pakistan. It is not easy for any country trying to play an important role in Afghanistan to ignore Pakistan. It's not only shares the long border with the Afghanistan but also it is home of a large number of Afghan refugees. It also has very close links with the majority Pashtuns and has in the past provided a large number of Taliban fighters training and weapons. If Iran wants to control terrorism and provide help in stabilizing the country it needs to take Pakistan on board. Iran also shares a large border with Pakistan and has cultural links as well. In this situation India's attempts to build a joint cause with Iran in Afghanistan faces the question about how to deal with Pakistan. India does not have a very good relationship with Pakistan, not even working one, whereas,

“Iran and Pakistan seem poised for a more balanced and cooperative relationship than has been the case to date. With the potential decline of its importance to American objectives in the context of U.S. outreach to Iran and the drawdown in Afghanistan, Pakistan has every reason to assume that antagonizing an Iran whose geopolitical stock will soon rise would be strategically counterproductive” (Kaura 2015).

This has prompted Iran to invite Pakistan to be a party of the Chahbahar project too. Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mehdi Honerdoost declared this when he stated after the signing of the deal with India in May 2016, “the deal is not finished. We are waiting for new members. Pakistan, our brotherly neighbours, and China are welcome” (as quoted in Jacob Happymon 2016). In this context, as Harsh Pant argues,

“India has a range of interests in Afghanistan that it would like to preserve and enhance, notably containment of Islamist extremism, the use of Afghanistan as a gateway to the energy-rich and strategically important Central Asian region, and assertion of its regional pre-eminence. Yet the most important goal for New Delhi remains the prevention of Pakistan from regaining its central role in Afghan affairs. The last time Pakistan enjoyed such a position was the 1990s, and Indian security interests suffered to an unprecedented degree” (2014).

In the same statement quoted above, Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Mehdi Honerdoost describes China as “a great partner of Iranians and a good friend of Pakistan” and wishes its involvement in the Chabahar project (Jacob Happymon 2016). Iranians have more than one reason to rely on China. It is not only the largest trade partner but also a reliable ally in world politics. It has stood with Iran during the most crucial phases of its history. When American sanctions were imposed and no other country, not even India, was ready to defy it Chinese supported Iranians. However, Chinese support is also guided by its pragmatism and realist policy orientation.

“China’s energy needs have become an economic lifeline for Iran. Growing bilateral ties reflect this reality. China accounts for approximately 50 percent of Iran’s total crude oil exports. China relies on Iran for a tenth of its foreign energy imports. Burgeoning energy ties between Tehran and Beijing have stimulated a deeper strategic alignment”(https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwifvoaRs5TUAhVFro8KHYSbD_gQFggoMAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fsvuniversity.ac.in%2FDept%2FJournal%2F17.4.%2520V.%2520Srilatha.pdf&usg=AFQjCNHRbBJfxfsU2MOov5AB44ZfiImlNw).

Chinese have invested heavily in Afghanistan and it has great influence in the Central Asia. Iranians compliment Chinese pragmatism with their own. Iran will prefer China over India if there is a point of confrontation. Given the shape in which Indo-Chinese relations are today and Indian obsession to portray China as its rival in world economy and regional politics, that confrontation is a possibility. Indians also do not like much the deep Chinese and Pakistan relationship. In the context of Iranians warming up to both China and Pakistan there is a real danger that India might lose Iran to them. Indians have to deal with the issue of China cautiously and should avoid any direct confrontation in Afghanistan if it wants to sustain its relations with Iran. India needs to adopt a more cooperative and accommodative approach to Chinese interest in Afghanistan.

“Since China shares disputed borders with India, realists would predict that the potential for conflict between India and China over influence in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region, and Central Asia remains alive as long as China continues to meddle in India’s northeast and Kashmir, whether directly or indirectly, by seeking to use Pakistan as a counterweight to India. Demand for energy resources in India and China is also a potential trigger for a clash of interests between the two countries, generating more competition for access to energy in resource-rich countries” (Kaura 2015)

In the recent past China has invested heavily in Pakistan in Gawader and also building a road link between Gawader and China through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. This is a provocation enough for Indians. Chinese are also supporting the building of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline which India abandoned due to American pressure. Iran too is keen to extent the pipeline to China in the wake of big Chinese market and Indian disinterest. Chinese has an ambitious plan to revive the old silk route through its Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road projects and both Iran and Pakistan are to play an important role in it (Zimmerman 2015). As noted by (Johny 2016), “China is playing a long game in West Asia. [During the sanctions] it expanded ties with Iran so that it would be better placed than any other power in a post-sanctions Iran. India did the opposite, and failed to retain the balance between Western pressure and ties with Iran during the sanctions era” (Ibid).

India has a tough task to choose between confrontation and cooperation and it seems cooperation is a better strategy.

“In the coming years, Pakistan and China will certainly intensify their efforts to “integrate” Iran into their strategic vision of the emerging regional order, as this will enable them to inflict high-leverage strategic harm on India. Notwithstanding Iran’s growing bonhomie with Pakistan and China, India must stay in close contact with Iran and consciously and consistently pursue good diplomatic and economic relations with it. India needs to remind Iran that Pakistan has become a country where political stability remains very fragile. Even though Pakistan is being ruled by a democratically elected government, security and foreign policy are utterly dominated by the military” (Kaura, 2015).

This might or might not work. Instead of getting involved in a zero-sum game India should try to focus on building a multilateral alliance in Afghanistan and even Pakistan and China should not be treated as untouchable rivals.

Two smaller but important challenges faced by India-Iran collaboration in Afghanistan are the persistence of warlords, mostly hostile to Iran and India in the Afghanistan politics. The warlords occupy local followings and Pakistan and Taliban in the remote areas support most of them. The reasons are Pakistan’s direct support to some of them in terms of providing them shelter and other necessary support. Even if Americans object to it Pakistan has its own reasons for maintaining such relations. They provide it crucial influence in Afghan politics. Iranians are better equipped to deal with these warlords rather than India for historical and cultural reasons (Hossein 2008). Iranians would like to neutralize some of the warlords hostile to Iran but it

would be difficult for even them to completely wipe them out. Indians have no experience with dealing with them and they have to rely on Iranians mostly. This provides Iranians an advantage over India and Indians have to see how to deal with it. They have the option either to compete with Iran and Pakistan or to let them do the groundwork and focus on major projects. Both options are full of risks though.

Yet another challenge faced by both Iranians and Indians in Afghanistan is the sectarian conflict in the country. Afghanistan is a deeply divided society both on ethnic and on sectarian lines. Pashtuns, a majority Sunni community is hostile to Shia Hazaras and Tajiks. There are other smaller sects too. As noted earlier Iranians are pro-Shia and pro-Hazaras and Sunnis have mistrust to Iranian interventions in the country. The interventions which Iranians do in favour of Hazaras provoke violence. Indians have to be very careful in dealing with the sectarian divide in Afghanistan. It cannot completely rely on Iran. It has to try to adopt a secular approach and deal with sectarian conflicts as a domestic affair of Afghanistan or it has to try and mediate among them. Indian closeness to Iran might play a spoiler as Sunnis would be distrustful. According to Sumitha Narayan Kutty,

“Senior Afghan officials in Herat often accuse Iran of meddling and supporting anti-government militancy in the region; Iran flatly denies such allegations. Nevertheless, anti-Iran protests targeting the Iranian consulate in Herat have become more frequent in recent years, and even Herat's new governor, Said Fazilullah Wahidi, has not shied away from opining about the “unfriendliness of Iran.” Beyond local resistance like in Herat, two other key factors have constrained Iran's successful use of these economic instruments”. (2015)

Pakistan also would like to portray Indians as pro-Iranians and hence anti-Sunnis. This situation would be a disaster for Indian interest in the country and hence India needs to be careful about it.

There are some bilateral issues between Iran and Afghanistan which can play a spoilsport if not tackled well. For example, the issue of the river Himand or Helmand water which is the main source of Iran's Hamun Lake in Sistan. During Taliban rule there were Iranian accusations about the diversion of the river water for poppy cultivation violating the 1973 treaty about the distribution of the river water. The post-Taliban government in Afghanistan has tried to deal with the Iranian concern. However, with the growing need of water within the

country and visible effects of climate change river water might be an issue of conflict.

Afghan refugees and migrants workers in Iran contribute greatly in the Afghan economy through remittances. They work in all kinds of industries and do even menial jobs. However, due to its own economic problems and ideological threat Iran often acts harshly on these refugees denying them basic rights available to them as refugees. The opposition from locals who see Afghans as competitors is one major reason for Iranian state's tough acts against them. Some of them are deported to Afghanistan on the allegations of drug trafficking, terrorism or any such issue. This increases the hostility with Afghanistan against Iran. Indian closeness with Iran might hamper because of these issues.

India's growing relations with Israel and the U.S. can be distasteful for Iran. Iranians are arch enemies of Israel since the Islamic Revolution and they see it as an imperialist state supported by the Satan U.S. Israelis too have maintained their hostilities against Iran. Any country which has close relations with Israel is seen with suspicion by the Iranians. It would a difficult task for the Indians to convince Iranians that their relations with Israel. Indians have already proven Iranians that they care more about their closeness to the U.S. than with any other country and since Iranians have dislike about Americans traditionally, it would be a test for India to not to commit the same mistake as it did during its vote in the IAEA. Iranians would be watching Indians moves carefully and any such repetition would harm their cooperation in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

As Pakistan factor and cross border terrorism commonly affect security system of India and Afghanistan, they seek cooperation with neighbouring countries especially Iran to resolve the problem. India is aspiring for a larger role in Afghanistan. Without close cooperation with Iran India cannot have expanded presence in Afghanistan. It is a reality that in order to have better access to Afghanistan a passage through Chabahar can prove extremely useful.

According to realist theory of international relations an understanding of strength and weaknesses of the adversary is essential to fulfil strategic objectives. In the

meanwhile, to survive in an anarchic world all states to have to adopt certain rational behaviour, such as power maximization and balancing strategies. States translate perceptions of their locational advantages and vulnerabilities into geopolitical strategies according to their worldview. Apart from revolutionary rhetoric, foreign policy of Iran has been in accordance with realist framework calculating costs and benefits. Its nuclear agreement with the U.S., if implemented will definitely mark the dawn of a new age of Asian geopolitics. Iran is aspiring for a greater and worldwide-legitimised regional role in which it can improve its standing and take benefit of mercantile opportunities whenever it finds them. This agreement will provide Iran that standing. This will also take away the pressure from India to not to have deeper understandings with Iran. Once Iran is free from American sanctions India would have no strategic compulsions to avoid Iran because Iran is essential for India in the region.

Iran's regional role can prove complementary to India. Both have had civilisational links. In the present day world both are concerned about their economic and security up gradation. India's present-day collaboration with Iran is primarily based on India's energy needs, access to Afghan territory and Central Asia, and its permanent enmity with Pakistan. India's economic interests in Central Asia are important, and it needs to strengthen its presence in the region. Here it must be emphasised that Indian hope or desire for reviving its presence as well as influence in the region of Central Asia cannot fructify without the help of Iran. The fact that India and Iran has historically pursued a relatively autonomous and independent foreign policy in the Central Asian region provides an opportunity for collaboration between the two countries. Some thinkers suggest that Iran may not show too much interest in responding to economic or strategic plan of India. International politics is witnessing constant changes. As so often happens in world politics, relation between states are inevitably shaped by multiple contingent factors. No single state can overcome or transcend these constraints their own. Relation between India and Iran came under strain as India under the pressure of international community voted against Iran in the UN on the nuclear development programme of Iran. India did not prove complimentary on Iran's nuclear programme at an UN forum. It was the assessment of Indian policymaker's of international situation at that time. Some observers suggest that Indian leaders then were unable to conceptualise a comprehensive scheme beyond

narrowly defined national interest. It will be very difficult for Iran to overlook India's negative vote at the IAEA. However, a realist outlook cares for the long-term benefits of cooperation.

India and Iran do have to develop a complementary understanding about regional issues. For a better coordination and cooperation between them a lot depends on what counts as "long term" in Iran's strategy and Indian overtures.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

India's Afghanistan policy being studied by various people from various angles. The present study was an attempt to understand it comprehensively in the period between 2001 and 2014 and how does it is influenced by the Iranian factor. The fall of Taliban and establishment of new government under Hamid Karzai was a significant moment in the long history of Afghan-India engagements. It was also the beginning of a new kind of cooperation between Iran and India in Afghanistan. In the present thesis it has been tried to understand the evolution of multilateral nature of India's Afghan Policy.

Afghanistan-India relationship is an old relationship going back to the ancient times. In the ancient period, when neither India nor Afghanistan was there, the states had close cultural, economic and political exchanges. Afghanistan, known as Gandhara has been mentioned in the ancient Indian epic Mahabharata. During great Ashoka's reign Afghanistan was the northern border of his empire. In the subsequent period Afghanistan remained the same, the northern most tip of rulers in the Indian subcontinent, till the advent of Islam and Arab and Persian Empires. Despite the massive cultural churnings in the medieval period the cultural, economic and political exchanges remained as strong as before between both the civilisations. Though in the subsequent period, aggressors to India came from Afghanistan and established their rule here it did not create any hostility in the post-independent Indian mind. Instead, it created an unbreakable bond between both the countries in the modern era except for a very short period that too under colonial period. When Afghanistan became a modern state in the eighteenth century Indian British rulers tried to annex it for their strategic purposes in the Great Game with Russian Empire. However, they were unable to do it even after three Anglo-Afghan wars. Afghanistan was recognised as independent state in 1919.

The state-to-state relationship between Afghanistan and India started only after the Indian independence in 1947. During the British period Afghanistan was a close neighbour as they had common borders called Durand Line. At the time of India's independence it got partitioned which created a hostile Pakistan state between

Afghanistan and India. This created a geographical distance between both the countries. Nevertheless, Afghanistan tried to maintain its cordial relationship with India. It was not only opposed to Pakistan's membership of UN but it also opposed its position on Kashmir from day one. In the beginning, the relationship was based on the principles of non-alignment and *panchsheel*. The first phase of Afghanistan-India relationship therefore was a relationship of cordiality and mutual trust. It was based on the liberal and idealistic understandings of the world politics and was beyond any explicit immediate interest. The cultural and economic exchanges remained intact despite the fact that due to the creation of Pakistan, it was no longer possible to have free exchange of people and goods between both the countries.

One major break in the relationship between both the countries was the 1978 invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. The establishment of pro-Soviet regime in the country was welcomed by Indian government but when the Soviet army moved in to support it against the domestic opposition then Indian position became little untenable. India still tried to maintain its diplomatic ties with the regime in Afghanistan and throughout the existence of the PDPA rule till 1992. However, due to internal instability in all these years Afghanistan and India were not able to maintain any dynamism in their relationship all these years. When a new regime came to power in 1992 under the leadership of Gulbudin Hikmatyar it too maintained the formal diplomatic ties between both the countries. It was only when Taliban came to power in 1996 defeating forces of Northern Alliance, that Afghanistan-India relationship was terminated. During the five years of Taliban rule, Afghanistan and India maintained no formal contacts and except for the 1999 Kandhar episode they had no interaction at all. The period of the Taliban rule was the worst period of Afghanistan-India relationship. The reason for the absence of relationship between both the countries were Taliban's fanatic beliefs, its hostility towards countries not ruled by non-Muslims and its closeness with Pakistan.

After September 2001 attacks on the U.S. by the terrorist forces sheltered in Afghanistan U.S. waged a 'global war on terror.' With the help of Northern Alliance, a loose group of anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, it was able to dethrone Taliban in 2001 itself. A new regime under the leadership of Hamid Karzai was established. Karzai was considered close to India too and this led to the reestablishment of

Afghanistan-India diplomatic ties in the same year. Afghanistan-India ties since 2001 have been very strong in political, economic and strategic fields. Both the countries have realised the potential of other country in their political and economic survival and progress.

Afghanistan-India political relationships have flourished since 2001 despite the obvious opposition put by Pakistan and other geo-strategic constraints. Afghanistan is trying to recreate the old political understanding with India at international forums and therefore building a close political relationship with it. India sees Afghanistan as an important country in the region with which political relationship is required. Despite the constraints posed by geographical distance and ongoing internal instability in Afghanistan both the countries have established their diplomatic missions in each other and their leaders are paying visits to each other regularly. Both the countries have regular contacts and consultations on several internal and global issues as well. Afghanistan wants to adopt the political model of India and therefore it is learning the functioning and structure of Indian political system. India is helping in this endeavour. India has helped in the reconstruction of the Afghan Parliament and training the officials in the democratic process. India is one of the biggest donors to Afghanistan and it has established five different consulates in five different regions of the country. Despite all the positives between both the countries there are some basic problems which need to be addressed. One of the most important problems is Afghanistan's inability to control the internal unrest in the country created by Taliban and other terrorist groups like Haqqani network. Until there is stability in Afghanistan there will always be a fear among the Indian diplomatic circles that Taliban or any such force can control the power tomorrow and create hurdles in the political ties between both the countries.

India has worked to develop its economic relations with Afghanistan in last decade post-Taliban. India is investing in the different sectors of Afghan economy and helping it to rebuild the infrastructure there. The recent discovery of deposits of various natural resources in the country has given more incentives to Indian business and industries to go and invest in Afghanistan. India has already become one of the biggest trade partners of Afghanistan. There are attempts to diversify the items in bilateral trade as till date the number of items is very limited. The trade between both

the countries is restricted to few items like agricultural products and some basic consumer goods. There is a big scope for the diversification of the trade items between both the countries and India is trying to do that as well. Recently TAPI project has been commenced. This provides a very good opportunity to create a dynamic economic relationship between both the countries. Growing Indian economic strength and untapped natural resources of Afghanistan are complimentary incentives to each other's economic development in future.

India's Afghan policy has a major strategic aspect as well. The geostrategic location of Afghanistan has always attracted great powers in international politics. The Great Game of the last century between British Empire and Russian Empire and the New Great Game among different countries in the world politics today including U.S. are the examples of this. The reason of great power's attraction toward Afghanistan is its centrality in location. Afghanistan was a buffer between Russian and British Empires in the last century and today it is located in the region where interests of Russia, China and U.S. converge. Afghanistan today is the main source of terrorism in Central Asia. It's the main source of illegal Drug trade in the world and it has a large deposit of untapped natural resources. Besides all these Afghanistan neighbours countries such as Pakistan and Iran. All this is creating a race among the great and even emerging powers in the international politics to get maximum influence in Afghanistan. Any Indian attempt to develop its hold in the countries requires factoring this fact.

India's Afghan policy is based on making a strategic relationship with it. However, one cannot look at it without the context of the competition pointed out above. Afghanistan wants to have a strong reliable partner in international politics and sees India as one. India is worried about terrorism in its own Kashmir province and wants to stop any possible source of training and finance for them. Pakistan is competing to have greater influence in the Afghanistan for opposite purposes. Hence, India is very seriously pursuing its strategic mission in Afghanistan. Both the countries have already signed a strategic treaty in 2011. They have identified numbers of subjects and issues for their strategic cooperation. Afghanistan and India are trying to find several regional partners in the pursuance of their mutual strategic interests. SCO has been seen as one such partner by both the countries. Since, U.S. and ISAF have

already withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2014 it puts a great challenge for all the members of SCO to manage the stability of the country and prevent it to fall in the hands of insurgents or Taliban again. That will ruin all the economic and strategic calculations of all the powers in the region including India.

II

Iran is a very important player in the region. It is one of the strongest economies and biggest countries which have direct influence in Afghanistan. The Iranian influence is mainly due to its ancient cultural and political links with Afghanistan. For millennia both the countries were ruled by single Persian Empire and even in the medieval period, for a substantial period of time, the rulers of both these countries were the same. There are similarities of ethnic, linguistic and religious kinds between the people of both the countries. Iran, a great Shia country, a self proclaimed guardian of all the Shias of the world, find itself emotionally attached to Shias in Afghanistan. It has an open natural border with Afghanistan and there are tremendous cultural similarities between people on both sides of the border. Iran has been a recipient of a large number of Afghan refugees both during the time of war and peace.

Modern Iran and Afghanistan have very good relations in the cold war period before the Soviet invasion. During the Soviet invasion both the Shah and Islamic Revolutionary, regimes were hostile to Soviets and tried to help the insurgents. When the Soviet invasion ended in 1988 a new civil war started albeit for a very small period. In the civil war, Iranians supported the anti-Taliban forces of Northern Alliance just like India and built a very good relation with some of the war lords. In the post Taliban phase Iran supported the democratic regime with financial and political aid. Today Iran is one of the largest donors and investors in Afghanistan.

Iran has several interests in Afghanistan emerging from its cultural, political and strategic needs. Iran wants to save Tajiks and Hazaras in Afghanistan against the mighty Pushtuns. It wants to expose the Afghan market for the export of its commodities and sees it as a transit route to Central Asia. It wants to curb Taliban as it is anti-Shia and it wants to keep big powers, particularly US out of the region. All these objectives can only be fulfilled if Iran is able to make its presence felt in the country and in the last decade it has attempt in that direction. It has meticulously

guarded its interest in the country through building links and investing in economy. It has also been able to convince the world that Afghanistan does not need NATO and American forces.

Not all attempts of Iran however, are bearing as much fruit as expected. Iran therefore is looking for a partner in Afghanistan. India can be one of the potential partners. There are similarities in the interests and objectives of both the countries in Afghanistan. India too wants to control the rise of terrorists groups and use the Afghan market. India too despises a long term presence of American forces in its neighbourhood. It wants to counter Pakistan and get access to the Central Asia.

III

India's Afghan policy is very much influenced by Iran. Iran provides India the only land route to Afghanistan. It is the cultural hub which is used by Indians to built links with Afghans directly. Iran can help India to create wider links with common Afghans. Since Iran has similar interests in Central Asia in which it can help India too. Though, India and Iran has a very unstable relationship in the last three decades owing to regime changes in Iran and large macro level changes in the world, their cultural links go back a very long time. Islamic Republic of Iran is also one of the most trusted partners of India in the international politics. Recently it was only in the 2005-06 that their relations had taken a real dip. India voted twice in the IAEA and the Security Council against Iran on the nuclear issues. These votes were to impose economic and political sanctions on Iran for a very long time harming its already bad economy and questioning the legitimacy of its political regime. Iran was also threatened of war by the U.S. in this period. Indian attempts to go close to the U.S. was the main reason that it voted against Iran otherwise its position on the nuclear issue is supportive of Iranian stand. Nevertheless, in June 2015 Iranian diplomats were able to negotiate with U.S. and other countries on the nuclear issues which has finally paved the way for the removal of sanctions. The removal of sanctions will make Iran free to invest in Afghanistan and India would also be free to invest in Iran. Indian investment in Iran is crucial for its Afghan project. Iran is building a port in Chahbahar and linking it with Afghanistan with both rail and road. Once built, this will provide a faster and easier route for Indian commodities to Afghanistan and

Central Asia. Both the countries have already signed the deal for the construction of the port and road and rail links.

The thesis has two hypotheses. First among them reads that, “**revival of historical ties and ethnic bonding has enhanced bilateral cooperation between India and Iran.**” This hypothesis has been proved beyond doubt as one can see that despite hiccups during the Indian attempts to go close to the U.S. in 2005-06 and voting against Iran twice in International forums, in the post sanction period Iran and India have come together faster than expected. In the short period of few months both the countries have signed a deal for Chabahar and have jointly vowed to increase bilateral trade, which was going down due to sanctions and international pressures on India. It was only due to close ancient and cultural links that both countries have no problem in helping each other in Afghanistan and creating a trilateral understanding to bring political and economic stability there.

The second hypothesis is “**Indian investment in Iran’s Chabahar port has the potential to overcome India’s lack of physical access to Afghanistan.**” This is evident that Chabahar is not an ordinary port. It is a sign of and a millstone of Iran-India cooperation and friendship. The port once linked with the Afghanistan through road and rail links would a point through which Indian goods and personnel could move easily there. Currently Pakistan is the only land route which directly links Indian with Afghanistan. Pakistan due to traditional hostilities and its own strategic interests wants to keep India away from Afghanistan as much as possible. This is the reason that it either does not give permission to Indian goods to pass through its territory or delays the movements of such goods. In one of such cases India had to move heavy machinery for Slam dam in Afghanistan through air in 2009. This is not only expensive it also delays the essential projects. It makes Indian projects economically unviable too. Another port in Iran is already too overburdened to provide any facility to Indian goods and materials. Therefore, the construction of Chabahar will not only increase the potential volume of Iranian exports, it will also provide it a much required source of liquidity and cash in terms of transit fees. It will provide Afghans and some of other Central Asian Republics much needed access to sea routes as most of them are landlocked countries.

As explicit from the chapters of this thesis the historic role of Iran in shaping India's Afghanistan Policy is quite significant both in terms of providing direct physical access to Afghanistan and being instrumental in facilitating better person to person links with Afghan ruling class and common people. This is again a sign of the liberal notions of mutual benefits. The fruit of this cooperation would be shared by both the countries.

Iran influenced India's Afghanistan Policy between 2001 and 2014 as it made India see the need of multilateralism and desisted Indian attempts to try and isolate Taliban. Iran was instrumental in convincing India that any long term solution to the instability in Afghanistan is rooted in roping in Taliban as it remains a formidable force in the country despite all the attempts. Iranians are important in providing much need access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Without the cooperation of Iran, it would be very difficult for India to engage Afghan meaningfully for long term. Iran has links with the local rulers and it has a wider influence among the people in regions such as Herat. India needs peace and stability and local connections to fulfil its dreams in Afghanistan and Iran is that country which can easily get these two for India if Indians are also respectful for Iranian interest in Afghanistan and in the wider region. That is the reason that India did not oppose Iranian attempts to join Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Iran might be essential for physical security of Indians working in the region too. Presence of Iran in the Indian attempts to reconstruct and built economic interests in Afghanistan provides India legitimacy in the eyes of local residents. It also provides India a much need strategic depth against Pakistan. Culturally Indian presence in Afghanistan and Iran would be a win-win situation due to mutual advantages and gains in terms of people to people contact and social and economic gains. India can open its educational institutions and can provide political training to its people. The building of democracy will solid because of the Indian presence. Iran and Afghanistan can help India is getting more acceptance in Central Asia.

Last but not the least, in the answer to the question that what is the India's Afghanistan Policy, one can answer after going through the chapters of this thesis that it's a programme of multilateral engagement to create mutual opportunities for prosperity and development. It's multilateral because there is scope for players other

than India and Afghanistan in the bilateral relations. Engagement of Iran and India's openness to involve other players is a clear stance of this nature of its Afghan policy. It is based on the understanding of cooperation. In other words India's Afghan policy is a classic example of liberal principles in foreign policy. In other words, though India has moved a lot from the traditional Nehruvian idealism its foreign policy, at least, vis-à-vis Afghanistan is based on liberal principals of cooperative development.

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