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The Big Picture - India's role in Afghanistan

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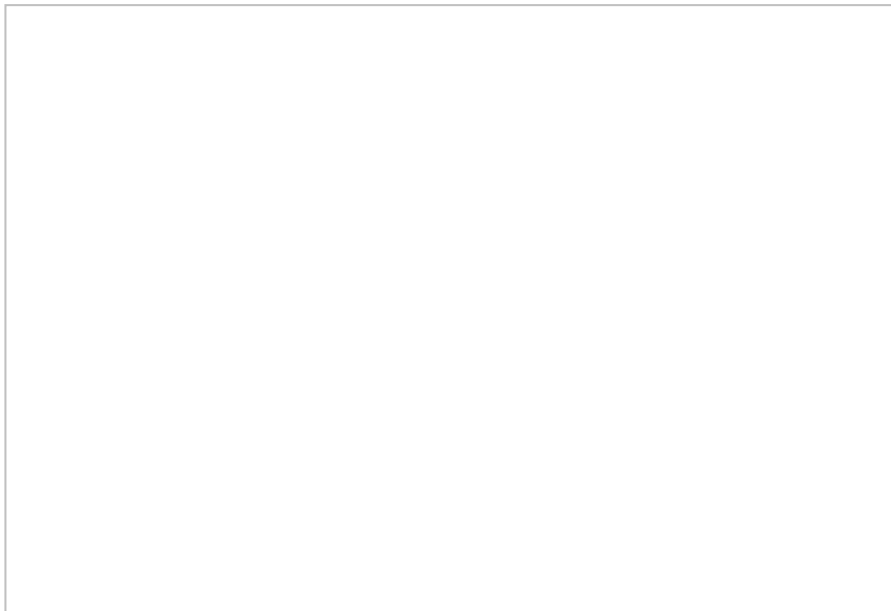


Responding to President Donald Trump, the Indian government has stressed on the fact that developmental assistance can play a major role in transforming Afghanistan. US mocked at India for funding a "library" in Afghanistan, saying it is of no use in the war-torn country as he criticised India and others for not doing enough for the nation's security. US also asked India, Russia, Pakistan and other neighbouring countries to take responsibility for Afghanistan's security as he defended his push for the US to invest less overseas.

India most of the investments in Afghanistan were on mega infrastructure projects including the 218 km road from Zaranj to Delaram, the Salma Dam and the new Afghan Parliament building. India has also been supplying military equipment to Afghanistan besides providing training to hundreds of Afghan security personnel.

India and Afghanistan

- Post the Taliban era, engagement by India with Afghanistan focused on to ensure a strong commitment **for building peace and stability in Afghanistan.**
- **India's strategy in Afghanistan** is guided by the desire to prevent a government that would readily provide Pakistan with strategic depth and a safe haven for terror groups.
- India has opted to pursue **a 'soft power' strategy to engage Afghanistan,** preferring to contribute substantially in the civilian sector rather than in defence and security.
- India is particularly active in the **construction, infrastructure, human capital building and mining sectors.** Besides, it has also identified the telecommunications, health, pharmaceuticals, and information technology and education sectors for cooperation.
- Within the framework of two bilateral agreements, **India has pledged over \$ 2 billion in aid to Afghanistan.** And, by the end of the year 2017 the investment has already crossed \$3 billion.
- **India has also agreed to build the 600-km-long Bamiyan – Herat rail link which will serve to connect the Hajigak mines to Herat and further to the Iranian port of Chabahar via the Delaram-Zaranj highway, which India had constructed in 2009.**



- This makes India the fifth largest investor in Afghanistan's stability and quest for economic and social development.
- **Some of the other important projects**
 - Supply of 250,000 tons of wheat.
 - Construction of the Parliament building (\$ 178 million).
 - Construction of the Pul-i-Khumri to Kabul power line (\$120 million).
 - Salma Dam power project (\$ 130 million).

- Food assistance to primary school children, and construction and rehabilitation of schools (\$ 321 million).
- Expansion of national television network with an uplink from Kabul and downlinks in all 34 provincial capitals.
- Women's Vocational Training Center in Bagh-e-Zanana for training of Afghan women in garment making, nursery plantation, food processing and marketing.
- Reconstruction of Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health, Afghanistan's only hospital for children, in Kabul.
- 84 ongoing projects related to agriculture, education, health, vocational training and solar energy.

Afghan Peace Process

Stakeholders

There are a number of indigenous players with regard to Afghan peace process

- **The Taliban group** – against whom the military action was taken post 9/11. The Taliban has at least four main branches whose relations range **from pragmatic cooperation to active hostility**.
- **They are organized around decision-making bodies called "shuras,"** these branches oversee various commissions and operate across Afghanistan – often in competition with one another and sometimes even within themselves.
- **Recently, they have engaged with countries like Russia and the US regarding peace process and withdrawal of troops from its soil.**
- The Taliban does not recognize the present day Afghan government as legitimate government as they believe that it does not represent the will of the people.
- **The Afghan Government** – they are the legitimate government recognized by the UN along with other countries.
- President Ashraf Ghani **re-launched the Kabul Process in June 2017**. The principal purpose of the process is to ensure an **Afghan-led and Afghan-owned, inclusive peace process** where the people are fully in the driver's seat to address the multiple dimensions of ongoing war and violence in Afghanistan.
- **The Haqqani Network** – the Haqqani network is the most ruthless, disciplined and organized subgroup within the Taliban. The Haqqani network is also a major impediment to the prospects of negotiations with Kabul. The network's leader favors a solely military solution to the conflict. The main base of its operation is in Pakistan.

External Stakeholders

- **The US led NATO forces** – the US and the allied countries have actively engaged with all the parties in the peace process including the political faction of the Taliban group.
- The US government has become wary of the long drawn war (which resulted

\$900 billion dollars in the past 17 years) and one of the most important agendas of the Trump administration is safe return of the American soldiers.

- **Regional powers** – countries like Qatar and Russia have actively engaged with all the stakeholders of the peace process, including the Taliban. The headquarters of the Taliban is located in Doha from where they engage with the rest of the world.
- **Russia a key stakeholder in the process** – Russia has hosted talks with Taliban delegates and members of Afghanistan high peace council, as the Kremlin seeks a role as peace broker between Islamist rebels and the US-backed government in Kabul.
- **Pakistan's destabilizing role in Afghanistan** – Pakistan sees Afghanistan as potentially providing strategic depth against India.
- Pakistan may also view a weak and destabilised Afghanistan as preferable to a strong, unified Afghan state (particularly one led by a Pashtun-dominated government in Kabul.)

India's Engagement with the Peace Process

- **India an important player in the peace process** – it has been acknowledged by all including the US and very recently by Pakistan that India is a key player in the peace process.
- The External Affairs Ministers have reiterated that India supports all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan which are inclusive and **Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled**.
- **India had strictly refused to put boots on the ground previously and would maintain the status quo.** Instead India has invested heavily in training security forces and supplying with necessary equipment.
- The key concern and challenge is the protection of the investment that India has made in Afghanistan.