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Indian Encroachment in Afghanistan: A New Imperialism in the Making

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Abstract:

India's hegemonic and imperialistic ambitions towards its neighbours are the reflection of Kautiliyan philosophy that regards neighbours as enemies and an enemy's immediate neighbour as a friend.[1] Therefore, taking advantage of the differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan over Durand line, India was able to establish cordial relations with Afghanistan in 1947. From Zahir Shah to King Dawood and Noor Muhammad Tarakai to Najeeb Ullah rule, India supported every one who ruled Kabul. However, Indian influence in Afghanistan was marginalized only in Taliban era when India was compelled to switch over to the opposing camp of Northern Alliance. Soon, India took advantage of the opportunity provided by the US operation against the Taliban government to re-establish and re-consolidate its influence in Afghanistan and in Central Asia. In this connection, Indian efforts have been to infiltrate all sectors of Afghanistan, in order to make them dependent on Indian support, thus making Afghanistan a launching pad for its double pincer envelopment against Pakistan. Peeping through the Afghan cauldron the paper attempts to conclude that how a new imperialism is in the making on our Western borders.

Geo-Strategic and geo-political landscape of the South Asia over the past sixty-one years has mostly remained turbulent mainly because of Indian hegemonic[2] designs towards its neighbors. India is one of the very rare countries, if not the only country, that has inimical relationship with all of its neighbors. Assuming itself a dominant power in this Indo-centric region where all states of South Asia are sharing physical borders with

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India, India, as policy objectives, has not only been strengthening itself militarily in order to assert her dominant position but also preventing outsiders from encouraging the regional powers that may challenge India's hegemonic ambitions. Strategic thinking of the Indian foreign policy revolved around the obsession that its politico-strategic boundary runs via Kandahar and Kabul. A glance over its policy moves, clearly points to its imperialistic mind-set whereby she seems anxious to dominate the entire region by imposing its will. Following the footprints of American Empire, it introduced Indira Doctrine[3], Rajeve Doctrine and Gujral Doctrine to keep all of its neighbours under influence of its hard and soft power and deprived them of any out side help. Under the self assumed responsibility of regional policeman, India with her coercive diplomacy has successfully brought almost all South Asian states such as, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka within ambit of its informal regional security system through formal treaties, agreements and accords. Probably Pakistan is the only country that has refused to be browbeaten. Rajiv Gandhi, in 1987, sent Indian troops to Sri Lanka to suppress Tamil freedom fighters, which his mother and he trained and armed earlier on. Though Bangladesh and Maldives are apparently out of Indian security system, but for all practical purposes, both of these states are covertly dove-tailed to Indian strategic plans. Amongst all the South Asian states, India has been the only country that has frequently used forces against its neighbours. Pakistan alone has been resolutely guarding its sovereignty and vehemently resisting Indian nefarious imperialistic designs. Since India never accepted open heartedly the creation of Pakistan therefore it has all along been busy in interfering and destabilizing this country. India combined all tools including sabotage, internal dissention, coercion and enflaming ethnic issues and discords of other states with Pakistan.

India could not feel satisfied even after the dismemberment of East Pakistan and stepped up its efforts in Afghanistan to make Pakistan worried about its Western borders as well. Indian hegemonic pursuits involve the outsiders and non-regional powers when needed even though she vehemently denies the same privileges to other states in the region. Indian doctrine of imperialism and hygmonism with respect to its weaker neighbors is in play till today. Not only should countries in South Asia seek military assistance from India first when they have a need but they should also get India's approval for conducting peace talks to settle their internal conflicts. However, Pakistan has to face multi-directional and multi dimensional intrigues/threats to its security as a cost of challenging the hegemonic tendencies of India. India's misguided pursuit of regional supremacy, desire for politico- military hegemony over Pakistan, its obsession for control over South Asia are the main causes that have motivated her to lay tentacles in Afghanistan against Pakistan. Indian support of the US invasion of Afghanistan was motivated by anti-Pakistan sentiments and were not meant for ending terrorism there, as was proclaimed in its public statements. Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru once remarked about Indian relations with Afghanistan:

> *'Ever since India's independence, we have grown closer to each other, for a variety of reasons. The long memory of our past was there, and the moment it was possible to renew them, we renewed them. And then came mutual interest, (our common hostility towards Pakistan) which is a powerful factor.'*

Indian Objectives in Afghanistan: Because of its geo-strategic location, Afghanistan has remained the focus of Indian regional policy. However, its geopolitical significance and its latent hostility towards Pakistan has overshadowed all other factors. India's economic interests in Afghanistan

are secondary to its strategic interests. Apart from the desire to restore Pakistan's two-front problem, some of the Indian objectives in Afghanistan are:

- Support Pakistan's Afghan adversaries with a view to counter-balancing Pakistan's help to Kashmiries and other insurgencies in India. India went all out to fuel Kabul's claims to represent all ethnic-Pashtuns and supported Afghanistan's rejection of the Durand Line, the colonial-era border that divides Pakistan from Afghanistan.
- Resurgence of Islamic independence movement and their successes have the potential to undermine the social fabric of India by providing cannon fodder to oppressed minorities particularly the Sikhs and the Kashmiri Muslims. Resurgent Taliban are seen as an immediate source that may infuse the spirit of freedom amongst the Sikhs, Kashmiries and other movements in India. This is the reason why India supports the so-called democratisation in Afghanistan and strengthens the Karazai rule in Afghanistan. This arrangement, they persume, could frustrate the Taliban movement (and by implication other freedom movements) and marginalize their role in Kabul affairs. Indian provision of technical assistance in education, and other so-called nation-building activities are part of Indo-US strategy of preventing the return of Taliban to power and isolating Pakistan in Afghanistan. Hence, Indian reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan are not aimed at social stabilization and providing assistance to the people. Instead, its a strategy for acquiring legitimacy for Karzai's government and wiping out the Taliban from the corridors of power.

- India realizes the fact that, being an immediate and strategically tied neighbours Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan will always surpass that of Indian. If both of the Muslim neighbours are allowed to work together, then there are possibilities that they may reach on agreed solutions of the problems like infiltration across porous borders, drug trafficking, Durand Line, Afghan refugees etc. India, does not want these neighbours to resolve their disputes amicably.
- From a geo-strategic and geo-economic point of view India takes control over Afghanistan as the threshold to Central Asian oil and gas pipelines to be constructed to markets in Pakistan, India and else where in the world. Indian solid positioning in Afghanistan politics would enable India to become a formidable part of Central Asian oil and gas distribution network thereby acquiring a strong foothold in the region and marginalizing Pakistan's unique position in this regard. India by virtue of its high publicity has succeeded in presenting herself as a counterweight to China and thus has increased its influence in the region. India's posture as counterweight to China compliments U.S. objectives of preventing Chinese or Russian influence over the newly independent Central Asian republics, helping these states develop alternative exit routes for their oil and gas other than through Russia or Iran. Resultantly in a bid to reinforce India's strategic relevance in the region, the United States has in turn encouraged Indian trade, investment, and assistance to the Central Asian states and Afghanistan. Afghanistan's entry into SAARC and signing of Indo-Afghan free trade area should be seen in this backdrop

- Indian presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia and its unconditional support to U.S. in its War on Terror has helped India in realization of her long drawn dream of replacing Pakistan as the America's strategic ally and sweeps-out Pakistani influence in the region. A cursory look over the post cold war events in general and post 9/11 in particular reveals that there is not only abstract cooperation rather there exists solid coordination between two countries with complimenting goals and congruence of strategies anchored not on principles but on commonality of interests. Indo-US commonalities of interests that helped in fomenting Indo-US strategic partnership symbolized by the Malabar joint naval exercises, agreement 123 on civilian nuclear cooperation, securing Indian interests in Afghanistan and other collaborations on range of regional and global issues, include:
    - Protecting their interests, primacy and security obligations by preventing key South Asian, Southeast Asian and Central Asian states from becoming strategically dependent on China. Maintaining and increasing of their military presence in these regions will preempt any such move from China that if materialized will serve their common strategic interests.
    - U.S. objectives also include the containment of anti-American regional powers, such as Iran and Syria, and limiting their access to WMD capabilities. This latter objective is shared by India, which also supports the U.S. goal of promoting pluralist democratic governments in the region. India by using American shoulders seeks

to strike a balance between maintaining its access to Israeli military technology and its older (though currently decreasing) commitment to Arab causes in the region.

- The United States and India seek to prevent the use of the ocean's transit routes for the movement of weapons of mass destruction and associated materials, in addition to protecting the littoral island states from internal and external threats and from exporting instability. Both countries maintain a strong naval presence in the region: the U.S. Navy maintains bases in Diego Garcia and the Persian Gulf, while the Indian Navy maintains a significant presence throughout the northern Indian Ocean. In addition, both have invested significant political, military and diplomatic capital on maintenance of cooperative security relationships with various littoral states as well as other key regional actors such as Japan and Singapore. The goals and strategies pursued by the two countries are thus clearly complementary.

India's Afghan Policy: An Overview

Afghanistan remained the focus of Indian regional policy because of its geo-strategic proximity to Pakistan, and having potential of becoming its rival from the West. Since Indian foreign policy was centered on maintaining very cordial relations with Afghanistan therefore, to enhance Indian influence it did architect "Friendship Treaty" in 1950 and signed various agreements and protocols to promote bilateral co-operation alienating Pakistan further. After the Soviet invasion in 1979 India doubled up its efforts to further strengthen its relations with Afghanistan

by co-operating in industrial, irrigation, and hydroelectric projects. The diplomatic table in Afghanistan was turned against India with the Soviet withdrawal and its disintegration 1991, Mujahideens control of Kabul and overthrow of Najibullah in April 1992. India tried to regain its dwindling influence in the Burhanuddin Rabbani government however that was short lived till the rise of Taliban and closed its embassy in September 1996.

History testifies that India and Pakistan had competing strategic agendas in Afghanistan. Pakistan visualizes Indian influence in Afghanistan as part of a threatening Indian double envelopment movement, and a source of fueling Pashtun separatism inside Pakistan. And Pakistan's friendly relations with Kabul can provide "strategic depth" to Pakistan. On the other hand, India perceives Afghanistan as an important geopolitical constraint on Pakistan, as well as the gateway to Central Asia. Indian friendly Afghanistan will not only deny most crucial strategic depth to Pakistan against Indian long range missiles and blitzkrieg/ pincer movements, rather would offer another front to dissipate and over-stretch Pakistan's defence resources to fight on two different fronts. During the cold war period, Indian hand was found involved behind each and every estrangement between both nations and during the post cold war America has joined India in this regard. Both India and USA are playing their game of divide and rule to full fill their Imperialistic designs. Both are looking to strip off Pakistan from its strategic assets including its nuclear deterrence capabilities. Both are working to control Afghanistan so as to command access to the Central Asian oil and gas reserves. Both are struggling to undermine Pakistan's territorial integrity, political stability and economic viability. Some of

the incidents reflective of Indo-US imperialistic designs unfolding in Afghanistan are:

- The Indian factor focuses Pakistan's perception of Afghanistan and its policies there. From independence until 1992, India supported whatever government was in power in Kabul. The Pashtunistan issue offered India the possibility of trapping Pakistan between two fronts in the event of a clash along the Durand Line and along the Indo-Pakistan border.
- Things changed after 1992 when the internal fighting led to a split between Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and all other parties. India then supported whoever was opposed to Pakistan.
- After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban and execution of former Afghan president Najibullah, in September 1996, New Delhi continued to support President Burhanuddin Rabbani. It was the first time in the history of its relations with Afghanistan when India found itself supporting an opposition group and not the Afghan government. India soon became a solid supporter of the Northern Alliance.
- India also exploited the anti-Taliban approach of Russia and Iran to forge closer relations with those countries and to develop its links with Central Asian States. As defined by Mr J. N. Dixit in his book, "*India, in co-operation with all like-minded countries, should resist the coercive propagation of any kind of religious, social, or ethnic extremism which can profoundly destabilize Afghanistan's Asian neighbours* … An early solution to the Afghanistan crisis is critical for realizing the enormous opportunities for energy and economic co-operation in the Eurasian region"

- As a prelude to regain its lost influence in Afghanistan and counter Pakistan's support to the Taliban government, India established links with the Northern Alliance - non-Pashtun groups opposing Taliban regime and controlling part of northern Afghanistan. During this period, India provided all kind of support to the Northern Alliance and few of the glimpses of this support included:
  - Provided high-altitude warfare equipment worth $ 10 million to Northern Alliance through its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).
  - Indian defence advisers provided technical advice to the Northern Alliance.
  - Established a hospital in Farkhor on the Afghan–Tajik border and Indian doctors provided medical assistance to the Alliance.
  - In the last seven years, India has promised $750 million in aid as reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan in the seven years since the Bonn conference, representing its second-biggest foreign aid commitment.[4]
  - Farkhor, India's only military base outside its territory is offering New Delhi's armed forces unprecedented strategic reach. Afghanistan's membership of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement will strengthen its trade ties with India, which is now the largest regional donor to that country's reconstruction programme. At the same time, India has succeeded in consolidating its presence. Farkhor, India's only military base outside its territory is thought to have been in a state of full operational

readiness since last year, offering New Delhi's armed forces unprecedented strategic reach. Afghanistan's membership of the South Asia Free Trade Agreement will strengthen its trade ties with India, which is now the largest regional donor to that country's reconstruction program.

- In a move to relieve Afghanistan of its dependence on Pakistan, India is focusing on rebuilding of transport and communication infrastructure that include: Kandahar-Iran highway, airports and power plants, and provides support to the health and education sectors. Afghan civil servants, diplomats, and police officials are being trained by India.
- India increasing the number of its military personnel in Afghanistan on the pretext of providing security to the Border Roads Organization, indicating that the strength of Indian troops had reached almost a company size. Some of the U.S. officials have stated that they expect India to play its new role in Afghanistan.
- India's announced US$450 million aid package on the eve of Afghan President Hamid Karzai's visit to New Delhi in August 2008, in addition to the US$ 750 million already pledged placing India amongst the top five donor countries.

Post 9/11 American game plans in Afghanistan brought pro-Indian forces in Kabul with unparalleled accumulation of power in the hands of Northern Alliance. The opening of Indian consulates in Afghanistan, in particular, became a

bone of contention between the two countries. These Indian consulates are having less to do with humanitarian aid and more to do with India's top-secret intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing.[5] Pakistan has accused India consulates for setting up and monitoring networks of terrorist training camps located inside Afghanistan and operating in Balochistan and NWFP.[6] Reportedly, Indian consulates in Southern Afghanistan have been supplying money as well as arms and ammunition to the militants that has added to the trouble and violence in the tribal belt.[7]



India's return to the Afghan scene was bound to worry Pakistan. Pakistan's government officially expressed its "deep" concerns

about the Indian government's activities along the Pakistan-Afghan border.[8] Pakistan's allegations about India ranged from charges of printing false Pakistani currency to carrying out acts of sabotage and terrorism on Pakistani territory. The most worrisome acquisition came from the Balochistan Chief Minister that the Indian secret services were maintaining forty terrorist camps all over Baloch territory.[9]

Foregoing in view, it has become evident that Indo US nexus revolves around their common desire for political and military hegemony, obsessive drive for control of oil and expansion of military bases around the region. In other words, both are imperialistic in their nature having the sole aim; attainment of economic aggrandizement. There is no reason to doubt that the US invasion of Afghanistan, in the wake of 9/11, was motivated by self-interest and not to end terrorism there, as was its stated objective. There is convincing evidence that the oil reserves in the Caspian Sea area were an important motivational factor for the US and India to gain control of Afghanistan on one hand and envelop Pakistan- the only nuclear power of the Muslim World on the other. It is reasonable to assume that if prevailing Indo- US imperialistic designs are allowed to continue then the last thing that Pakistan would like to see is an Indian presence on both of its eastern and western borders. The flow of massive aid under the guise of humanitarian relief, building of infrastructure, training of public sector human resources, are the indicators of the future prospects for large scale economico, political and military cooperation aiming at marginalizing Pakistan's future role in Afghanistan. The resultant vulnerability

> of Pakistan's Western border is becoming most serious security concern that terrifies Pakistan's security establishment, which is already short of the resources to meet even any conventional threat emanating from the East. Signing of Indo-Afghan preferential trade agreement and Indian generosity in waiving off tariff & other duties on certain types of dry fruits and precious stones from Afghanistan and duty free access to certain Indian items should be seen a substantial step of developing interdependence on private and public sectors.

In given geo- political and security environment Pakistan can't afford to allow any other regional or global player, in particular India, to gain a preponderance of influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's interest is vital at a time when India's growing political, military, and economic ties with both Afghanistan and the United States lead many Pakistanis to believe their country is being marginalized. The annihilation of the Taliban after September 11, 2001, radically shifted the balance of power in Afghanistan in India's favour. Seeing political leadership of its own choice in Kabul, Indian consulates sprouted across Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif, besides the embassy in Kabul, India is in a position to pursue its own interests in Afghanistan. Instead of accommodating the Pakistan's concerns over the anti-Pakistan clandestine activities of Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad, India and the Karzai government are accusing Pakistan of harbouring terrorists and sponsoring cross-border infiltration to India and Afghanistan. The situation has come to the point that even Karazai is talking of hot pursuit operations in Pakistani territories. NATO/American Commandos have started conducting operation inside their one of the closest non NATO allies of war against Terror. Only in the months of

October and November 2008 there have been more than 17 predators attacks in FATA[10] and one on 17th of November in Bannu- a settled area of falling directly under the perview of Pakistan's territorial limits.[11] Americans expression of 'do more syndrome' and NATO / ISAF forces' persistent allegations that Taliban's insurgency is being fed and controlled from the sanctuaries inside the Pakistan's tribal areas seems to be a prelude to bring war from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Indian factor is also playing its role in aggravating the bitterness of bilateral relations and spoiling the environment of trust with a view to pursuing its own nefarious designs. If the state of affairs is allowed to move on similar direction then there are all the chances that relations between Kabul and Islamabad may reach to a point of no return.

Building up of such an anti-Pakistan scenario on Afghanistan's soil is more than alarming. It carries a very loud and clear challenge for Pakistan's security and Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistan can't afford to have another India on its western border. Nor it can allow a War against Terror (being fought in Afghanistan) to spread and spill over to Pakistan. In such deteriorating environment, therefore, Pakistan had to remain prepared for new situations on the Afghan side and be able to adapt accordingly. And the one long term solution rests on the defusing of ongoing cold war, establishing mutual trust and relations *based on mutual interests and brotherly sincerity*. There has to be a realization that any adversity faced by one could affect the other. It is thus, in the interest of both countries to have friendly and cordial relations marked with trust, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other so as to promote peace, political stability, economic prosperity and socio-ethnic unity and cohesion in the region. If Afghanistan is passing through a phase of uncertainty because of decades of violence and civil war,

Pakistan is also facing a phase of instability because of extremism, militancy, political wrangling, socio-ethnic polarization, and range of other issues from bad governance, water and electricity crises to sectarian and ethnic discords. Therefore, normalization of Pak- Afghan relations is the only recipe to bring peace and stability in the two countries. Pakistan should be content with having an independent, integrated and friendly western neighbor. It could further be argued that, despite the present cold relationship between the two countries, other compulsions, especially those caused by economic and security issues are likely to draw them into a long-term, friendly relationship.

Conclusion

Pakistan that was once looking for a friendly Afghanistan with secure border to gain strategic depth in its confrontation with India is founding itself in a new kind of cauldron in Afghanistan. Pakistan being neighbouring country with closer cultural ties to Afghanistan vis-a-vis India has better leverage, and Pakistan could make it harder for India to get access to Afghanistan, since it is a land-locked country. Indian ingress to Central Asia is adding a new dimension to the concept of strategic depth that Pakistan was once looking for in its West. Pakistan can't afford to be further late in taking benefit of commonality of socio-cultural legacy, economic links and historical footprints among Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Islamabad must do all its best by tactfully offsetting Indian intrigues. Pakistan can cultivate a friendly and stable Afghanistan by reinvesting its people to people contacts with people of Afghanistan.

Pakistan policy response to Indo-US overtures in ethnically diversified Afghanistan should be Pashtun centered so as to gain widest possible social reach and acceptability on one hand and defuse

Pashtunistan stunt on the other. Right kind of Pashtun rule in Afghanistan should become an instrument of Pakistani influence, rather than a security threat. India's economic interests in Afghanistan are secondary to its strategic interests of encircling Pakistan. Apart from the desire to restore Pakistan's two-front problem, India, also wants to ensure that Taleban's return to Kabul is also blocked forever. However, Pakistan, regardless of ideology, should support only Islamic rather than nationalist groups in Afghanistan, as the former opposed nationalist claims like Pashtunistan issue or Durand Line against a fellow Muslim state. To forestall Indo-US nexus in Afghanistan, Pakistan should aggressively pursue to make US realize its strategic importance. It is not understood that why Islamabad is shy of asking publicly and bluntly from America about the following:

- Why U.S. supports warlords and officials in the Karzai government who are too close to New Delhi and hostile towards Pakistan.
- Why America is silent to Indian blockade of Pakistani water, flowing from Indian-controlled areas?
- Why Adm. Mike Mullen is contemplating invitation to Indian Army to patrol Pakistan Afghanistan border on the west.
- Why America is opposing Pakistan's peace initiative to Pakistan's own tribal areas whereas, America herself has the right to hold peace talks with Mullah Umer through Saudi Arabia or others.
- Why the CIA and not the U.S. military is manning American drones that are attacking Pakistan? Do they have the plan to take civil war to Islamabad? Should we read these

manifestations as "friendly" jestures of the United States towards a non-NATO ally?

End Notes:

[1] L. N. Rangarajan (ed.), *Kautilya: The Arthaashastra"* New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1992

[2] The word hegemony implies dominance by one country over the other regional countries. It is indeed not surprising to learn that the powerful countries frequently demonstrate such tendencies to impose their own policy pursuits upon the other regional countries. However one must also acknowledge that extending advice does not necessarily imply imposition or dominance. But the advice of a powerful neighbor always reflect hegemonic tendencies especially if it is an advice to prevent or obstruct another country's legitimate trade with the target state.

See: Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, "Indian hegemonic tendencies, Pakistan OBSERVER, Tue, Jun, 12, 2007. Available at: http://ipripak.org/articles/newspapers/hegemonic.shtml. (26.10.2008)

[3] According to Indira Doctrine (an Indian version of Monroe Doctrine) India will neither intervene in the domestic affairs of any state in the region unless requested to do so nor tolerate such intervention by an outsider power; if external assistance is needed to meet internal crisis, states should first look within the region for help. In other words any South Asian country needing military assistance should first approach India and only if it refuses should that country seek help elsewhere.

[4] "India and Pakistan in Afghanistan: Hostile Sports" South Asia Monitor, , Center for Strategic and International Studies, Number 1117, April 3, 2008

[5] Scott Baldauf, "India-Pakistan Rivalry Reaches into Afghanistan," Christian Science Monitor, September 12, 2003. Available at:<www.csmonitor.com/2003/0912/p07s01-wosc.html>.

[6] Baldauf, "India-Pakistan Rivalry Reaches into Afghanistan", opcit.

[7] Shaiq Hussain, "Pakistan to Ask India to Rein in Afghan Consulates," Nation, March 18, 2006,
See: <www.nation.com.pk/daily/mar-2006/18/index11.php>.

[8] Hindu,India, July 28, 2003.

[9] Jam Muhammad Yusuf, Balochistan CM Statement. See : Herald (Karachi, Pakistan), September 2004.

[10] "Focus with Faiza", ARY One World, 18th November 2008.

[11] The Dawn, Islamabad, 19th November 2008