

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL TRIANGULAR-INDIA-PAKISTAN-AFGHANISTAN AND RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN THE REGION

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The paper aims to analyse the importance of such a tangled triangle as India-Pakistan-Afghanistan and its impact over the whole of Asia and its regional stability and security. The already complex region is complicated by interference of such great powers as Russia pursuing its interests in the whole regional politics and of each country separately. The paper examines the strategic interests and the level of cooperation and influence of India in Afghanistan and its implications for Pakistan.

Methods. The study is mainly based on the following research methods: descriptive, analysis and document analysis. The paper is based on the books, scientific papers, studies and researches conducted by researchers in this field.

Results. We can claim that the work clearly describes the significant role of India that makes its presence justified there to achieve its broader aims via Afghanistan. Although there will remain a sizeable role of US presence in Afghanistan, however, India is providing local socio-economic infrastructure and civil, military, and political services to promote peace and security in the war-torn country, which represents a threat and anxiety for the whole region.

Conclusion. Regional cooperation between the five landlocked Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan opens up new directions and opportunities for the development of trade and economic relations. The Central Asian republics show great interest in the establishment of transport corridors through Afghanistan with access to the warm seas of the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Iran and Pakistan are developing their ports in anticipation of increased exports/imports and increased transit of goods.

Keywords: Russia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Asia, region, neighborhood, politics

INTRODUCTION

India is a classic regional power, which occupies a very strong position in world politics. The country can exert a corrective influence on the policies of neighboring countries using mainly „soft power“. By the year 2019,



India had a population of about 1,361 million and accounted for 73.4% of the territory and more than 85% of the gross national product (Shorrocks et al., 2019). Here it worth mentioning that only India has common land and sea borders with all other countries in the region. However, geopolitical realities play a huge role in the system of interstate relations, especially in the regional political system. The natural dominance of one country in the region predetermines the peculiarities of the regional situation. Here we have to say that the Asian region is driven by a dynamic interplay of economic, diplomatic, and security factors that reinforce each other due to the complex nature of territorial claims and religious extremist activities. Here we have to highlight the strategic location of Afghanistan which is significant for such Asian countries as Pakistan, India, as well as China, Iran, and Russia for their stability and security in the region. Afghanistan continues to be a haven for international terrorist groups and the Taliban, which poses a serious threat to the region and the world as a whole. Due to the geostrategic location of Afghanistan, any significant problem will affect the stability and security in the region, as it did until recently. The most troubled country Afghanistan is located at the convergence of Central, Middle, and South Asian regions, in one of the most world's prime geographical locations. Its strategic location and abundant mineral resources have always attracted the international community including India; hence Indian objectives to develop relations with Afghanistan are manifold and decades old. Indian foreign policy is devised by many factors: its bitter relations with Pakistan and its desire for an access route to Central Asian Republics have serious implications for Pakistan. In its turn, Pakistan perceives Indian extended desire to be engaged in Afghanistan as a deliberate strategy of using the latter as a battleground to show its power and use influence against Pakistan. The intention of India to invest in Afghanistan's infrastructure rebuilding raises Pakistan's doubts and its mistrust. It assumes that India has covert objectives of troubling Pakistan. Pakistan and Afghanistan are geopolitically and geo-strategically interlocked with each other and so the growing Indian influence in Afghanistan is a matter of grave concern for Pakistan. The affairs in Afghanistan directly affect Pakistan due to its location cultural, historical, linguistic, religious, and traditional ties. Thus, Pakistan's strategic strength lies in a strong and stable Afghanistan.

INDIA-AFGHANISTAN SEASAW POLICY

The territory of India locates in a single geopolitical space with Afghanistan and maintains traditional ties with it in the following directions: political, trade, economic, and cultural, and moreover India considers Afghanistan to be in the sphere of its vital interests. India is well aware that stability, cessation of armed clashes inside Afghanistan, preservation of its

territorial integrity, and the inviolability of existing borders are necessary conditions for the normalisation of the situation in the entire region, on which depends the solution of many of India's internal problems and the nature of its interaction with neighboring Pakistan. For multinational, poly-confessional India as a federal state with a direct threat of separatism in several strategically important regions, the aggravation of the situation in neighboring Afghanistan may become a serious factor in destabilising the situation both inside of the country and on its borders (Shaumyan, 2004).

India and Afghanistan are divided by the territory of Pakistan, which is in a state of prolonged confrontation with India and for decades has been directly involved in the conflict of the opposing forces in Afghanistan. In the confrontation between various groups in Afghanistan, India has traditionally supported politically and militarily the Northern Alliance, represented mainly by ethnic Tajiks, i.e. forces hostile to Pakistan. Moreover, the Indian government declares that Pakistan continues the penetration of militants from its territory through the line of control in Jammu and Kashmir to organise terrorist actions on Indian territory, and that a significant part of them are Afghan extremists (Donovan, 2004).

India's Afghan policy is based on the interests of the Muslim minority, which numbers more than one hundred and twenty million. Therefore, India is suspicious about the Taliban movement's coming to the power in Afghanistan which can strengthen the positions of Islamic extremists and separatists in India. India also expects that the territory of Afghanistan will no longer be used as a training camp for Kashmiri militants and the possibility of exercising control over the flows of smuggling and drugs. A serious problem for the development of the Afghan economy and strengthening its ties with the outside world, including with India and the states of Central Asia, remains ensuring trade routes and communication links within the region, especially taking into account its geographical position and difficulties in relations with Pakistan. Expansion of trade relations between Afghanistan and India is complicated by the fact that direct land routes lie through the territory of Pakistan, which often blocks the transport of Indian goods to Afghanistan, including those that go in the framework of providing economic and food aid. Therefore it is necessary to use the routes through Iran, or ferry goods with Afghan Ariana planes flying twice a week (Kawsar, 2020).

One can claim that India-Afghanistan relations can be assumed mostly as stable, it is true that India contributed and still does much for the development of Afghanistan and the partnership of these two countries counts a history of long centuries before the independence of India in 1947 and after even though after the division of the country it did not share a border with Afghanistan (Mullen, 2017). Nevertheless, India did not aid Afghanistan when it was attacked by the Soviet Union in 1979, which claimed that its only interest was to rebuild the crushing economy of Afghanistan. Here it is worth saying that being engaged in a cold war with the USA, the Soviet

regime was struggling for hegemony in Central Asia (Saikal, 1987). Due to its geographical location, Afghanistan became a victim of a great game between the US and USSR since at that time both of them were trying to establish their predominance in the Central Asian Region (Raza & Mustafa, 2019). Even nowadays Russia views Afghanistan mainly through the prism of threats to its security and the security of its neighbours in Central Asia, where Moscow is striving for the „soft power hegemony“ (Trenin & Malashenko, 2010).

As for the US, it was funding Mujahedeen to fight with the Soviet Union, here we have to say that not only the US was arming and supporting the Mujahedeen, it had such allies as Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. All this was happening in the territory of Afghanistan thus plunging the country into full chaos and creating a failed state, which threatens the security of the whole region. Moreover, concerning to the situation in Afghanistan, India did not support the resolution of the United Nations about the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country (Toporkov, 2014), because it would mean that India was directly opposing the Soviet Union and it could have led to unpredictable steps from the Soviet regime.

Due to this, there arose a kind of stagnation in the relations between the two countries. Then it was followed by the rise of the Taliban in the early 1990s which engaged India in the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and there was nothing but to cease the diplomatic representation with Afghanistan. But the situation changed after the tragic events of September 11, 2001, India seized the chance and established relations with the new government in Kabul through development assistance. It worth saying that at that time both countries needed each other: India was interested for regional and security reasons since it had and still has ambitions as a regional player, as for Afghanistan India appeared its only way out of the stagnation. Here we have to highlight that beside the above-mentioned interests India vitally needs a stable and secure Afghanistan since it plans to carry out a trade thus converting Afghanistan into an energy corridor to Central Asia (Sharma, 2011). Besides the energy factor, India pursues economic diplomacy in Afghanistan and tries to occupy Afghanistan's market, as its goods and services are much cheaper than from Western sources (Mullen, 2013). Here it is worth pointing out one more direction, the sphere of medical tourism in which India and Pakistan are competing. Having the access to health care in Afghanistan would not only be a priority itself but also could serve as a means of strengthening stability in the country. As, it is known that the social economic situation in Afghanistan leaves much to be desired and high health care costs can impact the already existing poverty which in its turn potentially increases the risk of radicalisation (Price & Hakimi, 2019). The hosts of medical tourism will also greatly benefit from this, as we know that financial stability leads to a country's development, which in turn gives rise to social welfare ensuring its and the country's security.

PAKISTAN – AFGHANISTAN ONE RELIGION DIFFERENT IDEOLOGIES

At the very beginning of the XXIst century under the influence of external events, the strategic course of Pakistan changed abruptly, its position in the international arena changed significantly, and relations with the United States and other Western powers improved dramatically. At the same time, external events harmed the internal political situation, causing an explosion of discontent among the Muslim population of Pakistan, the growth of Islamic extremism and terrorism; for the first time in the history of the country, its authorities began a changing struggle against Islamic radicalism (Belokrenitski et al., 2003).

Pakistan was said to have largely contributed to the creation of the Taliban religious extremist movement on its territory and its withdrawal to Afghanistan to participate in the military-political struggle that has been happening in the country for many years (Panichkin, 2015). Pakistan is accused to have provided the Taliban with wide assistance and support, defended them in the international arena, tried to ease the pressure on them from the international community. Pakistan was one of three states that officially recognized the Taliban government (Moskalenko & Topychkanov, 2013). By the beginning of 2000, the Taliban captured 90% of the territory of Afghanistan, which accordingly led to the deteriorations of Islamabad-Kabul relations. Here it is worth saying that at that time the Taliban became less governed and had little regard for their „benefactors“. The Taliban, despite all the persuasions of Islamabad, refused to expel from the country „terrorist number 1“ Osama bin Laden. They rejected Pakistani proposals to make Kabul’s policy not so tough and more acceptable to the world community (Moskalenko, 2004). Moreover, on February 26, 2001, the leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar issued a decree ordering the destruction of the colossal Buddha statues in Bamiyan, and despite Pakistan’s government appeal to stop it and efforts of Pakistan’s ISI Director Lt. Gen. Mehmood Ahmed the statue was destroyed On March 2, 2001 (Rath, 2013). Islamabad believed that by taking advantage of this, India was conducting anti-Pakistani activities in Afghanistan.

Pakistani and Afghan leaders during their official visits and working meetings always emphasise the growing demand to strengthen cooperation in the fight against international terrorism, ensure security, and prevent the use of the territory of the two countries against each other. With this understanding the two countries have cooperation in four main areas – the fight against drug trafficking, economic cooperation, the return of refugees, and military cooperation in the fight against terrorism. The results in the first direction are perhaps the most disappointing because over the time, the Afghan state turned into a state whose budget was completely dependent on such unstable sources of income as foreign aid and proceeds from the sale of limited natural resources (Mayley, 2010). The Afghani government

clearly understood that the danger posed by dependence on such receipts is a direct result of their instability, but perhaps it was the only way for the country. In this regard, it is worth referring to the situation during World War II, even though the country did not participate in the war, the dependence of its economy on the world market was acutely felt, especially when economic ties with the external market were broken. Trade between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union was reduced to almost a minimum. By the beginning of 1942, only the British colony – India remained an exporter of manufactured goods to Afghanistan, which, moreover, turned out to be the only consumer of the most important Afghan exports, such as fruits, wool, and cotton. In these conditions, the negative consequences of the dependence of the Afghan economy on foreign trade exchange were revealed. A significant deterioration in the conditions for the export of Afghan goods and a decrease in imports negatively affected the entire social and economic life of Afghanistan; the deteriorating economic situation raised social tensions. With the end of World War II, the Hashim Khan regime hoped to quickly restore foreign trade ties, fill the market with scarce industrial goods, and regulate the conditions for the procurement and export of agricultural raw materials, thus improving the economic situation in the country. However, undeveloped Afghanistan was not welcomed by the major part of the world powers, which did not have any desire to cooperate with it in solving acute economic problems. Attempts by Afghan economies to expand imports of the country's needed textiles from the United States and Western Europe have yielded little results. And the British colonial authorities in India even reduced the supply of cotton fabrics, gasoline, kerosene, and sugar to Afghanistan. Then, just a couple of decades later the communist coup in April 1978 pushed Afghanistan into a deeper socio-political abyss from which it has yet to get out. Thus, we can say that the guilt for the Afghani dependence on the sale of limited natural resources was partly on the world's leading countries (Korgun, 2004). Also it is a fact that historically British and Russian empires shaped the fate of Afghanistan by demarking its borders at the end of the 19th century thus making the country dependent on the foreign subsidies to survive, which stability is directly linked with an international will to support it (Rubin, 2017).

As for the second direction, the economic cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, we can estimate them as more or less successful; however, their pace and size are not very significant, which is determined by the limited capabilities of both countries. A real breakthrough in this area would be the development of gas and oil pipelines. Afghanistan has the privilege to be in the ambit of the silk route that represents a significant trade and commercial route (Rawan & Grishin, 2020).

The third problem is being solved more successfully – the return of Afghan refugees to their homeland. This is facilitated by a more stable situation in the country compared to the previous period, material assistance from the world community, and the implementation since 2002 of the UN

program „Voluntary Repatriation of Refugees“ (United Nations, 2002). Since the agreement entered into force, over 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned home. More than 80 percent of them (4.7 million) were assisted through the largest voluntary repatriation program in the history of UNHCR. About 3.8 million returned from Pakistan and more than 900,000 from the Islamic Republic of Iran. The peak of these steps was the period of 2002-2008 (Funding Proposal Foundation, 2015). Here it is worth saying that since early 2007, not a single citizen of Afghanistan was registered as a refugee in Pakistan, even though the economic conditions of Afghanistan still leaves much to be desired (Sadat, 2016).

The fourth sphere of these two Islamic countries cooperation was very difficult to start: to coordinate military activities, a trilateral US-Afghan-Pakistani commission was created, which discussed the general activities of the three countries, current issues, problems of material and technical supply, joint operations, coordination of intelligence services, etc. The commission, which had subcommittees, met quite regularly. Thus, on April 18, 2004, the seventh session of the commission was held in Rawalpindi, at which the Pakistani side informed the allies about the results of the operation conducted against the militants of Al-Qaeda and Taliban in South Waziristan in March. The meeting also discussed the functioning of tactical radio communication between the army units of the sides. The participants agreed to strengthen cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the crossing of militants across the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, this cooperation did not last long, it deteriorated soon after the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar and we can say that lasts up today (Sethi, 2020).

Thus, it is obvious that the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are far from cloudless. It is the fact that, the long-term cooperation of Islamabad with the Taliban could not disappear without a trace. Moreover, there are also older problems between Pakistan and Afghanistan: the main one is Kabul's non-recognition of the „Durand Line“, which is the border between the two states, which is considered as the root for many misunderstandings in establishing the nationality of individual sections of the adjacent territory. There were other irritants in the relations between the two Islamic neighbouring countries, which had accumulated over the many decades of their coexistence. During his first visit to Islamabad, the president of Afghanistan 2004-2014, Hamid Karzai called for forgetting past grievances and starting a new era of cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, it sounds much easier in theory than in practice; moreover, the „new era“ too brought mutual dissatisfaction and irritation. It was especially unpleasant when new grievances merged with old ones. Another reason is that, Pakistan is watching with great apprehension the growing influence in Afghanistan of its main enemy, India. The latter had advantages over Pakistan not only of the economy but also of a political side. As India has always opposed the Taliban regime, had good relations with the Northern Alliance, its leaders, and commanders.

CONCLUSION

All three countries belong to the developing region and may have more perspective positions in the future both in politics and in the economy throughout the Asian region. If we consider the fact that India's authority in the world arena continues to grow seriously, as evidenced by its inclusion in the G20, negotiations on granting the country a seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (Yurlov & Yurlova, 2010), we can claim that in the nearer future it will become the most influential country in the region. Here a significant role is played by the fact that India's wealth has been rising gradually, however not every citizen of the country benefits from it (Shorrocks et al., 2019). From the very beginning, India's main real strategic goal of foreign policy was the transformation of the country into a world power. This task has remained fundamental for the country's foreign policy for over 70 years, since the 1950s. But even having the status of the world authority and one of the regional players, India will have serious difficulties in a troubled neighbourhood, which will create a hindrance for the country's full development and dominance. As for Afghanistan at present, being at the junction of the Eurasian transport corridors draws the greatest interest of the Central Asian countries and not only, as it has the shortest route through Pakistan to the ports of the Indian Ocean. Thus, Afghanistan has every chance to become the center of all trade and transport links in the region. Due to the seaports in Iran and Pakistan, international transport corridors passing through Afghanistan will facilitate the promotion of not only regional but also international trade. All this will give impetus to the development of the economics of these countries. The trans-Afghan transport corridor will be of no less importance for Russia, as it brings it closer to the Indian Ocean. Pakistan with its fragile economy and turbulent politics needs a certain period to overcome the existing situation. However, the country has a strong economic partner such as China which is implementing „Silk Road“ projects in the country, giving a great opportunity to improve the country's economic situation, which is directly connected to the country's security and might become a warrant for its development in a correct way. All these possibilities attract Russian attention and raise its economic and political interest in the whole region. Since it is obvious that being a big country Russia has the ambition to dictate its rule and show its influence in every region of the world.

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