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## **AN INCREASING RELATIONSHIP STRENGTH BETWEEN INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN**

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# An Increasing Relationship Strength between India and Afghanistan

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**Abstract – The India-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership signed on October 04, 2011 was the first agreement that Afghanistan has formally entered into with any country to reconstruct Afghanistan, help guarantee its security and is linked with the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. Afghanistan views the strong ties with India as a means to assuage the sense of insecurity and capable of assisting the war-torn nation to stabilize the helpless nation on account of the debilitating power struggle anticipated in the power vacuum following the withdrawal in 2014 of the US and NATO forces. Pakistan is concern about the agreement and is quite suspicious of encirclement by India.**

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## INTRODUCTION

India has played a significant role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan. We believe that democracy and development are the key instruments to ensure that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability. This has been reflected in the Strategic Partnership Agreement, signed between Afghanistan and India during Afghan President Hamid Karzai's visit to India in October 2011, which reinforced the strong, vibrant and multi-faceted relations between the two countries and at the same time formalized a framework for cooperation in various areas between the two countries: political & security cooperation; trade & economic cooperation; capacity development and education; and social, cultural, civil society & people-to-people relations. This agreement is a strong signal of our abiding commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in Afghanistan during this critical period of security and governance transition. The commitment is also reflected in our extensive developmental assistance programme, which now stands at around US \$2 billion, making India the 5<sup>th</sup> largest bilateral donor in Afghanistan after the US, UK, Japan and Germany. This, by any reckoning, is a substantial amount for a non-traditional donor like India.

There also exists a high-level political engagement with Afghanistan, which is reflected in the large number of bilateral high-level visits. There have been frequent high level visits from both sides in 2011-12, including among others, External Affairs Minister (EAM) and National Security Adviser (NSA) in January and March 2011 respectively; Prime Minister in May 2011; Special Envoy to PM to Kabul in June 2011 for a meeting of the International Contact Group; Foreign Secretary in September 2011; Minister of Law & Justice Shri Salman Khurshid on September 24, 2011 after the demise of Prof.

Burhanuddin Rabbani, and again on June 14 for the Heart of Asia Conference in Kabul, and Minister for Steel Shri Beni Prasad Verma in April 2012. From the Afghan side high level visits to India include: President Hamid Karzai in February, 2011; Defence Minister Wardak in June, 2011; First Vice President Marshal Fahim in June 2011; a Parliamentary delegation led by Speaker of the lower house of the Afghan Parliament Mr Ibrahim to India in July, 2011; a delegation from the High Peace Council headed by its Chairman, late Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani in July 2011; Afghan NSA Mr Rangin Dadfar Spanta in August, 2011; Afghan Minister of Mines Mr Shahrani for the TAPI meeting in September, 2011; Afghan Commerce Minister Mr.

Anwar ul Ahady in October 2011 for the CII, SME summit, President Karzai in October 2011, Minister of Mines and Finance Minister in January 2012 for the CII Partnership Summit in Hyderabad and Foreign Minister Zalmi Rassoul at the first Partnership Council meeting on May 1, 2012.

India has played an active role in the development of Afghanistan based on the understanding that social and economic development in Afghanistan is crucial to regional stability. The principal objective of India's development partnership is to assist in building indigenous Afghan capacity and institutions and to ensure that development touches all the regions of Afghanistan and encompasses all the sectors of development.

India's pledged assistance to Afghanistan stands at a little under U.S. \$2 billion, making it the fifth largest bilateral donor in Afghanistan. All the projects are undertaken in partnership with the Afghan government, in consonance with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

India's programmes cover four broad areas – infrastructure projects, humanitarian assistance, small and community based development projects, and education and capacity development. The 218 km road project from Zaranj to Delaram in southwestern Afghanistan to facilitate movement of goods and services to the Iranian border and, onward, to the Chahbahar Port was inaugurated by the Afghan President and Indian External Affairs Minister in January 2009. India constructed the 202 kms long 220 kV DC transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul and a 220/110/20 kV sub-station at Chimtala, bringing Uzbek electricity and lighting up the city of Kabul throughout the year. This project was completed in collaboration with the Afghan Government, ADB and the World Bank, with inputs from USAID and international energy firms, and is an outstanding example of regional and international cooperation in Afghanistan. The other two major infrastructure projects, the construction of the Afghan Parliament in Kabul and the construction of Salma Dam power project in Herat province, are under progress and would be completed by 2012.

Under humanitarian assistance, India supplies 100 gms of fortified, high-protein biscuits every day to each of the nearly two million school children in 33 of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan under a School Feeding Programme administered through the World Food Programme. During the visit of President Karzai to India in January 2009, India announced the gift of 250,000 metric tonnes of wheat to assist Afghanistan tide over its food shortage. The Indian Medical Missions in the five major cities are providing free medical consultations and medicines to over 30,000 Afghans every month.

In education and institution development, India is providing every year 675 long-term university scholarships, sponsored by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) for under-graduate and post-graduate studies for Afghan students in India. Similarly, another 675 annual short-term India Technical and Educational Cooperation (ITEC) training scholarships for Afghan public servants are provided in Indian technical and professional institutions. More than 20 Indian Civil Servants served as coaches and mentors under Capacity for Afghan Public Administration programme supported by UNDP and the Governments of Afghanistan and India. Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) built an India-Afghanistan Vocational Training Centre for training Afghan youth in carpentry, plumbing, welding, masonry and tailoring. Another innovative programme was executed by the well-known Indian NGO, SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association), which built a Women's Vocational Training Centre in *Bagh-e-Zanana* in Kabul for training of Afghan women (War-widows and orphans) in garment making, nursery plantation, and food processing and marketing.

In regional cooperation, Afghanistan joined SAARC at the 14th SAARC Summit held in Delhi in April 2007,

opening possibilities of Afghanistan becoming a trade, transportation and energy hub linking together the countries of the region from Central to South Asia. India has also encouraged Afghanistan's efforts at capitalizing on its unique

geographical location at the heart of the Asian continent by supporting regional initiatives like the Istanbul process and RECCA that seek to assist in Afghanistan's development through cooperation in a various sectors of the economy.

India and Afghanistan are building a partnership between the world's largest and most recent democracies. Our countries are composed of myriad traditions and are joined together by history and civilisational contacts. Our close relations are based on cultural affinities, the shared values of multiethnicity and pluralism and the common quest of our peoples for peace and development. India has been one of Afghanistan's foremost development partners since end-2001.

India shares the collective commitment of the international community to the unity, integrity and prosperity of Afghanistan. A peaceful and stable Afghanistan is in India's interest, as also the interests of the region and the World. The trauma and the destruction Afghanistan faced in the 1990s requires a comprehensive effort to rebuild and reconstruct a war torn society and economy. India as a close neighbour and friend has sought to play its role in this effort.

India's expanding partnership with Afghanistan has grown into multi-sectoral activities in all parts of Afghanistan. India's reconstruction and developmental programmes in Afghanistan follow priorities of the Afghan Government and people. These encompass education, medical services, transport, telecommunications, civil aviation, agriculture, irrigation, power generation, industry, and rural development. India is building in Afghanistan structures from public toilets to transmission lines. A strong political relationship underwrites this partnership.

One of India's important infrastructure projects in South-Western Afghanistan, the highway from Zaranj to Delaram, was inaugurated by President Hamid Karzai and India's External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2009. Built at the cost of precious Afghan and Indian lives lost in the course of its construction, the highway is a symbol of India's commitment to Afghanistan.

Afghanistan became the latest member of the South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation at the 14th SAARC Summit in New Delhi in 2007, making SAARC's western boundaries contiguous to Iran and Central Asia. With this, Afghanistan could once again become the cross-roads between Central and South Asia, linking the regional countries together in a trade, transportation and energy hub. The region has the

world's largest and most rapidly expanding markets. Kandahari *anars* are a treasured delicacy, of which India consumes almost half of the Afghan exports.

Together, India and Afghanistan intend to work with our neighbours to dismantle trade and transit barriers for free movement of goods, investments, and peoples and unfettered and constructive regional relationships.

### **INDIA'S AFGHANISTAN POLICY**

India's relations with Afghanistan have steadily improved since the fall of the Taliban for a number of reasons. India's main focus has been to support the Afghan government and the political process in the country as mandated under the Bonn agreement of 2001.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Pakistan, ties between India and Afghanistan are not hampered by the existence of a contiguous, and contested, border. Its support for the Northern Alliance against the Pakistan-backed Taliban in the 1990s strengthened its position in Kabul after 2001. Many members of the Alliance are members of the government or hold influential provincial posts. India has also done its best to restore the balance in its engagement with a range of different ethnic groups and political affiliations in Afghanistan. The balance was tilted towards the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance during the 1990s as a counter to Pakistan-controlled hard-line Pashtun factions, led by the Taliban. India has used its vocal support for Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun educated in India, to demonstrate its keenness to revive its close ties with Pashtuns.

India has pursued a "soft power" strategy towards Afghanistan, sticking to civilian rather than military matters. In consonance with the priorities laid down by Afghanistan's government, Indian assistance has focused on building human capital and physical infrastructure, improving security and helping the agricultural and other important sectors of the country's economy. India is building roads, proving medical facilities and helping with educational programs in an effort to develop and enhance long-term local Afghan capabilities.

India has pledged around \$1.3 billion on various projects, emerging as the sixth largest bilateral donor to Afghanistan. Important infrastructural projects undertaken by India include building of the 218-km Zelarang-Delaram highway enabling south-western Afghanistan access to the Iranian port of Chabahar, construction of electricity transmission lines, the Salma Dam power project in Heart province, construction of the Afghan Parliament building, helping in the expansion of the Afghan national television network, and several smaller projects in agriculture, rural development, education, health, energy, and vocational training. The Zaranj-Delaram road, which will enable Afghanistan to have access to sea via Iran and will provide a shorter route for Indian goods to

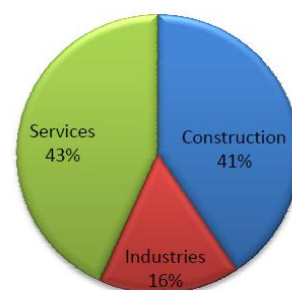
reach Afghanistan, was completed in 2008 despite stiff resistance from the Taliban by India's Border Roads Organization.<sup>13</sup> The security of the Indian workers working on this project was provided by a 300-strong paramilitary force provided by India itself because of which the project overshot time and monetary deadlines.

India also piloted the move to make Afghanistan a member of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) with the hope that with the entry of Afghanistan into the SAARC, issues relating to the transit and free flow of goods across borders in the region can be addressed, thereby leading to greater economic development of Afghanistan and the region as a whole. Moreover, South Asia will be able to reach out to Central and West Asia more meaningfully with Afghanistan as a member of the SAARC. It has been estimated that given Afghanistan's low trade linkages with other states in the region, its participation in the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) would result in trade gains of \$2 billion to the region with as much as \$606 million accruing to Afghanistan.

### **ECONOMIC LINKS BETWEEN INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN**

India has been playing an extremely significant role in Afghanistan's reconstruction, as well as in its social and economic development since 2001. It has extended development assistance and aid to Afghanistan, and has pledged and disbursed approximately \$2 billion for the country's rehabilitation, reconstruction, overall development, and building of basic infrastructure. This makes India the 6<sup>th</sup> largest donor in Afghanistan.

Since 2001, approximately hundred Indian companies have invested in different sectors in Afghanistan, whose total amount of investment reaches nearly \$25 million. Huge chunks of these investments, almost equally, go to the services and construction sectors, with comparatively lesser to the industries (see Figure 1). Moreover, almost 80 joint ventures have been established by Afghan-Indian firms with a total initial capital of \$20 million.



**Figure 1: Investment decomposition of Indian firms in Afghanistan by sector of activity**



In order to expand their domestic markets through economic integration and to remove the obstacles on the path of mutual trade, India and Afghanistan entered into a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTAJ) in 2003. This made India one of the major trading partners of Afghanistan and its fifth largest source of imports. The total value of trade between Afghanistan and India, which stood at slightly more than \$80 million in 2001, surged to nearly \$280 million in 2010. Afghanistan imported goods worth more than \$200 million from India in 2010. Similarly, it exported goods worth \$80 million to India which represents 20% of total Afghan exports. Furthermore, Afghanistan became the member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 2007, by the proposal of Indian government, which made Afghanistan once again a crossroad between South Asia and Central Asian, linking them by trade, transportation, and energy transformation.

With the intention of fortifying the economic and political cooperation between the two countries, and to deepening economic integration, the Afghan government has recently awarded the mining rights of the Hajigak Iron ore, country's biggest iron ore deposit, to a consortium of seven Indian companies for an investment of \$6.6 billion. This would be the largest single investment in Afghanistan by any country so far.

To further tighten their cooperation, Afghanistan and India signed, in October 4, 2011, an agreement on 'Strategic partnership' that includes provision for both security and economic cooperation. The 'strategic partnership' includes: training and equipping of Afghan National Security Forces, provision of economic aid and assistance, development of mining and energy production, and establishment of 'strategic dialogue' between their national security advisers so to provide a framework for cooperation in the area of national security.

## HISTORIC AFGHAN THREAT TO INDIA

India 's current involvement in Afghanistan is often described by Indian writers as the fraternal expression of —age-old civilizational, political, economic and cultural ties. It is true that Afghan traders were familiar figures in northern India during the British colonial period. It is also true, however, that for many centuries Afghanistan was for India mainly a source of civilizational conflict and conquest. Since the eleventh century, Afghan armies have marched repeatedly to loot and subjugate vast swathes of South Asia, including the heartland of present-day India . Mahmud of Gazni is said to have invaded India seventeen times between 1001 and 1027. Mohammed Ghoris invaded India seven times in the twelfth century. The Lodhi dynasty of Pashtuns ruled northern India from Delhi in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, as did the Sur dynasty in the mid-sixteenth century. The great Mughuls were not ethnically Afghan, but they descended onto the plains of India from Kabul and

Khandahar to rule from Agra and Delhi from 1526 to 1707.

Lest the destruction that Afghan Pashtuns have inflicted on India in the past be relegated to history, Pakistan has named two of its nuclear-capable missiles the Ghaznavi and the Ghaury, after Afghan invaders. In early 2011 Pakistan test-fired a nuclear-capable cruise missile, which it named the Babur, after the founder of the Mughul Dynasty. The irony is that many in Pakistan do not appreciate the threat that extremist Pashtuns pose for the modern Pakistani state. India 's challenge today is to do whatever it can, in cooperation with friendly countries, to help Pakistan defend itself from another invasion by Pashtuns seeking to establish an Islamic emirate.

## INDIA AFGHANISTAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

India has played an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, based on the understanding that social and economic development is key to ensuring that Afghanistan becomes a source of regional stability. India's pledged assistance to Afghanistan stands at 1.2 billion US dollars.

Indian projects cover all parts of Afghanistan, in a wide range of sectors, identified by the Afghanistan as priority areas for reconstruction and development. All the projects are undertaken in partnership with the Afghan government, in total alignment with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, and with focus on local ownership of assets.

An innovative element has been the focus on small and community-based development projects, with a short gestation period and having a direct impact on community life, unveiled during Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit to Afghanistan in August 2005. The latest phase of the bilateral development partnership focuses on capacity development and building Afghan institutions.

In October 04, 2011, during the visit of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai to India both countries signed Strategic Partnership agreement "based on mutual understanding and long-term trust" outlines areas of common concern including trade, economic expansion, education, security and politics. This is the first such agreement that post-Taliban Afghanistan has ever formally entered into with any country to help guarantee its security as international troops begin withdrawing from the war-torn country after more than a decade of fighting and is designed to address the challenges of transition as much as prepare ground for preventing the reversal of gains beyond 2014.<sup>1</sup> This agreement is linked with the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. It covers security cooperation, trade and economic ties, as well as social and cultural exchanges. The two leaders have also signed two separate deals increasing links in mining and energy which represented "a new dimension in economic

relations" to enable Kabul to integrate more effectively with the Indian economy and other economies in South Asia.

The agreements come at a time of severely strained ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The people of India sympathized with Afghanistan as it sought to cope with "acts of terrorism, particularly the assassination of [peace envoy] Burhanuddin Rabbani". Karzai has accused Pakistan of supporting militant networks in his country and of having links to the assassination of peace envoy and former president Burhanuddin Rabbani.

## CONCLUSION

There is clearly an appreciation in Indian policymaking circles of India's rising capabilities and the need for an effective Afghanistan policy. For many in the Indian strategic community, Afghanistan is a test case for India as a regional and global power on the ascendant. India's strategic capacity to deal with instability in its own backyard will, in the ultimate analysis, determine India's rise as a global power of major import. And so an Indian failure in Afghanistan is not really an option. Yet by failing to assert its profile in Afghanistan, India has failed to win the confidence of those constituencies in Afghanistan who considered India a natural ally. India is unnerved as Hamid Karzai seems to be exploring deeper alignments with China, Pakistan, and Iran with the prospect of American exit from Afghanistan getting closer to realization. As this paper underlines, India's policy towards Afghanistan is being filtered through a range of historical, institutional and domestic political factors.

The Strategic Partnership agreement which was signed during the visit of Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai to India on October 04, 2011 was the first agreement that Afghanistan has formally entered into with any country to help guarantee its security and is linked with the drawdown of US forces from Afghanistan. It was meant to reconstruct Afghanistan. But beyond the reconstruction, the Government of Afghanistan also views the strong ties with India as a means to assuage the sense of insecurity and capable of assisting the war-torn nation to stabilize the helpless nation on account of the debilitating power struggle anticipated in the power vacuum following the withdrawal in 2014 of the US and NATO forces. For India the strategic partnership agreement is more than just that as it aims to propel the relationship beyond a mere aid-donor equation to a much higher plane with training of the Afghan National Security Forces. India sees a strong, independent, stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan as being critical to her security interests and for overall stability of the region in the evolving geo-political and geo-strategic scenarios. It also includes coping with "acts of terrorism. Even though Karzai made his remark that the agreement

with India will not affect Pakistan. Pakistan views India as trying to isolate Pakistan through this agreement and is bound to cause serious discomfort to Pakistan especially on account of the "strategic" connotation of the agreement. Indian involvement in the training of Afghan National Security and Police Forces, in all likelihood, will be unpalatable to Pakistan. It is a new dimension in economic relations to enable Kabul to integrate more effectively with the Indian economy and other economies in South Asia.

In terms of economics relations, progress in strengthening trade routes with neighboring countries through infrastructure and legal agreements will lead to better regional trade relationships and will allow private sector development to increase. It is such private sector development that will pave the road towards stability and sustainable economy recovery in Afghanistan, which will lead to greater regional trade and commerce. Of course, such a transformation requires complementary measures by Afghanistan and others regional countries as well as the United States, the UN, and NATO.

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