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Aspects of India–Afghanistan Relations

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Certain aspects of relations between India and Afghanistan need explaining. What needs explaining, along with possible explanations, is elaborated in this article, which also brings in three different theories as an aide to understanding and conceptualizing these relations. This is important since policy makers do make assumptions about the theoretical framework of their decisions, even if they don't often spell out the framework; while of course academics evolve theories largely by testing them against the decisions of policy makers.

The Kautilyan tradition

By rights the two neighbours should have had the closest possible relations, as close, say, as the kind France and Russia had in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when both were facing a threatening Germany. That's the first kind. Or, the kind that the USA and the UK had through most of the 19th and all of the 20th centuries with their long tradition of common civilisational and cultural values, greatly reinforcing politico-strategic isometry. That's the second kind.

As for the first kind, in the corridors of South Block, housing India's Ministry of External Affairs, Kautilya's Arthashastra is often mentioned. K.P.S. Menon, as wise a foreign secretary as India has had, was among the first to do so; in his Travel Diary he quotes Mahatma Gandhi approvingly, who said he would ward off an invasion from Afghanistan by love, but, adds Menon, it is Kautilya who is borne out by history. "Kautilya, known as the

Indian Machiavelli, defined an enemy 2,200 years ago as 'that state which is situated on the border of one's own state', and this definition is "borne out by world history."[1]

Other foreign secretaries, also wise, endorsed this. One of his successors over four decades later, J.N. Dixit, had this advice, that a rational orientation of Indian foreign policy "required the application of the concepts and prescriptions of Chanakya who pre-dated Machiavelli by nearly 2,000 years."[2] That's actually quite an unfair comparison; Machiavelli's Prince was solely concerned with the preservation of his own power and supremacy; the Arthashastra is a much wiser and more comprehensive text, concerned with the prosperity and growth in power of a whole people, and the ultimate guide to the careful formulation of state strategy in all its aspects, domestic as well as external, and based on long-term self interest.

Academic experts have the same advice, and two of the most distinguished among them quote Kautilya approvingly, "Kautilya, in his Arthashastra, defined an enemy as that state which is situated on the borders of ones own state."[3]

In the 1960's, with the Chinese aggression and the India-Pakistan conflicts of 1965, this was more so, in contrast to the 1950s. In that earlier, decade India's foreign policy was primarily shaped by what Jawaharlal Nehru, who did the shaping, called a "duty to the world"[4], being a contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind. Nehru recognized and often spoke of security as the first concern of foreign policy. "Every country's foreign policy, first of all, is concerned with its own security and with protecting its own progress."[5] But this was to be gained by friendship, by building a world commonwealth. The 1960s turned all this upside down; realism and self-interest came to the fore.

Hence the marked turn to Kautilya, who did say that "the King who is situated anywhere immediately on the circumference of the conqueror's territory is termed the enemy" but also added, which is relevant to Afghanistan, and in the very next paragraph, that "the King who is likewise situated close to the enemy, but

separated from the conqueror only by the enemy, is termed the friend."[6]

In contemporary terms this translates into realism as far as IR theory is concerned.

This school has two fundamental premises: that the international system comprises sovereign states which have control over their decision making in foreign policy; and that this is an anarchic system where each sovereign states pursues its interests through the use of power. So this favours the expedient over the ethical, the pragmatic over the principled. In this school Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz are the leaders; they wrote the classics.

> Morgenthau starts with "the concept of interest defined in terms of power" as the main signpost to guide you through the subject. He inserts the "moral significance of political action" as one of his six principles of political realism; and this leads to "the ineluctable tension between the moral command and the requirements of successful political action". However this moral or ethical aspect is to be judged by its political consequences: "political ethics judges action by its political consequences", or, in other words, it is moral to follow the signpost of interest defined in terms of power, which is a circular argument, that is, it leads again to putting the pragmatic first.[7]
>
> Waltz[8] recognized the circularity of Morgenthau's argument and tried to escape it by deleting the moral from his systemic framework altogether, but only with limited success. In sum realism looks at IR in exclusively pragmatic terms of a world that is 'out there', governed by immutable laws impervious to human thinking or language. Ontology comes before epistemology and long before empiricism. If your neighbour's neighbour is logically your friend, the reality of geography has dictated this; rejection would sacrifice self-interest and jeopardize your well being. India and Afghanistan would need, by the sheer logic of this thinking, to make common cause *vis a vis* Pakistan.

As for the second kind(civilizational and cultural values), one has only to glance at some of the joint statements or speeches made on the occasion of high level bilateral visits from Kabul to Delhi and vice versa. For example, during the Afghan President's April 2010 visit to Delhi, "President Karzai and Prime Minister Singh ...expressed satisfaction at the progress in their relations. They noted that these relations were rooted in historical and civilisation links, and served not only the interests and welfare of the two countries, but also contributed to peace, stability and prosperity in the region." That is a fairly typical statement; one will find it difficult to locate a high-level exchange of visits between our two countries in which it is not reiterated with different degrees of elaboration. Here is another, more elaborate, this by PM Narendra Modi, in Afghanistan in June 2016 to mark the completion of an Indian project on the Harirud river, and the way Indians and Afghans worked together on it, which has "formed between us an eternal bond, written into the soil of this land, bonds that remind us of ancient links between this region and India. For many, the Harirud River is one strand of our connected histories since the ancient Vedic times. .... it is from here that the Chishti Silsila or Chishti tradition of Sufism came to India. Its glorious tradition and teachings resonate through the dargahs of Ajmer, Delhi and Fatehpur Sikri. It draws people from all faiths with its message of love, peace, compassion; of harmony among people of all beliefs; of respect for all of God's creation; Indians and Afghans know that these values, not extremism and violence, define Afghanistan - a nation brimming with poetry of love and spiritual tradition of peace and harmony. And, it is on the foundation of these values that Afghans and Indians seek each other."

The reference to Vedic times is not hyperbole; an archaeological site at Mundigak, about 35 km. north of Kandahar revealed that at the fourth level (2,500 B.C.) out of seven levels altogether, there was a white calcite head of a man, the head bound in a fillet, clearly parallel to those found in the Indus valley. Indus civilisation (which has increasingly been collated with Vedic times) sites have also been found along the Amu Darya (or Oxus), close to its confluence with the Kokcha river at Shortughai in

Badakshan; there the bricks, pottery, the depictions of the peacock, a seal with a rhinoceros, all show that the Indus culture had spread to the north of Afghanistan. Further west, near Turkmenistan, the Namazgai V period sites of the third millennium B.C. show signs of Indus valley influence: beads, figurines, pottery, indicate the existence of trade connections. Of course Kandahar (Gandhara), Kabul (Kubha) and Balkh (Balhika), as also several of the rivers in Afghanistan, find mention in the Rigveda.

Then again there is the Mahabharata, which mentions many places, rivers and names of tribes and their leaders who took part in the epic battle and which are identifiably located in Afghanistan. And, in that great story Gandhari, the wife of Dhritarashtra, as the name suggests, is a princess from Kandahar. Asoka edicts were found there, too, and it is historically true that Afghanistan was the vehicle for the spread of Buddhism from India to Central Asia and beyond.

By 303 B.C. the Mauryans were in control of Arachosia (the present Arghandab valley), the Kabul river and all the areas to the south and east of the Hindu Kush. In that year Chandragupta Maurya signed an agreement with Seleucus Nicator, the successor to Alexander, under which all these territories were ceded to the former. This seems to have been a recognition *post facto* of the situation, since the areas in question were treated as if they had been long part of India, of the Indian empire, inhabited by Indians, and their rule by the Greeks was an interregnum. The Mauryans regarded their taking of these lands as a restoration, not an imperial expansion.

Apart from this the Kushans, who did so much to adapt to Hinduism and in the spread of Buddhism, included large parts of northern India within their territory. So there really is a shared ancient history Although we should consider the possibility that the growing opacity of history as one goes back over the centuries does much to camouflage the real possibility that those early centuries may not have been very different from later ones when the better available records show a not always very happy relationship, as the repeated invasions into India from Afghanistan and the north-

west, the pillage, destruction and mass killing, testify. But overall it has been a shared enough relationship to have created strong bonds of culture; and which has been built on through cultural exchanges in contemporary times, using the shared tastes in music, poetry, and passion for the Persian language.

The Need for Explanation

Now we come to what needs explaining. David Moradian has summed this up well. In the Indian Express of 15th September, 2016, he writes: "Indo-Afghan relations are among the few bilateral ties that include elements of civilisational, emotional and strategic imperatives and bonds. Kabul was once a Hindu and a Buddhist city; while Delhi was a leading centre of Persian literature and language... For many Afghans, India is among the few places that accords them respect and dignity... Kabul and Delhi are also the main victims of Rawalpindi's use of terrorism to pursue its regional ambition and inherent insecurity. ... However, Delhi and Kabul have failed to translate their enormous mutual trust and political, economic and security imperatives into an effective, functioning and more importantly predictable partnership: It is more developmental and sentimental than political and strategic. India has been generous and effective in helping Afghanistan's massive humanitarian and developmental needs, but peripheral in shaping the country's politics and more crucially its struggle against terrorism. Delhi's reluctance to fully and confidently implement its strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan, signed in 2011, demonstrates India's residual doubt and fear about its engagement in Afghanistan."

In sum, and based on the above, Afghanistan could have been one of our closest friends in the region, deserving our political, economic, moral and military support to ensure its strength and stability. But that didn't happen. There was evidently, despite a lot of talk about it, a lack of strategic vision.

This has a background in history, which is worth recalling though some of it bears on the present only tangentially. Through the period of British expansion and rule there was no real effort by

the Indian independence movement to enlist Afghan support, nor vice versa, though of course Afghanistan was the one power that, more or less consistently, opposed that expansion.

For instance, going back to the mid-nineteenth century, and knowing the threat that rising British power in India posed to the interests of both the Indian rulers and the Afghan king, they should have joined hands. By 1847 it was clear what British policy was going to be towards Afghanistan as well as Indian rulers. In 1834 they had tried to overthrow the Afghan ruler, Dost Mohammed Khan, but failed; and the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, had joined them. Five years later they assembled the massive (for those times) Army of the Indus and invaded Afghanistan. This time they had a tripartite treaty, with Shah Shuja, a puppet who they intended to install on the throne in Kabul, and Ranjit Singh, still blissfully unaware of what lay in wait for his empire. They took Kabul, but the sequel, the destruction at Afghan hands, and to the last man, of the Army of the Indus in late 1841 and 1842, is too well known to need repetition. Less than a decade later Ranjit Singh's empire was gone, his armies (under somewhat inept successors) defeated by the British he had done so much to help in Afghanistan. The same thing happened in 1857. The Afghan ruler had signed a Treaty with the British in March 1855; he agreed there to be 'friend of friends and enemy of enemies of the Hon. East India Company'. In January 1857 he signed another treaty with them. So when the uprising of 1857 happened in India, and despite appeals for help, Dost Mohammed did nothing of the kind. The historian D.P. Singhal says, with the immoderation to which historians are occasionally prone (considering the British had not always lost against the Afghans) "If his (Amir's) armies had rushed down the north-western passes, the British would have been placed, to say the least, in an extremely difficult position."[9] The shallow point here is that some Indians felt the Afghans could have helped. The deeper one is that in ridding the subcontinent of the only invader, neither Indians nor Afghans were able to unite or strategise soundly, or do as Kautilya would no doubt have advised.

However, this was a frequent occurrence; the Afghan rulers were repeating the mistakes made by one Indian ruler after another,

being beguiled by one tempting offer after another to side with the invader; to recount this is only to offer a general background to the way, during the decades of British rule in India, there was really no united effort against them.

More important is to judge the way Indian leaders reacted to issues of concern to the Pashtuns in more recent years, an early sample of which is provided by how they responded to the anti-colonial movement there early in the twentieth century. We need here to realize just how important the Pashtun issue has been and continues to be for Afghanistan. The future of the Pashtuns has been at the core of the Afghan national self interest. It is impossible to judge how important this issue is without understanding that, more especially in the 20th century Afghanistan has had no choice but to build its nation around a core Pashtun identity which means of course a permanent claim on the Pashtuns east of the Durand line, where the majority of them are located, and especially the Pashtun city of Peshawar, which had historically been the Durrani winter capital.

It is equally important to understand, in the overall context of India's strategic approach to its neighbours, that India is the one country, within the region and outside, more than any other, that has a major stake in ensuring Afghanistan's strength. Support for Afghanistan on the demand for the autonomy or independence of all the Pashtuns of the northwest through a process of self-determination; and the linked demand for abolition of the Durand line may not have contributed directly to Afghanistan's strength, but it would have been a morale booster and would have earned a permanent friend. Moreover, such a viewpoint would have been amply justified.

The November 1893 agreement between H.M. Durand and the Amir of Afghanistan, which is the basis for the Durand Line, was not, as a reading of the text makes clear, primarily about any international border between British Indian territory and Afghan territory; the very first article of it is an agreement by the Amir that he will accept the Oxus river as the northern boundary of Afghanistan. It goes on then, in the second article,

about the 'frontier of Afghanistan on the side of India'(Article II, preamble), but it nowhere describes, delineates or even mentions an international boundary there. In other words, between British India and Afghanistan, the line is nowhere in the text described as a boundary, international border or the like; it is called a frontier, or frontier line and the agreement was that neither side will, per article II(2), 'exercise interference' in the territories lying on the other side. Thereafter, it is repeatedly called a frontier line. So this was really a mutual non-interference agreement, a line between two spheres of influence, not between two sovereignties. This position continued till 1947, and till then the British also made no attempt to change it. Then Pakistan unilaterally announced that it was a valid international boundary; it soon received the support of its military allies, from Britain (in a statement in the House of Commons on 30 June 1950, not yet an ally, soon to become one) and from a meeting of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation held in Karachi in March 1956.

The factual position is that no Afghan government has ever accepted the line as an international boundary. Even the Taliban government, an international pariah, recognized as legitimate in the world of nations only by three states, one of them Pakistan which really set it up in the first place, refused to accept it as such. Much to Pakistan's discomfiture, which had tried hard to get that acceptance.

The short point is that there was no reason in the text of the agreement or in international law or practice for India to recognize the Durand Line as an international boundary, and for years India followed a policy of studied ambivalence. Then on 31st May 1978 the Dawn, a Pakistani newspaper, reported that India's Minister of External Affairs, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had declared that the existing Durand Line between Pakistan and Afghanistan should be respected by the new Afghan government, and that 'existing borders are to be respected.'[10] The statement, not thereafter repudiated as far as I know, was evidently one of those pieces of random quixotry, a hazard that every researcher into India's policy towards Pakistan faces, and that may have its origin in chaos theory, since no known IR theory has a place for it.

There are, in the second place, those demands that Afghanistan has been making over the years on Pakistan, as a landlocked state, in particular that the blocking of access routes should be considered as aggression, which, too, India could have supported but didn't.

Badshah Khan as analogue

The general approach of India and lack of interest in the first issue is well illustrated by recent history, by the story of a man who built his entire political career around issues of concern to India (or which should have been of concern to India). Badshah Khan installed, or helped to install, all the beneficent political signposts of the northwest: India, Pakistan and Afghanistan and the possibilities of their mutual relations; peace and nonviolence as instruments; the Pashtuns and their orbits in tradition and religion. But reality is not beneficent; it's more like a multilevel freeway interchange leading in different directions.

He had, by 1919, built up a large following among the Pashtuns of the North-west, based on the principles of the Congress Party, above all the imperative of non-violent means, which in itself was quite a miracle, considering how important the gun is to Pashtun culture and tradition. His very first political action against British rule was directed at the Rowlatt Acts, passed in March 1919 in order to perpetuate the extraordinary powers that the government had acquired during wartime, including the doing away of ordinary legal procedure and authorizing imprisonment without trial. Gandhi had organized a passive resistance movement in protest, which was met by the organized violence of the government, including random shootings of civilians, hanging without trial, bombing from the air, and then General Dyer's massacre of several hundred unarmed civilians in Jalianwala Bagh.

Repressive measures in the Northwest were particularly severe and on the 6th April Badshah Khan organized a public meeting in Utmanzai, the village where he was born; there was a good response from the people and a resolution condemning the

Acts was passed. He was arrested and some of his friends began to ask him why he was doing this, and why should the people of the Northwest run any risk for the people of India, who had shown no sympathy for the Pashtuns.

Contemporaneously, and no doubt to take advantage of British discomfiture with the resistance movement launched by Gandhi in India, and what he judged to be a general sense of rising unrest against British rule in India, on 4th May 1919, the ruler of Afghanistan Amir Amanullah Khan called a special durbar to proclaim Jehad against the British, the first aim being to achieve complete independence for Afghanistan and the second being to help "our brethren in India."[11] A detachment of Afghan troops crossed the Durand line and took control of a border village. Then the British received "alarming information … that the Afghans planned a simultaneous attack on three fronts, spearheaded by hordes of religious fanatics, responding to the proclamation of Holy War … while British forces were to be immobilized by mass rioting in India."[12]

The Congress Party responded with indifference both to the initiative taken by Badshah Khan and to the Jehad declared by the Amir of Afghanistan. Nobody from the party went to the Northwest to see just what the former was doing (Gandhi did, but that was years later); as for the latter, there was no support for Amanullah and the Afghans, despite them hosting at the time a 'Provisional Government of India' to oppose the British. Anyway several Congress leaders were convinced, even after the end of the Third Anglo-Afghan war on May 31st 1919, that he might invade India, (a fear factor fed by frequently reiterated British propaganda about past invasions from the North-West along with all that pillage and rapine, raising the ghosts of ideational baggage from earlier centuries) although this opinion was far from general and not shared by Gandhi himself. But the conviction was reinforced by the fact that at the December 1919 Congress session Maulana Mohammed Ali made a plea for the migration of Indian Muslims to Afghanistan, the so called *Hijrat*, saying that in India conditions were not conducive for the exercise of their religious rights. A rather vaguely formulated supplementary idea was that

the Muslims of India would then, with help from the Afghan Amir, descend on India to oust the British. By the end of July 1920 some 25,000 Muslims had moved from India to Afghanistan, and then the Afghan ruler started sending them back, on the plea that there were limits even to Afghan hospitality. Then, by late 1921, the brief and somewhat unprecedented honeymoon between Indian and Afghan nationalism ended. Amanullah shut down the Provisional Government of India office. On 22 November, 1921 he signed another agreement with the British, establishing formal diplomatic relations, and affirming mutual friendship and understanding, thus bringing to a definitive end that somewhat shaky episode of cooperation with the Indian nationalist movement against the British. Amanullah did, in word, continue to support independence for India and said so in a speech at a mosque in Bombay in 1927. Nevertheless, years later, though Netaji Subhas Bose went to Afghanistan as a first refuge from the British, he couldn't trust the government there not to catch hold of him and hand him over; so he stayed less than two months, in constant hiding, moving from one place to another, occasionally bribing the police not to give him away, while organising his next move.

As for the fears of an Afghan invasion, these were widespread enough to require frequent refutation; they were partly laid to rest by declarations, including by Mohammed Ali himself at the 38th session of the Congress (1923) that "As for the bogey of His Majesty the Amir of Afghanistan attacking India with the assistance of Indian Muslims, is the creation of the fear and cowardice and can only be laid to rest by courage and self-confidence."[13]

Then Gandhi wrote in 'Young India' that "I do not believe that the Afghans want to invade India", adding in his usual quixotic fashion that "I would rather see India perish at the hands of the Afghans than purchase freedom from an Afghan invasion at the cost of her honour."[14] At the Congress session in Karachi, Nehru, who moved the resolution on the government's frontier policy, took this argument further, and said, "For years past the Afghans have been painted as savages who were out to murder and pillage

and the moment the British government were out of India, there would be universal loot."[15] Despite all this those ancient fears could resurface.

In any case, the Afghan ruler's primary interest was more directly in the future of the Pashtuns; he thought this should be with Afghanistan, and self-determination for them was a key slogan in his anti-British Jehad. The general who had commanded his forces against the British, Nadir Khan, called a meeting on 31st January, 1920, of the frontier tribes from both sides of the Durand Line, the aim of which was Pashtun unity and he declared at that meeting, "The frontier tribes are one with the Afghans in race, religion, and custom and there is no reason why they should remain under the control of strangers." And in the negotiations that year to end the Afghan British War, this became a major issue.

This brings us to the 1940s, the negotiations that took place to decide the shape of independent India and how (as seen by Pashtun leaders) this reflected the attitudes of Congress leaders, especially Jawaharlal Nehru, towards Pashtun demands. The draft plan for the transfer of power from the British to India was ready by early May 1947. When V.P. Menon showed this to Nehru, he didn't like the provisions regarding the North West Frontier Province. Other provinces were to be given the chance to decide according to the wishes of the Provincial Assembly and in the NWFP Khan Sahib's (brother of Badshah Khan) Frontier National Congress had emerged as the largest party, would certainly vote for the province to join India and this was a vote that was likely to carry. But the May 1947 plan carried a provision, in lieu of that vote, for a referendum in that province and it was known that the Muslim League would then organise the kind of violence which the non-violent approach of Badshah Khan and his brother could not effectively counter; the referendum was actually permission for the province to join Pakistan against the wishes of its people. So Nehru in May still envisaged that the province might join India, writes V.P. Menon.[16] By the 2nd June, largely it seems due to Lord Mountbatten's persuasive abilities on Nehru in particular, the original plan was accepted by the Congress party leadership. At that time the Government of Afghanistan made its own position

clear: the people living west of the Indus were Afghans and these people should be given the right to decide their own future. The Secretary of State for India rejected this, but there was certainly an Afghan sense (on both sides of the border) of having being let down by Nehru. Strongly though occasionally hinted to me in conversations with Afghan leaders and Ministers four decades later when I was serving there, if the conversation got around to the events leading up to India's independence.

The Congress party's local unit in Bannu in the Northwest, however, adopted a resolution on 22 June, 1947, defining an independent Pathan State (with a 'Pathan constitution' and based on Islamic conceptions of democracy, equality and justice).[17] This was inspired by Gandhi, going his own way. All in all the Afghan feeling of being let down was general. As was the case with Badshah Khan, who famously told the leaders of the Congress party, 'you have thrown us to the wolves', after they accepted Mountbatten's June 3, 1947 plan for a partitioned subcontinent; this was not pure hyperbole; actually, like the baby and the bathwater, they'd thrown out their chances too – of a successful policy towards the strategic Northwest Frontier and beyond.

Nehru: We cannot help

In line with this generally neutral approach, the key issues of interest to Afghanistan were more or less neglected. So, although relations with Afghanistan were friendly with high level visits, a Treaty of Friendship of January 1950 which established 'eternal peace and friendship' between the two; expanding trade and a trade treaty of April, 1950, minor aid projects and facilities for training among other co-operative ventures, there was no support for Afghanistan on the issues it regarded as critical, not for self-determination for the Pashtuns nor for the rights of landlocked states; talking about neighbours in a speech in Parliament in March 1950, Nehru was clear on the former, an issue, mentioned before, as of particular interest to Afghanistan. He referred to the Frontier Province, to 'colleagues and friends who played a more important part than most of us in the struggle for freedom', and that it would be false and inhuman to forget them, but then added "but it is a

matter of abiding regret to us that we can only be interested from a distance without being able to help in any way"[18], though he refrained from going into exactly why no help could be given.

In many ways the substantive content of India's policy towards Afghanistan in the seven odd decades that followed can be nut-shelled in those eight words of Nehru – 'without being able to help in any way'. There seems to be no objective reason for India's expression of helplessness in this matter, since a lot could have been done, starting with diplomatic support for the Afghan position on the Pashtun issue and the Durand Line. This could justifiably have been done, but no such thing was done. And the Afghans were disappointed, which they showed in particular by taking an even-handed position at the time of the Chinese aggression of 1962 as well as being generally supportive of Pakistan during and after Pakistan's aggression in 1965 as well as the 1971 war. In fact, after the latter, Premier Bhutto went to Kabul on 11th Jan 1972 and announced at a press conference there that the purpose of his visit was to "thank them for not increasing our problems when we were facing our gravest crisis." And, during that period, when we judged countries by how soon they extended recognition to Bangladesh, Afghanistan was among the last to do so, even among members of the Islamic world. So there has been plenty of sentimentality, generosity in giving aid, but in essence, in so far as core issues of self-interest are concerned, the relationship has remained peripheral.

It should be mentioned in all fairness that two aspects of India's foreign policy grounding may have intervened here.

The need for consistency was one. Setting an example, taking the lead in the way foreign relations should be conducted; India believed that historically determined borders like the Durand Line should be respected (no matter that this was not an international border at all). It was only later that Pakistan extended support to China when the latter questioned the legality of the McMahon line. Finally, self-determination for the Pashtuns would imply that Pakistan's demand for the same right to the people of Kashmir was justified. Consistency was also the major factor in determining

India's lack of support for Afghanistan in its demands on Pakistan over landlocked status; since Nepal would certainly have used any arguments espoused by India to demand the same treatment. There was, secondly, the desire for bonhomie with Pakistan; in the early years after Independence, India hoped that after the 1948-49 ceasefire in Kashmir, relations with Pakistan would enable the continuation and even reinforcement of the historical bonds between the two peoples.

Consistency, however, the main reason given for India's position on the two issues of concern to Afghanistan, is not uniformly(or is never) thought to be a virtue in international relations; it is discarded whenever inconvenient, as when, for example, a large country like India has the position of lower riparian in one case, upper riparian in another. Nehru himself was not consistent, as pointed out above, about the future of the NWFP at a time when this was undecided. As for the desire for bonhomie with Pakistan, this takes us outside the realm of Kautilyan realpolitik as an explanation for how policy towards Afghanistan evolved, but there is theoretical grounding in IR for this in Alexander Wendt's Social Constructivism. So now we need to take recourse to a different theoretical framework. This framework is especially important to understand Nehru's eight-word formulation of policy towards Afghanistan.

Here power and interest explain what states do in international relations, but these explanations presuppose ideas. "The meaning of the distribution of power in international politics is constituted in important part by the distribution of interests ... and the content of interests are in turn constituted in important part by ideas"[19] So it is ideas about international politics that really constitute the material causes for actions here. It is the meanings that human beings construct around power distribution and interests, meanings that depend on ideas, that make for decisions. While material conditions, interests and ideas constitute the tripartite basis for decision-making, a Kautilya could well interpret the same material conditions and interests one way, a Jawaharlal Nehru in another. All sorts of things go into this: identity, ideology, culture, imitation and social learning. Group beliefs are integral to the way

material conditions and interests are interpreted through ideas. These are the myths, narratives and traditions that constitute who a group is and how it relates to others.[20] These include inherently historical phenomena that are kept alive through the generations by socialization and ritual enactment, a process that is an important part of a group's identity. In the case of Afghanistan, of course, this is to some extent constituted by a shared culture and history, and by a story like Rabindranath Tagore's 'Kabuliwala', which generates a generally positive reaction, but much more strongly, negatively, by recollections, memories and re-enactments of repeated invasions, by Mahmud of Ghazni, nineteen of them in all, by Nadir Khan and the rivers of blood that flowed; by all those fears that were aroused by British propaganda in the 1920s; most recently the brightest memory of all is the enthusiastic and blood-bespattered invasion of Pashtun tribesmen from the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands into Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, an integral part of the Pakistani invasion of that time. The Vedas and 'Kabuliwala' are not enough. All this ideational baggage accompanies whatever we may want to think of Indo-Afghan relations.

This goes far to explain both the general desire for bonhomie with Pakistan and Nehru's eight word statement of helplessness of March 1950. There was a reluctance to engage, the obvious of realpolitik concealed by layers of ideational baggage. During my tenure in Kabul in the mid-1980s, as well as before and after, this same reluctance to engage was in evidence. Minimal aid was given, just enough to keep the Indira Gandhi Child Health Centre going as well as an Indian Cultural Centre, but nothing more, no project aid, no large infrastructure works. I should point out here that there had been evolution by then. The ideational baggage of centuries of pre-1947 memories had been largely replaced by Cold War compulsions.

So it was largely in deference to Soviet wishes that we adopted a hands-off policy; nothing should dilute the ideological content of the social system they were trying to build. The years 1979 – 1989, when the Soviet Union continued to struggle in Afghanistan, were also the peak years of the Cold War; everything that mattered

in Afghanistan was all part of the struggle between the USA and the Soviet Union and we had rather better relations with and much greater dependence on the latter. As they got up to leave, however, they did persuade India to extend an official invitation to President Najibullah to visit India which we did (another of the mystifying quixotries which have dotted our policy in this region; his rule was predictably going to come to a quick and inglorious end and, soon enough, it did); and he came on this high profile state visit, more or less informing the international community that we were behind him.

But then, when the Americans came in 2001, the Cold War was over and there was a completely different approach, one based on a unilateral world order; they wanted everyone to help reduce their burden, in every way possible, so India did that, going in for large projects, infrastructure, expanding the number of scholarship given to Afghans to study in India, but with a studied abstention on the military front. Note that no such thing was ever done (or even considered, as far as I am aware) in the years before the July 1973 coup (which replaced Zahir Shah by Daud and the monarchy by a republic), when Afghanistan was really an independent player and would have been happy to have close relations or in the five years of the republic till the April 1978 Saur Revolution which brought the Marxists to power, though Daud did try hard and at one stage even came to India to plead with Indira Gandhi for support on the Pashtun issue. But Nehru's eight-word formula was still applicable. No luck there, so he went back and struck a deal with Premier Bhutto, which led to accusations of collusion with Pakistan and the US, some rumblings in the armed forces, and helped along the forces that wanted him out and the Marxists in.

Nevertheless, immediately following the Bonn Conference of 2001 to determine the political shape of Afghanistan's future, India announced a $100-million aid package, more than had been given during the entire decade of Soviet occupation. Substantial further aid followed: donation of airbuses; hundreds of city buses; and the four infrastructure projects: construction of a 218 kilometre long road from Zaranj to Delaram, connecting Afghanistan better to the Iranian port of Chah Bahar (which recently became

operational); a dam across the Salma river, a major hydroelectric project, built at a cost of $300 million and which will supply power to a large area of Herat province, the Afghan Parliament building; and a 220 KV transmission line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul as well as the sub-station at Chimtala. Then there were 1000 long term scholarships annually from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and 500 short term scholarships from the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme (compare 10 and then 20 per year altogether during the decade 1979-89) and a host of small development projects, the total commitment being $2 billion and which takes India to fifth highest position in bilateral aid. Then, of course, the USA announced that it would pull out of Afghanistan after 2014 and India scaled back; there was a new emphasis on small development projects (SDPs); it was, a large number of people started saying, the SDPs that would carry forward India's strategy in future years, they would carry forward the success story by which India's aid had been adjudged the most popular and acceptable among all bilateral donors year after year. Reasons were given, of course: security would be problematic after the withdrawal of the international (read US) military contingent; SDP's had become more appropriate for Afghanistan's developmental needs; this decision was actually a response to what the Afghans themselves considered to be priorities. Time will tell, of course, but there is perhaps no need to hide the suspicion that this new strategy is simply a way to fit action to a change in the unilateral power's aims.

The Third Theory: Culture and IR

That is not, actually, the end of the story. Clearly, if it were, relations with Afghanistan would not be of a different order to, say, relations with Argentina or Morocco. But they are; here there is far more, a sense of common historical experience, however blood bespattered some of it might have been, of a shared culture, music, language, literature and traditions, which obviously comes into play to explain the wide acceptability and even enthusiasm in deciding the sheer scale of financial commitment, why Indians have been so hospitable towards Afghan refugees and others, the

sheer comfort level between the two sides which David Moradian writes about. You feel this strongly in Afghanistan, sitting in the evenings with Afghan friends, the way they react to Indian music, poetry, films; that kind of bonding happens only in South Asia. In order to fit this into a theoretical framework we turn to a third theory in which relations might fit: Richard Lebow's cultural theory of international relations.[21]

According to this, there are four drives that operate in the field of relations between nations and peoples: spirit, appetite, reason and fear.

Of the four drives, Lebow gives the nodal position to the spirit in the development of his theory; and this is where it is radically different to other theories about IR. Where this, the spirit predominates, people, individually and collectively, seek honour and standing and self-esteem, the sense of self-worth that makes them feel good about themselves. Self-esteem, in turn, requires a sense of self, of course, but also and more importantly, the need of the self for society. And it is closely connected to honour and to hierarchy, one's standing in society or the nation's standing in international society. The higher your rank, the greater the privileges you enjoy, but also the more demanding your role. Greek society, particularly that portrayed in Homer's *Iliad,* best exemplifies one based on the spirit, where honor and standing are valued appropriately. This leads to a competitive quest for honour which is largely restricted to a self-reproducing elite, since upward mobility in such a society is limited, as is the case, of course, in both India and Afghanistan. But the elite feel a strong sense of obligation towards society, which is therefore robust. Warfare is frequent in such societies, but it is limited in its ends and means and governed by rules. Cooperation is actually the norm here, based on friendship, common descent and a sense of mutual obligation among the members of the elite. As far as India and Afghanistan are concerned this is where civilisational ties, culture and music, language and literature come in. Such ties give depth to a relationship, giving it a character of individuals seeking common goals, fundamentals of the spirit, through centuries of contacts, and which can only exist between neighbours that

share and have shared over a long period of time a spectrum of experiences, ranging all the way from cooperation to conflict.

What needs to be added is that although this spirit-based relationship is largely about cooperation, civilisational ties, common culture, other drives like appetite, meaning the greed to acquire, and fear, where there is an anarchic world or regional order, can coexist at the same time, and these other drives can come to predominate, over time. Appetite signifies a drive to acquire wealth, as a society's primary goal and this clearly will not be of long term significance in India's relations with Afghanistan. As for fear, the relationship would have to be highly conflictual, characterised by "arms races, reciprocal escalation, alliances and forward deployment"[22] This, of course, typifies India's relations with Pakistan, but would be impossible so far as Afghanistan is concerned (barring the kind of disaster where Afghanistan sides openly with Pakistan.)

Nevertheless the coexistence of other drives does underline the emphasis that has to be placed on the growth of cooperation, more cultural exchanges, more cultural centres, more student interaction, on all those cooperative ventures that would keep the dominance of a spirit based relationship in place. Economic cooperation, no doubt, will continue to be important, of course; both the small development projects being emphasised now and the larger ones like the four infrastructure projects undertaken earlier, of which the latter made a considerably larger impact.

The Trump policy and regionalism

The most recent developments, however, seem to underline the need for fresh thinking on this subject, the need to introduce, in fact other elements than just culture and the spirit, and indeed to go back to Kautilya. There are two major developments: the new US policy under the administration of President Trump; and the likely return of regionalism to the whole South Asian region after a two-hundred-year gap.

Trump's policy has usually been misunderstood and this is nowhere more evident than in the case of Afghanistan, for it is actually, reading between the lines, a new policy, and a major departure. Though let us admit that he does often contradict his own policy statements.

By way of background, and to help read between the lines, it needs to be explained that the Afghans are, contrary to a widely held belief, actually quite easy to defeat in war, meaning the kind of set battles in which modern armies engage; this was done repeatedly by the Moghuls, Ranjit Singh's empire, and by the British. Subjugation of the Afghan is however, quite a different matter. None of those who defeated Afghan armies were able to subjugate the Afghan individual; actually they are extremely difficult to subjugate, and even under Afghan rulers, their sense of individualism, of *Afghaniyat*, *Pashtunwali* and *rawaj*, makes them hard to control. They have been so ruled, first by the founder of Afghan unity Ahmad Khan of the Abdali tribe (later Durrani or its Mohammadzai branch) for twenty five year and then by others for shorter periods, until Zahir Shah of the same family became king in 1933 and ruled till 1974. The founder was a strong leader and others who wished to rule required to be equally strong, otherwise dissent and rebellion would spread (though of course we see here an acceptance of the Mohammadzai family as legitimate rulers). But at least the Afghans do respect their own rulers to some extent and with qualifications (except, of course Afghan rulers which outsiders may try to impose as the British and the Soviet Union did); this has never been the case with foreigners and all those who tried to rule or subjugate them, the British, then the Soviet Union and then the Americans, failed. The former tried through a political party and an ideology which, despite the emergence of a tiny educated and even somewhat leftist urban elite, was so radically opposed to everything that the Afghans could accept that it was doomed; the latter through a complicated system of democratic and constitutional nation building, complicated because they wanted also to ensure that Pakistani assets in Afghanistan were not totally eliminated. Recall that the Taliban came to power riding on Pakistani tank turrets (just as Babrak Karmal did

on Soviet tank turrets in 1979); that since the US had ensured through its policies on arms supplies and funds to the insurgency that Pakistan controlled all the rebel groups, they could play the decisive role in ensuring unhindered Taliban rule for five years; and that Pakistani troops and military 'advisers', during those years, ran its administration. So it was Pakistan led and Pakistan armed Taliban that took over Afghanistan in the years 1994-96 and Pakistan which ran the state machinery after that till 2001. It is a piece of mythology that the Taliban got to power on the strength of an ideology (which was against all Afghan tradition, by the way) and their own power as the untutored students of madrasas. But the Afghans were not subjugated and in case Pakistan desires to gain influence in Afghanistan, which it is waiting to do once the US withdraws in toto, that will still be the case.

The US, by the way, has been helpful in this endeavour; they paused in their November 2001 offensive so that Pakistan could evacuate the Taliban and its own troops to safety before the really heavy attacks began. Had the Taliban been substantially damaged, forces then favourable to India, namely the Northern Alliance which had been consistently armed and supported by India during the years of Taliban rule, would have had a clear field, and this was quite unacceptable to Pakistan while even the US was not supportive of such an Afghanistan. This is often forgotten, and it is indeed rather difficult to believe, but it is clear that the US did not want to eliminate Pakistan's position and I can find no other explanation for their actions, the sheer dilatoriness with which they took action in late 2001, long after they were fully ready[23]; they wanted a balance in which the terrorism potential of Afghanistan was eliminated, a moderate democratic government took over, but Pakistan retained substantial influence. Nation building was the expressed aim of the Obama administration, but not just building an independent and democratic Afghan nation, but also, very importantly, one that would be friendly to Pakistan. That's what made it complicated and, eventually, impossible to achieve: there were too many aims. So since 2005 the Taliban has, with support from Pakistan, grown steadily and year by year, stronger, and their attacks on coalition forces more deadly. It is impossible to

believe that this is an entirely home grown and domestic force and difficult to believe that the US, knowing that its entire leadership is located within Pakistan and no doubt all its locations known to the armed forces of the latter, has nevertheless not really insisted that that leadership be eliminated, but it is true – that insistence is absent. Under Obama, Pakistan was not the problem; India was the problem.

Trump has eliminated that complication and reversed that policy; nation building is not possible with so few troops and has been openly abandoned. Furthermore the concern for Pakistani interests has abated; indeed Trump has been strongly expressive about what Pakistan is doing in Afghanistan, saying in August 2017 at the Fort Myer military base, Arlington, that the US has been paying Pakistan billions of dollars while the latter has at the same time housed the very terrorists that the US is fighting, and all that will have to change. As if to eliminate doubts on the subject he reiterated in a tweet of January 1, 2018 that in response to generous US aid, "they have given us nothing but lies and deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools ... No more." It is a clearly voiced message that Pakistan's interests will no longer be foremost for the US. The same paragraph of August 2017 has praise for India saying it is critical to US policy to further develop its strategic partnership with India in this part of the world.

As for US troops therefore, they are there as a morale booster[24], a sign that US economic aid will continue (without which Afghanistan cannot meet its defence expenditure) and they serve another purpose, perhaps unintended: as a sort of hostage, to prevent an attack and take over by the Pakistan-led Taliban. The Taliban cannot take over while US troops are there in a sort of Vietnam-like situation; they are simply not strong enough and need as an essential adjunct regular Pakistani troops to lead the charge, but that is not going to happen while US troops are there even in small numbers. Could US troops in these small numbers be there indefinitely? Maybe, but remember these troops are suffering casualties, unlike, for example, in Korea, so there will be mounting domestic pressure on any president to pull them out and one day this will probably have to be done. Meanwhile, Pakistan

is more determined than ever under a regime in which the armed forces have more power than ever, to ensure that the emerging dispensation in Afghanistan is strongly influenced or even under their control. What is going on in my view is that there is now, while US troops are still there for a few years, a window of time in which India can get its act together, if it wants to, but it is probably not one that is going to last long.

This brings us to the question of regionalism. In recent years India has taken steps to play a larger role outside South Asia where for long its traditional interests were focused. An early sign was the gradual expansion of relations with ASEAN from 1992 onwards, including the start of the Indo-ASEAN strategic partnership in 2012 and of course the latest summit on the occasion of Republic Day 2018. However there now seems a greater urgency in the need to expand westwards. With Afghanistan the Strategic Partnership agreement of October 2011 envisages the elevation of ties to higher levels, including close political cooperation, regular political and foreign office consultations and cooperation in the United Nations. That clearly is not enough to ensure the protection of our vital interests once the balance of forces begins to change.

For one, the nature of the Indian-Russian relationship has evolved; it is not quite as firm a partnership as it once was and Russian interests in Afghanistan, especially their willingness to support a dialogue with the Taliban, as well as their closer ties with Pakistan, as also the fact that they may see ties with China as a help in dealing with pressure from the West, are at variance with those of India. For another the Chinese are today more aggressively pushing their interests than at any time in the past, which are not supportive of Indian policies, while even Iran has not been quite as friendly as we would like. Putting it crudely, once the US departs and regional forces come into their own the adjacent regional powers are not necessarily going to support our interests. Recent literature on this subject suggests that the decline of the US has led to regional gains by China on the one hand with an emerging partnership between India, Japan, Australia and the US on the other.[25] But this latter will not regard Afghanistan as a priority, so India needs to look elsewhere or go it alone for

the pursuit of its interests in that country. The line up of external interests in the region in the coming years is therefore one that we should be wary of while ensuring it does not adversely affect our security.

Hence the need for a rethinking of the content of the 2011 Strategic Partnership agreement with Afghanistan as well as our overall policies[26] and the need to bring in a greater element of jointness of strategy. We can here return to what David Moradian wrote and suggest that we now are compelled to translate the enormous cultural commonalities, mutual trust and political, economic and security imperatives into an effective, predictable partnership, which can of course be added to the developmental strategy we have, almost exclusively, followed so far. We also need to rethink the future of our ties with Russia, in order to avoid isolation once the US has withdrawn. Doing all this would require adroit diplomacy.

But it is important to underline that what is urgently needed is action fairly quickly to start this process, to overcome the latent suspicion that the Pashtuns have towards India's intentions and gain their confidence, and to get into a give and take relationship with Russia which is devoid of the sentimentalities of the past, and can lead to a broad understanding on issues relevant to Afghanistan.

Endnotes

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24 As President Ashraf Ghani told the US 'sixty minutes' programme on January 16 this year, 'we will not be able to support our army for six months without US support and US capabilities. Because we don't have the money'

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26 On the question of Pashtun unity, for instance, and the problems of being landlocked.