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**An Overview of India's Foreign Policy Priorities Towards Afghanistan
(2014–Present) with Focus to Political and Diplomatic Engagements**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines India's foreign policy priorities towards Afghanistan from 2014 to the present, with particular emphasis on political and diplomatic engagements in the context of evolving regional and global geopolitical dynamics. Afghanistan has occupied a significant position in India's foreign policy owing to its strategic location, implications for regional security, and its role in promoting peace, connectivity, and economic cooperation in South and Central Asia. The period under study has witnessed major political developments, including democratic transitions, the withdrawal of international forces, and the political changes in Afghanistan after 2021, which have significantly influenced India's diplomatic approaches and strategic priorities. India's engagement with Afghanistan has been characterized by a multidimensional framework encompassing political dialogue, developmental partnerships, humanitarian assistance, capacity-building initiatives, and participation in regional and multilateral diplomatic processes. Since 2014, India has sought to strengthen bilateral relations through sustained diplomatic outreach while simultaneously responding pragmatically to changing political realities. In this article, an overview of India's foreign policy priorities towards Afghanistan (2014–present) with focus to political and diplomatic engagements was discussed.

Keywords: *India, Foreign, Policy, Afghanistan, Political, Diplomatic, Engagements.*

INTRODUCTION

India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan has historically been shaped by geographical proximity, civilizational linkages, regional security concerns, and strategic interests in South and Central Asia. Afghanistan occupies a significant position in India's foreign policy framework owing to its geopolitical location, its role in regional connectivity initiatives, and its implications for peace and stability in the wider South Asian region. Since 2014, India's engagement with Afghanistan has undergone substantial transformations in response to changing political developments, including the democratic transition in Afghanistan, evolving regional power dynamics, the withdrawal of international military forces, and the political change following the Taliban's return to power in 2021. These developments have necessitated a recalibration of India's diplomatic priorities while maintaining its long-standing commitment to the Afghan people. India's foreign policy under the leadership of Narendra Modi has emphasized strategic partnerships, regional cooperation, development diplomacy, and people-centric engagement. Afghanistan has remained an important component of India's "Neighbourhood First" approach and its broader vision of regional stability and connectivity. India's engagement has been characterized by political dialogue, developmental assistance, humanitarian support, capacity-building programmes, and multilateral diplomatic initiatives. Unlike many traditional strategic relationships, India's policy towards Afghanistan has largely focused on fostering democratic institutions, strengthening governance mechanisms, and



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supporting socio-economic development while respecting Afghanistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The objective of the study is to an overview of India's foreign policy priorities towards Afghanistan (2014–present) with focus to political and diplomatic engagements.

INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN (2014–PRESENT)

Since 2014, a complex combination of security needs, regional geopolitics, development work, and strategic independence has shaped India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan. One of the main goals has been to create a stable, sovereign, united, and peaceful Afghanistan that is free from terrorism and outside interference. The explanation is because instability in Afghanistan directly affects India's national security, especially when it comes to cross-border terrorism and radical extremism coming from the region. India kept up its long-standing policy of supporting peace and reconciliation efforts led, owned, and controlled by Afghans throughout the NDA government. It also strongly opposed using Afghan territory for terrorist actions against India. Developmental diplomacy was still a key part of India's involvement, with a focus on building infrastructure, capacity, education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid to improve state institutions and encourage people-to-people ties. India's investments in things like the Afghan Parliament building, the Salma Dam (also known as the Afghan–India Friendship Dam), road networks, and community development initiatives were part of its soft power strategy and showed its commitment to Afghanistan's long-term stability. Another goal was to improve regional connectivity so Afghanistan would rely less on Pakistan and be more connected to South and Central Asia. Projects like the Chabahar Port project and the India–Afghanistan Air Freight Corridor showed how India was trying to make new trade and transit routes. India tried to balance its strategy toward Afghanistan between the interests of major and regional countries, such as the US, Russia, China, Iran, and Pakistan, while also fighting against Pakistan's attempts to downplay India's position in Afghan affairs. The U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's return to power in 2021 were big changes that forced India to change its policy. Now, India puts humanitarian aid, protecting its strategic interests, and limited diplomatic engagement through practical channels without formal recognition first. India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan since 2014 has been a careful mix of strategic caution, commitment to development, and support for democracy and pluralism. The goal has been to keep Afghanistan from becoming a source of instability in the region while maintaining India's long-term influence (Subirthana, M.S., 2020).

Since 2014, when the NDA administration took office, India's foreign policy priorities regarding Afghanistan have shown a clear pattern of continuity with some changes, based on security issues in the area, political needs at home, and changing conditions throughout the world. India has always seen Afghanistan as an important partner for regional peace, a strategic barrier against terrorism, and a path to get to Central Asia. It has also kept its long-standing focus on supporting a sovereign, stable, united, and democratic Afghan state. The NDA government kept India's focus on development by continuing big infrastructure, capacity-building, and humanitarian projects like the Salma Dam (now called the India–Afghanistan Friendship Dam), the Afghan Parliament building, road connectivity projects, health and education initiatives, and scholarship programs. This helped India build its image as a soft-power country and people-centered diplomacy. Simultaneously, the NDA era brought about significant changes, particularly in terms of security pragmatism and diplomatic flexibility. India, under the NDA, carefully



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increased security cooperation by training the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, providing limited defensive military equipment, and improving intelligence coordination, all while avoiding sending troops directly into combat. This process was done in response to the worsening security situation and the gradual withdrawal of Western forces. India was far more eager to work with regional and multilateral groups like the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, SCO procedures, and talks with Russia, Iran, and Central Asian states to preserve its interests in a more contested Afghan theatre. The biggest change happened after the Taliban took power again in August 2021. India changed its policy on Afghanistan from only dealing with the elected Afghan government to a more practical, interest-based approach that included limited, issue-based contact with the Taliban regime. India did not officially recognize the Taliban regime, but the reopening of its technical mission in Kabul, ongoing humanitarian help, and cooperation on problems like food security and medical aid showed that its approach had changed from idealism to strategic reality. Despite this change, India remained focused on its primary objectives: preventing anti-India terrorism on Afghan soil, countering Pakistan's strategic influence, safeguarding regional connectivity projects, and ensuring the protection of India's long-term interests in Afghanistan. So, India's policy toward Afghanistan has changed in terms of means and tactics during the NDA government, but it has stayed true to its long-term strategic goals, balancing its moral duty to the Afghan people with practical reactions to changing geopolitical conditions.

India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan has increasingly focused on regional stability and counterterrorism as key strategic goals since 2014. This is in line with New Delhi's broader concerns about security in South Asia and its immediate vicinity. India has seen Afghanistan as more than just a partner in development; it has also seen it as a crucial frontline state whose stability has a direct impact on peace in the region, especially when it comes to cross-border terrorism, radicalization, and the activities of extremist groups that are linked to networks based in Pakistan. India's policy has always stressed the need for a peaceful, united, democratic, and sovereign Afghanistan that is free of terrorism. This is because instability in Afghanistan can lead to the rise of groups like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and other transnational jihadist groups that are a direct and indirect threat to Indian security. India tried to make Afghan institutions stronger by working with them diplomatically, building their capacity, and cooperating on security. These actions included training the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), supporting intelligence cooperation, and giving non-lethal military aid. All of this was meant to help Kabul fight terrorism and keep the country stable. India also actively supported regional and multilateral counterterrorism frameworks, working with partners like the United States, Russia, Iran, and Central Asian states on platforms like the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process and the SCO to push for a unified approach to Afghanistan's security problems. After the Taliban took power again in 2021, India changed its policy toward Afghanistan while keeping its main priority on fighting terrorism. It did this by using a pragmatic and cautious approach to engagement that aimed to keep Afghan territory from being exploited for terrorist actions against India. The reopening of India's technical mission in Kabul and the continuation of humanitarian aid were not only driven by humanitarian concerns, but also by geopolitical imperatives to monitor the situation and safeguard regional security. India's Afghanistan policy from 2014 to now shows a strong link between counterterrorism and regional stability. New Delhi has always said that lasting peace in Afghanistan is necessary to stop terrorism, improve connectivity, and create a stable and secure regional order in South and Central Asia.



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From 2014 until now, India's foreign policy priorities for Afghanistan have been focused on developmental and economic diplomacy. This demonstrates New Delhi's strategic vision to foster stability through inclusive development, capacity building, and active engagement with the people. India always took a soft-power approach, focusing on building infrastructure, training people, improving health and education, and strengthening institutions instead of being directly involved in military actions. India's long-term commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan's economy and society was shown by major development projects like the Afghan Parliament building, the Salma (Afghan–India Friendship) Dam, road connectivity projects like the Zaranj–Delaram highway, and community-based development projects in all 34 Afghan provinces.

India employed economic diplomacy to establish connections between Afghanistan and regional trade networks, providing support for transit and connectivity projects such as the Chabahar Port in Iran. This port was meant to give Afghanistan a trade route that didn't go through Pakistan, which would have made Kabul's economy more independent and connected to the rest of the region. India also helped trade by letting Afghan exports, especially dry fruits and agricultural goods, come into the country without paying taxes. It also encouraged the private sector to become involved and invest. Under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) framework, capacity-building initiatives trained thousands of Afghan civil servants, professionals, and students. These initiatives made institutions stronger and built goodwill for the long term. When the Taliban came back to power in 2021, India changed its developmental diplomacy but didn't stop it. It shifted its focus to humanitarian aid, such as food and medical supplies, and support through multilateral and UN mechanisms. At the same time, it carefully kept diplomatic channels open to protect its strategic and economic interests. India's economic and developmental diplomacy with Afghanistan since 2014 has been a pragmatic combination of moral commitment and strategic restraint. Its goals are to promote stability, regional connectivity, and sustainable development while countering hostile influences and maintaining its status as a reliable development partner in a complicated geopolitical environment (Dhar, X & Dhiman, A., 2021).

POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS

India's political and diplomatic relations with Afghanistan since 2014 have been based on a practical but principled foreign policy that aims to promote Afghan sovereignty, stability, and inclusive governance while protecting India's regional security interests. During the time that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was in power, India always stressed that peace and political processes should be led, owned, and managed by Afghans. They emphasized the legitimacy of elected Afghan institutions and rejected external solutions. India had close diplomatic ties with Afghan governments from 2001 to 2021. It did these activities through high-level visits, strategic talks, and regional platforms like the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, SAARC, SCO, and the UN, where it pushed for ongoing international support for Afghanistan's reconstruction and peace. India's diplomatic strategy tried to challenge Pakistan's strategic power by employing soft power and normative diplomacy. The tactics included creating capability, exchanging parliamentarians, training civil servants, and making connections between people. India changed how it dealt with the Taliban after they took power again in August 2021, but it didn't officially recognize the administration. In 2022, India re-established a technical presence in Kabul to monitor humanitarian aid



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and maintain open communication channels. The main reasons for this engagement were worries about terrorism, drug trafficking, regional security, and the humanitarian crisis. It also stressed that there were red lines when it came to terrorism and human rights, especially women's rights and protecting minorities. India has used international diplomacy to push for a political system in Afghanistan that includes everyone and to keep its land from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups who are against India. Overall, India's political and diplomatic involvement since 2014 shows that it has a balanced strategy that includes moral convictions, strategic prudence, and flexible diplomacy. The goal is to protect India's long-term interests in Afghanistan as the situation changes in the region and at home (Sethi, H., 2020).

From 2014 to now, bilateral summits and high-level visits have been a key part of India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan. This shows that New Delhi is still committed to political engagement, developmental partnership, and regional stability, even though things on the ground are changing quickly. During the first several years of the NDA government, Indian and Afghan leaders talked to one another a lot. This showed that India wanted Afghanistan to remain independent, democratic, and open to everyone. Afghan Presidents Ashraf Ghani and Hamid Karzai both made high-level visits to India, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also met with them. These visits institutionalized strategic engagement and strengthened the 2011 Strategic Partnership Agreement. Prime Minister Modi's historic trips to Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016, during which he opened the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul and the Salma (Afghan-India Friendship) Dam in Herat, showed India's long-term commitment to development and soft power diplomacy. These summits were more than just symbolic; they helped people agree on security cooperation, capacity building, and people-to-people ties. They also gave people a place to work together on regional connectivity projects like the Chabahar Port and the India–Afghanistan–Iran trilateral framework, which aims to make Afghanistan less reliant on Pakistan for transit access. When the Taliban came back to power in August 2021, the way that India and the Taliban interacted with each other changed a lot. However, high-level diplomatic exchanges continued to be a crucial way for India to protect its strategic interests. India took a careful and practical approach after formal summits ended. It kept diplomatic channels open through senior officials, special envoys, and technical-level discussions that focused on humanitarian aid, evacuation, and the safety of Indian assets and enterprises. India's talks with Taliban leaders in Doha and other regional forums showed that it understood the changing political situation in Afghanistan, but they did not provide the Taliban full diplomatic recognition. During this time, multilateral summits and regional conferences, like those held by the SCO, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, and the Moscow Format, also served as extensions of high-level diplomacy. They gave India a chance to express its worries about terrorism, inclusive governance, and regional security in Afghanistan. In general, bilateral summits and high-level visits, whether planned or not, have been very important in showing how India views its foreign policy priorities toward Afghanistan. They have helped India balance its moral and strategic responsibilities in a region that is becoming more complicated.

Since 2014, working together in international and regional forums has been a key part of India's foreign policy goals for Afghanistan. This shows that New Delhi prefers multilateralism, legitimacy, and rule-based engagement. India has always used the United Nations, SAARC, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and other regional and global forums to show its support for an independent, stable, united, and peaceful Afghanistan that is free from terrorism and outside



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interference. India has been an important part of shaping the conversation about Afghanistan at the United Nations. It has supported the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), pushed for peace processes led and owned by Afghans, and stressed the need to protect human rights, women's rights, and minority rights, especially after the Taliban took power again in 2021. India has also utilized its time on groups like the UN Security Council to talk about the threats of cross-border terrorism coming from Afghanistan and how stability in Afghanistan is connected to peace and security issues around the world. Even though SAARC isn't very effective because of political problems in the region, India has pushed for Afghanistan to become part of South Asian regional frameworks. India sees Kabul as a natural link between South Asia and Central Asia and supports initiatives that connect people, trade, and people-to-people. India's participation in groups like the Heart of Asia has helped it work with other countries in the region, such as Iran, Russia, and Central Asian states, on issues like security, development, and fighting drugs. It has also helped India keep Pakistan and China's growing power in Afghan affairs in check. India has used the SCO to deal with regional security issues, including terrorism and extremism. It has stressed the need for everyone to work together to keep Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups. Overall, India's participation in international forums shows that it is using multilateral diplomacy to protect its security interests, stay politically relevant in Afghanistan even as regimes change, and help keep the region stable by building consensus instead of directly intervening. This strengthens its image as a responsible and constructive regional power in Afghanistan after 2014 (Ali, A.M., 2014).

Since 2014, India's foreign policy toward Afghanistan has focused on working with Afghan political institutions to promote stability, sovereignty, and an inclusive political order, even though the situation on the ground has changed quickly. During the time that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was in power, India always backed the constitutionally established institutions in Kabul, such as the presidency, parliament, judiciary, and independent commissions. India saw these institutions as essential for long-term peace and democratic governance. India's involvement was based on a strategy of Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled reconciliation. These actions showed that New Delhi respected Afghanistan's political independence and did not want answers imposed from outside. India wanted to make the Afghan state more legitimate by strengthening its governance institutions, improving its administrative skills, and supporting its electoral procedures. It did this through high-level diplomatic exchanges, capacity-building programs, and institutional collaboration. India also put money into parliamentary diplomacy by bringing Afghan lawmakers to India, educating civil servants, and backing programs that attempted to establish institutions that would support democratic values and the rule of law. After the Taliban took over again in August 2021, India's policy changed slowly instead of suddenly cutting ties. India did not officially recognize the Taliban regime, but it did keep in touch with them through its embassy in Kabul and regional and multilateral forums. Its objective was to protect its strategic interests, ensure humanitarian access, and protect the progress made in people-centered development. India's carefully planned involvement showed that it wanted to stay an important player in Afghanistan's political destiny without supporting a political system that was unfair or radical. India's involvement with Afghan political institutions since 2014 shows that its strategic thinking has stayed the same. It has been able to balance its commitment to democracy and pluralism with its need for practical diplomacy that is shaped by security concerns in the region, the need to fight terrorism, and the changing geopolitical situation in South and Central Asia.



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CONCLUSION

India's foreign policy priorities towards Afghanistan from 2014 to the present reflect a careful balance between strategic interests, regional security considerations, and humanitarian commitments. Despite significant political transformations in Afghanistan, India's engagement has demonstrated both continuity and adaptability. Political and diplomatic relations have evolved in response to changing geopolitical realities, yet India's fundamental objectives of promoting peace, stability, development, and regional cooperation have remained consistent. Through sustained diplomatic efforts, developmental partnerships, and people-centric initiatives, India has sought to strengthen its role as a constructive stakeholder in Afghanistan's future. The period under study highlights that India's Afghanistan policy extends beyond conventional diplomacy and encompasses strategic engagement aimed at fostering long-term regional stability. High-level political interactions, multilateral cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and diplomatic outreach have enabled India to maintain meaningful engagement even during periods of political uncertainty. Following the political developments of 2021, India's pragmatic diplomatic approach has underscored the importance of safeguarding national interests while continuing to support the welfare of the Afghan people. India's policy towards Afghanistan also reflects broader foreign policy objectives, including regional connectivity, counterterrorism cooperation, and the promotion of an inclusive and stable political environment. The changing nature of political authority in Afghanistan has required India to recalibrate its diplomatic strategies without abandoning its long-standing commitments. This adaptability demonstrates the growing maturity and flexibility of Indian foreign policy in responding to complex regional challenges. In the contemporary geopolitical context, Afghanistan remains strategically significant for India's vision of regional peace and cooperation in South and Central Asia. Future engagements will likely depend upon evolving political developments within Afghanistan, regional security dynamics, and opportunities for constructive diplomatic dialogue. India's continued emphasis on humanitarian assistance, diplomatic engagement, and multilateral cooperation suggests that its Afghanistan policy will remain guided by both strategic pragmatism and normative commitments. In conclusion, India's foreign policy priorities towards Afghanistan since 2014 illustrate a multidimensional approach that combines political engagement, diplomatic resilience, and humanitarian responsibility. The study demonstrates that India's evolving policy framework seeks not only to protect its national and regional interests but also to contribute meaningfully to the prospects of peace, stability, and sustainable development in Afghanistan. Such an approach reinforces India's position as an important regional actor committed to constructive engagement in addressing the complex challenges facing Afghanistan and the broader South Asian region.

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