



Afghanistan's Strategic Reorientation Towards India During the Second Taliban Regime: Implications for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The resurgence of Taliban as the new regime in Afghanistan has created a complex geo-strategic environment for Pakistan. Contrary to the popular expectation, the new Taliban regime has refused to toe the Pakistan line and are increasingly aligning themselves with India. Increasing ties between India and Afghanistan has pushed Pakistan in a geo-political quandary where its two immediate neighbours, harboring hostile intentions towards it, are increasingly growing closer. The changing regional environment calls for a re-assessment of Pakistan's foreign policy goals towards Afghanistan and its *modus operandi*. The following article by discussing historical relations between India and Afghanistan, highlights how the new Taliban regime is growing closer to India at the cost of Pakistan. Further, the article highlights the geo-strategic goals of India and Afghanistan behind their increasing linkages and how these growing ties implicate Pakistan. The article then concludes by discussing some strategic pathways that Pakistan can leverage to secure its legitimate interests.

Keywords: Terrorism, Taliban Resurgence, South Asia, India-Afghan Relations, Pakistan.

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Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan share of long history of periodic clashes, political distrust, and a long-standing border issue. This shared history of conflict and disruption has created enormous challenges for both the states and have impeded the pathway towards progress for both states. There was a widely held consensus among the Pakistani politicians and academicians that the reemergence of Taliban government in Afghanistan would bode well for Pakistan as Pakistan has been their primary facilitator in their long war against US. However, contrary to the expectations, the reemergence of Afghan Taliban has pushed Pakistan in a security conundrum where its highly volatile regions of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are witnessing repeated and large-scale terrorist attacks primarily by the Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan- an offshoot of Afghan Taliban. The Taliban government in Afghanistan, in blatant disregard for their obligations under Doha agreement, have not only allowed safe havens for TTP but are also providing them shelter and logistical support (Asma, 2024). Despite repeated requests by Islamabad to the Afghan government to withdraw support for the Afghanistan based factions of TTP, there has been no efforts by the Afghan government to curb its support for the terrorist groups functioning on its soil.

The developments have led to a further deterioration in relations between the two states with Pakistan conducting strikes in Paktika province in Afghanistan to eliminate the TTP leaders operating from Afghanistan. The situation further deteriorated by October 2025 when the Pakistan warned Afghanistan of an “open war” if it fails to curb the terrorist factions operating on its soil (AlJazeera, 2025). Mediatory efforts by Qatar and Turkey subsided the aggravating situation by mediating a ceasefire between the two countries but the central question of Afghan Taliban’s support to the TTP which continues the challenge states writ and wreak havoc on its security infrastructure remains.

Another prominent feature of this downward trajectory of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations is the India factor that configures deeply in the regional strategic environment. Embedding Mandala theory by Kautilaya in its foreign policy approach, India eyes Afghanistan as its strategic asset against

Pakistan. According to the Mandala theory, “Your neighbour is your natural enemy and your neighbour’s neighbour is your friend” (Patil, 2022). Aligning its foreign policy with the theory, India historically views Afghanistan as its natural ally. This is primarily because both the state’s share territorial disputes with Pakistan: India has border disputes in Kashmir and Afghanistan questions the legitimacy of its border with Pakistan (Ganaie, 2022). The relations between India and Afghanistan stretch back to 1950 when soon after independence India signed a friendship treaty with Afghanistan known as ‘Treaty of Friendship between the government of India and The Royal Government of Afghanistan’ (Ganaie, 2022). Since then, India has maintained its goodwill posture within Afghan political and social community. The relations reached their zenith when after the war on terror India began heavily investing in Afghanistan. It funded the development of Afghan Parliament, several dams and other infrastructural and financial supports. Indian Foreign Minister in 2023 acknowledged that India has spent around \$3 billion in Afghanistan to efforts to build long term cordial relations (Biswas, 2025). With India and Afghanistan cozying up to each other, Pakistan finds itself in a catch 22 position where it is flanked by hostile neighbours from both sides.

These changing regional dynamics call for a reevaluation of the security imperatives of Pakistan. The article therefore assesses the role of India in using the terrorist factions and proxies as a means to destabilize Pakistan. The article establishes that the regional security calculus of the three states is so interlinked that the security for one cannot be seen as independent of the security of its neighbour. The article by discussing the historical relations between India and Afghanistan highlights the changing dynamics of the relations between the two during first and second Taliban regime. By establishing the causes for Afghanistan increasing tilt towards India and its corresponding impacts on Pakistan, the article argues that Pakistan needs to adapt to the changing regional environment and re-engage Taliban on a strategic level.

Historical Trajectory of Relations Between India and Afghanistan

India-Afghan Relations: From 1947 to 1979

Soon after partition of subcontinent, India and Afghanistan set off for a longterm and amiable

strategic relations. Both viewing Pakistan as with a lens of hostility, agreed to support each other against their regional rival. India and Afghanistan signed their Friendship Treaty on January 4, 1950 (Ganaie, 2022). The treaty set the foundation for an extended period of cordial relations between the two envisaging economic, diplomatic and political support. Consequently, India enjoyed friendly ties with King Zahir Shah and the successive regimes until the soviet invasion of 1979. Even after Soviet invasion India continued to enjoy significant political leverage in Afghanistan. During the early years Afghanistan outrightly rejected Pakistan inclusion in the United Nations and purported the idea of 'Pushtonistan' (Howenstein, 2010). Afghanistan also continued to oppose Pakistan's narrative on Kashmir and claimed it to be a part of India. As a result, India supported Afghanistan's claims on the north western region of Pakistan and its idea of 'Pushtonistan'. India-Afghanistan relations at this time were motivated by their shared rivalry against Pakistan (Ganaie, 2022). Making an apt use of the situation India aimed to encircle Pakistan from its western and eastern borders to curtail its prospects of growth. For the purpose it made significant investment in development projects and energy infrastructure as well creating its fond impression among Afghan public.

Relation During Soviet Invasion: Relative Turbulence from 1979 to 1990s

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, India continued its fraternal relations with successive communist regimes. Although it did not outrightly supported Soviet presence in Afghanistan but the regional geo-political climate of the time demanded India to pursue calculated engagement with new communist regimes (Howenstein, 2010). This was primarily because during the Afghan war, United States of America (USA) was openly supporting and assisting Pakistan and Afghan Mujahideen through military and economic support. India feared continuous support to Pakistan and Mujahideen would dismantle the regional balance of power in favour of Pakistan, thus it avoided UN calls for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan to avoid Soviet antagonism at a point when Pakistan was enjoying the perk of US support (Ganaie, 2022). Additionally, India also realized that Mujahideen led victory would also strengthen Pakistan's position within the political corridors of

Afghanistan, to avoid Pakistan using up the vacuum to create its influence in the region, India warmed up to Mujahideen as well (Ganaie, 2022). India predominantly kept its relations with Afghanistan within the development and trade. Direct banking arrangement were established in 1987 to consolidate economic ties. Further visits to India by Afghan leadership strengthened the commercial and industrial markets (Majeed, 2023). Thus India took a relative backseat in relations with Afghanistan during this era because of Afghanistan domestic political turbulence. The era was marked by a surge in development activities and economic ties between the two.

Relations with First Taliban Government: 1996 to 2001

After a prolonged civil war in Afghanistan following Soviet withdrawal, Taliban came to power in 1996 with Pakistan's help. The first Taliban government was a Pashtun dominated, radical Islamist government. Soon after Taliban's accession to power India closed its embassy in Kabul as it did not recognize the Taliban government. However, during this time India established its relations with the Northern Alliance an anti-taliban movement formed by non-pashtun tribes in Afghanistan (Majeed, 2023). India supported the Northern Alliance by donating \$10 million through its intelligence agency RAW to strengthen defense of the areas controlled by it (Majeed, 2023). Former Indian Ambassador M.H Ansari defined India's hesitation to establish relations with Taliban as a result of Taliban's oppression of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs. Moreover, the hijacking of the Indian airlines flight IC 814 by Taliban further aggravated the dynamics between the two. Thus, during the first Taliban government India did not have any direct relations with the regime rather supported the anti-taliban alliances through its intelligence agencies and military and economic support.

Relations with new Afghan regime: From 2001 to 2021

After the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent war on terror by US on Afghanistan, Taliban regime came to an end while the Northern Alliance under the leadership of Hamid Karzai appeared as the new Afghan government. After the fall of Taliban India revived its relations with Afghanistan under the new regime. As a result the Taliban started their

antagonistic activities against by attacking Indian embassies and consulates (Shankar, 2026). India's relations with Afghanistan's new regime were established on three levels: political and diplomatic, economic and geo-strategic.

On Political and diplomatic levels, India restored its diplomatic relation with Afghanistan under the new regime headed by Hamid Karzai. It opened its new consulates in Mazar-i-sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Herat (Majeed, 2023). This uptick in diplomatic relations with Afghanistan proved to be a harbinger of an era that ushered in India's growing influence in Afghanistan. Not only on diplomatic front, India also utilized important international forums like South Asian Association of Regional Countries (SAARC) to consolidate its support for Afghanistan. Afghanistan became a member of SAARC in 2007. Although the organization has remained dormant for long, Afghanistan's inclusion in the block gave a significant boost to the Karzai regime on international level.

India has made significant investments in Afghanistan economically. These economic investments were aimed at achieving the support of Afghan people and India establishing itself as a major player in Afghanistan. It became the sixth largest donor to Afghanistan in the post 9/11 era by donating 1.5bn till 2011. In addition, it is also largely investing in highways, power transmission setups, dams and infrastructure. India Army's Border Road Organization (BRO) has been building Zaranj Delaram Highway giving Afghanistan access to Iran's Chabahar port (Majeed, 2023). Other than that Pul-e-khumri power transmission line, Salma Dam, and Indian Medical Missions (IMM) are other projects that India has been working on in Afghanistan (Majeed, 2023). Its major and most important contributions have been the parliament building and a Dam on river Kabul. The new dam being built by Indian assistance would hinder the water flow to Pakistan. Pakistan has repeatedly voiced its concerns regarding the dam but nothing substantial has been done to address them. Other than hydroelectric projects India has also heavily invested in education, health, infrastructure, agriculture and telecommunication sectors in Afghanistan (Ghosh, 2026).

Indian investments in Afghanistan have a geo-strategic dimension to it as well. India has two

primary goals in Afghanistan. First, it wants access to the resource rich central Asian states and having close ties with Afghanistan would allow it to bypass Pakistan and access central Asia through Afghanistan using Iran's Chabahar port. Secondly, India aims to diminish threats to security which it believes is threatened with an antagonist regime in Afghanistan. By establishing close ties with the Afghanistan India would be able to maintain its presence in the region and keep Pakistan's inroads in check. Shashi Tharoor argues that India has been using its soft power in Afghanistan and balance out Pakistan's influence in the region (Majeed, 2023). For the purpose it has also expanded its influence in southern regions of Afghanistan close to Pakistan's borders.

However, during all this time Taliban have continued to show strong resistance to India and had made it a constant target of its aggression. Due to India's support to the Karzai regime, Taliban conducted several attacks on India interests in the region including attacks on Indian embassy in 2008 and 2009. More recently Taliban, in July 2021, Taliban also killed the Pulitzer prize winning Indian photojournalist Danish Siddiqui (Chaudhry, 2025). Moreover from 2009 to 2013 Taliban continued to attack Indian diplomatic sites and areas frequented by Indians causing deaths of numerous Indian nationals (Sarkar, 2025). Thus the period between 2001 to 2021 signified intense hostility between Taliban and India and resurgence of Taliban in August 2021 as the regime in power ignited assumptions that India would once again be averse to building any kind of relations with the radical Taliban regime. However, after the reemergence of Taliban India has recalibrated its posture towards the new regime. The relations between the two after 2021 are analyzed below.

India-Afghan Relations Post 2021

In August 2021, in a drastic turn of events, Taliban started taking control of major cities. In a month, they captured Kabul without much resistance from the Afghan army and established their government. The developments came as a shock to the international community which believed that Taliban lacked the strength to pose significant resistance to the US backed Afghan government. However, the Taliban showed remarkable strength and resilience by dismantling the republic government and re-establishing their rule. For

India, likewise, the developments proved shocking. Considering its prior experience with the first Taliban government, India immediately closed its embassy and evacuated its staff and citizens after Taliban regained power in 2021 (Ghosh, 2026). This temporary halt in diplomatic relations was believed to be because of security concerns and deteriorating conditions for the minorities and women. However, as the situation unfolded and international community starting accepting Taliban as the regime in power in Afghanistan, India also started recalibrating its stance towards the new regime. By mid-2022 India sent its 'technical mission' to Afghanistan to re-establish its diplomatic relations with Afghanistan (Ghosh, 2026). Consequently, Taliban were also allowed to re-open Afghan consulates in Mumbai and Hyderabad (Shankar, 2026). Taliban have also been keen to establish pragmatic relations with India. Taliban administration's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi has twice held meeting with his Indian counterparts, once with Indian foreign secretary and then with Indian Foreign Minister in Dubai and India respectively (Shankar, 2026). The last meeting as of writing, was held in India between Muttaqi and Indian Foreign Minister Jaishankar in October 2025. The meeting revolved around discussing mutual security concerns, areas of cooperation and building people to people contacts (Ghosh, 2026). Interestingly the time of the meeting coincided with Pakistan's attacks in Afghanistan against the TTP elements further aggravating the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan by pushing Afghanistan deeper into Indian ambit. India also utilized the moment to its full benefit by announcing that it would be reopening its embassy in Afghanistan only a day after Pakistan's strikes in Afghanistan (Eshetu, 2025). India has also hastened its humanitarian efforts to build a goodwill among the Afghan public. It established itself as the 'first responder' after Afghanistan deadly earthquakes in November 2025. It has been relentlessly investing in Afghan medical, education, agriculture and power sectors. These humanitarian aid has allowed India to maintain a ground presence in the region to forward its strategic goals which include filling the power vacuum created by strained Pak-Afghan ties and countering Chinese influence in the region. A deeper analysis of India's geostrategic interests in the region is given below.

Indian Geo-Strategic Interests in Afghanistan

Curbing the security threats

One of the primary reasons India wants to maintain its presence in Afghanistan is the its security concerns (Grossman, 2025). During the first Taliban government and in the following years Afghanistan proved to be a camp for anti-India elements. The Taliban not only provided safe sanctuaries to groups fighting against Indian occupation in Kashmir but also provided training and arms. India fears a revival of these ties between Taliban and the anti-India groups. To keep these elements in check and assess the ground realities India needs to maintain its presence in the region.

Access to Central Asia

Another prime Indian interest in Afghanistan is that Afghanistan provides India a gateway to Central Asia by circumventing Pakistan. To access landlocked Central Asian markets India needs access either through Pakistan or through Afghanistan. With relations with Pakistan in jeopardy, India can now only rely on Afghanistan to ensure its access to Central Asia. India is thus recalibrating its policy on engaging with Taliban government according to new strategic realities (Afzal, 2026). It now wants to ensure it is not left out while its adversaries like Pakistan and China strengthen their foothold in the region. For the purpose India is also developing Iran's Chabahar port that would provide it access to Afghanistan and then to Central Asia (Singh, 2025). It aims to connect Chabahar to North-South Transport corridor which is a multimodal route that would connect India to Central Asia and Russia through Iran (Vishnoi, 2025). To materialize its these aspirations India now needs to ensure its presence in Afghanistan and that would only be viable by reviving diplomatic ties and maintaining an onground presence.

Regional hegemony

India has always aspired to be the regional hegemon which can dictate the security and political environment of the region according to its whims. Its relations with its much smaller neighbours are built on the similar dynamic. With Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, India increasingly intervenes in the domestic political structure and tries to maintain its influence through overt and covert operations. It enjoys a great degree of

influence in Bangladesh by overtly supporting one party against the other. In Sri Lanka as well, it has widely leveraged its ethnic linkages with Tamil community to ensure the situation does not escalate to further deterioration. Similarly, with Pakistan India aims to disrupt Pakistan's security structure as Pakistan presents the biggest threat to its regional ambitions. Primarily since the nuclearization of the sub-continent Pakistan has positioned itself as the main rival to Indian military might effectively becoming an obstacle to India's regional goals. Thus, India now aims to weaken Pakistan using hybrid warfare and proxy wars. For the purpose it is increasingly using Afghanistan as a basecamp for its operations.

Countering Pakistan's role in Afghanistan

Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep historical, religious and ethnic bonds, and these bonds were the reason that first Taliban government was able to get recognition from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and UAE. Due to Pakistan's history with the Taliban India is increasingly attentive about the growing relations between the two in the second Taliban government. Pakistan's alleged support to Taliban before the takeover and the presence of Pakistan's DG ISI Faiz Hameed in Kabul after it fell to Taliban sent alerts throughout the India media and leadership. The incidence was seen as a clear depiction of Pakistan's continuous support to the Taliban. However, when the relations between Taliban 2 and Pakistan became turbulent India found a good enough opportunity to strengthen its relations with the new regime. Despite the ideological and cultural barriers, India now aims to re-establish its presence in Afghanistan to keep its adversaries in check.

Extending influence beyond region

One of India's major goals is to extend its influence beyond the region. It not only wants to establish itself as a regional hegemon but aims to establish its position as a global power. For the purpose it needs to get its home in order and that would not be possible if it continues to stay pre-occupied with terrorism and security threats at home. To get its home in order India needs to have a ground presence in Afghanistan so it can assess the situation first hand and recalibrate its position according to the changing realities. Afghanistan's former Interior Minister Masood Andrabi acknowledges that Indian presence in Afghanistan

does not merely serve humanitarian purposes but also has a transactional approach to it. India has been slowly building its intelligence networks close to Pakistani borders to keep Pakistan in check using Afghan soil (Andrabi, 2025).

Strengthening Political and Diplomatic Clout

Maintaining a strong political and diplomatic clout is another of geo-strategic goal that India eyes in the region. The Pakistan-India clashes in May 2025 gave a deafening blow to the Indian narrative on terrorism. Major global power including US did not toe the Indian line and rather supported Pakistan's proposal of a fair and prompt investigation of the matter. Moreover, Pakistan's prominent role in defusing tensions between US and Iran highlighted Pakistan strong mediatory posture and its inclination towards peace and resolution of issues through dialogue whereas India was absent from the international scene. In this situation India could not risk further diplomatic isolation and had to take steps to regain its diplomatic leverage in the region. For the purpose, it assessed that complete disengagement with Afghanistan would not be in its interest and would provide its adversaries including Pakistan and China the space to consolidate their presence in the region.

Instruments used by India to destabilize Pakistan

India has been using multiple covert and overt strategic instruments to destabilize Pakistan using Afghanistan. These instruments include establishing intelligence and espionage networks through consulates close to the Pakistani border, financial, logistical and military support to the warring factions, tactical alliances with anti-Pakistan groups, proxy warfare and soft power leverage through economic and humanitarian aid.

India has been building its intelligence and consular networks close to Pakistan's borders on the Afghan side. It has its consulate offices in Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad and Mazarisharif (Usman, 2018). Many of the consulates are located close to Pakistan's borders and have created a justified sense of unease in Pakistan as Pakistan views them as strategic headquarters working for RAW to dismantle its security structure. Afghanistan's former Acting Director of NDS (Afghan intelligence agency) also acknowledges that it was a widely known fact in the NDS that Indian consulates along Pak-Afghan border have been working to sabotage Pakistan's

security (Andrabi, 2025). Other than consulate networks India has also been using its economic aid as a soft power leverage to build goodwill and influence among the Afghan public which it can use against Pakistan if and when the situation arises. Andrabi argues that India has been working under a transactional approach in Afghanistan where it wants to exert its influence to counter Pakistan sway in the region.

India also uses proxy warfare as an eminent tool to jeopardize Pakistan's security structure through Afghanistan. It has been using anti-Pakistan groups in Afghanistan to ignite insurgency in Balochistan and terrorism throughout the country. The Tehrike Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other insurgent factions including Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have joined hands against the Pakistani state and are aimed at wrecking its security structure. These terrorist factions are receiving direct logistical, financial and military support from India. The tragic incidence of Hijacking of Jaffar Express serves as a case study for how India is utilizing its links in Afghanistan to create a security conundrum for Pakistan.

The article has so far highlighted that India aspires to seek a prominent position in Afghanistan under the new Taliban regime while simultaneously maintaining a safe calculated distance that does not jeopardize its position as the largest democracy. It now aims to highlight the key driver that have led the new Taliban regime to establish relations with India. The new Taliban regime has made it evidently clear that it does not harbour any hostile intentions towards India and like the previous republic governments, looks forward to strengthen cooperation with India. Unlike their first term in government and contrary to the general expectations the Taliban are now increasingly cosy with India even at the cost of Pakistan. The key drivers that have led to these changes are discussed below.

Economic Development and Infrastructural support

A major driver of Afghanistan towards India is India's continuous economic and infrastructural support. India has been one of the major donors to Afghanistan during the Karzai and Ghani governments. Even after the reemergence of Taliban, India has continued to economically support Afghan people through humanitarian

efforts. India has provided support in construction and maintenance of the India-Afghan Friendship Dam also known as Salma Dam in Herat (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Moreover, it has also invested heavily in medical and health sector by establishing a Thalassemia center, a modern diagnostic center and heating system at the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH) in Kabul (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Moreover, numerous other projects are still in pipeline which include 30 bed hospital in Kabul's Bagrai district, an oncology and trauma center Five maternity health clinics in Paktika, Khost and Paktia regions (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

Humanitarian support

India has also positioned itself as one of the major humanitarian supporters of Afghanistan. It was the first responder to October 2025 earthquake in Afghanistan and shipped 15 tons of food immediately (Patel, 2025). Moreover in three years from 2022 to 2025 India has supplied 50,000 metric tons of wheat, 28 tonnes of earthquake relief material and around 250 tonnes of medical aid including vaccines (Chaudhry, 2025). Afghanistan is in a dire need of humanitarian assistance especially after Pakistan has repatriated millions of Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan since years. This has further festered the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan which was already under immense strain with most of its funds frozen. Furthermore, as Ibrahim Bahiss of International Crisis Group opines Afghanistan's isolation from international banking channels have made it increasingly hard for the funds and aid to move easily (Patel, 2025). In these dire circumstances India has appeared a major humanitarian supporter to Afghanistan. Thus Taliban now do not want to jeopardize their relations with India as it would further isolate them regionally and would deprive them of the aid that they urgently need.

Security Cooperations

Another reason of Afghanistan's tilt towards India includes security cooperations between the two. In the preceding decades both India and Afghanistan have had security concerns with Pakistan. Afghanistan has had border fencing issues with Pakistan while India alleged that Pakistan is supporting insurgency and agitation in Kashmir and supporting proxy groups against it. Thus, both India and Afghanistan view cooperation with each other

as a means to keep Pakistan in check through strategic hedging (Dadlani, 2025). This strategy is aptly depicted and evidenced by Masood Andrabi's acknowledgement of India's regional goals and its subvertive activities in Afghanistan (Andrabi, 2025). Moreover, Afghanistan has also shown willingness to send its troops to India for training (Khizar, 2024).

RAW-NDS Nexus

Masood Andrabi highlights that it was common knowledge for the NDS that RAW was utilizing Afghan consulates near Pak-Afghan border for building contacts and networks that could be used against Pakistan if need be (Andrabi, 2025). This acknowledgment of a former NDS official depicts that India's use of Afghan soil against Pakistan was not a hidden fact but a prominent reality. India has been building its networks and links close to Pakistan's borders and has been aiding the militant groups to plan and execute attacks on Pakistan's security forces. It has been engaged in selective investment and fostering links with Afghan defence forces to plan and execute attacks in Pakistan (Farooq, 2022).

Implication for Pakistan

The growing ties between India and Afghanistan significantly impact Pakistan especially its security structure, trade dynamics, regional influence and diplomatic positioning. The security front is the worst affected by growing ties between India and Afghanistan. It has been collectively opined by the scholars and national security experts that India aims to embroil Pakistan in a 'Two-front war', on western side Afghanistan while on eastern India itself (Farooq, 2022). Pakistan aware of the fact is ardently trying to avoid such a situation where its security would be greatly jeopardized. For the purpose it has repeatedly warned Afghanistan of becoming an Indian proxy but the warnings have fell on deaf ears. This leaves Pakistan in a complex geo-strategic position where it needs to prioritize its own security while simultaneously preventing the geo-political environment from festering to a greater extent. The security threat for Pakistan is further aggravated by presence of India intelligence agency RAW and its links close to Pakistan's border areas. As evidenced by the case of Kalbushan Yadav, a serving Indian Navy official accepting RAW's nefarious plans against Pakistan, India is ardently trying to sabotage Pakistan's

security by using Afghanistan as its proxy. It is not only cultivating ties with Afghan Taliban to the detriment of Pakistan's interests but is also actively involved in funding, training and providing logistical support to TTP, BLA and other irritant factions against Pakistan (Ali, 2025). The increasing ties between India and Afghanistan thus present a serious security conundrum for Pakistan which does not only have to deal with the possibility of an all-out two-front war but also proxy wars and subvertive activities of its adversaries.

Another grave economic implication for Pakistan is the closure of trade and economic ties with Afghanistan. Pakistan already has minimal economic ties with India and borders are closed due to May clashes and diplomatic and political tensions over Kashmir. Now with tense relations with Afghanistan and borders closed with Afghanistan as well, Pakistan economic potential through trade is greatly jeopardized. India, Afghanistan and Iran have been finding out ways to circumvent Pakistan and have greatly succeeded in doing so. India now aims to bypass Pakistan and reach Afghanistan and then central Asia through Iran's Chabahar port. For the purpose it has been heavily investing in Iran port and creating local linkages with new Taliban government as well. The situation presents a catch 22 position for Pakistan as Pakistan needs to revive its trade potential while simultaneously curbing the security threat to its sovereignty and territory.

Increasing India-Afghan ties also present a difficult question for Pakistan on diplomatic front as well. Pakistan has repeatedly voiced Indian involvement in sabotaging Pakistan's security but have not published the evidence for its claim for the public to see. It has, however, submitted dossiers containing all the undeniable evidences to UN Security Council. However, little has been done by UNSC and global powers to curb India's nefarious designs. A case of Jaffer express Hijacking in 2025 explains how India has been playing a role in jeopardizing Pakistan security through clandestine actions.

Case Study of Jaffer Express Hijacking

In 11 March 2025, a Peshawar bound train travelling from Quetta was hijacked by militants from Baloch Liberation Army (BLA). The train carried around 400 passengers of whom some were from security forces. The BLA militants hijacked

the train, took the passengers hostage and demanded release of some BLA officials held captive by security forces (Sheikh, 2025). After an intense 36 house operation the militants were eliminated and the hostages rescued but the incident took lives of 31 people according to Pakistan armed officials.

A close investigation of the incident has led Pakistani officials to identify the links between BLA terrorist, their Afghan facilitators and their Indian sponsors. Pakistan armed forces alleged that that have 'credible evidence' that the attack was orchestrated and sponsored by India as the attackers were using Indian weapons (Momand, 2025). Moreover, the militants were continuously in contact with their Afghan handlers leading to a clear depiction of the fact that India is sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan using Afghan soil.

Way forward for Pakistan

The research establishes Indian involvement in Afghanistan as a legitimate security concern for Pakistan. Growing Indian linkages with new Taliban regime present a complex security threat for Pakistan as depicted by Indian intelligence RAW's linkages with Afghan nationals and acknowledgment by former NDS head Masood Andrabi. To deal with these threats Pakistan needs to adopt a pragmatic approach to secure its sovereignty and territory especially amid the changing geo-political environment.

With regards to Afghanistan, Pakistan needs to adopt a **policy of strategic engagement** rather than strategic depth. Strategic engagement implies that Pakistan needs to position itself as an independent strategic partner to Afghanistan. Historically, Pakistan has viewed Afghanistan as a space that would provide it with strategic depth in case of a war with India (Wani, 2022). The policy has remained unfruitful throughout and now needs a major renewal. Strategic engagement with Afghanistan which should involve, economic, political and trade incentives would provide a way

forward to Pakistan to mend its ties with the new Taliban regime.

Furthermore, rather than a military approach Pakistan should go towards **diplomatic encirclement** of Afghanistan. Pakistan needs to leverage its ties with regional and global powers like, China, US and UK to pressurize Afghanistan fulfil its commitments under Doha Accords and stop supporting terrorist factions like TTP. The diplomatic encirclement would allow Pakistan to compete with India on the same diplomatic and humanitarian grounds without incurring the cost of military adventurism.

Another key structural recommendation for Pakistan includes **strengthening its internal counterterrorism framework**. Pakistan needs to strengthen its counterterrorism bodies and ensure their interoperability to ensure no loopholes are left in the investigation of a terrorist incident. Moreover, strong, credible evidence should be provided to international bodies and regional states if a state's involvement is found in fomenting the incident.

Conclusion

The increasing ties between new Taliban regime and India has indeed created a complex geo-strategic question for Pakistan. Pakistan now faces a two-folds threat: an increasingly hostile India which threatens its sovereignty from time to time and a highly volatile Afghanistan which continues to foster strategic linkages with anti-Pakistan groups and India. The situations call for a reassessment of the policy options available for Pakistan. To avoid being entangled between two hostile neighbours Pakistan needs to build on its new found global reputation in the wake of May 2025 clashes and ensure that its global partners are aligned with its narrative. Moreover, Pakistan needs to cultivate amicable linkages with Afghanistan to ensure that it does not fall completely into Indian ambit.

Conflict of Interest

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