

# India – Afghanistan Relations

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## Manifest Pedagogy

Afghanistan as an issue should be studied bilaterally and regionally. Hence a study just focusing on bilateral relations would be incomplete. For a holistic preparation of Afghanistan as a topic involvement of foreign powers historically and at present needs to be known to examine its impact on India. The relation between India and Afghanistan is always hyphenated with countries like Pakistan, US etc. so clubbing Indo-Afghanistan relations with any other country and framing it as a question is always a possibility in UPSC.

## **In news**

High Peace Council on Afghanistan held recently

## **Placing it in syllabus**

India and Its Neighborhood – Relations.

## **Static Dimensions**

1. History of Foreign Invasion in Afghanistan
2. Indo – Afghan relations since 2000
3. Impact of Pakistan on Indo-Afghanistan relations
4. India aspiration of regional leadership and Afghanistan
5. Terrorism as an issue in Indo-Afghanistan relations

## **Current dimensions**

1. Indo-Afghanistan relations under the new regime
2. Peace conferences on Afghanistan and India's role in it
3. Issue of Good and Bad Taliban and India's stand on it

# Content

Afghanistan is connecting link between Central Asia and South Asia. As part of Central Asia it has been a playground for foreign powers over ages. In the modern age as part of Cold War it becomes the theatre of Cold war. USSR invades Afghanistan in 1979. US to counter USSR supports Mujahideen with the support of Pakistan, the fall out of which is today's Taliban. It is in the issue context one needs to know Indo – Afghanistan relations

## Historical Links

1. Buddhism – Ancient cultural link
2. Islam – Medieval India
3. Anglo-Afghan War to make Afghanistan a Buffer State under the British rule in India

## Chronology of landmark events in Indo-Afghanistan relations

1945 – Cold War: Afghanistan becomes a theatre

- US supports Mujahedeen (IF) against USSR

(Mujahedeen are non – state actors)

- US gets Pakistan's support (Pakistan uses this support against India)
- Pakistan also supports Mujahedeen
- Use them against India for Kashmir
- Exert influence on Afghanistan and Central Asia

1989: USSR withdraws

1996: Splinter group called **Taliban** emerges and comes to power

- After collapse of USSR, power vacuum is seen and Pakistan supports Taliban to set-up government in Afghanistan
- India, Russia and Iran support "Northern Alliance" which

is a legitimate government

1999: Kandahar Hi-jack of IC814: Till then only Liaison with Afghanistan and no permanent Diplomatic office hence India couldn't bargain with the terrorists due to lack of proper communication channels

2001: Northern Alliance comes to power: India – Afghan relations begin

2001: Bonn Conference (This was the beginning of peace process for the region and the country)

2002: India establishes a diplomatic mission in Afghanistan and begins soft diplomacy

2007: Afghanistan becomes member of SAARC

2011: India-Afghan Strategic Partnership signed

### **Importance of Afghanistan to India**

- Connecting link to Central Asia
- Terrorism as a common threat
- Involvement of Foreign powers in Afghanistan and its impact on India
- India's involvement in Afghanistan – gives 'regional leader' status to India

India is deeply involved in Afghanistan both bilaterally and regionally as well as part of its peace process. India's involvement is characterized by Soft diplomacy. India seeks to involve itself through **soft power** rather than militarily as India believes that it wins the hearts and minds of Afghans.

### **Soft Power**

It is a concept given by Joseph Nye in the context of excessive use of military power by US and its futility in making any tangible gains for the country. Joseph Nye suggests

US to go for Soft Power. Soft power means, achieving an action, through co-opt in (willing acceptance), which is sustainable and is more beneficial.

### **India's best experiment of Soft power is in Afghanistan**

- Cultural diplomacy : Bollywood
- Development Project :
  - Hospitals
  - Parliament
  - Selma dam/ friendship dam
  - Zaranj – Delaram road link between Chabahar and Afghanistan
  - Chabahar/Shahid Behesti port road link
- Indirect Military Involvement
  - No Hard Power
  - Just training Afghan army and other law & order forces – US withdrawal after its **Operation Enduring Freedom** has made this a prominent issue today

US has been involved in Afghanistan completely after its Global War on terror after 9/11. After 9/11 Pakistan was given prime importance in its war against Pakistan. This continued till Obama as part of his Af-Pak policy. But this got a shift with the coming of Trump and his Af-Pak policy which replaced the earlier one

### **Trump's Af-Pak Policy and its impact on India**

1. Trump changed the policy now where India (and not Pakistan) will be its partner for US in Afghanistan
2. Withdrawal of US forces within specific time which is in line with his **America First policy**

### **Implications of the policy**

#### **Disadvantages for India:**

- India – Pakistan relations may be hampered
- India – China relations may be hampered
- China and Pakistan may get closer
- India may be forced to be involved militarily
- India may be forced to accept the Good Taliban and the Bad Taliban bifurcation of US which India has been traditionally against.

### **Advantages in India**

- India's rise as a regional leader will have positive implication against terrorism
- Kashmir/Terrorist issue will be accounted as a global issue
- India's connection with Central Asia will be enhanced
- Indo-U.S relations will be stronger

### **Good – Bad Taliban Issue**

Obama initiated this idea and this is being carried further by Trump. It gets a formal recognition in **Tashkent Declaration–2018** which was an outcome of **International Conference on Afghanistan (ICoA)**

**Why USA and Trump is going for this separation and Dialogue with Good Taliban?**

- US withdrawal will be easier
- Saves the image of US from being dented, by offering a diplomatic solution
- In line with **“America First” Policy** of Trump

In **2018 High Peace Council** initiated by Russia held recently Good Taliban participated. India has sent two representatives unofficially. India is right now in a dilemma to go ahead with the talks with Good Taliban.

India should wait and watch until there is a visible proof of Good Taliban shunning process and being genuinely interested in the progress of Afghanistan as a nation and Indo-

Afghanistan relations a foreign policy issue.

## **Test yourself: Mould your thoughts**

Afghanistan is not only important bilaterally for India but also as a platform to launch its Regional Leadership Policy. Critically comment