

Journal of Religion & Society (JRS)

Available Online:

<https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/index>

Print ISSN: [3006-1296](#) Online ISSN: [3006-130X](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

**THE AFGHANISTAN FACTOR: ITS INFLUENCE ON REGIONAL
COMPETITION IN SOUTH ASIA**

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Abstract

The role of Afghanistan in shaping regional dynamics in South Asia is profound and multifaceted, influencing security, political alignments, and economic developments across the region. This article examines Afghanistan's pivotal position at the crossroads of South Asia and Central Asia, and how its geopolitical significance impacts regional competition, particularly in the context of the withdrawal of international forces and the resurgence of the Taliban. The analysis begins with an overview of Afghanistan's historical role as a buffer state and its strategic importance in the "Great Game" of the 19th and 20th centuries. The focus then shifts to contemporary issues, detailing how Afghanistan's security landscape affects neighboring countries like Pakistan, India, and Iran. The study highlights the complex interplay of insurgent groups, state actors, and external powers within Afghanistan, which perpetuates instability and fosters regional power struggles. Key aspects discussed include the implications of Afghanistan's instability on cross-border terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and refugee flows, which pose significant challenges to regional security and cooperation. The paper also explores the strategic interests of major powers in the region, such as the United States, Russia, and China, and their influence on Afghanistan's internal politics. Moreover, the article examines the economic implications of peace in Afghanistan, particularly the potential for regional connectivity and trade routes that could link South and Central Asia. The conclusion underscores the need for a coordinated regional approach to address the multifarious challenges posed by Afghanistan, suggesting pathways towards collaborative security

frameworks and economic integration. In essence, "The Afghanistan Factor: Its Influence on Regional Competition in South Asia" provides a detailed analysis of how Afghanistan's geopolitical challenges are central to understanding and addressing regional competition and cooperation in South Asia.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, regional competition, South Asia, Central Asia, geopolitical significance, security landscape, regional power struggles, external powers, cross-border terrorism, economic connectivity*

Introduction

Afghanistan has historically been a nation of great strategic importance in the diverse and complex landscape of South Asia. Its extensive influence stretches beyond its borders, reaching neighboring nations such as Iran to the west, and extending towards China and India in the east, as well as encompassing various Central Asian republics to its north. The stabilization and security of Afghanistan have consistently been a primary goal for the United States, illustrating its broad and multifaceted interest in the region's stability (Khan & Shirazi, 2021). However, the significance of Afghanistan becomes even more pronounced when considering its relation to India and Pakistan, as it intensifies their longstanding and deeply rooted conflict. This situation highlights the critical notion that Afghanistan's importance is not confined solely to the interests of a single nation; rather, it plays a vital role at the regional level, significantly impacting the intricate interplay of national interests as they relate to Afghanistan's security, its economy, and its intricate rivalries with both global and regional powers, which in turn shapes the political dynamics of the entire region (Bhatnagar and Shahab2021).

Afghanistan faces numerous intrinsic challenges that stem from its landlocked geography, being bordered by as many as six major countries. This geographical limitation significantly impacts its economic stability, political dynamics, national cohesion, and security landscape. The overall situation is further complicated by factors such as persistent uncertainty within its borders, ongoing violence driven by various proxies, and the pervasive threat of cross-border terrorism (Bukhari et al.2024). These issues are notably exacerbated by the repercussions resulting from the long-standing Afghan war. The involvement of non-state actors, particularly those being supported by the military establishment of Pakistan, adds another layer of complexity to the situation. Additionally, India's engagement in the region introduces further complications and influences

dynamics. These elements collectively hinder Afghanistan's ability to secure meaningful economic growth and essential security benefits. Nonetheless, countries such as China and Russia, in conjunction with key regional players like India and Uzbekistan, have been advocating for a stable, peaceful, and resilient Afghanistan that is in alignment with their varied respective interests (Phillips & Smith, 2021). Historic rivalries, which have persisted over time, have occasionally led former adversaries to collaborate effectively, a unique strategy that has been observed among the US, India, Pakistan, Russia, and China in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (Jadoon et al., 2023). This significant geopolitical shift has even included Beijing and Moscow making strategic moves to engage with the Taliban, aiming to safeguard and enhance their own security interests, economic aspirations, and political aims within Afghanistan's challenging landscape.

Geopolitical Significance of Afghanistan in South Asia

The geopolitics of the landmass these two regions share provides some incredibly valuable context to understand the unfolding current events in Afghanistan. The relevant and strategic position of Afghanistan is that it lies at the critical crossroads of South Asia to the south and Central Asia to its north, functioning as a vital bridge between these two diverse regions through various significant trade routes. It is precisely through Afghanistan that a comprehensive network of pipelines and energy corridors is likely to be constructed, which would effectively connect the four Central Asian republics without the necessity of passing through other countries, thus enhancing regional trade and cooperation (Rasool et al.2024). Having acquired a distinct and unique geopolitical significance over the years, Afghanistan has experienced a turbulent history marked by various external interventions. As Afghans have at times resorted to boldly challenging the occupying forces, whether they were from various countries or foreign powers, the country has also, at other times, witnessed strategic collaboration among regional and extra-regional states, fostering moments of internal peace that have led to notable periods of prosperity.

Afghanistan shares its borders with five immediate and critical neighbors: China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This geographical positioning not only defines Afghanistan's national identity but also plays a significant role in its geopolitical dynamics. Furthermore, it is important to note that Afghanistan has a narrow border with the disputed territories of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir,

which is now administered partly by India and partly by Pakistan, adding another complex layer to its international relations. Iran and Pakistan are also directly connected by a land route that leads to two major ports essential for marine trade and energy shipments. These ports bear crucial importance, as they would have to be utilized by Afghanistan in order to access the sea for trade, whether directly through its own routes or indirectly via Pakistan or Iran (Shahi2022). Pakistan acts as a linchpin, drawing together all the intricate dynamics in the region. Its eastern neighbor, India, has a keen interest in accessing the resources and markets of Central Asia, viewing Tajikistan as a vital conduit, which shares a narrow border with Afghanistan through the Wakhan Corridor. This makes Afghanistan not just a neighbor to both countries but a critical player in their ambitions. Meanwhile, a contentious land boundary dispute between India and China has been strategically exploited by Pakistan in its efforts to undermine India's position in the region. Moreover, the Chinese government has also regarded Afghanistan as an essential component of its neighborhood diplomacy initiatives in South Asia (Junaid et al., 2022). Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, the Chinese have proactively approached the Afghan government, offering a blend of monetary assistance and pragmatic support, highlighting their strategic interest in fostering stability in the region and securing their own economic and political objectives. The interplay of these relationships presents a complex web of alliances and rivalries, with Afghanistan sitting at the center of it all, influencing and being influenced by the actions and policies of its neighbors.

Major Players and Their Interests in Afghanistan

In more than four decades of relentless war and pervasive violence in Afghanistan, the quest for peace has frequently been discussed and debated as a potential determinant for not just national stability but also for broader regional stability, and even global peace itself. This complex situation has implicated numerous regional and extra-regional actors who have sought to exert influence over the policy decision-making processes of the country's political elite, all to sway those decisions in their favor. The significant involvement of a diverse array of actors in Afghan affairs has inadvertently established a primary ground for Afghanistan's pronounced dependence on the international community, not only for vital monetary assistance but also for critical military aid. In fact, it has become increasingly clear that it is foreign relations, rather than the internal dynamics of national politics, that

wield considerable influence over the policy-making landscape in Afghanistan (Dawlat, 2024). Moreover, it is against this intricate backdrop that the middle section of the text places a key focus on identifying and exploring the major actors intricately involved in Afghan affairs. Additionally, it seeks to analyze how the outcome of any forthcoming peace settlement in the country closely correlates with the distinct self-interests of these various actors and their respective agendas.

At present, the situation in Afghanistan is shaped by a diverse array of actors that can be categorized under various groups. This landscape is characterized not only by competition but also by collaboration among different states. Among these, Afghanistan's immediate influence comes primarily from its neighboring countries. This includes significant nations such as Pakistan, China, Russia, India, Iran, and the Central Asian Republics, all of which play crucial roles in the political dynamics of the region (Barfield, 2022). Additionally, international organizations and global powers with vested interests look towards Afghanistan, viewing it as a pivotal point not only in relation to its own national concerns but also within the broader context of South Asia as a whole. The fundamental driving force in this intricate web of interactions is the concept of national interests, which serves as the bedrock of power politics. The national interests of the various actors engaged in Afghan affairs contribute to the considerable complexity that undermines the potential for lasting peace in the region (Akbarzadeh et al.2023). Engaging with these major actors, forming consortiums, and establishing strategic partnerships with smaller nations like Afghanistan or taking on a direct involvement demonstrates their distinct interests and objectives. This interplay of relations amongst states makes the path to a peaceful resolution a significant challenge.

Afghanistan's Role in Regional Security Architecture

Afghanistan is a vital part of the regional security architecture in South Asia. The over 4,000 km long border with Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, Pakistan, and a short stretch with India, in an environment of insecurity, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling, worries all of Afghanistan's neighbors. Smugglers, extremist terrorists, and illegal arms merchants do not pause to ask for passports and visas. They just move across borders in search of areas of weak governance where they can operate relatively freely. An unstable and insecure Afghanistan also means a regional security environment fraught with many risks and uncertainties.

Although trained by the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence, the Taliban insurgents are no longer an instrument of Pakistan's security policy. Nor can it be said that they are absolutely controlled by Al-Qaeda and other international terrorists. The Afghan Taliban do have an agenda of their own to establish their supremacy over other political groups in Afghanistan (Ahmed, 2023).

Smuggling and extremism have a symbiotic relationship, feeding off one another in a cycle of violence and instability. Local support for extremist messages serves as the greatest nemesis of all measures taken to enhance security across the region. While it is anticipated that international donations aimed at Afghanistan will exceed a staggering 6 billion dollars in the post-Bonn era, widespread popular belief insists that a majority of this significant financial aid is not being utilized effectively for the benefit of the impoverished citizens of Afghanistan. Regardless of this unfortunate reality, the core point that is being articulated here is that authoritarian external interventions often provoke and exacerbate authoritarianism, which can run counter to the very policies they are meant to support (Fishstein & Farahi, 2023). Furthermore, even though the formal structures of governance in Afghanistan are claimed to be in place and functional, the day-to-day experience of governance at the level of the ordinary citizen remains as exploitative and oppressive as it was during the rule of the Taliban. For instance, in Kandahar province, one finds the presence of over 45 different armed groups, each pursuing their own agendas and wielding considerable power. It is widely believed that only through the establishment of a political system that is far more inclusive and truly representative of the diverse Afghan populace can any meaningful progress toward Afghan security be achieved. Without such systemic changes, the cycle of violence and exploitation is likely to continue unabated (Weigand, 2022).

Economic Impact of Afghanistan on South Asia

Afghanistan's landlocked geography has constrained its economic ties with South Asian countries over the years. The land links and nascent commercial ties constructed in recent decades, especially with India and to some extent Iran, have bolstered Kabul's economic interdependence with the region. In addition, Afghanistan has the potential to act as a trade route for South Asian countries to Central Asia and beyond, and as a potential hub for electricity transmission from Central Asia to South Asia. Similarly,

India has invested heavily in the Chabahar Port in Iran, a significant part of which is meant to establish a trade corridor to Afghanistan. War and political instability, however, have obstructed Kabul's economic relationships with its southern neighbors, especially Pakistan (Bhatnagar and Shahab2021). As a result, Afghanistan is economically more integrated with its eastern and western neighbors as opposed to its southern neighbors. This is corroborated by historical evidence which shows that military imperatives have played a pivotal role in the development and sustenance of economic ties between neighboring countries.

Years of war have devastated Afghanistan's economy and hindered its integration into regional and global markets. Four decades of conflict have ravaged the country, leaving its infrastructure development stagnant and the economy fragile. Infrastructure projects lack sufficient staffing and funding, with reconstruction efforts often mismanaged. Limited progress in development stems from insecurity, corruption, poor governance, underinvestment, and the Afghan authorities' inability to absorb investments effectively. The key to growth lies in shifting away from outdated practices and embracing innovation (Abdullah & Azim, 2023). A qualitative leap in labor is unlikely in the near term, as Afghanistan remains predominantly agricultural, with innovations primarily focused on agriculture, including aquaculture and agro-industrial uses. For lasting peace, Afghanistan must revitalize its agro-based industry, crucial for absorbing millions of returning workers from Iran and Pakistan. These returns present a strategic necessity without jobs, there can be no peace. Thus, developing the agro-based industry through innovation to increase income is essential for both peace and progress (Karimi et al.2024). A larger exportable surplus is necessary for financing development, particularly in the East, alongside advancements in aquaculture and fisheries for improved productivity and sustainability. Additionally, establishing a market for surplus production in eastern Afghanistan is vital.

Social and Cultural Dynamics in Afghanistan and South Asia

This paper contended that not only are the social, rather than the political-military factors, necessary to truly understand the real dimensions of regional cooperation and competition, but it also emphasized that the effective protection of the legitimate security interests of both Afghanistan and Pakistan cannot be adequately promoted in isolation from these critical factors. Precisely for this reason, this study begins with what are referred to

as commonalities or the power of similarities, underscoring the importance of recognizing shared aspects that transcend individual political narratives. It discusses in detail the intricate relationship between culture and security within Afghanistan, which is a complex interplay that shapes the fabric of society. Afghanistan is not merely a part of the geographic realm of South Asia; it has also historically been integrally linked to its contiguous territories, societies, economies, trade networks, and has served as a major center of civilizational, spiritual, and cultural heritage spanning more than two millennia, with a rich past that continues to resonate today. Whether considering the ancient region of Gandhara or the complexities of the Great Game that have taken place over centuries, the continuous flows of people, goods, and ideas have consistently connected the daily lives of Afghans with those of their South Asian neighbors, creating a vibrant mosaic of shared experiences (Barfield, 2022). The great mountains and longstanding social webs of Afghanistan have also constituted vital components of this vast and billowing cultural interconnection, which cannot be understated. While the Durand Line indeed divides the heartlands of the Pashtun people, it is noteworthy that many of the Durand Pashtun can also be found in significant numbers in cities like Lahore and Delhi, among other locations across the region, reflecting the intricate network of relationships that have developed over time. The historic rhythms and dialectics of these cultural sinews, along with the shared nostalgia, sediments, and enduring historical links, collectively impart distinct flavors to the regional cultural affinities and subsequently help to mold national identities. They create several layers of like-mindedness while simultaneously presenting instances of dissociation within the various states involved, highlighting the complexity of identity in such a multifaceted region (Bano et al.2024).

Nevertheless, the smaller states and numerous trans-state networks and connections within Afghanistan and Pakistan together weave a rich tapestry of variegated patterns and shared histories, as well as a history of strife that cannot be overlooked. In cultural terms, and due to the notably rich migratory patterns observed from Afghanistan to South Asia, along with their related socio-economic and cultural impacts, the so-called Afghans have increasingly come to signify more than mere nationality; they have thus developed more profound historical and cultural-ethnic connotations that resonate in various aspects of regional life. While it is true that a substantial portion of the migration between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been driven by political motivations, it is essential to note that there have

been no outright conflicts or wrangling that pit Afghans against Kashmiris, suggesting a complex relationship that includes more cooperative and shared elements.

The Role of External Powers in Shaping Afghanistan's Future

Some keen analysts and observers of Afghanistan have suggested that ultimately, it is the interference of outside powers that will, in the end, decisively determine the fate of the Afghan people. These observers argue that, more often than not, it is the vested interests of these influential outside powers that play a significant, central rather than merely a peripheral role, in shaping the domestic political system and the broader social trajectory within the country. Their rationale for this argument is quite straightforward: many crucial domestic conditions are significantly shaped and influenced by foreign interests. In the complex post-9/11 landscape of Afghanistan, having citizenship or working for the national government, as well as for various international organizations, represent just three of the extremely limited possibilities for securing what can be termed as "protection rackets." These avenues offer a semblance of minimal physical security and protection from both the fluctuating governance and the unpredictable international presence (Sarwari2024).

The principal international objectives in Afghanistan stem from a mixture of security goals and economic ambitions. The security goals are twofold. The bases of some of the attackers were in Afghanistan. Many of the world's most dangerous terrorists were trained in Afghanistan. Therefore, on the rationale that "if I can capture all of al-Qaida in the world merely by invading an obscure and insignificant state in Central Asia, of course I am going to try it," outside powers sent a military force. All of these and other motives were classified under the rubric of the "responsibility to protect." They have also been intent on promoting a specific form of domestic governance and state, which is federal over centralized, bicameral, and legislative rather than executive (Zarawar et al.2024).

Afghanistan has been on the mind of three sets of potential patrons, to various degrees of prominence, since the collapse of the Taliban. Observers worry that Afghanistan's sovereignty will become a thing of the past if these outsider interests continue to dominate its internal political affairs. Afghanistan's coalition of support has nibbled away at the edges of Afghanistan's internal integrity in favor of their own foreign agendas. It is

understood in this scenario that whoever garners power to control the internal situation will not be those who are foolish enough to get into a fight they can easily lose, but hypocrites who believe their own aggressive propaganda. Economic motivations in Afghanistan derive from the geo-strategic necessity to move energy products in a cost-effective manner between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea (Barna, 2024). As in other parts of the world, each patron opposes the ambitious agenda of every other - or to put it more strongly, there is no power in this scenario: merely a jockeying for more shares in an undercapitalized market which has seen more than \$4.75 billion in development aid without a single banking institution that can guarantee a transfer of funds or conduct foreign trade.

Challenges and Opportunities

Theoretical models and empirical studies indicate many challenges for Afghanistan's integration in South Asia. There is a manifold nature of those challenges. Undefined political systems and prolonged conflict have made Afghanistan a less-than-ideal candidate for regional integration. The security threats emanating within and around Afghanistan and economic underdevelopment are the two main factors that have a bearing on Afghanistan's pursuits of regional cooperation. Apart from these two, the pattern of social cleavages and unilateral foreign policies pursued by the Indian and Pakistani states further undermine Afghanistan's attempts to deepen regional cooperation with India and Pakistan. The deep regional division along ethnic and linguistic divides has impeded the expansion of national influence and integrated regional relations (Acharya & Lee, 2022).

However, there are other domestic factors that also have implications for regional integration. Results show that prolonged warfare, the regional division in the complex form of various factions and power struggles, caused important effects in Afghanistan: for instance, the proliferation of weapons, the dismantling of the informal apparatus of security cooperation among communities that had consolidated over the years, and so forth. This has clearly slowed down the potential for a return to regional integration in South Asia. In the long-term horizon, however, there is also a set of factors and initiatives that might open some paths for regional reintegration in South Asia. Afghanistan is being proposed as a buffer in numerous international initiatives to propose bilateral trade and economic agreements for creating maritime routes and road networks linking Central Asia, South Asia, and the North (Mughal and Suleman 2021). But such an enclave

economy can only work as an island of modernity in a cultural and political backwater.

It also highlights what numerous studies have pointed out: the key to the improvement of the landlocked, war-torn economy primarily depends on the security situation. Economic reconstruction cannot play a positive role in Afghanistan or beyond unless the state is able to maintain minimum security at least in what generally stands as the main corridor of regional trade. Therefore, outside donors should insist on the development of an Afghan-owned political process parallel to the post-political process. The Central Asian leaders bear the primary responsibility for deterring the logic of leaving from deepening the fracture between Afghanistan's various northern and southern stakeholders (Bizhan, 2022). With time, most sanctions and humanitarian aid to the new Afghan state and the NGOs—especially some of the madrasa-based ones—face some risk of slipping into formulaic, unguided humanitarian aid. The answers on how peace and security can be managed in Afghanistan do not stare at the bureaucracies or at the *loya jirga* that is due to be celebrated, but at other levels.

The Taliban Factor and Its Implications for Regional Competition

The radical group is not only back; it is more powerful than it has ever been, and it controls more Afghan territory than it did in its prior reign. Frequently overshadowed by the media's focus on the U.S. withdrawal and the overall regional security situation, the Taliban factor will fundamentally change the South Asian "great game" in numerous ways. The Taliban's control of Afghanistan, in turn, dramatically alters the regional power balance between Afghanistan and its neighbors. The Taliban's hold also forces a rethinking of the nature of a neighboring country's relationship with the Taliban regime. Throughout the war itself, regional apprehensions about the Taliban's ongoing war were one of the primary drivers of regional security cooperation.

Yet the Taliban's actual record of governance also has significant implications for its new regional role. The Taliban's approach to security and its gross human rights violations have significance as a regional destabilizing force that may draw in Pakistan and strengthen regional diplomatic and security ties. Pakistan, China, and Iran all face real security concerns, while India and Russia see fundamental regime interests. Regional responses will likely be incomplete and asymmetrical. Regional

states take a keen interest in Afghanistan's governance model and its potential impact on security within Afghanistan and across their borders. There is a wide range of commentary on how the Taliban's Security Policy has changed and what the implications are for specifically Pakistan, China, Iran, India, and Russia, five of the six countries that share a border with Afghanistan. From interviews, we understand that the governance factor is just as, if not more, important in informing regional policy towards the Taliban. The inability of independent media to cover events on the ground or conduct interviews in Afghanistan during the data collection phase has hampered attempts to get a detailed understanding of the ground-level situation. However, the above expert interviews and events suggested that weaknesses in governance represent a real chink in the armor of the new Taliban regime and that those vulnerabilities are felt most acutely across its border neighbors. It should be noted that the above analysis is not entirely predictive in nature. We have already seen some contours of the above analysis emerging in practice.

Future Scenarios for Afghanistan and South Asia

This section of the comprehensive study thoroughly examines approximately four to six potential futures for Afghanistan and their various impacts on the entire South Asian region. These diverse scenarios are fundamentally founded on general assumptions rather than explicit and specific forecasts that dictate outcomes. They are also not mutually exclusive, nor do they encompass all conceivable outcomes that could arise. Instead, these scenarios collectively reflect a broad range of potential trajectories that Afghanistan might follow in the terminal year and over an extended period of the next fifteen years. The careful development of these scenarios relies not only on the complex interaction between ongoing political and economic trends and the continually evolving security and insurgency situations within the country but also significantly on the far-reaching implications of external political interventions and influences. This multifaceted approach provides a more nuanced understanding of how Afghanistan's future may unfold and how that, in turn, will affect South Asia as a whole.

This document presents four potential scenarios for Afghanistan over the next fifteen years, leading up to 2025. One possibility is that the country achieves unity, though this may be under a soft authoritarian regime led by the Taliban or a coalition it heads. Another scenario envisions a weak

government struggling to address socio-economic challenges, where the political affiliations of the elite are less significant. A more pessimistic view anticipates a resurgence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, creating larger areas of ungoverned territories that would heighten security threats within Afghanistan (Shah & Rosenbaum, 2022). The most pessimistic outlook posits that this situation could mark the beginning of a new phase of geopolitical competition in the region. Moreover, there is a possibility of continued depopulation driven by escalating insecurity and diminishing economic opportunities, prompting enterprising individuals to migrate to Central Asia, Europe, or the Middle East via Iran and Pakistan. In this case, only Kabul may continue to serve as a center for political and socio-economic advancements, as well as evolving gender dynamics. While we will place greater emphasis on the first two scenarios, we will also monitor the latter two and investigate potential avenues for engagement involving Afghanistan and Pakistan. The chapter will be organized into sections analyzing Security, Governance, Economic factors, and Human Rights, providing comprehensive insight for predictive analysis alongside 'Key uncertainties (Abels & Bieling, 2024).'

Furthermore, the demographics and a probable profile of social movements in Afghanistan are suggested. As many of these internal dynamics can be influenced and manipulated by external actors in ways that benefit them, the report goes on to identify key regional and international stakeholders and to analyze the possible role they may play in constructing the future of Afghanistan. Among these is the role of Pakistan, India, Iran, Central Asian Republics, and other stakeholders. They are followed by 'Principal Scenarios Meeting in New Alliances and Rivalries with Distinct Security Implications.' This section discusses various possible regional alliances that could be influenced by international actors. Finally, the report argues, 'Adaptive Strategies and Policy Implications are necessary' as whatever the case, 'it is necessary to disengage or engage at the regional level or through sub-national entities, according to evolving views and interests of clearly identified stakeholders.'

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis indicates that Afghanistan exerts a direct influence on regional competition in South Asia. The various interests related to security, energy, trade, and political leverage among six countries situated within the South Asian region converge within Afghanistan, a

country marked by conflict and political instability. More generally, the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan adversely affects the economic and political progress of the region. The elements that could lead to transformations in Afghanistan are multifaceted, making it challenging to formulate strategies in response to potential shifts in regional politics. It is essential that the frameworks governing mutual interactions are not solely reactive to changes in regional dynamics but are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the evolving relationships that encompass political, social, and economic dimensions, instead of merely addressing the formal aspects of economic, aerial, or land transportation routes.

However, this understanding cannot be constructed unless the countries of South Asia broadly adhere to it. As the above analysis shows, all these three problems poverty, drugs, and the forces of terror will have to be met through a three-basin approach through the lens of South Asian realities and not regional differences. It is necessary to establish confidence towards each other, engage in sustained dialogue, and prepare people on both sides to push the political establishments forward towards the resolution of outstanding disputes. There are no quick or easy solutions to the above problems. This research work is the beginning, and it is necessary to take this research forward to involve people in general and the political elites of the region in a dialogue to build an understanding of the common threats and challenges to peace and development posed by poverty and lack of understanding.

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