

## **Regional Interference in Afghanistan and its Implications for Regional Peace and Security**

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### **Abstract**

Owing to Afghanistan's geostrategic location, diverse ethnic composition, decentralized governance and socio-political structure, outside interference has been a historical phenomenon. However, 1978 can be treated as a watershed which changed the entire dynamics and context of foreign interference in the country. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan triggered by global power politics and developments subsequent to Soviet forces withdrawal in 1989, accentuated prospects of competition among regional players. The extreme rivalry proved to be self-defeating for regional countries as their policies were not well grounded. The covert manipulation of Afghan policies by regional countries together with Afghans own internal divisions and divergent interests have had serious repercussions for Afghanistan's stability and that of the region as a whole. Most importantly none of the regional players have managed to achieve their self-defined objectives in Afghanistan. The dire instability and insecurity has deprived all the regional countries of economic dividends and development. The paper suggests that the self-interests of each of the regional countries would be best served through collaboration and problem-solving approach. This would demand more nuanced focus on shared interests, cooperation and a broad common vision that would promote an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence. This article attempts to highlight the regional interference in Afghanistan and its implications for regional security. Moreover, it contends that common destiny of the region is interwoven through history and a collective prosperous future.

**Keywords:** India; Iran; Pakistan; Afghanistan; Interventions; Conflict; Peace; Cooperation; Security.

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### **Introduction**

Afghanistan, a small landlocked country, is vulnerable to interference from regional countries. The saga of external interference in Afghanistan is not a new

phenomenon. It is a fact that Afghanistan has been a goat among the buzkshi<sup>1</sup> playing regional powers to hold their sway and are not prepared to allow others to gain preponderant influence in Afghanistan. In addition, almost all the neighbours maintain links to non-state actors who are responsible for much of destabilization and debilitating Afghanistan. States in the neighbourhood may well sponsor subverting forces in the event that Kabul governments fail over time to extend their authority and tangibly improve people's lives, or should Afghanistan's international benefactors lose their patience and interest. Undeniably it remained Afghanistan's chronological history that domestic political forces pursue developments in the neighbouring territories and have intermittently sought opportunities to manipulate relationships in the region to achieve domestic benefits. (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013)

Afghanistan quagmire is complicated by conflicting interests of regional countries. Regional interference in Afghanistan is increasing with the passage of time, which is causing instability in the region as well as hindering the rapprochement process between regional countries. How regional interference has problematized the Afghan situation need to be highlighted for reaching a solution to Afghan dilemma which is complex and multi-layered. Studying regional interference in Afghanistan is significant for managing interstate conflicts and understanding the regional dynamics in a better way. Moreover, the future of the region depends upon stable Afghanistan. Constructive partnership among all Afghan ethnic groups and its neighbours are necessary for stability of the region.

Pakistan, Iran and India are chosen for the study because their role is critical in stabilizing Afghanistan and has direct bearing on the regional stability. China is also an important regional country and Afghanistan's neighbour, but its role is deliberately excluded because of the space limitation as it will broaden the scope of article. In addition, for theoretical purpose different types of interventions are highlighted but the focus of the article is on political interventions by regional countries as it is not possible to discuss in detail all kinds of interventions.

The first section generally highlights different types of interventions for better understanding of the nature of the concept, and helps in distinguishing types of interventions in Afghanistan. It is followed by factors that drove Pakistan's, Iran's and India's interference in Afghanistan and its pitfalls. It also mulls over whether these regional interventions have yielded any results or not. The last section formulates recommendations for ironing Afghan quagmire fuelled by consist interferences. Interference from Pakistan's side is highlighted more because of its centrality to Afghanistan's foreign policy. Moreover, it is Afghanistan immediate neighbour, sharing longest border as well as it is

generally believed that among all the regional countries, interference from Pakistan is dominant.

### **Types of Interference**

Interference in the affairs of other countries is not a new phenomenon and has a long history. It is an old and well entrenched tool of foreign policy like war, negotiations and diplomacy. Since the era of Greeks to present day, states consider it beneficial to interfere in the domestic affairs of other states for protecting and promoting their interests. Other countries in the wake of their interests have showed stiff resistance to such interventions and have resorted to “counter interventions” to protect their interests (Morgenthau, 1967).

External interference in the domestic affairs of other countries is a destabilizing factor and as mentioned above is a common practice in international relations. The absence of a common government to implement rules complicates relations among states, thus making cooperation difficult but also allows war and hostility to erupt. Such absence not only weakens state’s capacity to arrive at a better-informed policy of managing interstate conflicts but also make it difficult to recognize shared interests which can act as a force multiplier and a catalyst to forge better relations. Therefore, mistrust on the intentions of other states, direct or indirect interference and defection, is the fall out of the anarchic nature of the international system (Jervice, 1978:167-170).

International interventions for much part of the history have been a subject that has occupied much debate in international law. Since the unification of Germany in 1871 along the fall of communism in 1991 and the end of bipolar supremacy of the world landscape, the topic is a major discourse among the jurists. The argument regarding the subject can by and large be placed into two categories. In the first argument, the realists believe that where state sovereignty is concerned, no other rationale but self-defence should allow states to take arms against one another. In the second argument, “intervention is advocated from a more liberal approach of rectifying wrongs and protecting the innocent” (Ahmed, 2012).

In order to study types of interference, it has been categorized as ideological, political, economic and humanitarian.

### **Ideological Interference**

Every country has its own ideological foundations which play an important role in formulating its foreign policy. The cold war period best describes ideological war between superpowers i.e. US and Soviet Union. Thus, ideologies have been a motivating force between states to intervene in other countries. Containment was the strategy by which the United States waged the Cold War and intervened in

other countries to bring them in its orbit. The main aim of containment was to counter the Communist ideology and spread of Soviet power. After the Second World War, Soviet Union intervened in Poland and Hungary on ideological basis. Likewise, on August 20, 1968, the Soviet Union led Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia to rupture reformist trends in Prague.

In 1948, Czechoslovakia endeavoured to join the U.S led Marshall Plan. The aim was to assist post-war rebuilding which was disrupted by Soviet takeover and the installation of a new communist government in Prague. Resultantly, Czechoslovakia continued to be a stable state within the Soviet sphere. In the 1960s, however, the new leadership in Prague led a series of reforms to reduce the appliance of communist doctrines within the country's border. Soviet leaders were apprehensive of these developments in Czechoslovakia. Communist Party leadership in Moscow, after much deliberation, decided to interfere to set up a more conservative and pro-Soviet government in Prague. (US Department of State, 2014).

Thereafter, US intervened in Vietnam on ideological grounds. The Vietnam War initiated public debates and several theories emerged providing details about the war and its protraction. Generally, the deliberation on the Vietnam War saw two sides, the "hawks" (those who support military action) and the "doves" (those against military action). Ideological discrepancy was also used to explain the war. Therefore, the split between communism and capitalism provoked obvious or clandestine involvement of states (*The Views Paper*, 2011).

### **Political Interference**

Political Interferences have another kind of destabilizing effects. A country's internal political instability often invites external interference which exploits the internal political stability to its own advantage. Political instability may be due to either ethnic or sectarian differences or struggle for power among different political groups which often engulf the whole geostrategic and geopolitical environment (Adam, 2005).

Robert Jervice in his work highlighted that states interfere in the affairs of other states in order to bring it in its orbit, thereby controlling their resources or land so as to protect their possessions. Mostly, the states in order to make sure the necessary supplies during wartime also interfere in the affairs of other countries. This was the main drive behind Japan interference in China before Second World War. Moreover, when there are tight linkages between domestic and foreign policy or between the domestic politics of two states, the quest for security may drive states to interfere pre-emptively in the domestic politics of others in order to provide an ideological buffer zone (Robert, 1978:170-178).

Political interference is contrary to the norms of international relations and has a long history. According to scholars like Thomas and Max Beloff, political intervention is the act of interference by one state in the affairs of another state. Thomas contends that “intervention occurs when a state or group of states interferes in order to impose its will, in the internal or external affairs of another state, sovereign and independent with which peaceful relations exist and without its consent, for the purpose of maintaining or altering the conditions of things”. According to Max Beloff intervention is an attempt by one state to affect the internal structure and external behaviour of other states through various degrees of coercion (Chander, 2000:403).

It was until the birth of nation state, because of Westphalia treaty of peace and since French revolution, that the validity of political intervention has been inquired. The Westphalia treaty of peace in 1648 laid the foundation of nation state and gave a Westphalian constitution containing three principles i.e. territoriality, sovereignty and autonomy. It said that mankind is organized into specific territorial community having fixed borders; autonomy and sovereignty. Westphalian constitution paved the path for a rule that was developed by French constitution and later by UN charter i.e. non-interference in the affairs of other states (Benjamin, 2008).

In 1973, article 119 of French constitution declared that the French people do not interfere in the domestic affairs of other nations and will not tolerate interference by other nations in their affairs. Onwards for a century or more lawyers, statesman, political scientists endeavoured hard to devise a strategy through which to make a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate interventions. To that effect, the principle of non-interference was added in the course book of international law and statesmen started condemning the act of interference (Morgenthau, 1967).

In this regard, the United Nations also took a lead and in Dec. 1965 adopted a declaration on the “admissibility of intervention in the domestic affairs of states and the protection of their independence and sovereignty” which says that “No State has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are condemned”. But we are witnessing inference in the domestic affairs of states around the globe (Morgenthau, 1967).

### **Economic Interference**

Every state has the right to formulate its economic policy towards other states in such a manner to protect and promote its economic objectives. If such a policy is used to impose its will or to influence state behaviour in such a manner to force a state to take or to prevent a state from taking certain actions, then such actions are considered as economic interference or economic intervention. Economic interference can take place through trade relations. Economic interventions through trade relations occur through impositions of tariffs, embargoes, boycotts and sanctions. Tariffs are imposed by states for generating revenue but when the same are used for coercing states then it becomes intervention. In the same manner, embargoes can become intervention when it is used to force another state to come to terms or prevent a state from taking certain actions against the former. Third type is through boycott i. e. dismantling its commercial or financial relations with another country or forcing its citizens to boycott other state products to inflict harm on its economy (Chander, 2000: 405).

In addition, economic interference can be the result of competition among multinational cooperation, foreign investors or intervention by international financial organizations such as IMF, WTO or World Bank. Likewise, United States has endeavored to manipulate the domestic policies of other states by using other economic means such as linking "most favored nation" status to a country's human rights record or keeping out the import of goods from states in which illegal child labor is prevalent. Consequences from these actions seriously impact a country's economic development and can also influence the general welfare of a nation (Adam, 2005).

Moreover, economic intervention also occurs under UN charter through imposition of sanctions Article 41 of UN charter says:

The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations (UN, 1945).

The Security Council, since the end of the Cold War, has more relied upon collective economic sanctions. Sanctions have been imposed on former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Libya, Liberia, Angola, Rwanda and Sudan. As can be seen from these examples, UN sanctions may be imposed in peacetime as well as in times of armed conflict (Ellen & Connell, 2002).

Economic intervention is predominantly a contentious matter. In fact, it is very difficult to illustrate a difference between the rightful expedition of the State's own economic interests and illicit interventions in another State. Article 1 of the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties (1974) clearly set out that "external coercion of a State in the affairs of another State is prohibited in any form" (United Nations, 1974).

This explanation is not generally acknowledged as it would lead to a non-intervention principle that prevents any action which drives a State in a particular direction. It does not take into account that in the contemporary international world, States are economically connected with each other in such a way that almost every economic act a State executes impinge on other States and may thus put strain. Furthermore, in order to find out illegal economic coercions, it is important to look at the factors that motivate a State and recognize the objective of the State's intention. However, the factors of motivation cannot be the only decisive factor; some other important factors are the intensity of the measures taken and the connection between the means and the object.

In order to draw a line between acceptable economic pressures and prohibited intrusions, different categories have been made. These categories set out that typical economic interference is intrusion in trade and shipping and the denial of transit by land and water. On the other hand, the strict criterion of an illegal economic intervention stays vague. In this area cases on the borderline, nevertheless uncertain as to their legal qualification, are the imposition of sanctions, embargoes, and boycotts. The refusal or extinction of aid to developing countries or the violation of an economic treaty does not amount to a breach of the non-intervention principle. States are free to make a decision and which other States they want to give economic support to, as a right to development aid does not exist (Barry, 2011).

### **Humanitarian Interference**

"Humanitarian intervention," is an old concept. It is the intervention for the purpose of protecting human life from the state oppression, natural calamity or civil breakdown. Customary international law has always recognized a principle of military intervention on humanitarian grounds. It is currently being practiced in Somalia and parts of Iraq, and has been discussed, with varying degrees of seriousness, about Bosnia, Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Zaire, Sudan and Haiti (Alex, 1994).

Humanitarian intervention can be forcible and non-forcible. Non-forcible humanitarian intervention is the provision of humanitarian aid including medicine, food, clothing etc. On the contrary, forcible humanitarian intervention

is the use of force by humanitarian consideration i.e. self-defence, protection of nationals abroad or intervention by invitation. In this regard legal justification for the use of force is driven by humanitarian component sanctioned by the Security Council (Lowe & Tzanakopoulous, 2010).

The forcible humanitarian intervention goes back to Hugo Grotius during period of Renaissance 1300-1700, thus saying that wars are the punishment of the wicked-on behalf of the oppressed. Thereafter, Emmerich de Vattel supported the idea to intervene in the support of the oppressed when they themselves rise against the oppressive government. Though, he rejected intervention in the affairs of another state in any other circumstances. Intervention by great powers in the nineteen centuries for the protection of Christian and Jewish population is often cited as humanitarian intervention. In the modern era the UN collective security changed the modality of humanitarian intervention. The UN has the authority to intervene on humanitarian grounds in any member state under chapter vii UN charter (Lowe & Tzanakopoulous, 2010).

### **Pakistan's Political Interference in Afghanistan**

Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs, extending over the last four decades, is seen by most Afghans as the root cause of their miseries. For most part of Pakistan's independent history, relations with Afghanistan have been problematic, characterized by recurrent mutual suspicions which most of the times are noticeable in the policies of interference and even in attempts at undermining cooperative measures. Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighbouring countries, sharing 2240 km long border. Despite shared geography, proximity, faith and ethnic ties, relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have never been smooth. With the only exception of Taliban government in Afghanistan (1996-2001), successive governments in Kabul have exhibited varying amount of discontent towards Pakistan. Resultantly demonstrating the fact that the above-mentioned factors i.e. geography, proximity, faith and ethnic ties are ineffective if they are not in sync with the government in place and its interests, diplomacy and internal weakness and nationalism (Hassan, 2013:82-87).

The above-mentioned factors have far reaching consequences and better explain the motives that drove Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan over the period of time, in comparison to the factors of commonalities. Pakistan has a history of troubled relations with the Pushtun nationalists because of their support for Pushtunistan as well as with northern alliance because of their anti-Taliban stance which highlights how the statecraft or the government in place affects the relations. To demonstrate it more clearly, Hamid Karzai's government was dominated by northern alliance whose representation was oversized and shared a history of belligerent relations with Pakistan. Pakistan requested US that they



should not be allowed to take over the administration but to Pakistan's dismay it was allowed to dominate the administration. As a result, even if the Afghan government wanted to pursue friendly relations, the top brass in foreign services and army would continue with anti-Pakistan agenda and blame game (Hassan, 2013).

The second important factor which drove internal meddling and shapes their relation was diplomacy. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan always relied on external support and adopted aggressive attitude to pursue their foreign policy goals. Since the beginning their relations were confrontational by establishing relations with US and Soviet Union respectively. Afghanistan adopted aggressive attitude towards Pakistan by raising Pushtunistan issue with the support of Soviet Union, which was rejected forcefully by Pakistan thus keeping their relations strained for most part of the history. In case of Pakistan, it was also external support that played a role in building militants groups, thus launching them in Afghanistan to counter the Soviet Union (Hassan, 2013).

Moreover, poor administration, domestic security situation, often plays a negative role in relations with big neighbour. President Musharraf of Pakistan tried to legitimize his rule, and gained international aid by exaggerating threat of terrorism from within and threat arising out of Afghanistan in the shape of its tilt towards India. On the other hand, Karzai's government in Afghanistan covered its short comings of not being able to establish writ of the government beyond Kabul, by addressing the concerns of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan. It failed to eradicate corruption and develop modern economy; resultantly it started blaming Pakistan for poor law and order situation in order to divert the attentions of masses from real problems. Regional based competition, strategic culture of Pakistan and Afghanistan of blaming each other and narrow outlook of the dominant elites who hypothesized threat perception did play a role and accelerated interference (Usman, 2013).

In addition, to the above-mentioned factors, historical political events also paved path for Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan. It did not start interference in Afghanistan immediately after its inception. Pakistan started out as a security seeker and was converted into fearful one by Afghanistan's non-cooperative attitude. Afghanistan refused to recognize Pakistan and laid claims on its territory; it rejected Durand line agreement and opposed Pakistan's entry in UN which shaped the latter's interference in Afghanistan. Afghanistan interfered in Pakistan for three reasons as defined by Ayub Khan in his book, *Friends not Masters* i.e. its fear of Pakistan democracy and large size. They considered democratic Pakistan as a threat to Afghan monarchy. Secondly, Afghan traders, a dominant social group, wanted access to sea for free and uninterrupted trade.

Thirdly they inherited a disputed border i.e. Durand line which became a cause of interference and mistrust between the two neighbours. Durand line is the most misquoted and misinterpreted agreement which shape Pakistan's interference and policies towards Afghanistan. Afghanistan misperceived that agreements concluded with the British government have become dead and illegal; that the Durand line was concluded for hundred years i.e. from 1893 to 1993 (Muhammad, 1967). Furthermore, Afghanistan's misperceptions shaped the future course of relation in negative direction. Afghanistan misperceived that Pakistan as a state would no longer survive, because it was lacking necessary infrastructure which is a prerequisite for any state. Therefore, Afghanistan considered it wise to lay claims on Pakistani territory before it disintegrates (Usman, 2013).

Pakistan's policy since its inception until Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was defensive. Pakistan's main aim during this period was to prevent Afghanistan's support to Pushtun and Baluch nationalists thus halting Pushtun demand of Pushtunistan into a full-fledged movement of freedom. Pakistan effectively countered Afghanistan's attempts of interference in its domestic politics. Afghanistan supported Pushtun nationalists in their demands of Pushtunistan which was countered by Pakistan by giving support to Afghan dissident groups. It started out when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government put its weight behind the Islamists after Sardar Daud staged a coup against the Afghan monarchy and declared Afghanistan a republic in 1973, due to the resistance to his government's modernization policy. Pakistan supported Afghan Islamists by allowing them on territory to create ideological buffer zone in Afghanistan. Pakistan supported political instability and a struggle for friendly regime in Afghanistan which intensified during and after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (*Daily Times*, 2013).

Pakistan supported Hezb-e-Islami of Hekmatyar, favorite of ISI (a Pushtun Sunni group) and then Taliban. Pakistan believed that Hekmatyar would establish friendly relations with Pakistan and would provide much strategic depth against India. Strategic depth is a military term evolved by Pakistan's military establishment in 1989. It was adopted during Zia's regime and extended by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by recognizing Taliban regime in 1994. Strategic depth was a two-pronged policy i.e. to make Afghanistan a satellite state by installing a friendly government which will not provoke Pushtun nationalism and to cleanse Indian influence in Afghanistan (Shehzad H, 2011).

To achieve strategic depth, Pakistan relied on proxies in the shape of Mujahidin<sup>2</sup> and then Afghan Taliban.<sup>3</sup>When Hekmatyar failed to maintain peace, Pakistan started supporting Taliban. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the latter

got embroiled into civil war. Fighting broke out first between Mujahidin and then resistance developed against the Taliban rise. The nature of civil war that broke out in Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal was the imposed civil war if the appropriate term is used. In a sense, without Pakistan's support to certain Afghan factions and then Taliban, the situation would have been different. Although Iran also interfered in Afghanistan, but dominant interference was from Pakistan's side. Pakistan's relations with Hekmatyar, Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud were demonstration of this fact, until mistrust developed between Pakistan, Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Massoud (Najib, 2009).

Pakistan distrusted Rabbani and his foreign policy when he became the president of Afghanistan for a brief period i.e. from 1992-1996. The major reason was that Rabbani kept direct relations with foreign countries especially India and Russia. In June 1986, a delegation under the leadership of Rabbani visited Washington to meet Reagan. In Dec 1988, he met Russians in Taif and again in November 1991 against Pakistan's wishes and Hekmatyar's protest. Pakistan always wanted Rabbani to accept Pakistan's dictates and treat it as an elder brother for nurturing Afghan refugees for more than a decade during Soviet Afghan war and for facilitating Afghan resistance against Soviets. As a matter of fact, Rabbani was not against Pakistan, but he was against compromising independent Afghan foreign policy. Specifically, the disturbing factor was Rabbani's overtures towards India (Najib, 2009).

Pakistan, to counter this behaviour, started pursuing strategic depth policy which continued until Taliban government was toppled by US in 2001 and even in post-Taliban era by Pakistan's reliance on proxies. Another reason given by analysts while explaining Pakistan's interference in Afghanistan is the notion of installing friendly regime in Kabul for establishing relations with Central Asian Republics (CARs). After Soviet dismemberment, Pakistan saw Iran and Turkey as main competitors for securing CARs markets. Albeit Pakistan do not share direct border with any of CARs republics therefore the only option left was Afghanistan. For this matter friendly and peaceful Afghanistan was the utmost priority. Here it is pertinent to note that Pakistan's mistrust of Rabbani went against Pakistan's advantage. Bringing Rabbani into Pakistan's orbit by working for stable rather than friendly Afghanistan would have facilitated Pakistan's access to CARs (Najib, 2009).

Islamabad, in post-9/11, gave up the idea that it can establish Afghan government of its choice. To maintain its sway, Pakistan instead chose to depend on its personal networks with Pashtun leaders built up by its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) directorate. Pakistan, during that period, did interfere by backing certain Pashtun political figures, some of them were opposed to the central government

in Afghanistan, thereby supporting their claims of unequal representation in government offices and development funds (Gul, 2010). In addition, after Pakistan's reversal of policy on Afghanistan, pro-Taliban officials in the ISI, some officially retired military officials, continued with their previous positions. It was frequently alleged during the above said period that pro-Taliban elements continue to remain active within Pakistan's security apparatus.

### **Political Interference by Iran**

Iran's interest in Afghanistan is embedded in history. In 1737, Nadir Shah's Army marched and captured Afghanistan. After his death, Ahmed Shah Abdali rose to power and controlled area around Kandahar and started moving towards Kabul. Iran got actively involved in Afghanistan politics after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. To counter Soviet influence, it worked with various Mujahidin groups, including the Northern Alliance of Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara militias for ideological and political reasons. Until 1993, Pakistan and Iran worked closely to achieve a remedy to Afghanistan predicament which began with Soviet invasion. After Soviet withdrawal, regional countries patronized their favourites on the basis of ethnicity. Pakistan put support behind Sunni Islamist groups i.e. Hizb-e-Islami and later Taliban as discussed above. Meanwhile, Iran supported Shia and Persian speaking groups i.e. Herkat-i-Islami and Hazara Nasr party (which later on was united into Hezb-i-Wahdat) and Jamat-i-Islami, so as to achieve greater representation of Shiites in the government. Resultantly, regional powers supporting different factions caused civil war and chaos in Afghanistan (Usman, 2013).

Afghanistan is strategically significant for Iran. It is important for Iran to secure its vital economic interests, prevent cross border trafficking in weapons, persons and narcotics. Iran's relations with Afghanistan are complex, mostly driven by external factors. In post-Taliban era, Iran interfered to counter US influence in Afghanistan. For this purpose, Iran supported Al-Quds forces to undermine US influence. Al-Quds established good relations with Shia Hazaras' militias which received weaponry from Iran since Soviet-Afghan war. It is also believed that the Hazaras political parties achieved mandate in 2010 with the Iranian backing (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2013).

Iran's relations with Taliban or Haqqani network<sup>4</sup> is limited because of their Sunni ideology as well as the atrocities they committed against Hazaras back in late 1990's. There were reports that Tehran supported Taliban financially and with arms to pressurize US and Hamid Karzai's government (Center for strategic and international Studies, 2013).

### **Political Interference by India**

Relations between Afghanistan and India can be traced back to over 2000 years ago. India has always struggled to keep up its interests in Afghanistan. In order to keep foreign invasions at bay via Afghanistan, British India endeavoured to keep Afghanistan a buffer zone between India and the Tsarist Empire. Although, the partition of India broke the geographical proximity, but political interaction remained intact. India maintained good relations with King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan. It was the only South Asian country which recognized the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government and supported the presence of Soviet military, provided technical and humanitarian aid to Babrak Karmal and then President Najibullah of Afghanistan. Soviet withdrawal created a political vacuum leading to internal conflict between different Mujahidin groups leading to the rise of Taliban (Shreshta, 2012).

India faced many security threats in the form of increased Afghan Mujahedeen militants in the Kashmir area during Taliban's rule. In 1999, Indian Airlines Flight 841 was hijacked by a Pakistani-based Mujahedeen group and eventually landed in Afghanistan. The hijackers were believed to be associated with the Taliban, which led to further tensions between Afghanistan and India. Resultantly, India backed the northern alliance (Shreshta, 2012).

In post-Taliban Afghanistan, India enjoyed close and multifaceted relations with Afghanistan. Many factors drove India's political interference in Afghanistan i.e. the Pakistan factor, Islamic militancy and Central Asian hydrocarbon resources. Pakistan is paranoid of Indian presence in Afghanistan and has accused it of fomenting troubles and aiding separatists' elements in Baluchistan. According to a leaked US embassy cable, in 2010, the then Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani told US Senator John Kerry that India had to "decrease its footprint in Afghanistan and stop interfering in Baluchistan" in order to gain its trust. Pakistan blamed the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the Indian military intelligence agency, of sending spying personnel into Afghanistan under the garb of engineers and doctors, and of delivering the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), a militant separatist group, with arms. In order to contain Taliban and Pakistan's sway in Afghanistan, India built up the defence mechanism of the northern alliance by giving them high-altitude combatant equipment worth of \$ 10 million via its Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) as well as provided technical guidance to the Northern Alliance. India has repeatedly denied these allegations, which have not been backed up by enough evidence (*The Economic Times*, 2010).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

In order to conclude, it is necessary to discuss the problems halting regional interference in Afghanistan. Multiple regional organizations i.e. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), or Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) (which is economic oriented) lacks expertise to deter external interference. In addition, regional organizations are unable to block the proliferation of militant groups. These groups are well equipped and can retain long arm struggle. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan the Soviet forces left behind stock of weaponry including AK-47 which was used by different Mujahidin groups along with the weaponry channelled by US and was transferred to Pakistan. The Gun is now manufactured in Khyber agency at very cheaper rates. Therefore, the availability of small arms makes it difficult to block the proliferation of militant groups.

Moreover, mostly neighbouring countries retain links with groups working on their behalf which has made Afghanistan a battle field for proxy wars. Afghanistan is a land of diverse ethnic groups i.e. Pushtun, Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara. The countries surrounding Afghanistan have competing interests. Pakistan wants to counter Indian influence; Iran cannot compromise Shias being treated as second class citizens by Sunnis; while India and Central Asian countries have their own stakes.

In addition, Afghan rulers have always acted on behalf of other countries and have never ruled by fairly elected Afghan representatives. The Afghan citizens have less influence on decision making or participating in governance. As a result, the need of Afghans has always been kept passive to the strategic interests.

Moreover, India used humanitarian assistance to justify its presence in Afghanistan. Iran took active part in Afghanistan's reconstruction and aligned itself with India to rebuild the country and supported Shia political groups to achieve its wide range of interests. Likewise, Pakistan adopted some tactical measures to safe guard its stakes involved in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan's case, responsibility for much of the political instability and misery of its people can be traced to regional powers seeking influence to realize their own strategic, ideological, and economic interests in the country. Indubitably, Afghanistan has been a victim of regional and extra regional interference since centuries. Regardless of the existence of international coalition forces in Afghanistan and the pledges of the United States, United Kingdom, and NATO to support the autonomy, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of Afghanistan, the country is still prone to the intervention by neighbouring countries, which has the possibility to either ruin or promote Afghanistan's stability. Optimistically looking at Afghanistan's situation, there exists "peace

and stability”, with continuity of democratic political process and an end to the conflict, especially after the successful Afghan presidential election held in 2014. On the contrary, “civil war” continues, with an institutional decay and escalation of the conflict. The article concludes that, regional dimension is more important. Afghanistan is prone to regional powers’ meddling, especially if the country remains unstable. Eventually it matters for the regional powers whether Afghanistan get on the path of peace and prosperity, or whether it slips back to civil war. Although through their collective and bilateral decision making, the regional powers have some prospects to influence developments towards a more favourable outcome.

The conception of Afghan actors having regional patrons is well established in Afghan political thought. A strong central government that remains committed to exclude such militant groups, or at least carry security operations against them, because aid donors are expected to demand this. On the other hand, there are apprehensions that restoration of the Islamic Emirate, or serious conflict scenarios, can result in militant groups receiving regional backing to increase activities to counter other regional powers.

In this scenario, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Iran have good reason to collaborate in support of conflict resolution. Their efforts for peace will be a key part of their frame of reference for dealing with Afghanistan. However, progress towards mitigating fighting in Afghanistan is possible to be accomplished gradually, through broad range of persistent measures rather than by a simple peace agreement. Nonetheless, effective regional cooperation can considerably contribute to the accomplishment of an Afghan peace process. In this regard Pakistan, which shares longest border and blamed for excessive interference, should refrain from relying on Pushtun card. The only workable strategy is to consolidate and bring reforms in its own Pushtun dominant tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. If these areas have better education, institutions and industrial infrastructure then it will be in better position to compete with India and Iran, thereby winning hearts and minds of Afghans.

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<sup>1</sup>“Buzkashi” means "goat grabbing" and is the national sport of Afghanistan. Many historians believe that Buzkashi began with the Turkic-Mongol people, and it is indigenously shared by the people of Northern Afghanistan. In Buzkashi, a headless carcass is placed in the center of a circle and surrounded by the players of two opposing teams. The object of the game is to get control of the carcass and bring it to the scoring area. Although it

appears to be a simple game, but it is not. Only the most masterful players (called chapandaz) ever even get close to the carcass. The competition is fierce, and it reflects the boldness and fierce competitive spirit of the Afghan people. See G. Whitney Azoy. (2011). *Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Waveland PrInc: Illinois.

<sup>2</sup>Mujahidin is the plural of Mujahid. It is used for a person engaged in Jihad. Afghan Mujahidin refer to those Afghans who were involved in guerrilla warfare against the Soviets.

<sup>3</sup>Afghan Taliban is used for those who are involved in Islamic fundamentalist movement in Afghanistan. They ruled Afghanistan from 1994-2001.

<sup>4</sup>Haqqani network is the Afghan insurgent group that is working against US led NATO forces and Afghan government. Siraj-ud-din Haqqani is the current head of Haqqani Network. It operates on both side of Pak-Afghan border and has links with Taliban. See "Haqqani Net Work", website Institute for the study of warfare, <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/haqqani-network>. Also see, Valid, Brown & Don, and Rasslar. (2013). *Fountain Head of Jihad: The Haqqani Nexus 1973-2012*. UK: Oxford University Press



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