

Political Landscape of Afghanistan: A Historical Analysis

By

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Abstract:

Afghanistan is a landlocked Muslim country situated in Asia. It is the cradle of various civilizations and place of birth of several religions and Aryan family of languages. The foundation of modern Afghanistan was laid by the Ahmed Shah Abdali in 1947. It has many ethnic groups. Majority of its population is Muslim but religious minorities also dwell there. Afghanistan has always played vital and key role in the regional and international politics due to its geographical position. It has served as a buffer state between Russia and Great Britain. Afghanistan was the battlefield between Soviet Union and America during Afghan-Soviet War. Moreover, the internal political situation of Afghanistan endangered security of the west which finally resulted in the occurrence of 9/11. This accident was followed by the US action in Afghanistan. American presence in Afghanistan is the cause of unrest for the other regional players. Afghan Politics has also affected the relationship between India and Pakistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Politics, War, America, Russia, Europe, Britain, Civilization, Government, Capitalism, Socialism, Taliban, Mujahideen, World Powers, Relations.

Introduction:

One of the chief purposes of this research article is to illuminate the political importance of Afghanistan both in regional and international politics. Another purpose of this paper is put light on the political and strategic role of Afghanistan in the Indo-Pak relations. Furthermore, the impacts of Afghan politics and wars on the global politics, especially, on the policies of the World Powers are also meant to be discussed in this article.

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Afghanistan- The Cradle of the Civilizations:

The political, strategic and cultural importance of Afghanistan can be gauged from the maxim that names Afghanistan as the cradle of civilizations. The land of Afghanistan had its own importance even before the foundation of modern Afghanistan was laid down. Various civilizations were born in the lands that are now part of Afghanistan (Rahim, 2015). These civilizations were the source of knowledge for the other civilizations. Both the Western and Eastern civilizations are said to have been influenced by the civilizations that were born on the land which is now known as Afghanistan (Jan, 2017). Moreover, some religions of the world are said to be taken birth in Afghanistan and others are believed to have been flourished in Afghanistan. Moreover, Afghanistan is believed to be the birth place of Aryan family of languages (Rahim, 2015).

1747 is the year when the foundation of modern Afghanistan was laid down by Ahmed Shah Abdali, the first ruler of modern Afghanistan (Darvesh, 2014). The type of government introduced by the founding father of the country was monarchy. It must be kept in mind that most of the governments of the World were run by the monarchs at that time. Afghanistan is the only Islamic country after Turkey that was not colonized by the European powers during colonization period. It was the love of Afghans for freedom which did not let the Europeans especially the British to occupy and colonize Afghanistan (Jan, 2017).

Afghanistan is a landlocked country situated in Continent Asia. It is an Islamic country located in the South – Central Asia (Paul, 1989). In fact, Afghanistan connects South Asia and Central Asia. This country has also geographical connectivity with Middle East. Furthermore, Afghanistan is said to be a connecting bridge between Asia and Europe. Afghanistan shares common borders with six other countries (J. N, 2000). Iran, Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are the countries that have common borders with Afghanistan. As we are aware of the fact that Afghanistan shares the longest border with the Pakistan and the length of this border is about 2430 Km (Darvesh, 2014). The second largest border of Afghanistan is Afghan-Tajik border that is 1206 Km long (Louis, 2012). The Afghan – Iran border is 936 Km long and it is the third longest border of Afghanistan. The fourth largest Afghan border is 744 Km long and it separates Afghanistan from the Turkmenistan (J. N, 2000). The boundary that separates Afghanistan from Uzbekistan is 137 Km. And, 76 Km is the length of border between Afghanistan and China. The Central Asian neighboring countries of Afghanistan I.e. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and

Turkmenistan were actually part of former USSR. These countries are energy and resources rich countries of the region (Jan, 2017).

The official name of Afghanistan is “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan “. Pashto and Persian also called Dari are the official and national languages of Afghanistan. The regional languages enjoy the position of third national and official language in their respective areas (Rahim, 2015). The capital of the country, as we know, is Kabul. Afghani, as matter of fact, is the currency of the country. The official and national languages are the languages of court, judiciary, market, media and home. Medium of instruction in the educational institutions of the country is also the same i.e. Pashto, Dari and regional language (Louis, 2012).

The largest ethnic group of the country is Pashtun. They are the rulers as well as founders of modern Afghanistan. Majority of the Pashtuns are sunni Muslims (Ejaz, 2013). Most of the rulers of Afghanistan from Ahmed Shah Abdali to Dr. Ashraf Ghani are Pashtun. Tajik is the second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Majority of them are sunni Muslims. The role of this ethnic group in the development and protection of the country is laudable. The third largest ethnic group of Afghanistan is Hazara. They are Shia Muslims. The members of Hazara community play vital role in development of Afghanistan. The fourth largest ethnic group of Afghanistan is Uzbek. They are also sunni Muslims. Their role in the development, protection and prosperity of Afghanistan cannot be ruled out. Other ethnic groups of Afghanistan are Aimaq, Turkmen and Baloch (Malik, 2012). All the ethnic groups play their respective role in the prosperity and development of the country. Apart from the ethnic groups, religious minorities of Afghanistan also play effective and cardinal role in the prosperity of Afghanistan.

Impacts of Afghan Politics on Global Politics:

As stated earlier, Afghanistan is located at a junction that connects not only the regions of a Continent but also connects Continents I.e. Europe and Asia. Afghan politics has always affected the global politics in general and western politics in particular. Afghanistan acted as a buffer state between Great Britain and Russia when the Indian Sub-continent was the colony of the Great Britain (Paul, 1989). Both the great powers of the world were fearful of Afghanistan. They both wanted to influence the rulers of Afghanistan. They both tried to use Afghan soil against the rival. But, the rulers of Kabul always maintained a policy of equilibrium between the two powerful neighbors. The British imposed the first and second Afghan-

Anglo wars on Afghanistan on the pretend that the rulers of Kabul hurt the interest of Great Britain by securing the interest of Russia (Ejaz, 2013).

The policy makers of Great Britain and Russia kept the political situation of Afghanistan in their minds while formulating their respective foreign policies. Both these countries used to spend large amount of money on their Afghan policies (Darvesh, 2014). During this period, other European countries, especially rival countries of Great Britain, like Germany were also active in Afghanistan. German Embassy in Afghanistan is said to have provided support to those Indians who were running freedom movement in British Occupied Indian Sub-Continent (Malik, 2012).

British even continued their policy of interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan after the third Afghan-Anglo War. It must be kept in mind that third Afghan-Anglo War enabled Afghanistan to get full freedom from the policies of British. The Great Britain took Afghan politics in mind till 1947 when it granted independence to her Indian colonies (Jan, 2017).

Afghanistan remained aloof and neutral in World War I. It also tried its level best to keep its neutrality in the second World War (Rahim, 2015). But, Afghanistan could not remain neutral in the global politics after the end of second World War. As we know that the clash between capitalism and socialism quickened after the World War II. The Socialist Russia, a neighbor of Afghanistan, was keen to expand socialism in the non-socialist countries while United States of America, a staunch supporter and leader of capitalist world wanted to counter the socialism at any cost (Darvesh, 2014). Infact, Afghanistan once again became victim of the policies of the two super powers of the world I. e. Russia and America (Ejaz, 2013).

In 1979, a pro-socialist government came into power in Afghanistan. The internal situation of the country started to worsen as the pro-Islamic groups that had hidden support of capitalist bloc resisted vehemently. These groups took weapons against the Socialist state of Afghanistan. They are named as Mujahideen. The leadership of Mujahideen took refuge in Pakistan and Iran, the two neighboring countries of Afghanistan, and from there guided the military operations (Paul, 1989). The entrance of Soviet troops in Afghanistan for the support of Afghan troops against Mujahideen and the internal differences of Socialist Afghan leaders that resulted in the killing of two Afghan rulers like Nur Muhammad Tarakai and Hafeez Ullah Amin further worsened the situation. The capitalist bloc now openly started supporting Afghan Mujahideen (Abdul, 2013).

Both Russia and America were trying their level best to win the hearts of Afghans. Both allocated funds for Afghanistan. Both were eager to win the battle that they had started in Afghanistan. Finally, the capitalist bloc under the leadership of America carried the day. The Soviet Russia had to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan but the fighting did not stop. The Mujahideen continued their battle against the Afghan government. Even the last Socialist Afghan president Dr Najib Ullah who was the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan also stepped down but the battle in Afghanistan did not stop (Mohammad, 2010).

The battle in Afghanistan turned into civil war as the former Mujahideen started war among themselves. The governments of the Mujahideen that were formed in Pakistan failed to bring peace and tranquility to the war-torn Afghanistan. The Mujahideens were fighting violently with one another as the international community including America had left wounded Afghanistan helplessly (Mohammad, 2013). Civil War was followed by the Taliban regime. Taliban emerged so as to put an end to the Civil War of Afghanistan. Taliban had neither understanding of global politics nor knew the tactics and strategies of government. It was recognized only by three countries. The economy of Afghanistan collapsed under the Taliban regime and it became a safe haven for the international terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda (Abdul, 2013).

The presence of Al-Qaeda endangered the security of western countries and finally resulted in the occurrence of 9/11 which was followed by the American and NATO action against the Taliban government. The Taliban regime was toppled by the International Security Forces and a new government was installed in Afghanistan (Louis, 2012). The type of government installed by the International community under the leadership of America is going to hold its presidential elections for the fourth term.

Although America and her NATO allies have reduced the number of troops in Afghanistan, yet the presence of America in Afghanistan has created unrest in the regional powers like Russia and China. Iran, the rival of America and neighbor of Afghanistan, is also worried about the presence of America in Afghanistan (J. N, 2000). It might be the reason that Iran despite sectarian clash provides hidden support to the Taliban that are fighting against Afghan government and Americans and NATO troops in Afghanistan. China has for the first time started taking interest in the affairs of Afghanistan. The reason may be economic but the political reasons seem heavier. In short, the entire global community is affected by the politics of Afghanistan.

Impacts of Afghan Politics on the Indo-Pak Relations:

Afghan Politics has not only affected the global politics but also the regional politics. It has also influenced the Indo-Pak Relations. In fact, India and Pakistan came into being when Great Britain granted them the independence in 1947. Afghanistan started normal relationships with India as it had neither any direct border nor any dispute with India. On the other hand, the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan were not cordial even in the beginning as they had border dispute. Afghanistan was the only Islamic country that opposed the entry of Pakistan into United Nations Organization. Pashtunistan movement was another reason for the cold relationship between the two neighboring countries (Abdul, 2013).

During the Afghan – Soviet War and during the American attack on Taliban regime, millions of Afghans took refuge in Pakistan. Even today millions of Afghans are said to be living in Pakistan as refugees. The presence of Afghan refugees has affected almost every walk of life in Pakistan both negatively and positively (Mohammad, 2010). Pakistan has both lost and gained many things in the Afghan wars. For example, Weapon and heroine cultures were introduced in the Pakistani society due to Afghan Politics while on the other hand Pakistan got its doubts cleared due to Afghan wars. It also received loans, aid grants and military equipment owing to Afghan wars. Pakistan completed its nuclear and missile programs without facing tough time from the international community due to its role in the Afghan wars (Abdul, 2012).

India and Afghanistan had normal and cordial relationship till the installation of Taliban regime. India was among those countries that enjoyed normal relationships with the communist Afghan government. Unlike Pakistan, India neither became home of Afghan refugees nor was directly affected by the Afghan wars. The diplomatic ties between India and Afghanistan stopped when Taliban took reign of government in Kabul because India like most countries of the global community did not extend recognition to the Taliban government (Ejaz, 2013). But, after 9/11 India not only resumed its diplomatic ties with Afghanistan but also started participation in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process of Afghanistan. India spends much money on various projects in Afghanistan. The active participation of India in Afghanistan enabled it to earn the trust of America and her allies on one hand and on the other hand India got direct and easy access to the energy rich Central Asia. India is also alleged of using Afghan soil against her rival Pakistan. The terrorist organizations that carry out operations in Pakistan are said to be given funds and weapons by the Indian consulates in Afghanistan (Abdul, 2012).

Conclusion:

Afghanistan, no doubt, is an important country of the region. The internal politics of Afghanistan has always affected the global and regional politics. This country acted as a buffer state between the Russia and Great Britain. The Socialist and capitalist blocks played a deceive battle on the land of Afghanistan in which the Soviet Union had to eat the dust. This battle was followed by civil war in Afghanistan and resulted in the destruction of state structure of Afghanistan. The Civil War gave rise to the birth of Taliban regime that not only endangered the security of Western countries but also weakened Afghanistan economically. 9/11 event brought American and NATO forces to Afghanistan. The presence of America has created unrest in the regional players. Afghan Politics has also affected the relationship between India and Pakistan. And, Pakistan blames India of using Afghan soil against Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan. The terrorist organizations that carry out operations in Pakistan are said to be receiving financial, moral and political support from the Indian spy agency Research and analysis Wing (Raw). India is said to be using its consulates in Afghanistan for this purpose.

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