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## China India in Afghanistan

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### Abstract

At the time the traditional and non-traditional security issues in South Asian and regional dynamics mounting into a complex geopolitical space, India and China are gearing up their regional political and economic outlook somewhat country-specific. For India and China, Afghanistan has been a grey area. Being positioned at the heart of Asia, Afghanistan directly influences the logistic arteries of the whole of Asia. In the framework of possible US withdrawal and ensuing traditional geopolitical rivalry in the region, this article focuses on how India and China carried out or would likely to carry out their joint relations in Afghanistan. It would be interesting to observe the rationale behind their renewed engagement and either it is heading to more people-oriented or towards the new 'Great Game'. Within this context, this article aims to outline a comprehensive and comparative analysis of India and China's policy in Afghanistan after 9/11. In which this article argues that despite having some differences in approaches, there is a great possibility for cooperation. This analysis considers both countries' contemporary political, economic and security engagements, and geopolitical dynamics as a base – which are key variables shaping their present foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** India, China, Afghanistan, Geopolitics, Afghan Peace Process

### Introduction

Ever since the fall of the Taliban, the global community has been providing enormous political, financial and technical support for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan, which are supplemented by India and China's contributions. Outshining of other international donors, their contributions to the Afghan state and society are significant and incomparable. Within Afghanistan's geosphere, the intriguing interests of great powers have always been a source of certain strain for Afghan society and neighbouring countries as it was evident with the 'Great Game' of bygone century. Besides, the broader geopolitical considerations also present an overwhelming picture of disharmony in approach despite having similar perceptions about the threats from and within Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan is not the primary focus of either countries' foreign policy in the region, the recent developments such as the likely US withdrawal, the rise of Taliban in Afghanistan and other South Asian geopolitical changes have high chances for cooperation in economic, political and security interests.

India's increasing relations with Afghanistan can be attributed due to the following reasons: (1) security concerns within and from Afghanistan (2) Afghanistan as a transit for economic and business activities (3) energy security

(4) political influence. India's multidimensional relations with Afghanistan dates back to the prehistoric period. Excluding the Taliban era (1996-2001), it maintained cordial relations with all other Afghan governments. Post 9/11 has provided a glittering prospect for India's foreign policy elite to recalibrate their detached policy to a more aggressive pursuit in Afghan affairs. In the post-Taliban period, India's policy and engagement became again a multi-dimensional, thus surfaced as one of the key players in the post-war reconstruction process (Basu 2007). In 2002, India elevated its diplomatic mission from a Liaison office to full embassy (V.Pant 2010). Moreover, India vigorously participated and generously contributed to the 'Bonn Conference', thus regarded as a key contributor in the post-Taliban's political process. India provided financial and necessary diplomatic support to all Afghan governments after 9/11. Since then, India has been dynamically pursuing its bilateral relations through a wide variety of economic transformation projects, humanitarian assistance, political reconciliation activities, cultural exchange programs, student scholarships and financial backing to Afghan governments. As like India, China's relations with Afghanistan are mainly based on following interests: (1) security of the Xinjian autonomous region (2) Afghanistan as a connection between China and west Asia for economic activities (3) energy security (4) for strong foothold in the regional geopolitics. On the other side, China, since 1955, pursues decent relations with Afghanistan except the Soviet allied regime (1979-89) and largely inactive in Taliban's period. After the end of Taliban government, China restored diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in Feb 2002. Once the newly elected federal government started to function after 9/11, China's policy has been meaningfully growing from a very low to active engagement (Andrew Scobell 2015). While complimenting the rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of the international community, China's contributions have brought extraordinarily momentous in China-Afghanistan relations. Similar to India's engagement, China also actively pursues its bilateral relations to facilitate its participation in the Afghan peace process and security related areas through a wide variety of economic initiatives, humanitarian aid programs, and student scholarships.

Reverting former disengagement policy of the Taliban era, Asia's two powerful countries India and China, are engaged in Afghanistan to win friends. Unlike the players of the 'Great Game' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both India and China desire to play an alternative or different role. China and India's relations in Afghanistan can be helpful in understanding the regional dynamics and are important due to the following reasons (1) both are the emerging economic powers of the world (2) Afghanistan's security situation has direct bearings over their internal security (3) their approach will set the tone for regional peace. With this background, the study intends to investigate the question, what is the similarity between India and China's approaches towards Afghanistan? By considering their multi-layered approaches, the research also aims to address the following question, how does the existence of two great economic and military powers of Asia would remarkably contribute to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, or will they fall in the trap of a new version of old geopolitical 'Great Game'? Both sides have noteworthy economic, political, cultural and security interests in Afghanistan; but diplomatically are seen as competitors in South Asia. With the mission of brief assessment of India-China's relations in Afghanistan, this paper would suggest how lack of clarity could be remedied.

### **Superficial Cohesion in the Pursuit of Economic Interests**

More than any other, both India and China's trade activities have been increasingly growing those of other contenders in Afghanistan since 2001. Moreover, it is also the established fact that their trade initiatives boosted the Afghan economy, which extensively addressed in the ensuing discussion. To comprehend how both sides view, one and other, it is unavoidable to this research to answer the subsequent query – how do both countries manage their economic differences in Afghanistan while delineating their bilateral trade and investments relations with Afghanistan. In this way, the research can lay in a better position to address the question realistically.

In March 2003, India signed a preferential trade agreement with Afghanistan in which it gave 50% to 100% duty concessions on items such as dry fruits. Earlier in November 2011, India also gave free duty concessions to certain Afghan goods except alcohol and tobacco (Kumar 2017). The bilateral trade for the year 2017-18 was somewhere around about \$ 1.143 billion; thus India became the second export destination of Afghan goods. In 2017, two air corridors for Delhi and Mumbai from Afghanistan were initiated to expand the trade volume. Most of the Indian companies focus on hydropower sector, information technology and spice trades. Whereas China is one of the other important trading partners of Afghanistan. China's export to Afghanistan is around 17% of its trade volume

more than any country. This influenced Afghanistan to take part in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since May 2017. According to 2018 survey, the bilateral trade volume between China and Afghanistan is around \$ 1.1 billion, with mostly import from China (Salehi 2018). Despite the fact that Afghanistan is embroiled in a relentless conflict, both countries agree on the common perception that economic engagement is the best policy against terrorism and extremism. Their economic incentives to Afghan economy are unprecedented in a sense that they were started amidst political and security disorder and present an alternative path to Afghan people.

One factor that brought India and China to Afghanistan is its large deposits of natural mineral resources which are untapped. Its mining industry is deemed a profitable sector for foreign investments. Both India and China have considerable interests and investments in the lucrative mining industry of Afghanistan. In 2011, at Bamiyan province of Afghanistan, Indian state-owned mining company 'Steel Authority of India' (SAIL) gained the contract of 1.8 million tons of Hajigak iron ore deposit (S. Khan 2011). In 2007, two Chinese state-owned enterprises Metallurgic Cooperation of China (MCC) and Jiangxi Copper Cooperation (JCCL) gained contracts worth of \$ 4.4 billion of copper mine project at Aynak, which is the largest ever investment in Afghanistan (Downs 2012). In oil and gas sectors, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) initially invested \$ 400 million in three blocks of Amu Darya region at Faryab province (Najafizada 2011). The project of the century, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) became the most remarkable cross-continental connectivity initiative by China. To bolster the faltered infrastructure of Afghanistan in 2017, China hooked it with 'China Pakistan Economic Corridor' (CPEC) to stimulate investment, which provided space for several agreements in trade and Information Technology. BRI could likely make Afghanistan another hub of connectivity in Asia (Jennifer-staats 2017). India, in order to improve connectivity, has also been building roads in Afghanistan to improve infrastructure (Staats 2017). Comprising the mining industry, Indian companies are also keen on investing in Information Technology, agriculture, livestock and logistics. Afghanistan is full of natural resources and precious metals. Due to uncertain security and political situation, international mining firms were hesitant in investing these sectors. With the coming of China and India's firms in Afghan mining industry not only brought investment and infrastructure improvement but also restored the friendly atmosphere for future investors.

Being located at the heart of Asia, Afghanistan's geographic position is overwhelmingly determining factor for prompting crucial trade routes in Asia. For attaining upper hand, both sides seem to vie for economic projection in Afghanistan. By having a strong economic presence in the war-torn country, their enterprises can grow better in West Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and East Asia. Due to traditional geopolitical thinking, both China and Pakistan desire limited Indian influence in Afghanistan (S. Ali 2018). CPEC is the flagship project under BRI; China extended it to Afghanistan in 2017; but, India has totally rejected the idea of BRI concerning sovereignty claims over Jammu and Kashmir (*The Print* 2018). In 2016, India with Iran and Afghanistan inked the 'Chabahar Port Transit Accord' and invested \$ 500 million: under this agreement, India built Zaranj-Delaram road that would connect landlocked Afghanistan with Chabahar port in Iran. Moreover, infrastructure between Afghanistan and India are considered as a counter move to sabotage CPEC. China views these adroit economic maneuvering by India as geopolitical stubbornness (Shashkikumar 2009; *Energy Infra Post* 2017). From the discussion in above paragraph, it seems appropriate to say that no doubt their economic contributions in less focused areas of Afghan economy are remarkable. But the problem arises when they adopt self-contained approach in economic development of Afghanistan. By communication on common forums, this problem could be minimized.

Despite apparent resentment, which is deeply embedded in traditional South Asian geopolitics and security dilemma, there seems a specific desire to endeavour for joint economic projects in Afghanistan. The joint cooperation is not a new idea; it was previously floated in 2010 when the officials of both countries scheduled to work on a joint infrastructure project in Afghanistan (Patranobis 2018). First time in April 2013, India and China organised bilateral talks about Afghanistan reconstruction, which both agreed to work collectively for the peace, welfare and prosperity of Afghanistan often referred as 'shared interests' (Schwarck 2016). In April 2018, at the informal summit at Wuhan, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to launch joint economic projects in Afghanistan (Patranobis 2018). The question arises here is that if both want resonance in their engagement in Afghanistan, then what are the factors that are not remote and could pose a threat in their bilateral relations? A recent report reveals that there are some serious challenges in the factual realisation of these joint economic ventures: among them first is, precarious security situation and second, misgivings of China's close

connections with Pakistan. Since the informal Wuhan summit, China-India joint economic cooperation was limited to small scale projects, possibly to address the apprehensions of Pakistan (Sutirtho Patranobis 2018). To Sum up this section, both China and India consider economic engagement with Afghanistan as their first policy to deal with terrorism and extremism. And their increasing economic contributions seem to confirm it. However, tradition geopolitical thinking generates suspicions of one another's economic activities in Afghanistan. It is necessary to mention here that both sides view cooperative attitude towards conflicting interests as a reasonable way to push on their engagement in Afghanistan such as Wuhan summit in 2018.

### **Is Development Aid Strategy a Source of Suspicion?**

Most of the great powers used Afghanistan as a tool to further their vested interests. Both China and India are unique in a sense that their development aid programs seem to focus more on people-oriented and public welfare projects. These aid programs bring substantial changes in Afghan economy and way of life. Almost immediately after the collapse of the Taliban government, both India and China embraced development aid as a policy to assert positively. To apprehend their underlying geopolitical ambitions, the research tries to address the following questions such as is the development-oriented projects of both countries focus on the people-centric or interest centric? Besides, is the increase in development activities create suspicion between India and China? In having a succinct analysis of this prism, we could better assess the looming differences.

Since the formation of the post-Bonn political set up, political clout through development is the characteristic of India's foreign policy. Due to these development projects, India enjoys a good reputation in the eyes of common people. In the analysis of an Afghan researcher, India's soft power is pillared on three relevant links: historic India-Afghanistan link, Bollywood popularity and India's support to rebuild Afghanistan (Abdul Rahman Rahmani 2019). India remarkably accomplishes its economic interests and geopolitical agenda. Its development assistance program stands around about \$ 2 billion. Then Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee announced a line of credit of \$ 100 million and one million tons of wheat for displaced Afghans and a team of doctors for the ailment of artificial limbs in war-torn Afghanistan<sup>1</sup>. India also constructs strategic infrastructure projects that include electric transmission lines to provide electricity to Kabul; an electric powerhouse in Herat and parliamentary building in Kabul. For Afghan civil servants' capacity building training programs were launched for embellishing their professional functioning. For each year the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) grants 500 scholarships to Afghan students to study in various Indian universities ( as cited by Fair 2010). In 2016, Prime Minister Modi and President Ashraf Ghani inaugurated the Salma Dam on Hari River in the Herat province, was the hydroelectric and irrigation dam renamed as the 'Afghan-India Friendship Dam'. The project cost was around \$ 290 million, and the largest development project of India had ever undertaken in Afghanistan (Roy-Chaudhary 2016). India also sponsored the up-gradation of Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health Hospital and provided medical equipment to other hospitals (Mullen and William 2017). In 2015, it delivered a home cricket field to Afghan national cricket team and hosted matches ( as cited by Mullen and William 2017). Further, India granted complete support to Afghanistan to become the full member of the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). All these have created a respectable posture in the eyes of common Afghan people with new employment opportunities (Anant Mishra 2017).

China on the other side also keen to attain political influence through development projects, its focus centred around humanitarian aid, building hospitals, educational institutions, student scholarships, improving people's livelihood and providing technical assistance to the Afghan government and institutions. China development aid falls around \$ 1.5 billion as compared to India's that is around \$ 2 billion (Baisali Mohanty 2017). Since the recommencement of diplomatic relations in Feb 2002, initially as a goodwill gesture, it provided \$ 5 million in humanitarian aid (Ng 2010). Two Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE assisted the Afghan's telecom infrastructure with 2,000,000 lines (Daim Fazil 2014). In 2007, China gained contracts of Ayank Copper mine for \$ 3.5 billion. In return, promised to build mosques, school, clinic, power plant, railway line construction and creation of 4000 new jobs opportunities (cited by Ng 2010). China investment projects were seen as a boost to the

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<sup>1</sup> For more details of India's support refer to Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Ministry of External Affairs Annual Report 2000-2001*, (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 2001), <http://meaindia.nic.in/>.(R. M. Khan 2015)

employment opportunities for Afghan nationals in electricity production and mining. China also started a freight railroad passing from western China through Tajikistan Afghanistan to Pakistan (Chansoria 2019).

In the health sector, China, with \$ 4.35 million assistance constructed the Republic Hospital in 2003 to provide world-class health facilities (Sabir 2018). Along with the above, it also built Kandahar Hospital and Jumhoriyat Hospital. For technical and higher education, China provided aid for a teaching building of the Chinese language department, and guest house of Kabul University and National Centre of Science and Technology Education (Deng Xijun 2015). To invigorate the economic and social sector development, China built the Parwan Irrigation System in the Parwan province. This project intends to facilitate around 100,000 people and 27,000 hectares of land (Government of PRC 2012). China extended CPEC and some mega infrastructure projects to Afghanistan such as rail, roads, energy supply lines and electricity generation power plants. All these efforts were seen as factors to provide additional business opportunities in Afghanistan (Meena Sing Roy 2017). China also aims at maximising its cultural (people to people relations) with Afghanistan. With the framework of the Cultural Exchange Agreement of 2008, China established a Confucius Institute at Kabul University, to create an understanding of Chinese culture and open opportunities for Chinese language learning to Afghans (CGTN 2019).

When we examine both India and China's development initiatives and strategies, it presents an identical picture of wooing all sides of the society and polity with a people-oriented approach. Moreover, their development aid is more focused on public welfare projects and less visible in security sector. Because both believe that poverty is the main cause of the Afghan conflict. This also resonates their similar strategic considerations. Being the most respectful donors in public welfare projects in Afghanistan, it seems that China and India have implicit consensus on development as a strategy for furthering their interests. So, these are the agreed points where the harmony can be further increased by two countries.

### Common Security Threats

Both China and India are the neighbors of Afghanistan and they seem more concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan than any of other international partners. Afghanistan's security quandary and its spill over effects in and around its periphery have been the foremost disquiet on both sides and have caused clear understanding but fluctuate in self-contained approach to deal with it. For unearthing the suitable explanation of this frantic divergence, this segment mainly dedicates on what are the dominant misgivings that lead to deviating lines in security relationships?

In the context of mounting terrorist threats, India diversified its approach to secure its multiple security interests in Afghanistan. Its prime focus of securing Indian interests and investments has led to the security dilemma. India also believes that fight against the extremism requires collective approach to deal with it. In July 2008, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Nirupam Sen, stated that the 'security within Afghanistan and coordinated efforts to stop terrorists from operating with impunity beyond Afghanistan's border must be the paramount priority of our collective efforts in Afghanistan'<sup>2</sup> Second, a great fear that exists within the policy elite of India that after the US withdrawal, Pakistan would again dominate the political landscape and pose a direct threat to its national security, by using Taliban and other affiliated militant groups. As the editorial of Indian Newspaper Mint asserts: 'once Islamabad assured of a friendly government in Kabul, it will unleash all the terrorists at its disposal on India. This will only mean more trouble in Jammu and Kashmir, and it will embolden terrorist groups to attack our cities with greater frequency' (Live Mint 2010). In order to consolidate its security profile in Afghanistan, India provides regular military assistance and training to the Afghan National Army (Joshi 2011). In 2011, it also provided training to the Afghan National Army in light weapons and high-altitude warfare, along with police and Air Force (Ganguly 2011). To scale up Afghanistan's air surveillance capacity, India provided Afghan Air Force MI 25 and Cheetal light helicopters (Manu Pubby 2018). To show a posture that it respects Afghanistan's sovereignty, India restrains from the formidable military presence and limited to 500 'Indo

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<sup>2</sup> Nirupam Sen, Permanent Representative from India to the United Nations, statement on the situation in Afghanistan to the United Nation's Security Council, July, 9, 2008. Available at <http://www.ijmra.us>.

Tibet Border Police Force' (ITBP) personnel to protect workers and diplomatic staff with no offensive counter-insurgency capabilities.

Being also the neighbour of Afghanistan, China's worries are not different from that of India. In its strategic calculus, one of the principal objectives has been the extermination of security threats emanating from Afghanistan that include, East Turkestan Movement (ETM) which occasionally launched terrorist attacks using China-Afghan border (Akhtar 2015). In Dec 2017, Chinese and Afghan higher defence officials met and agreed on building a military facility in Afghanistan Northeast Badakhshan province to strengthen pragmatic cooperation against anti-terrorist activities (Daly 2018). China also warily sees the presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Afghanistan adjacent to its border. In order to create mutual military to military confidence, China assists the Afghan military for a mountain brigade (Daly 2018). Since two countries established military dialogue in 2016, China has been stepping up military assistance to Afghanistan providing small arms, logistics and military equipment (Martina 2018). It was reported in US-based Military Time that Chinese troops along with Afghan forces were operating in Afghanistan and performing counter-terror patrols (cited by Shawn Snow 2017). Nevertheless, here a question arises that is: what are the factors that bar India and China from adopting a unified approach towards Afghan security issues? According to Chinese scholars, China engagement policy with the Taliban in the Afghan peace process is in the sharp contrast to India's. China considers that the Taliban presence in Afghan peace initiative is necessary to end the conflict because Taliban belongs to majority ethnic group of Afghanistan and their roots are deeply embedded in the Pashtun society. China is not against the Taliban but is opposed to terrorism, separatism and extremism (Huasheng 2014). India shares bad memories with the Taliban due to their pro Pakistan approach and infiltration in Kashmir. So, again Pakistan factor, as is perceived by India, allegedly behind the Taliban backing, has been a contentious issue between two, which also widens the gap.

Inferring from the above discussion, both sides, arguably, consider terrorism as a firm national and regional security threat. They also believe that to contain terrorism; it is the best strategy to do it within Afghanistan with humanitarian aid and various development activities and military to military relationships. On account of ensuring their domestic security, both sides also support post-Bonn polity, but differences arise when it comes to the level of how to deal with allegedly Pakistan backing to the Taliban. Contrary to the Indian point of view, China deems Taliban inclusion in peace initiative necessary to end the conflict. India also blames China of pursuing Pakistan's agenda in Afghanistan. Despite this conflicting approach, there appears no direct conflict between China and India in Afghanistan.

### **Afghan Peace Process: Can It Be A Middle Ground?**

To settle down a stretched war, international community conceives peace talks as the only rational mean to resolve the most complex dispute. Both India and China have been strategically compelled to endorse and weigh in the peace endeavours to make it sustainable, and both also accentuate on Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. In addition, to get the peace initiative in right course; their backing is, however, at least contributing to Afghan peace. For making peace talks smooth and efficacious, their determined efforts may yield substantial outcomes. Their ultimate commitment for peace and subsequently their vigorous campaign, it is flaring indications of their decency and devotion to the Afghan cause. However, some vested geopolitical dots have a direct negative bearing on the outcomes contrary to, what they conceived of earlier, following the guidelines of the international community for Afghan peace. Their solo flights are somewhat contributing, but not as much as their international status is expected to render. Both China and India are emerging economic, political and military powers and their status seems to be accepted by the Afghan government and the Afghan people. My point here sticks to the disturbed peace in Afghanistan if both emerging powers, setting aside their vested geopolitical agenda for the sake of Afghan peace, agree to conduct their interests for the common cause of peace, it deems necessary for regional and global peace. Can the Afghan peace process be a middle ground for their conflicting motives in Afghanistan despite all perceived misgivings?

In the pretext of India's development contributions and stakes, International and regional countries endorse the Indian role in Afghan peace process. It looks no coincident that international community converges on India has a role in Afghanistan peace process. In fact, it is the realization of the fact by the International community that for

durable and longstanding peace in Afghanistan all stakeholders must be on board. Indian ambassador to Afghanistan Vinay Kumar met with Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib and reiterated that his country's firm support for Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace initiative (Nizamuddin Hameedi 2019). US special envoy for peace talks Zalmay Khalilzad also visited New Delhi and affirmed that India has a positive role to play in Afghan peace initiative (Sibbal 2019). Previously, Pakistan's stance over its participation in Afghan peace initiative was not entirely complimentary. But now, Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mahmood Qureshi was quoted as saying, 'some meetings have taken place among key stakeholders for establishment of peace in Afghanistan. India has also stakes in Afghanistan and its cooperation will also be needed' (*The Economic Times* 2018). Pakistan seems more concerned about the growing role of India in Afghanistan but its endorsement for India's role in Afghan peace process symbolizes the turning point from traditional strategic perception and good for Afghan peace. China's leadership also realizes this fact. China special envoy for Afghan peace Deng Xijun met with Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale and agreed on cooperation in Afghan peace initiative (*India TV* 2019).

China has always been more concerned about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. In the face of new emerging challenges and interests, China's efforts now seem more focused for durable Afghanistan peace. Considering peace as a positive solution for formidable global stability, China participated in peace initiatives in 2014 by endorsing the talks between the Taliban and Afghan government (Yongbiao 2018). China Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in a press conference in Islamabad, said that 'we[China] will support the Afghan government in realising reconciliation with various political factions including Taliban' (*RT News* 2015). By considering China as a close ally of Pakistan, Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani, after assuming office in 2014, went straight to China and requested help to resolve Afghan crisis before the start of the 'Fourth Ministerial Conference of Istanbul Process' on 31 Oct 2014. This request was well-received in Beijing and assured Ghani of assistance in Afghan Peace Process (Hiro 2015). The US welcomes Chinese involvement in the Afghan peace process. In fact, it was the US in 2009 which said to China to play an important role in the Afghan crisis. President Obama in 2009, while announcing the Af-Pak strategy, urged Afghanistan's neighbouring countries including China to play a role in the stability of Afghanistan (Obama 2009). China and the US are part of the most important organizations for a peace initiative. In 2016, China also formed Quadrilateral Cooperation Group with the USA, Pakistan and Afghanistan. China also hosted many Taliban delegates in efforts to end the crisis. In 2017, 'China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Foreign Minister Dialogue' mechanism was established to address the looming Afghan crisis. China's efforts have been mainly focused on bringing all concerned Afghan group to the Afghan peace talks.

Both China and India contribute positively to the Afghan peace process and their status is endorsed by the international community. Afghan government also looks China as peacemaker (Saif 2019). Afghan president Ashraf Ghani also praised India for its services for Afghan state and society (Srinivasan 2019). Officially, both sides endorse one another's role in Afghanistan peace process. But the recent trends create imbalance in policy and practice. India seems less visible on international forums for Afghan peace conducted by international community particularly China. But again, the question is that, what is dissension point that pushes them away from mutual efforts? Yasmeen Rashid Ali analysed the complicated peace initiative in the following words, 'the countries involved in the peace initiative have gone ahead with the peace process with Pakistan irrespective of India's reservations. With China, Iran, U.S, Russia and Pakistan opening direct Channel of communications with the Taliban, the government in Kabul, which is also a partner of India, is facing a policy crisis in the country' (Y. R. Ali 2019). However, it does not mean that India's role is neglected by international community in Afghanistan. So, peace initiative for Afghanistan has the potential to bring all the opposing parties on table. It was the realization of the fact on the part of Chinese government about India's role in Afghanistan that China's peace envoy contacted with India for consultation on Afghan peace process.

## Conclusion

Right from Afghanistan's reconstruction and development process, both India and China donated colossally. Gradually their economic, political and military contributions eclipsed those of other players. With rising power status, both countries seek a greater role in Afghanistan for consolidating their position in Asia's trade. In broader traditional geopolitical perspective, both seem deliberated as arch-rival in global affairs, particularly in South Asia.



There are also other explanations to understand their case in Afghanistan. Both being neighbours of Afghanistan with rising powers and influence seek not just stability and also a greater role. To unfold their burgeoning concerns for Afghanistan, the research mainly addresses a question that what is the possibility of China India relations in Afghanistan.

With swelling engagements in Afghanistan, China engagement indicates that it tries to maximize its influence in Afghanistan. The above discussion shows that China has its own reasons of spreading its influence in Afghanistan. India's status in Afghanistan is mainly contested by two factors: one, Pakistan and second, the Taliban. Besides, the current situation reflects that without the support of China, it would be challenging for India to establish a robust presence in post-US withdrawal Afghanistan (Melanie Hanif 2010). So, it could be concluded that there exists an element of traditional thinking between India and China in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, there seems an underlying necessity that also compels them to have a common approach towards Afghanistan mainly driven by shared economic and security interests. This notion was among the main themes of the Wuhan Summit in 2018. When both countries decided to initiate joint economic projects in Afghanistan, they sought to have a common ground in Afghanistan based on mutual interests and similar perceptions on regional security issues. As pointed out earlier that there are some challenging factors destabilising the equation of mutual cooperation such as China's close connections with Pakistan; Taliban factor; and regional competition.

In proportion to their economic, political and security contributions, China and India may emerge as the dominant players in post-war Afghanistan. Thus, there is a room for cooperation on some agendas such as joint economic ventures, common security threats and Afghan peace process in Afghanistan. China and India's bilateral relations must evolve peacefully in Afghanistan which are crucial to avoid misgivings about each other's intentions and interests. Their rivalry may bring catastrophic consequences not only for the security of Afghanistan but also for the whole region. By finding workable and common approaches towards Afghanistan, their mutual cooperation can assure peace and economic prosperity in the whole South Asia including Afghanistan.

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