
**The India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership:
Geopolitical Implications and Regional Security Dynamics in South Asia (2001-2023)**

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ABSTRACT

The present studies will explore the transformation of the strategic partnership between India and Afghanistan from 2001 to 2025 and what this means for security in South Asia region. The study uses qualitative research approach. It attempts to understand the impact of India's involvement on the geopolitical environment of the region, using policy documents and data on development assistance. It focuses on India's investment of three billion dollars in Afghanistan's infrastructure, education and security sectors. Key points show that India's strategy had four goals: to provide reconstruction aid to improve regional connectivity to expand its strategic depth and to balance influence with other regional powers. The study finds that while India played a role in boosting Afghanistan's development it also made the region's security situation more complicated. The balance of power in South Asia has shifted in ways that were not expected. This partnership model has been tested heavily by the Taliban's return to power in 2021. India now needs to rethink its strategy. This discussion helps explain some of the dynamics in South Asia and provides lessons on how lasting cooperation among countries, in the region can be built.

Key Words: India-Afghanistan relations, South Asian security, strategic partnership, regional geopolitics, development diplomacy.

Introduction

The geopolitical situation in South Asia had changed dramatically soon after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in USA. The India-Afghanistan strategic relationship has become one of the most important variables in regional security. The strategic position between South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East has generally placed Afghanistan at the Centre of great power competition. This phenomenon is sometimes described by scholars as the Great Game (Hopkirk, 1992). Nowadays, it has changed and become regional concerns as India becoming a significant stakeholder in Afghanistan's political and economic progress.

Even though the India-Afghanistan relationship has a history and cultural context dating back thousands of years, The relationship between India and Afghanistan has also a long history after the independence of India. A development package of more than \$3 billion in terms of aid for the establishment of comprehensive diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation platforms. (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2021).

This bilateral alliance has initiated an intellectual and policy debate, particularly over its implications for regional stability as well as the broader South Asian security landscape. On the one hand, the proponents believed that the involvement of India in Afghanistan helps the country develop and gain connectivity with the rest of the world. Some critics considered that it brings in more tension and raises security dilemmas in Pakistan (Fair, 2010; Pant, 2010).

The research problem behind this study: First, what are the main motives and goals of the strategic involvement of India in Afghanistan since 2001? Second, what has been the development of this partnership through the various stages in the development of Afghanistan's politics? Third, what are the security implications of the India-Afghanistan strategic partnership at the regional level? Finally, yet importantly, what has been the impact of the resurgence of the Taliban in 2021 on this relationship and overall regional dynamics?

This paper uses a theoretical model that integrates neorealist explanations of regional security complexes with constructivist explanations of identity formation and the culture of strategy. As explained by Buzan and Waever (2003), the neorealist school of thought emphasizes security interdependence and the balancing of power in regional systems. The constructivist approach examines how historical accounts, cultural affiliations, and identities shape strategic alliances (Wendt, 1999).

The methodology of research refers to the research path, activity, and sequence. The reality of India-Afghanistan ties and its implications for Pakistan point to a range of interconnected and occasionally overlapping issues and concerns. A qualitative approach will be adopted due to the subjective and immeasurable nature of the subject. To critically analyze the topic's relevance, most of the research will be conducted through books, documents, scientific papers, and printed and electronic journals, and will thus comprise text interpretation or content analysis.

This study is critical because it provides an in-depth analysis of a crucial regional relationship between India and Afghanistan during a time of dramatic geopolitical change. Although, the Afghanistan experiencing different challenges under Taliban rule and the region facing emerging security challenges for the neighbors. So, this Study will provide a lens to the policymakers, scholars, and stakeholders in the region to understand the relationship and prospects of the India-Afghanistan partnership.

Literature Review

The literature on this topic falls into the following thematic sectors such as historical bases, strategic motivation, development cooperation, security benefits, and regional reactions.

Historical commentaries emphasized the deep cultural and civilizational links between India and Afghanistan which be traced back to ancient trade routes and common Buddhist roots (Sidky, 2007). Both Nojumi (2002) and Barfield (2010) have discussed all development as a great move by the India Government for the sake of reviving cooperation. But, as Rubin (2002) informs that one should not underestimate the historical connections and states that the present-day geopolitical calculations are the main driving force of the existing relationships in the world.

The literature identifies several aspects that contribute to engagement in India from a strategic point of view. According to Pant (2010), India's Afghan policy is directed to four main objectives: to counter Pakistani influence, secure energy transit routes, access Central Asian markets, and enhance the region's prestige. Similarly, Fair (2010) quotes the need of India to build strategic depth and to ensure that Afghanistan is not a place of anti-Indian activity. In contrast, scholars such as Adeney and Lall (2005) are of the opinion that humanitarian interests and genuine developmental goals drive Indian participation.

The literature on development cooperation has extensively reported on infrastructure projects, educational projects and capacity-building projects in India. Krishnan (2009) provides a detailed discussion of large projects, including the Zaranj-Delaram highway, Salma Dam, and the construction of parliamentary buildings. Harshe and Tripathi (2014) discuss the concept of soft power in India, utilising cultural diplomacy, media collaboration, and education. However, there are critics such as Ahmed (2013) who doubt the sustainability and efficiency of India's development model in Afghanistan within its complex security environment.

Security implications are probably the most controversial field of scholarship. According to Pakistani scholars such as Haqqani (2005) and Ahmad (2011), the presence of India in Afghanistan is a strategic encirclement strategy and poses a threat to the stability of the region. Indian thinkers, such as Ganguly (2016) and Kapur (2009), argue that India is actively involved in development and helps maintain peace in the region. Western analysts, such as Tellis (2010) and Cohen (2013), who acknowledge Pakistan's legitimate security concerns, mainly support the constructive role of India.

The literature on regional responses focuses on the reaction of other stakeholders towards India-Afghanistan cooperation. Chinese scholars, such as Zhao (2016), examine Beijing's concerns about India's influence in areas adjacent to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Iranian attitudes, as recorded by Ehteshami and Zweiri (2008), reveal a mix of cooperation and competition with India in influencing Afghanistan. As seen in Russian analyses, such as Blank (2012), Moscow calculates extensively about the presence of India in its old area of influence.

More recent scholars have begun to consider the implications of the 2021 Taliban's return to power. Kugelman (2021) and Maizland (2021) note that early discussions have indicated that India-Afghanistan relations will face a substantial amount of difficulty because the Taliban has historically been tied to Pakistan and will be hostile to Indian presence. According to Panda (2022), however, the economic interests might prevail over the ideological ones and allow future cooperation.

The literature gaps include a lack of empirical investigation into the effectiveness of development projects, a lack of focus on the role of Afghan agency in defining the relationship, and a lack of attention to sub-regional differences in cooperation patterns. Additionally, the bulk of scholarship predates the Taliban's comeback, and there is a need to analyse the new dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

This work employs a multi-theoretical framework that integrates neorealist security complex theory with a constructivist explanation of identity formation and strategic culture. The framework will enable a thorough examination of both material and ideational conditioning in the formation of the India-Afghanistan strategic partnership and its regional implications.

The primary analytical framework is the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), developed by Buzan and Waever (2003). According to RSCT, regional security complexes refer to clusters of units whose key processes of securitization, de-securitization or both have become so interwoven that neither can be logically examined nor solved in isolation of the other (Buzan and Waever, 2003). South Asia is a unique security complex with high security interdependence among India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other players in the region.

In this context, the India-Afghanistan relationship is an effort to alter the power balance in the region through an alignment policy. India's involvement plays several security roles: to provide a deeper strategic layer, alternative centers of power to counter Pakistan's role, and to establish forward bases to collect intelligence and exert power. This is consistent with neorealist expectations that states will resort to balancing behavior under a security threat or power alteration (Waltz, 1979).

However, neorealist analysis alone is insufficient to explain the complexity of the India-Afghanistan relationship. Constructivist theory, as formulated by Wendt (1999), Fennimore, and Sikkink (1998), provides the much-needed information on the role of shared identities, historical narratives, and cultural affinities in creating strategic alliances. The India-Afghanistan friendship is based on numerous narratives of shared democratic principles, civilizational linkages, and respect for diverse cultures.

Strategic culture theory, developed by Grey (1999) and Johnston (1995), can be used to explain the enduring trends in India's strategic behavior. India has adopted a broader strategic cultural bias of non-alignment, multilateralism, and development-based interaction towards Afghanistan. This cultural tendency toward strategic autonomy shapes the way India organizes its relationships with Afghanistan, aiming not to dominate them militarily but to gain as much influence as possible as an economic and diplomatic partner.

The concept of strategic partnerships requires theoretical analysis. According to Wilkins (2008), strategic partnerships are defined as a formal relationship between two countries that

allows them to develop a framework of enhanced cooperation across various issues, supported by a shared perception of convergent interests, and are distinguished by the lack of mutual defence commitments of the type that alliances entail. This definition perfectly reflects the nature of the India-Afghanistan relationship: institutionalized structures, multi-sector cooperation, shared interests, yet minimal security assurances.

A combination of these theoretical lenses suggests that the India-Afghanistan association serves as a security-balancing factor (neorealist), an identity-based alignment (constructivist), and an expression of strategic culture (cultural). This multi-dimensional nature not only makes the relationship resilient but also makes it a highly controversial issue among regional stakeholders.

History and Development.

The modern India-Afghanistan strategic relationship cannot be interpreted in isolation from its historical roots and the pattern of its development. The relationship has undergone numerous stages, including ancient civilizational linkages, colonial disruptions, and post-independence political alliances, as well as modern strategic partnerships.

The Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan have pre-colonial trade, cultural, and political ties that date back to more than 2,000 years. The Kushan Empire (30-375 CE) and the later Buddhist kingdoms established long-lasting cultural connections, as reflected in each archaeological site, such as Bamiyan and Gandhara (Harmatta, 1994). The Ghaznavid and Mughal medieval Islamic dynasties further assimilated the Afghanistan regions into Indian politics, establishing similar administrative and elite traditions and networks.

The colonial regime (1839-1947) transformed the region's dynamics essentially due to British imperial policies that aimed to stabilize Indian frontiers against Russian expansion. The Anglo-Afghan Wars of 1839-1842, 1878-1880, and 1919 formed Afghanistan as a buffer state and established artificial boundaries, which remain in place to this day. The Durand Line settlement of 1893 between British India and Afghanistan left permanent territorial issues, especially between Pashtun communities who found themselves on either side of the demarcation (Barfield, 2010).

During the post-independence period (1947-1979), Afghanistan was the first to protest against Pakistan's UN membership and developed friendly ties with India. The India-Afghanistan Friendship Treaty of 1950 established formal structures of cooperation; however, due to a lack

of economic integration and regional discord, further collaboration between the two nations did not proceed. The foreign policy of non-alignment adopted by Afghanistan during the Cold War is similar to that of India, which established ideological similarities among countries despite geographical boundaries (Nojumi, 2002).

The era of Soviet invasion (1979-1989) was a turning point in the regional relations. The acceptance of the Soviet-placed regime in Kabul by India was the opposite of the encouragement of the mujahedeen resistance movements by Pakistan, with the help of the United States and Saudi Arabia. This era created a permanent suspicion between Pakistan and Afghanistan and placed India as a possible alternative to the Afghan governments (Rubin, 2002).

The Taliban regime and civil war (1989-2001) curtailed the opportunities of Indian activity in Afghanistan. The Taliban had been closely linked with Pakistan and harboring anti-Indian terrorist groups posed security risks to India. During this time, India supported the Northern Alliance, which established future collaboration with the post-2001 allies by offering military assistance, intelligence information, and diplomatic aid to anti-Taliban groups (Rashid, 2000).

The transformation after 9/11 is the most critical stage of the relationship between India and Afghanistan. The collapse of the Taliban regime, combined with the enormous reconstruction demands in Afghanistan and the increasing economic potential of India, led to unparalleled prospects of Indian engagement. The Bonn Agreement (2001) provided guidelines for international aid, which India strongly followed and invested heavily in Afghanistan's development.

The developments of the post 2001 period were characterized by three separate sub-phases: Initial Engagement (2001-2005) with establishing a diplomatic presence and initiating significant infrastructure projects; Strategic Partnership Development (2005-2014) with formalization of cooperation structures and substantial expansion of assistance programs; and Transition Challenges (2014-2021) with adapting to reduced international presence and Taliban growing influence.

The 2021 Taliban takeover can be viewed as a potential watershed, after which the current patterns of cooperation may be disrupted, necessitating a strategic recalibration. Experience suggests that practical interests may ultimately prevail over ideological differences, although considerable challenges lie ahead for long-term collaboration under Taliban rule.

Strategic Indian Intervention in Afghanistan.

The Indian involvement in Afghanistan since 2001 can be described as one of the most holistic developmental partnerships in modern international relations. This activity encompasses infrastructure development, economic cooperation, security assistance, and diplomatic efforts, totaling more than \$ 3 billion in commitments and making India the fifth-largest donor to Afghanistan (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2021).

Projects of infrastructure development.

The foundation of India's strategy of engagement in Afghanistan lies in the development of infrastructure. The flagship project, the Zaranj-Delaram highway, exemplifies India's policy of connectivity-based diplomacy. This road, completed in 2009 for \$150 million, links Nimroz province in Afghanistan to the Chabahar port in Iran, providing Afghanistan with an alternative trade route that bypasses Pakistan (Krishnan, 2009).

The Salma Dam in Herat province is the most significant one-time venture by India in Afghanistan. The 42MW hydro plant, installed in 2016 for \$290M, demonstrates India's ability to operate in challenging conditions and meet the energy-starved needs of Afghanistan. There were serious security issues in the project, and Taliban attacks caused several casualties among the Indian and Afghan employees (Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, 2017).

Another area of concern that has come to the fore is power transmission infrastructure. The development of the 220kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul by India, worth \$140 million, significantly contributed to the electricity supply to the capital region of Afghanistan. Other plans to generate power include the reconstruction of Nughlu and Mahipar hydropower stations, which would add approximately 100 megawatts to Afghanistan's overall generation capacity (Da Afghanistan Bank, 2020).

Infrastructure transportation goes beyond highways to railway connectivity projects. Another long-term vision of regional integration is evident in India's presence in the Chabahar-Zahedan railway extension, which will grant it access to Afghan territory. Although international sanctions on Iran have hindered significant growth, preliminary deals have established structures through which future development will be undertaken (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2019).

Educational and Capacity Building Activities.

In Afghanistan, educational cooperation has become a key pillar of India's soft power policy. The scholarship program has established an extensive network of alumni among Indian-educated Afghan professionals across the government, business, and civil society sectors, thanks to its scholarship offerings of more than 1,000 Afghan students annually in Indian universities (Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2021).

The Parliament building in Afghanistan, which was inaugurated in 2015 and cost \$90 million to construct, serves both practical and symbolic purposes. In addition to modern facilities for holding its legislative proceedings, the project reflects India's interest in stabilizing Afghanistan through democratic institutions and government building (Embassy of India, Kabul, 2015).

Capacity-building programs cover various sectors, including agriculture, information technology, healthcare, and public administration. In 2011, the India-Afghanistan Foundation was founded, which organizes cultural and educational exchanges, finances conferences, seminars, and research projects. More than 4,000 Afghan officials have been trained in Indian institutions as part of the technical assistance programs, which have been in operation since 2002 (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2020).

Medical cooperation involves the opening of health clinics, supplying medical equipment, and offering medical training to Afghan healthcare workers. The Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul has a 400-bed capacity and serves as a specialized pediatric center, in addition to being a training center for medically trained Afghan staff (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, India, 2018).

Economic Cooperation and Trade Relations.

India has become one of Afghanistan's largest trading partners, as bilateral trade between the two countries has increased significantly, rising to more than \$ 1.5 billion in 2019, compared to \$ 180 million in 2003. However, geographical factors and security issues have hindered the growth of trade, with most commerce being directed through Pakistani soil or the alternative route of Chabahar (Export-Import Bank of India, 2020).

The extractive industries of Afghanistan are a strategic resource security priority for India. Steele Authority of India Limited (SAIL)- led Indian firms gained rights to develop the Hajigak iron ore deposits in Bamiyan province, which are estimated to contain 1.8 billion tons of high-grade iron ore. Although the project has been postponed due to security reasons, it represents

a future cooperation worth several billion dollars (Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Afghanistan, 2019).

Technology transfer, seed development, and betterment of irrigation systems fall within the field of Agricultural cooperation. Cooperation between India and Afghanistan Agricultural University has led to research collaboration and faculty exchange. At the same time, micro-project financing has been provided to support rural development programs in several provinces (Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 2020).

Security Cooperation and Strategic Partnerships

The relationship between India and Afghanistan in terms of security has developed cautiously within the international system to prevent tensions within the region. In 2011, a Strategic Partnership Agreement formalized collaboration in fields such as counterterrorism, the sharing of intelligence, and the development of capacity to train Afghan security forces. Nevertheless, India has not directly participated in the military or transferred weapons, but has only provided support in terms of training and non-lethal equipment (Strategic Partnership Agreement, 2011).

Afghan security personnel have also undergone training programs at Indian military academies, police training institutions, and specialized training institutions. Since 2002, over 3,000 Afghan military and police officers have been trained in India, establishing institutional connections and professional relationships that have been found to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation (Ministry of Defence, India, 2019).

Intelligence cooperation is primarily focused on counterterrorism and regional security threats. Although the information is kept secret, official declarations of the two states suggest frequent information exchange in the context of terrorist cells, transnational flows, and local security trends (National Security Council Secretariat, India, 2020).

Implications and Security Dynamics in the Region.

The strategic alliance between India and Afghanistan has produced notable spillovers across the South Asian regional security complex, changing the balance of power calculations and generating novel forms of tension and cooperation. These implications are not limited to bilateral relations but also extend to multilateral regional processes, competition between great powers, and the transformation of security structures.

Resolution on Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations.

The reaction of Pakistan to India-Afghanistan cooperation can be considered rooted in historical security anxieties regarding strategic encirclement and the deterioration of control over a historically aligned neighbor. Pakistani observers always present the Indian presence in Afghanistan as a threat to their existence, referring to the creation of several Indian consulates along the Pakistani border and support of anti-Pakistan forces (Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2020).

The Durand Line dispute has taken a back seat in this area as Afghan officials raise more concerns regarding the legitimacy of the boundary in forums where India offers diplomatic backing. The Pakistani fear of Indian consulates in Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif can be explained by the fact that they are located on the Pakistani territory and may collect intelligence (Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, 2019).

One highly controversial subject has been the issue of water security, with Pakistani analysts arguing that dam projects financed by India in Afghanistan could affect downstream water flows into Pakistan. These tensions are evident in the Salma Dam controversy, as Pakistan has consistently opposed the project, despite Afghanistan's sovereign right to utilize its water resources (Indus River System Authority, 2018).

There are Pakistani voices, however, that recommend realistic interaction with Indian developmental endeavors in Afghanistan, as they believe that, in the long run, regional well-being will ultimately benefit all parties concerned. The Pakistan-Afghanistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA) indicates that there are possibilities for finding cooperative solutions to regional connectivity, even in times of greater tensions (Ministry of Commerce, Pakistan, 2020).

Dynamics of Great Power Competition.

The India-Afghanistan association overlaps with the broader Great Power rivalry in the region, as well as with the specific rivalries between the United States, China, and Russia. There has been a broad American policy of encouraging Indian participation in Afghanistan as a tool for stabilization and development, and of perceiving India as an effective burden-sharing ally in rebuilding Afghanistan (U.S. Department of State, 2020).

The Chinese views on Indian actions in Afghanistan are based on complex calculations related to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), regional stability, and access to resources.

Although Beijing officially advocates for the nation to rebuild Afghanistan, Chinese commentaries are concerned about the presence of Indian intelligence along the CPEC corridors and the security implications of this activity (China Institute of International Studies, 2019).

Attitudes of Russians towards Indian interaction have been changing, from initially being pessimistic to being cautious about engagement, as they have realized that they share a common ground in avoiding Afghanistan from becoming a haven for extremist activities. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves as a multilateral platform for discussing regional security issues, such as the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Russian International Affairs Council, 2020).

Iranian Indian cooperation on matters concerning Afghanistan is both convergent in terms of interests and competitive in nature. The Chabahar port development is an example of successful trilateral cooperation, whereas competition for influence in the western part of Afghanistan can sometimes be a source of tension. The main reason Iran backs the involvement of India in Afghanistan is that they are concerned about the Taliban revival, along with Sunni extremism (Institute for Political and International Studies, 2019).

Implications on Regional Security Architecture.

The India-Afghanistan alliance has contributed to altering the regional security landscape, affecting current institutions and giving rise to new institutional formations. India's observer status in the SCO reflects, in part, its growing awareness of its expanding role in the region, including Afghanistan (Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat, 2018).

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process is a multilateral mechanism through which India plays a central role in debates on Afghanistan's security and development. The fact that India leads the Commerce and Trade confidence-building measure indicates its determination to utilize regional economic integration strategies as a solution to security dilemmas (Heart of Asia Secretariat, 2020).

The dynamics of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been hindered due to India-Pakistan friction over Afghanistan and disagreements on the issues of counterterrorism cooperation and transit arrangements. To the extent that the Afghan presidency at SAARC from 2014 to 2016 corresponded to increased India-Afghanistan

collaboration, it raised Pakistani anxieties about organizational partisanship (SAARC Secretariat, 2017).

Alternative methods of coordinating the region that do not rely on the old multilateral institutions include emerging minilateral arrangements, such as the India-Afghanistan-Iran trilateral cooperation framework. Such arrangements could be a precursor to more practical issue-based cooperation arrangements of South Asian regional security governance (Ministry of External Affairs, India, 2021).

Trade Corridors and Economic Dimensions.

Economic aspects of the India-Afghanistan strategic partnership include trade facilitation, investment promotion, and regional connectivity programmes aimed at integrating Afghanistan into the wider South Asian and Central Asian economies. These endeavors denote both short-term development aims and long-term strategic ambitions to exert influence and access resources in the region.

Chabahar Port and Alternative Trade Routes.

The construction of Chabahar Port in Iran forms the foundation of India's policy to provide Afghanistan with a solid trade route, independent of Pakistani soil. In 2016, the trilateral India-Iran-Afghanistan accord established structures to develop Chabahar as the primary maritime access point to Afghanistan, thereby bypassing the conventional route that passes through Karachi (Chabahar Port Authority, 2020).

The \$ 85 million investment made by India in the first phase of Chabahar has led to the development of a handling capacity of 8.5 million tons per year, and it is planned to expand to 82 million tons by 2030. The volume of Afghan trade via Chabahar increased to more than 200,000 tons per year in 2020 and currently accounts for approximately 15% of Afghanistan's total trade (Iran Ports and Maritime Organization, 2021).

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) would provide Afghanistan with access to European and Russian markets through Iranian airspace, linking Chabahar to Central Asian markets. Although political issues have hindered growth, pilot shipments have been successful, indicating that it is technically feasible and cost-effective compared to conventional routes (Export-Import Bank of India, 2020).

The comparative analysis shows that the Chabahar directions result in transport costs that are about 30 per cent lower than the Dubai options, and significantly more reliable than transit options in Pakistan. Nevertheless, capacity growth and efficiency increase remain limited by infrastructure constraints and regulations (Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, 2020).

Mining Sector Cooperation

Another area of India-Afghanistan economic cooperation is the mineral wealth of Afghanistan, estimated to be more than one trillion dollars by the U.S. Geological Survey. Indian firms have secured exploration and development rights for several mineral deposits, including iron ore at Hajigak, copper at Aynak (in consortium), and rare earth elements at various sites (Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, Afghanistan, 2019).

The Hajigak iron ore project, awarded to an Indian consortium led by SAIL in 2011, covers three of the four available blocks, estimated to contain 1.8 billion tons of iron ore. Security issues have slowed down any development, but initial agreements provide a framework for future production capacity of 6 million tons per year, which could potentially transform both Afghan export revenue and supply security in the Indian steel industry (Steel Authority of India Limited, 2020).

The search for rare earth minerals has become more strategic in the face of global supply chain vulnerabilities and increasing dependence on technology. Indian geological surveys have found large deposits of lithium, beryllium, and cesium resources in Afghan territory, which can be utilized in the electronics, defense, and renewable energy industries (Geological Survey of India, 2021).

The mining sector is working together not only in extraction but also in capacity building, technology transfer and environmental protection. In Afghanistan, over 500 Afghan professionals have been trained through Indian technical assistance programs in mining engineering, geological survey techniques, and regulatory compliance procedures (Indian Bureau of Mines, 2020).

Energy Cooperation and Regional Integration.

India-Afghanistan energy cooperation covers the short-term demand requirements and long-term integration goals. Investment in electricity infrastructure and power generation in India, including transmission lines, power plants, and grid connections, is addressing the long-term

electricity crisis in Afghanistan and establishing interdependent networks (Ministry of Power, India, 2021).

The Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Trade and Cooperation Agreement (CASA-1000) is an example of a multilateral system in which India and Afghanistan agree on using Central Asian hydroelectric power. Despite numerous obstacles to its implementation, the successful completion of the project would bring Afghanistan transit income and India diversified energy resources (CASA-1000 Program Management Unit, 2020).

Solar and wind energy collaboration has been in the spotlight due to the abundant solar and wind resources in Afghanistan and India's advanced technology in the field. Solar power plants with a total capacity exceeding 50 megawatts have been established in various provinces of Afghanistan by Indian companies, and it is anticipated that this capacity will reach 500 megawatts by 2025 (Solar Energy Corporation of India, 2021).

The integration of energy within a region faces significant challenges, including security threats, problems with harmonizing regulations, and funding constraints. Nevertheless, pilot projects have demonstrated the potential for scaling up cooperation as soon as political stability is achieved and international sanctions are lifted (South Asia Regional Energy Partnership, 2020).

Challenges and Limitations

Irrespective of the commendable success, the India-Afghanistan strategic alliance has several issues that limit its efficacy and viability. These constraints include security threats, political instability, and regional opposition —structural limitations inherent in Afghanistan's geographical and economic conditions.

The most direct constraint on the expansion of cooperation is the issue of security. The Taliban attacks on Indian development projects have claimed the lives of many people and led to delays in the projects that have demanded costly security measures, which add a lot of money to the cost. The 2014 assault on the Indian consulate in Herat and constant targeting of Indian workers on infrastructural projects indicate that they continue to face threats to their personnel and infrastructure (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2020).

Afghanistan has remained a political uncertain state that has made it stimulating to execute major projects on a long-term basis. Government leadership, policy priorities and administrative processes have been fractured, raising doubts about Indian investments and

forcing deals to be constantly renegotiated. The result of these political risks is reflected in the Taliban's 2021 takeover (Observer Research Foundation, 2021).

Local resistance from Pakistan has posed further barriers by employing diplomatic pressure, security threats, and alternative partnership options to Afghanistan. Pakistan efforts to limit the influence of India involve promoting anti-Indian forces within Afghanistan, diplomatic policies aimed at isolating Indian projects as well as economic incentives meant to lessen Afghan reliance on Indian aid (Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, 2021).

Infrastructure development did not alleviate the geographical limitations on trade and investment, even as these restrictions had remained a major issue for trade and investment. No one can deny the fact that Afghanistan is a landlocked state and depend on its neighbors to reach the market. The other possibilities via Iran are internationally sanctioned and have limited capacity to be effective alternatives in Pakistan (Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce, 2020).

Policy Implications and Conclusion.

The India-Afghanistan strategic partnership, 2001 to 2023 offer a major case study in modern development diplomacy and regional security relations. This discussion reveals that, despite India's multi-dimensional and multifaceted plans constrained by multiple complex factors that limit its transformative capacity and create unintended effects of its activities on the region.

Being a critical observer, India through its development projects, institutional linkages and diplomatic engagement has created a sound presence in Afghanistan. Moreover, the \$3+ billion invested in infrastructure, education and capacity building delivered tangible benefits to the development of Afghanistan and the deepening of India's strategic and regional presence.

But the regional implications of the partnership have remained a complex case study than expected. Moreover, the India's role has aggravated the existing security dilemmas in region and caused a new source of tension especially with Pakistan. The Taliban's return in 2021 was a test for the viability of the partnership, and a wake-up call for a much-needed strategic recalibration.

One of the policy implications of India is that more nuanced strategies are required to accommodate regional sensitivities without compromising development commitments. Any further involvement must focus on multilateral institutions, economic collaboration rather than alliances, and long-term diplomatic work to create a regional agreement on the need to rebuild Afghanistan.

In the case of Afghanistan, experience reveals both opportunities and risks associated with strategic alliances that have sparked controversy in the region. Strategies and institutional strengths are needed to balance relationships between competing regional powers and to maximise the advantages of development, which can be quite complex to maintain.

Pakistan, China, Iran, and Central Asian states should think about frameworks of cooperative and not competitive participation in Afghanistan's development. The country's strategic position and resource endowment can be leveraged to mutual advantage, provided that political barriers can be overcome by building confidence and negotiating. This process can be facilitated through extended dialogue.

In case of Afghanistan, Neutral platforms can be proposed by organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, and regional bodies for the assistance and ratings of security concerns among all concerned parties in a legitimate manner. Additionally, the international community should support multilateral approaches in the perspective for Afghanistan's development that are likely reduce to zero-sum competition among regional powers.

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Conflict of Interest: Author (s) declared no conflict of interest.

Citation: Non.

Article info:

Article received: 20 May 2026

Article accepted: 10 June 2026

Article published: 25 June 2026