



India and Afghanistan: A Relationship that has been Evolving for Decades

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Abstract:

The study has concentrated on elucidating Afghanistan-Indian political cooperation and its impact on regional dynamics. It has also looked at the economic ties and implications for both of the two nations. The research has also examined the development programs and efforts that Afghanistan and India have carried out during the previous 20 years, as well as the results that have been obtained. The data used in this article came from a variety of papers that combined quantitative and qualitative research techniques with information from print and digital media sources. Since 2001, India and Afghanistan have worked closely together in several areas to promote an independent, diversified, peaceful, powerful, and united Afghanistan. India intentionally abstains from using force and strong power strategies, preferring to work cooperatively and build amicable connections. Furthermore, India has allocated enormous funds towards significant infrastructure projects such as the Zaranj Delaram Highway, the Salma Dam, educational establishments, and healthcare facilities like the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health, among others. Over the past 20 years, India has constantly shown that it is a trustworthy partner of the Afghan people. The Afghan people are quite happy with the effectiveness and integrity of the Indian government.

Keywords: Indo-Afghan ties: Evolving, Strategic, Enduring

1. Introduction

Supporting the Afghan government after 2001 is India's primary objective in Afghanistan, as it is one of the key forces in South Asia. Having said that, the political and security problems that arose after the US troops withdrew from Afghanistan had a substantial effect on India. Afghanistan is now facing a security and political dilemma. Even after over thirty years of instability and unpredictability that have gravely impeded Afghan society's progress, the country's economy has improved significantly since 2003, with average growth rates above nine per cent. Afghanistan's GDP development is facilitating the country's ability to forge new economic linkages with other countries in addition to generating job opportunities that support the stabilization of Afghan society. India is eager to increase its commercial footprint in Afghanistan, particularly in the mining and natural resources sectors (WANG,2018). In the Journal of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies, Kirit K. Nair's article "India's Role in Afghanistan Post 2014 Strategy, Policy and Implementation" states that India has adopted a multipronged strategy, initiating multiple projects in a variety of sectors to promote economic growth and further peace and stability in Afghanistan. It has deliberately avoided employing force in Afghanistan in favour of developing non-coercive resources. India's approach to participation in Afghanistan has shown to be highly effective, garnering the respect and support of India and is seen by the Afghan government and people as a trustworthy economic partner and ally (Nair, 2015).

The goals of New Delhi are primarily focused on three areas: security, economic dominance, and regional hegemony. New Delhi frequently views Afghanistan just from a security perspective. Both New Delhi and Islamabad aspire to maintain their significant influence in the domestic politics of Afghanistan. India intends to restrict Pakistan's capacity to influence events in Afghanistan, whereas Islamabad believes that

New Delhi wants to involve it in problems along its western boundary (Junaid & Malik, 2021). The Strategic Partnership agreement, which was signed on October 4, 2011, during Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai's visit to India, is the nation's first official security accord and is correlated with the withdrawal of US soldiers from Afghanistan. The primary objective of the Afghan government, alongside reconstruction efforts, included fostering robust relations with India to mitigate unrest and support the stabilization of the war-torn nation amidst anticipated power struggles following the withdrawal of US and NATO forces in 2014. India and Afghanistan maintain a strategic cooperation agreement aimed at enhancing their partnership beyond mere provision of aid, notably through initiatives such as training for the Afghan National Security Forces. Against the backdrop of evolving geopolitical and geostrategic dynamics, India perceives a strong, independent, secure, prosperous, and democratic Afghanistan as crucial to its security interests and regional stability (Raiphea, 2013). This study aims to systematically compile detailed insights into India's collaborative endeavours with Afghanistan across political and related domains. Furthermore, the study seeks to assess the scope and effectiveness of collaboration across these sectors, including their economic, reconstruction, and developmental dimensions.

2. Review of Literature

The literature review synthesizes various studies pertinent to the subject, outlining the theoretical frameworks underpinning proposed problem-solving approaches. Below is a synthesis of studies on "Collaboration between Afghanistan and India in Political, Economic, and Development Sectors": In their 2021 paper titled "Indo-Afghan Strategic Alliance in the Post-9/11 Era," Noor Abid and Dr Khushboo Ejaz highlight Afghanistan's pivotal geographical location at the crossroads of Central, Middle, and South Asia, which makes it strategically significant on a global scale. This has attracted sustained interest from neighbouring countries like Pakistan and India due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources. India, in particular, has invested considerable effort over several decades in building relations with Afghanistan, recognizing its role as a gateway to energy-rich Central Asia amid a regionally and globally competitive landscape (Ejaz & Abid, 2021). According to Abdul Rouf Bhat, Mudasir Mubarak, and Raghavendra Pratap Kushwaha (2018), Afghanistan holds strategic importance for India's objectives in Central Asia. It facilitates collaboration between India and the Central Asian Republics (CARs). They emphasize India's ongoing policy of engagement with both Afghanistan and the CARs, stressing the need for continued commitment from New Delhi amidst challenging security dynamics to foster Afghanistan's reconstruction and development (Bhat et al., 2018). Dr Adil Zaman and Fazli Subhan's 2019 study, "The Current India-Afghanistan Relationship: Implications for Pakistan," notes a shift in India's engagement with Kabul following the Taliban era, culminating in the signing of the "India-Afghanistan Strategic Pact" in 2011. This agreement marked a significant milestone in bilateral cooperation, with Afghanistan seeking India's support in trade, security, economic growth, and overall welfare, leading to the establishment of Indian consulates across key Afghan cities (Zaman & Subhan, 2019). Peerzada Ahmad Tufail (2021) examines "India's Policy in Afghanistan since 2001," highlighting India's proactive approach aimed at enhancing security and influence through collaborative efforts with Afghanistan. India's engagement strategy underscores its aspiration as a growing regional power seeking to expand its influence through constructive means. Despite being a relatively modest contributor to Afghanistan's development, India has pursued soft power strategies such as infrastructure development projects including roads, schools, and parliament buildings, aimed at fostering goodwill and support from the Afghan government and populace (Ahmad, 2021). Mehmet Turan ÇAĞLAR and Mirwais Muttaqi's 2021 paper, "Indian Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan 2001-2018," focuses on India's evolving foreign policy approach characterised by continuous engagement and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing bilateral ties and regional stability (ÇAĞLAR & Muttaqi, 2021). These studies collectively explore the multifaceted dimensions of collaboration between Afghanistan and India, encompassing political, economic, and developmental spheres, while highlighting the evolving dynamics and strategic imperatives shaping their bilateral relations. The competition for influence in Afghanistan among neighbouring nations, notably Pakistan and India, has intensified. Afghanistan's strategic importance has significantly increased on both regional and global stages, owing to its pivotal geographical position linking South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and East Asia (Muttaqi & ÇALAR, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

The author employed a qualitative approach to get the conclusions in this study, drawing on existing literature and articles to finalize the report. The author utilized various sources, including print, electronic media, and online materials, to create this article. This study aims to enhance readers' understanding of the partnership between Afghanistan and India in the realms of politics, economics, and development.

4. Research Objectives

The research seeks to accomplish the following goals: The aim is to analyze the political collaboration between Afghanistan and India and evaluate its impact on regional dynamics. The aim is to assess the economic linkages between Afghanistan and India and study the implications for both countries. The aim is to examine the development initiatives and endeavours undertaken by Afghanistan and India during the past two decades, along with their consequent impacts. The aim is to assess the challenges and potential benefits of the collaboration between Afghanistan and India in specific sectors. To understand the impact of historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors on the relationship between Afghanistan and India.

5. Findings

5.1 *Strategies aimed at enhancing the ties between Afghanistan and India*

India's strategy towards Afghanistan since 2001 is driven by diverse objectives, including countering Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, supporting Afghanistan's unity, autonomy, diversity, and peace, fostering strong economic linkages through trade, transport, and energy, and committing to sustained engagement in Afghanistan. India has shifted from its earlier military-focused approach, such as supporting the Northern Alliance, to a proactive strategy centred on cooperation. India now refrains from direct military involvement and emphasizes soft power tactics to strengthen its political influence and enhance longstanding ties with the Afghan population. The overarching goal is to empower Afghan society and actively contribute to building a secure, democratic, and harmonious Afghanistan (Ahmad, 2021).

5.2 *Infrastructure Developments*

India has invested significantly in various major projects, including infrastructure development such as road construction, irrigation systems, railways, and electrical transmission lines. Notable examples of these infrastructure efforts include the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Salma Dam. According to Scott, the construction of the Zaranj-Delaram road serves two primary purposes for India. Firstly, it provides Afghanistan with a more direct and alternative route to access the sea, reducing its reliance on Pakistan. Secondly, in case Pakistan restricts transit rights for trade, India can utilize the Mumbai-Chabahar port route in Iran to transport goods to Afghanistan once the highway is completed. India has undertaken various small-scale development initiatives in Afghanistan, including the establishment of essential services such as health clinics, schools, livestock facilities, bridges, bore wells, and public toilets for the Afghan populace. These projects aim to encourage community involvement and contribute to the restoration and enhancement of Afghanistan's infrastructure. Additionally, since 2001, India has provided humanitarian aid to Afghanistan in sectors such as healthcare, aviation, education, and food assistance. Notably, India has restored the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul and regularly sends medical missions to support humanitarian efforts across different regions of Afghanistan, particularly focusing on healthcare. Furthermore, India committed \$800 million during the Berlin Conference to support the construction and implementation of the Salma Dam Project in Afghanistan's Heart region, aimed at improving the country's water storage capabilities. Indian engineers oversaw the construction of the 107.5-meter-tall earth and rock fill dam on the Hari River, completed in June 2003. Responding to a request from the Afghan government, India also constructed two additional electricity substations in Doshi and Charikar to support the existing 220kV Transmission Line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul. In 2016, India contributed to the restoration of Kabul's century-old Stor Palace within the Afghan Foreign Office premises, restoring it to its original splendour. The restored Stor Palace was formally reopened on

August 22, 2016, in a ceremony attended by the Prime Minister of India and the President of Afghanistan (Hashimy, 2022).

5.3 Economic and Commercial Development

India recognizes Afghanistan's pivotal role as a nexus for economic routes connecting Central, South, and West Asia. Afghanistan holds significant importance for India not only due to its strategic location but also because it presents lucrative business opportunities for Indian enterprises. Despite the substantial potential for commerce between India and Afghanistan, bilateral trade amounted to US\$ 683 million in the fiscal year 2013-14, with India exporting US\$ 474 million worth of goods and importing US\$ 209 million.

India's main exports to Afghanistan include man-made filaments, garments, pharmaceuticals, cereals, dairy products, poultry, and clothing accessories. Conversely, Afghanistan primarily exports dry and fresh fruits to India. India has implemented several measures to maximize the trade potential between the two nations. In March 2003, India entered into a Preferential Trade Agreement with Afghanistan, offering significant tariff reductions ranging from 50% to 100% on 38 varieties of dry fruits. In November 2011, India eliminated basic customs duties on all Afghan goods (excluding alcohol and tobacco), facilitating their duty-free entry into the Indian market. The operationalization of the Chabahar port in Iran is expected to significantly boost Afghan exports by providing a new transit route for the country to engage in trade with India and other global markets. Furthermore, an Indian consortium named AFISCO, comprising both public and private sector iron ore mining and steel companies led by the Steel Authority of India, secured a contract for the Hajigak iron ore reserves. Their objective is to establish a steel plant with an annual capacity of 1.2 million metric tons, along with a power plant to support operations (Hashimy, 2022). India has significantly bolstered its ties with the Afghan government, establishing itself as a valued partner. In 2005, India actively advocated for Afghanistan's inclusion in SAARC, underscoring its commitment to strategic collaboration and intelligence sharing in combating militant groups. Over the past two decades, India has been pivotal in advancing Afghanistan's economic development. India's robust engagement includes substantial investments in various development projects aimed at fostering economic stability. Notable initiatives include a USD 178 million contribution towards Kabul's Parliament Building, funding the USD 150 million Zaranj-Delaram highway project linking western Afghanistan to Iran's Chabahar port, and allocating USD 42 million for the Salma Dam Project in Herat province. India's involvement extends to a trilateral preferential trade pact with Afghanistan and Iran, reflecting its strategic interests in the region.

Moreover, India has committed USD 2 billion, positioning itself as one of Afghanistan's largest donors, to support Kabul's reconstruction efforts. Bilateral trade between India and Afghanistan has seen steady growth, reaching USD 1.5 billion during the 2019-2020 period. The operationalization of the Chabahar port in Iran since 2018 has further facilitated the transportation of Indian goods to Afghanistan, with the Air Freight Corridor facilitating 100 flights since 2017, transporting commodities valued at USD 216 million. Despite these advancements, challenges remain, particularly concerning the Wagah-Attari route's accessibility for bilateral trade, hindered by restrictions under the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). This limitation has adversely affected the smooth flow of Afghan products into India, despite India being the region's largest market for Afghan goods (IndoAfghan Relations: India-Afghanistan Relations, n.d.). The government has pledged more than US\$3 billion to deliver humanitarian aid, develop essential infrastructure, and enhance governance capacity in Afghanistan, aiming to promote human development. India's support for Afghanistan includes significant humanitarian efforts such as providing one million metric tons of wheat, revitalizing hospitals, and implementing extensive health programs (Nandan & Kumar, 2022).

6. Political Development

India strategically aims to exert political influence within Afghanistan's political landscape. Therefore, India's economic initiatives play a pivotal role in advancing its political agenda in Afghanistan and

strengthening bilateral political ties. Despite the Taliban's governance in Kabul from 1996 to 2001, India maintained political relations with Afghanistan, which gained independence in 1919. Following the Taliban's defeat, supported by Pakistan, in 2001, India perceived an opportunity to cultivate friendly political relations with the new Afghan government. The overarching goal was to foster a pro-India administration in Kabul, not only to counterbalance Pakistan but also to solidify its position as a significant regional power (Muttaqi & CAGLAR, 2021).

Afghanistan has historically been a focal point of intense power struggles and regional rivalries. These rivalries, characterized by coups, proxy warfare, and arming local factions, have significantly influenced Afghanistan's stability and governance establishment. The rivalry between India and Pakistan is particularly prominent, predating the Afghan conflict and rooted in differing interpretations of nationhood, notably exacerbated by the ongoing dispute over Kashmir following British rule in South Asia. Afghanistan quickly became entangled in this regional rivalry, with Pakistan viewing India's relationship with Afghanistan as a potential threat to its territorial integrity and ethnic unity. Historian William Dalrymple describes the relationships between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India as a "lethal triangle of mutual distrust and competition," with all three nations ensnared in this complex dynamic (Constantino, 2020).

During an interview with the Wall Street Journal at the UN General Assembly in September 2009, Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna emphasized India's stance that war is not a sustainable solution to any crisis, including in Afghanistan. India's position underscores its support for the Afghan government's efforts to establish an inclusive democratic system, aligning with India's participation in various discussions, negotiations, and reconciliation efforts aimed at integrating diverse insurgent groups (D'Souza, 2011).

7. Financial assistance after 2001 and common ideologies

India has had a substantial influence on the development of Afghanistan and the South Asia region since 2001, and the two countries have maintained their longstanding, cultural, and social ties. The 9/11 tragedy led to the elimination of Taliban control and the provision of extensive political and financial support to the newly formed Afghan government. After the downfall of the Taliban administration, India's strategy changed to aggressively promote and maintain a cordial relationship with Afghanistan. President Karzai's nine trips to India greatly facilitated the smooth implementation of India's planned projects in Afghanistan, therefore empowering the nation. India should execute its policies without facing any obstacles or hazards. India committed to providing an additional \$500 million in development assistance to Afghanistan. In October 2011, the Afghan president's visit to New Delhi sparked ideas about establishing an expanded diplomatic alliance (Sendhilkumar, 2015). India has established two primary objectives in Afghanistan: firstly, to actively participate in the process of rebuilding and promoting economic development, and secondly, to mitigate security challenges by combating the influence exerted by Pakistan and China in Afghanistan. In 2011, India established a strong partnership with Afghanistan and committed a significant amount of \$2 billion for rehabilitation. India's reconstruction and development policies have positioned it as a prominent contributor to Afghanistan, assuming responsibility for executing initiatives related to rebuilding and development.

India's substantial financial investments in Afghanistan aim to enhance its influence in Central Asia, leveraging its long-standing involvement in the country since the 1950s via extensive economic projects. India has provided substantial financial contributions to Afghanistan's economy to uphold its regional security framework. India has pledged to provide \$3.1 billion in financial aid to the Afghan government, with the funds being distributed throughout all 31 provinces of Afghanistan. India is now involved in the construction of dams, establishment of aviation links, development of power plants, and making investments in the healthcare and education sectors. Furthermore, it is engaged in several businesses, including telecommunications via Indian networks. India has allocated funds for the building of the Afghan Parliament, which has been named the 'Atal Block' in honour of the deceased Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Furthermore, India has offered monetary assistance for the construction

of a 135-mile highway that connects Afghanistan to Iran's Chabahar port. India has contributed over \$3 billion in help towards the advancement of socio-economic initiatives. Pakistan is investing in Afghanistan, but it is clear that India has also become an important player. India is using both non-military and military techniques in Afghanistan and has a longterm strategy to combat the network of enemy nations in the area (Akhtar, 2019).

8. Progression of the relationship

Pakistan's strong objections, which were conveyed to the United States, consistently hindered the Karzai regime's efforts to strengthen its ties with India. The United States has shown its readiness to include India in development projects in Afghanistan but has made it clear that it opposes India taking on any security-related responsibilities to prevent any potential provocation of Pakistan. Therefore, the UPA administration in New Delhi, eager to preserve the Indo-US reconciliation, was reluctant to challenge the US about its efforts to enhance its influence in Afghanistan. India, as the fifth biggest contributor of aid to Afghanistan, has unquestionably made significant progress in providing developmental assistance. The support offered has included funding for education, healthcare, and infrastructure. India has constructed Afghanistan's new parliament building and given training to its members. The Border Roads Organization has effectively built a 218-kilometre road connecting the town of Zaranj, situated near the Iranian border, to Delaram in the northeast. Despite occasional assaults by the Taliban on Indian labourers, this achievement was nonetheless accomplished. India has made substantial contributions to the building of a power transmission line to Kabul and the development of a hydroelectric project valued at \$180 million at the Salma Dam near Herat. Furthermore, India has actively participated in providing various types of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, including the delivery of food supplies, the deployment of medical teams, and the establishment of a facility to provide prosthetic limbs to amputees. In addition, the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) holds an annual event that grants a maximum of 500 scholarships to Afghan students (Ganguly, 2012)

9. Major challenges and opportunities

India's primary goal is to limit China's influence since China is using the Gwadar deep-sea port in Baluchistan, which is next to Afghanistan's Kandahar region where the U.S. military facilities are located. This port offers the most effective and expedient route to Pakistan, enabling tourists to reach Kandahar within a few hours. India is apprehensive about the possible threat that China, particularly, presents to Indian commerce in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, India is concerned that Pakistan may acquire dominance over crucial energy pathways. India is displeased with China's control over the Gwadar port since it provides China with the capability to monitor Indian activities in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, as well as any forthcoming maritime collaborations between India and Iran. Similarly, Iran has valid concerns about the use of the Gwadar port by the United States as a strategic base for observing Iranian actions. India has always acknowledged the significance of Afghanistan, but the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has significantly increased its relevance. The proximity of Afghanistan to Pakistan and the strained ties between the two countries after the Taliban period contribute to this situation. India, as a prominent force in the area, has capitalized on the strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, successfully forging stronger ties with Afghanistan. India has formulated a policy to impose economic and military limitations on Pakistan by leveraging Afghanistan. At the same time, India seeks to discourage any favourable ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as such a relationship would not align with India's interests in Afghanistan (Akhtar, 2019).

10. Deterioration of relationships

India assumed the role as the main regional benefactor to Afghanistan after the occurrences of 9/11. India has earmarked more than \$3 billion for various developmental and rehabilitation projects in Afghanistan till the end of 2021. New Delhi tactically used the Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM) strategy to establish a presence in the freshly changed Afghanistan, while ensuring it maintained a non-participation stance on military matters. India cultivated robust diplomatic ties with both the Karzai and Ashraf Ghani-led civilian governments in Afghanistan. India's policies, which prioritize the well-being of civilians,

have positioned it as a supportive neighbour committed to fostering peace and progress in Afghanistan, as acknowledged by the Afghan population. New Delhi's use of soft power in its relationship with Afghanistan was appealing, but it lacked a long-term strategic vision. Despite the US-led international community's military presence and financial help to Afghanistan, the establishment of democracy and the development of a more evolved Afghan state looked to be taking place. As the US-led West began to withdraw from Afghanistan, it became clear to all observers that the new Afghan government was very fragile. In the last two decades, New Delhi has significantly depended on the Afghan government as its main priority and investment. India neglected to provide enough diplomatic resources for engaging with the Taliban, despite the evident need to do so. The Taliban's reluctance stemmed from their deep-seated hostility against India and the many assaults inflicted upon Indian security forces and civilians in Afghanistan as a result of the Taliban's insurgency post-2001. One factor for this opposition to the Taliban was the Indian government's desire to avoid being seen as sympathetic to an Islamist extremist organization known for its flagrant contempt of human rights. Gender equality. India's inability to cultivate a rapport with the Taliban during the last ten years finally led to the disintegration of the Afghan government as a consequence of the Taliban's extensive offensive from May to July 2021. This incident replicated India's prior encounter in Afghanistan in 1996. India was compelled to close its embassy in Kabul and other consulates around the nation as a result of the Taliban's resurgence. For a considerable duration, experts and observers have consistently emphasized the need to initiate dialogue with the Taliban, especially after their comeback in 2005-06. The security and foreign policy elite in New Delhi, however, decided to give priority to the development of bilateral ties only with the administration in Kabul. They ignored the reality that, in recent years (especially after 2012), even the United States changed its emphasis from military tactics to discussions as a more practical method of attaining peace in Afghanistan. India's physical and symbolic influence in Afghanistan was lost as a result of the Taliban's swift and successful military assault in August 2021, which was followed by the downfall of the Ashraf Ghani administration (Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022).

11. Conclusion

India's attitude to Afghanistan after 2001 has been multifaceted, shaped by a range of objectives. The goals include reducing the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and extremism, strengthening a united, independent, diverse, and peaceful Afghanistan, developing strong economic ties in terms of trade, transportation, and energy, and committing to long-term engagement in the region. India has transitioned from engaging in military operations during the 1990s to adopting a proactive approach that prioritizes collaboration over military actions. Furthermore, it has shifted its approach by distancing itself from the use of harsh force strategies. India has placed a high priority on using soft power to strengthen its political influence and solidify its longtime connections with the Afghan population. India has allocated substantial funds towards key infrastructure initiatives, such as the Zaranj-Delaram Highway and the Salma Dam. The objective of these initiatives is to provide alternative trade pathways for Afghanistan to reduce its reliance on Pakistan.

India has strengthened its relationship with the Afghan government, demonstrating a commitment to strategic cooperation and the exchange of information in the battle against Islamic militants. Over the last two decades, India has allocated more than US\$3 billion to support Afghanistan by providing humanitarian aid, developing infrastructure, and enhancing governance capabilities. India's approach to Afghanistan is largely aimed at reducing Islamabad's influence in the region, to strengthen its position and political influence. India seeks to enhance its standing as a prominent regional actor by actively participating in the Afghan economy and offering support to the government and populace. This endeavour further aims to foster political alliances with Afghanistan. Despite Pakistan's efforts to impede India's efforts to form a strong alliance with Afghanistan, India continues to allocate resources towards development projects and provide humanitarian aid in the country. India's goal is to ensure that Afghanistan remains a friendly nation and to have control and influence over activities in Pakistan. India's substantial expenditures in Afghanistan exemplify its long-lasting dedication and efforts to position itself as a key influence outside the South Asian area. New Delhi used the Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM)

approach to establish a presence in the 'new' Afghanistan without actively involving itself in military operations. India forged robust diplomatic ties with civilian administrations in Afghanistan, resulting in India being seen positively by ordinary Afghans as a friendly neighbouring nation committed to fostering peace and progress. However, the use of soft power by this technology, while visually appealing, eventually revealed a deficiency in long-term strategic planning. After the US-led international community pulled out of Afghanistan, it became evident that the Afghan state was vulnerable. India's exclusive focus on the Afghan government left it inadequately prepared to interact with the Taliban, despite the pressing need to do so. A multitude of specialists and observers have constantly advocated for actively interacting with the Taliban, particularly after their resurgence in 2005-06.

However, the influential individuals in New Delhi who are responsible for security and international policy made it a priority to develop strong connections with the government in Kabul. They did not support the United States' shift towards diplomatic solutions. Consequently, India has lost its physical and symbolic influence in Afghanistan as a consequence of the Taliban's rapid military offensive in August 2021 and the following downfall of the Ashraf Ghani regime.

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