

India-Afghanistan Relations

1) Introduction

- India and Afghanistan have a strong relationship based on historical and cultural links.
- In the recent years, the pace of Indo-Afghan bilateral cooperation in the political, security, development, and cultural areas has continued to accelerate, on the basis of the Afghanistan-India strategic partnership agreement (SPA).

2) Why Afghanistan is important for India?

- Afghanistan serves India's security and economic interests
- Afghanistan is tied to India's vision of being a regional leader and a great power, coupled with its competition with China over resources and its need to counter Pakistani influence.
- India's ability to mentor a nascent democracy will go a long way to demonstrate to the world that India is indeed a major power, especially a responsible one.
- The pipeline project TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), which seeks to connect an energy-rich Central to South Asia, will only see the light of the day if stability is established in Afghanistan
- India's interest in Afghanistan relates to its need to reduce Pakistani influence in the region.
- New Delhi needs Kabul to get a better view of Islamabad and hence it is pertinent that it fosters positive relations.
- For access to the landlocked Central Asian countries that border Afghanistan.
- The country is home to resource deposits worth one trillion dollars, according to the US Geological Survey.

3) Pakistan card in Afghanistan

- For Pakistan, Afghanistan is a zero-sum game with India.
- Ghani's misguided attempt to forge a workable relationship with Pakistan cost India and Afghanistan a "lost year" that could have otherwise seen real strategic progress.
- India should contain and balance Pakistan's influence, which may otherwise hamper Indian interests.
- Afghanistan has been the battleground for an India-Pakistan proxy war since 2001.
- Mr. Ghani is turning to India because his relationship with Pakistan is breaking down.
- It is breaking down because Pakistan has neither reined in the insurgency nor compelled the Taliban to negotiate.

4) Bilateral Relations

- In order to mitigate the threat from an unstable backyard, India has employed a "soft-power" approach in Afghanistan.
- **Bilateral trade**
 - a) India's bilateral trade with Afghanistan stood at \$684.47 million in 2014-15, 20.41 per cent higher than \$568.44 million in 2010-11.
 - b) Despite the lack of direct land access, India is the second-largest destination for Afghan exports.
- **Defence**
 - a) India, according delivered three Russia-made Mi-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan
 - b) India has also discussed potential sales of its Light Combat Helicopter and has ambitions to export the much-maligned Tejas combat aircraft.
- **Parliament building**
 - a) India has constructed the new building at a cost of about \$90 million, as a sign of friendship.
 - b) The Afghan Parliament and the Salma dam are two of India's showpiece projects in Afghanistan.
- **'Heart of Asia' conference**
 - a) The 2016 Heart of Asia (HoA) conference began in New Delhi with the objective of bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan.
 - b) The key elements of HoA process have been to devise a sustained, incremental approach to implementation of the confidence building measures (CBM) in Afghanistan
 - c) It will also seek to speed up reconstruction in Afghanistan with a focus on enhancing investment and connectivity to the country.
- **India's role**
 - a) India has played a constructive role over several past years inside Afghanistan
 - b) India has extended an aid of over \$2 billion to Afghanistan and has been involved in massive developmental efforts in the war-torn country.
 - c) India has done well in Afghanistan, and its projects have touched the lives of ordinary people.
- **A long history**
 - a) During the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-89), India was the only South Asian nation to recognise the Soviet-backed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.
 - b) Following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, India continued to provide Afghan government with humanitarian aid.

5) India's growing arms footprint in Afghanistan

- India's growing arms footprint in Afghanistan points to an important future aspect of its regional power projection
- Arms generate revenue but can also transform the balance of power, and as India has discovered to its cost, provide leverage during crises and wars
- India had gifted four MI-25 attack helicopters to Afghanistan
- Pakistan has raised "concerns" about India's security assistance to Afghanistan
- **positive impact**
 - a) Increasing Capacity of Afghan forces resulting in better combat of militants.
 - b) Further strengthening of bilateral relations. It will be helpful in aligning Afghanistan towards India, away from Pakistan.
 - c) Thrust to manufacturing of defence equipment to India.
 - d) Status of regional power requires active involvement in efforts to maintain peace and stability. India also need to make its presence and influence felt in the peace talks
 - e) Afghanistan's stability is essential for India as it provides a gateway to central Asia
 - f) A number of India backed projects (Chabahar port project) are running there. And Stability can be brought only when Afghan Army is equipped with modern weapons
 - g) Both India and Afghanistan are suffering from cross border terrorism. Military assistance to Afghanistan will help it eliminating the cross border terrorism, which will in turn be beneficial for regional peace and stability.
- **Negative impact**
 - a) Leadership crisis is a fundamental problem in Afghanistan which arms cannot compensate for.
 - b) Conflict with Taliban and other state actors may increase.
 - c) India should first attain self-sufficiency before exporting the weapons to other nations.

6) Concerns

- Many believe that with Taliban gaining ground, India must be much more careful and choose smaller projects with care.
- The quantum of assistance should not go down, but projects must be selected with the ground situation in mind
- India's growing friendship with Afghanistan has always been a major worry for Pakistan.
- Besides the embassy in Kabul, India had consulates in Kandhar, Herat, Jalalabad and Mazr-e-Sharif irked Pakistan.

7) Need of the Hour

- It is imperative for Indian to assist Afghanistan in building sound political structures, a strong military and economy, along with human resources.
- India's push for Afghanistan to be included in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), in 2005, was a smart move
- India needs to enhance its current assistance to Afghanistan given the growing security challenges and economic difficulties.
- In response to Kabul's military and economic demands India needs to take a tough decision – to address the burgeoning threat in Afghanistan while keeping in mind its own strategic interests

8) The Threat to India's Security in Afghanistan

- An unstable backyard is not only pernicious to India's larger strategic interests abroad and future goals but can also impact its internal security.
- The mounting fears in the country are not only an impediment to Indian companies' ability to tap into Afghanistan's mineral resources, estimated at \$1 trillion, but can prove to be detrimental to ever-growing Indian energy demands.
- The threat, however, is not just to Indian embassies and consulates but also to New Delhi's economic interests in the country.

