

# **The Post 2014 Indo-Afghan Nexus: Implications for Pakistan**

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## **Abstract**

The paper provides with an analysis of the post-2014 Indo-Afghan nexus and its implications on Pakistan. In doing so, it investigates India's engagement in the internal & external affairs of Pakistan; its Cold Start Doctrine, and ultimately Pakistan's response to the said events. In addition, the paper also analyses India's role in CPEC, its huge investment in Iran and Afghanistan, and its overall foreign policy in the region with particular reference to Pakistan. Furthermore, the paper comes up with some policy recommendations as to what measures should Pakistan adopt to hamper Indian Foreign Policy in the region; especially how Pakistan would be able to counter Indo-Afghan close nexus.

**Keywords:** Cold Start Doctrine, CPEC, India, Taliban

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## **Introduction**

Afghanistan and India both are neighboring countries to Pakistan, sharing Western (2430km) and Eastern (2912 km) borders, respectively. Pakistan has been a staunch supporter of the United States in its interventions against Afghanistan and has been labeled as the chief non-NATO ally of the United States.<sup>1</sup> When Pakistan became front line state in war on terror, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan started to change. Afghan government as well as Taliban leadership accuses Pakistan of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. Whereas, India claims strong historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan for ages. Indian close ties with Afghanistan after 2014 especially elaborated her

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Nawaz Khan, 'Pakistan-Russia Relations Redux: From Estrangement to Pragmatism', *IPRI Journal*, 19:1 (2019), 56-85.

vision to undermine Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> India believes that to ensure regional security – the socio-economic development in Afghanistan is crucial. To achieve this purpose, India is making huge investments – the fifth largest contributor to the development of Afghanistan. For India, Afghanistan is an important partner to reach energy-rich Central Asian markets.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, India wants its presence in Afghanistan by increasing the training of civilians and military personnel and wants to deter Pakistan to claim regional hegemony. India being the fifth largest financial donor (more than \$2 billion) of Afghanistan wants to make nexus with Afghanistan becoming a strong stakeholder in the region.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, India maintained close connections with Northern Alliance in the war against the Taliban regime. It also constructed the Afghan Parliament building in 2014 and Salma Dam in 2015.<sup>5</sup>

Pakistan is also engaged in Afghanistan and wishes to bring a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul. Pakistan's national interests are threatened by the presence of Indian consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar. Pakistan is supporting Afghanistan in countering terrorism so that it could counter Indian presence in Afghanistan. Similarly, India will support Iran's Chahbahar Port to use as a trade route while Pakistan with the help of China would utilize Gwadar port as a counter-strategy. Indian involvement in Afghanistan is aimed to counter Pakistan and China's influence on Afghan soil.<sup>6</sup> Pakistan has been an active regional player after the withdrawal of NATO forces. Pakistan is upholding its 1980s policy not to allow Afghan refugees to influence the politics of Pakistan. Pakistan further started to promote its policy of reconciliation after claiming a 'strategic shift' in Afghanistan. It resulted against Pakistan, making it the aggressor and major driver of insurgency in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> This study explores the following questions:

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<sup>2</sup> Harsh V. Pant, 'India's Afghan Muddle: A Lost Opportunity', *Journal of Defence Studies*, 10:1 (2016), 121-24.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Yousaf Saqib, 'India's Socio-economic and Political Engagement in Afghanistan', *Asian Journal of Multidimensional Research (AJMR)*, 8:7 (2019), 11-28.

<sup>4</sup> Prof. Javaid, 'Analyzing the Dynamics of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations: Past and Present', *South Asian Studies*, 31:1 (2020).

<sup>5</sup> B. Reeta, 'India-Afghanistan Political & Economic Relations', *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 7:5 (2017), 291-99.

<sup>6</sup> Marium Kamal, 'Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Relations: A Paradoxical Perspective', *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society*, 33:02 (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed Ali Naqvi, 'Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations Post 2014: Impacts on Pakistan's Security', *Journal of Political Studies*, 22:1 (2015), 197.

Firstly, how India by maintaining close relations with Afghanistan would achieve its objectives and hegemony in the region. Secondly, how India will carry its Cold Start Doctrine against Pakistan in the post-2014 scenario. Lastly, how Pakistan by stabilizing its relations with Afghanistan can counter the growing Indian hegemony in the region?

### **Indian Cold Start Doctrine**

The dormant clash among nuclear-equipped competitors Pakistan and India made the stability of South Asia ambiguous. Both are trying to hit the threshold that can have serious consequences in terms of the use of potential weapons against each other. Since 1999, there had been two military catastrophes encompassing Pakistan and India that intensified to the extent that outer players intervened to lessen the outbreak of war. In April 2004, Indian Military initiated a new limited war doctrine through which India will be able to respond quickly and retaliate swiftly against Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. Since 1947, this very doctrine is a noticeable breakthrough in terms of defensive positioning by the Indian Military. This combined arms operation jointly with the Indian Air Force and Indian Army's, Cold Start represents a significant undertaking.<sup>8</sup>

This doctrine was developed by India between the years 1981 and 2004 where seven defensive "land force" and minor armed units of the Indian Military was positioned at the Pakistani border as a pressure tactic.<sup>9</sup>

Operation *Parakram* exposed the very limitation of war fighting doctrine. Following the attack on the Indian parliament, Indian authorities immediately put allegations on Kashmiri militants just because of a similar incident that took place in the Kashmir assembly. After the attacks, Delhi asked the United States to pressurize Islamabad to stop backing these militant groups like Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Tayyba. Therefore, the US pressurized Pakistan to ban these two and declare them as militant organizations.<sup>10</sup>

Operation Parakram aimed to stop Pakistan from supporting militants and India warned of the threat of deploying its forces near Pakistan's border. The critics of Indian Operation Parakram blamed the Indian leadership, that they miscarried the definition of strategic objectives for the armament of weapons, which made the victory or

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<sup>8</sup> Marium Kamal, *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Ali & Syed Ali Shah, 'The Region of Pakistan, China, and India: Geopolitical Currents after the Cold War Till 9/11', *Global Economics Review*, 2:1 (2017), 90-8.

defeat dubious.<sup>11</sup> The security predictors pinned the very long delay between enrolment and positioning of personnel, which allowed Pakistan to call allies for intervening before India could take any action.<sup>12</sup>

In April 2004, the Indian Chief of Army Staff unveiled the very concept of Cold Start. Cold Start was aiming to launch a reactive predictable strike that would significantly damage Pakistan Army before any state intervenes.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, it would also hamper Islamabad to react with nuclear weapons. This doctrine shows the offensive mindset of the Indian Army combined with mechanized infantry, artillery, and armor groups. The Indian Army is working to enhance its ability for exercising Cold Start Doctrine and is willing to ignore the chance of a diplomatic solution for the stability of the region. During Operation Parakram, the three weeks suspension of the strike, and corps deployment provided enough time for Pakistan to prepare itself for a counter-attack.<sup>14</sup>

The implications of conventional war between the two nuclear powers would intensify the conflict. If Pakistan and India indulged in a clash, it may lead to a full-scale conventional war that may include nuclear strikes. On contrary, some of the Indian strategic designers believe that India waging limited war against Pakistan would not hit nuclear. The Cold Start Doctrine was used as a military strategy to respond against Pakistan's funding for extremism and rejected the no-first-use nuclear doctrine. Furthermore, the Indian Militia is strongly enhancing its capability to counter Pakistan's proxy warfare with its conventional strength. This further threatens the stability of the region.

### Conceptualizing Pakistan's Policy

Pakistan aims to connect with Central Asian Republics, but it does not have any direct boundary linkages with them.

For that purpose, Afghanistan serves as the best route for Pakistan to reach the Central Asian Republic states for trade and commerce.

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<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Sajjad Malik, 'Pakistan-India Relations', *Strategic Studies*, 39:1 (2019), 59-76.

<sup>12</sup> Zulfqar Khan & Ahmad Khan, *op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Ali Baig & Hamid Iqbal, 'A Comparative Study of Blitzkrieg and Cold Start Doctrine: Lessons and Countermeasures for Pakistan', *IPRI Journal*, 18:1 (2018), 1-31.

<sup>14</sup> Ghazala Yasmin Jalil, 'Nuclear Arms Race in South Asia', *Strategic Studies*, 37:1 (2017), 18-41.

India on the other side wants to establish a pro-Indian government in Afghanistan that would restrict Pakistan to use the Afghan route. The Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad were used for covert activities on Pakistan's soil. A retired Indian Army Chief General Vijay Kumar admitted that India with the help of Afghanistan and its National Directorate of Security (NDS) is involved in terrorist activities inside the territory of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the dispute between these two states over Kashmir is another major issue that has turned India to adopt an aggressive stance over Pakistan since 1947. Their rivalry is deeply rooted in terms of a clash of ideologies, the nationalistic aspiration of their people over the Kashmir issue, and historical grievances.

Similarly, Pakistan claims that India is backing Afghanistan in its stance on Durand Line through international forums. The offensive policy of India against Pakistan has contributed to Pakistan's struggle for power and survival in the region.<sup>16</sup> For that purpose, Pakistan has to go for the armament of nuclear weapons, diplomatic solutions, and alliance building, with China and other states.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of defensive policy and state security against India, Pakistan has to dedicate a huge budget to balance the strategic equation with India. Evidence and incidents suggest that India is backing anti-Pakistani elements operating from Afghanistan. India is also spending a huge amount on its defense and Afghanistan's development forcing Pakistan to build up its security at such a level that it can defend itself in case of any aggression from India. Pakistan's policymakers suggest external assistance for contributing to the defense capabilities and development.

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<sup>15</sup> Usama Bin Ashraf, 'Indian State Sponsored Terrorism and Illegal Interventions: A Case Study of South Asia', *Muslim Perspectives*, IV:2, 27-64.

<sup>16</sup> Umbreen Javaid & Rameesha Javaid, 'Indian Influence in Afghanistan and its Implications for Pakistan', *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, Vol. 12, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Qadar Bakhsh Baloch & Abdul Hafeez Khan Niazi, 'Indian Encroachment in Afghanistan: A New Imperialism in the Making', *The Dialogue*, 3:1 (2008), 16-33.

## India and the CPEC

Hu Jintao, the Chinese President initiated the “Good Neighbor Policy”.<sup>18</sup> That is part of China’s approach to peaceful development, which encourages interdependence, rather than competition. In this regard, China has curved its neighboring constituencies into a new regional trade hub that would create a new world order in the future.<sup>19</sup> Following China, Pakistan also adopted the policy to connect with regional partners. In fact, China, and Pakistan both are strategic as well as economic partners. This partnership is helping Pakistan to maintain the balance of power in the zone where India and other non-state actors are acting as threats to Pakistan. China has constantly been a key factor when it comes to Pakistan in achieving its foreign policy objectives. With Chinese support, Pakistan extended a noteworthy reputation not only in the region but worldwide. Silk Road reestablishment with the efforts of both Pakistan and China is one of the recognized economic paths in the world and will further deliver a direction for trade. Another major development is China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) an idea that will make Pakistan the most important strategic country in the region. It would likewise deliver China an opportunity to construct a base at Gwadar. According to research, China is making efforts to counter the influence of the US in the Asia-Pacific by developing strong economic contracts with Pakistan.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR), notion has its tactical position. The OBOR enterprise envelops approx. inhabitants of 4.4 billion.<sup>21</sup> As per the research about the Corridor, the one belt one road would involve regional cooperation, economic growth, trade, cultural diversifications, transportation, energy sector, and diplomatic flexibility. This would not only change the very texture of the world but would also combine certain geographies through Oceans and Roads. The OBOR venture comprises three important routes. Route from Pakistan would be the most feasible option for China. The second trade route would be from Shanghai linking Tashkent, Tehran, and Bander Imam Port on the Persian Gulf. From there it would connect to Europe as well.

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<sup>18</sup> Chien-peng Chung, ‘The Good Neighbour Policy’ in the Context of China’s Foreign Relations’, *China: An International Journal*, 7:1 (2009), 107-23.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Akber Ali, ‘China Pakistan economic corridor: prospects and challenges for regional integration’, *Arts and Social Sciences Journal*, 7:4 (2016), 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> T. Zimmerman, *The New Silk Roads: China, the US, and the Future of Central Asia* (New York, NY, USA: Center on International Cooperation, 2015), 1-26.

However, this New Silk Road Economic Route is longer but it can be beneficial for China's larger economic interests.<sup>22</sup>

CPEC is not the only initiative in terms of economic development, but the Economic strip along the Silk Road and Marine Silk road is a priority under the 2013 OBOR project. Both Pakistan and China are the strategic partner in this One Belt One Road to trade with Central Asian countries, South Asian countries and Middle Eastern countries, and European states. Similarly, Gwadar deep-sea port is playing a major role, as it gives uninterrupted entrance to the Indian Sea. Both countries are working to harmonize and to gain their mutual benefits. Furthermore, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a sign of Pakistan and China cooperation that would benefit both. Meanwhile, in relation to trade, China has progressively appeared as Pakistan's foremost economic partner. Both signed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on 24 November 2006. CPEC is expected to increase the economic and strategic depth between Pakistan and China in the years to come.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, CPEC is a mega project and expected to bring massive benefits to both countries but it faces some challenges like separatist movements in Balochistan.<sup>24</sup> Pakistan on certain platforms has exposed Indian involvement in Balochistan and obstacles to CPEC's growth in particular.

## Discussion

To anticipate the Indo-US nexus in Afghanistan, Pakistan should belligerently pursue to make the US realize its strategic importance in the war on terror. Similarly, critics say that Islamabad was nervous about asking questions from America firstly, Why the US supported chieftains and officials in the Karzai government that are too hostile towards Pakistan and also close to India. Secondly, Why the United States does not note India's violation of the Indus Water Treaty. Thirdly, on what grounds Indian Army is patrolling on Pak-Afghan Border intervening in the territorial boundaries of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Fourth, the US has hampered its military aid to support the Haqqani network, how can it support non-state actors while fighting the war on terror? However, there

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<sup>22</sup> Abid, Massarrat, and Ayesha Ashfaq. "CPEC: Challenges and opportunities for Pakistan." *Journal of Pakistan Vision* 16, no. 2 (2015): 142-169.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Rackmawatie Lokman, Sity Daud & Chiew Ping Hoo, 'CPEC and South Asia's Geopolitical Complex: Powers' Rivalry', *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 7:9 (2022), 1-17.

is a civil-military divide in the country of Pakistan risking a civil war in Islamabad though Pakistan has already sacrificed more than 75000 civilians in the proxy war fought by the US on Pakistan's soil.

Furthermore, India's relationship with Afghanistan covers all aspects of military security and economic development through which India aims to utilize the strategic depth of Afghanistan that is hindering Pakistan's interests in the region. Afghanistan has strong military relations with India making Pakistan's western border insecure and vulnerable to threats and security risks. Furthermore, India is involved in economic, social, and other infrastructure development projects.

Furthermore, a collective effort of regional players was launched on 2 November 2011 in Istanbul that aimed at securing and stabilizing Afghanistan for achieving prosperity in the Asian region.

Furthermore, India is also assisting Afghanistan in developing trade links through Iran to reduce Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan. India has reservations when it comes to China and Pakistan relations. India is also having problems due to the presence of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean posing a direct threat to Indian security in the region. In response, India has triggered the Operation Necklace of Diamonds, an Indian strategy to counter China growing influence in the South Asian region. Similarly, China and Pakistan's nexus can cause trouble for India in Afghanistan, where it wants to restrict Pakistan's presence with the help of Ashraf Ghani's government. A compact mark for the Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in Afghanistan can be on the cards as well.

Moreover, China has always utilized non-violent tactics to resolve territorial disputes with India but India with its limited war strategy might lose its major economic partner in the region and might also change the security atmosphere of the region.

Furthermore, the situation in Afghanistan has become very complicated after the 2014 presidential elections and the withdrawal of some US personnel. Major players in the region such as Pakistan and Iran are working to mitigate the spillover effect of the crisis in the region. However, India with the support of the US wants to involve in a more rational way to sustainance Afghanistan's longstanding firmness as the US and NATO-ISAF<sup>25</sup> militaries drawdown. This would need an

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<sup>25</sup> International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was in fact one of the major coalitions. It was mandated by United Nations and led by NATO in 2003 with the overall objective to enable a sustainable government and develop security mechanisms in Afghanistan.



additional collaboration of the Indo-US policymakers to assist Afghanistan to be better in terms of political as well as economic standings. In this regard, the first step can be a consensus-building process that helped the Afghan security forces to manage the situation from further deteriorating. It further would require India to show a strong leadership role in the region. Moreover, India-Afghanistan relations have major concerns as India aims to counter Pakistan and the US can have considerable influence without maintaining its forces there.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Pakistan should first, coordinate with the US to build positive relations with Afghanistan. This would serve as an important step towards confidence-building measures. Secondly, Pakistan should work to create efficiency in the Afghan government. Similarly, Pakistan can offer trainings to Afghan public servants working on key posts, and cultural and educational exchanges can also lessen the tensions between two neighboring states. Pakistan in collaboration with Washington or Beijing should support supervision teams in important sectors such as finance, education, mining, infrastructure building, and maintenance. Thirdly, it is in Pakistan's best interest to engage in dialogue with the Taliban. Pakistan should play an active part in becoming the mediator between the Afghan political government and Taliban leadership. For that purpose, Pakistan has to collaborate with China and the US, for bringing parties to the table. Meanwhile, Pakistan and Afghanistan should sign a memorandum in terms of intelligence sharing to stop terrorism on both sides of the Durand Line. Further, Pakistan should boost administrative and financial national incorporation between the neighbors through SAARC platform. New Delhi and Washington are unhappy with the current step taken by Pakistan in collaboration with China. Further, Pakistan with help of China should engage New Delhi to achieve her interest in the region. For Pakistan, developing positive relations with India has been very important, for three consecutive administrations, over the past two decades. Meanwhile, Pakistan is utilizing all diplomatic platforms to expose the sources involved in cross-border terrorism. In addition, it is also engaged with Afghanistan - with the help of the international community to dismantle terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Pakistan with the help of China, United States and other regional players give up the rivalry with Afghanistan and tries building trust. With this confidence, Pakistan should be involved in economic integration with Afghanistan. The economic integration would ultimately, stabilize the region. Washington should acknowledge Pakistan's concerns in Afghanistan and must encourage India to identify

Pakistan's genuine apprehensions in Afghanistan and assist to grow an outline in which these anxieties can be coped. Meanwhile, Pakistan can appeal to several International platforms for economic assistance to Afghanistan. Pakistan, China, and Russia can work on a possible collaboration for fighting terrorism and drug trafficking in Afghanistan. Pakistan should also involve Iran to neutralize Indian influence in Afghanistan. a stable Afghanistan is in the favor of Pakistan's stability. Both, Pakistan and Afghanistan can control the spill-over effect of crisis from spreading in south and central Asian region. Pakistan should engage Afghanistan in bilateral talks and sign memorandum of interests in economic, infrastructure, intelligence sharing and combined military operations on bordering area of both countries. Pakistan can build bilateral confidence by providing equipment coupled with training to Afghan National Security Force. This would give confidence to both states and would hamper Indian interests. Lastly, Pakistan with China should involve Afghanistan, Iran and other regional players in CPEC, this would increase strategic importance of Pakistan.