

Dalbir Ahlawat

Tahmina Rahman

INDIA'S AFGHAN STRATEGY: REVISITING KAUTILYA

Abstract

With the deadline for the US withdrawal from Afghanistan getting closer, regional and extra-regional states have indicated pivoting their Afghan strategy. India, being an emerging power, holds much potential to contribute to the stabilisation and reconstruction of war-torn Afghanistan by developing strategic partnership with other stakeholders. For this, India's status in the regional and international system, its economic and military might and its strategy to reach beyond its traditional zone of influence warrant a systemic analysis of its Afghan strategy. The article traces the antecedents of India's current strategic and foreign policy in classical Indian strategic text *Arthashastra* and analyses India's present level of involvement in Afghanistan in the light of that discussion. An attempt is made in this paper to show how India's Afghan strategy is informed and influenced by its perception of allies, enemies and indifferent big powers. The paper also suggests some policy changes by critically assessing the broader context in which India operates today.

1. Introduction

India, a country with 1.17 billion people¹, an economy worth US\$ 4.5 trillion² (PPP), one of the largest standing armies in the world, possessing a substantial pool of conventional and nuclear weapons and considerable diplomatic clout within and outside South Asia, no doubt reflects characteristics of a rising big power. Its status as a key regional actor and its potential in stabilising its immediate and extended neighbourhood has been recognised widely. Afghanistan can be viewed as a test case for India's ambition as an emerging power and its ability to reach out for nations beyond its traditional 'sphere of influence'.³ For this, a detailed analysis is required

Dalbir Ahlawat, Ph. D is Lecturer at the Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, Macquarie University, Australia. His e-mail address is: dalbir.ahlawat@mq.edu.au; **Tahmina Rahman** is Lecturer at the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. Her e-mail address is: tahmina.rahman.tani@gmail.com

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¹ Thanong Kanthong, "India Rises Quietly and Steadily", *The Nation*, 22 February 2013, available at <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/India-rises-quietly-and-steadily-30200484.html>, accessed on 08 August 2013.

² The Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal, *2013 Index of Economic Freedom: India*, available at <http://www.heritage.org/index/country/india>, accessed on 18 August 2013.

³ India's traditional 'sphere of influence' refers to India's immediate neighbourhood, consisting of the smaller countries of South Asia. Brewster contends that due to the religious, cultural, linguistic and other commonalities with the countries in this region, India shares a special bond with them. As the most

based on India's evolving stature as a rising power in the international arena, status as a key regional actor and its potential in stabilising its immediate and extended neighbourhood.

The incident of 11 September, 2001 brought the US and its allies in Afghanistan some 13 years ago with an objective to neutralise Taliban and Al-Qaeda. While smoking them out of the caves was relatively easier, it was difficult to get to the top leadership of both the organisations as they had easily crossed the 2,640 kilometre long porous Durand Line to take refuge in Pakistan. However, by killing Osama Bin Laden in May 2011 in the garrison town of Abbottabad, Pakistan, the US claimed achieving its target after 10 years of bloodshed and mayhem. Killing of Bin Laden gave impetus to the existing US plan for a phased troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. With the US withdrawal plan drawing closer, Afghanistan's neighbours with vested interests, intend to play a role in stabilisation and reconstruction of the country. India, in particular, has the potential and interest to be actively engaged in post-2014 Afghanistan. Moreover, the complex geographical and historical contexts of South Asia and India's growing status as an emerging power, its rejuvenated relationship with Central Asian Republics (CARs) and the US' calls for special attention to India's Afghan strategy. For this, the paper revisits the time honoured dictums of *Chanakya Kautilya*, the chief adviser of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya in 300 BC India. End of the Cold War, shift in power from the West to the East and rise of China, posed critical challenges to India's strategic thinking. Against this backdrop, India took a cue from its past as how to deal with the evolving situation. C. Raja Mohan, a leading Indian strategist, suggested that "Internal balancing, alliances, asymmetric approaches are as old as statecraft. They are not inventions of the modern strategic thought from Europe, but date back to the era of Kautilya's Arthashastra.... Unless Delhi is willing to grapple with the basics of statecraft and reconnect with its own traditions of strategy, India will find it increasingly hard to deal with the unprecedented challenges arising from the rise of China"⁴. Although written more than millennia ago, the principles enshrined in Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (Treatise on Polity) are believed to be still influencing the strategic thinking of Indian policy makers. This paper put India's strategy towards Afghanistan in the context of Kautilya's version of realism and geo-politics.

The paper proceeds in four sections. The first section involves theoretical discussion on India's foreign policy and strategy, with focus on roots of its strategic culture. The second section critically examines India's interests and strategies in Afghanistan, referring back to historical ties and strained relationship between India, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The third section analyses Pakistan's reaction to Indian strategy in Afghanistan and its role in Afghan peace process and reconstruction.

prominent regional power, it is reluctant to allow an external power to interfere into the domestic affairs of these states or adjudicate any bilateral or regional problems. For detailed discussion see, David Brewster, *India as an Asia-Pacific Power*, London: Routledge, 2012; and Devin T. Hagerty, "India's Regional Security Doctrine", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31, No. 4, April 1991, pp. 351-363.

⁴ C. Raja Mohan, "Rising Power and Enduring Paradox- India's China Challenge", *USJ Journal*, Vol. 142, No. 587, January-March 2012, p. 29.

Subsequently, Chinese, Iranian and American interests in Afghanistan and their evolving Afghan strategies and India's place in those strategies gets attention. Finally, the paper reiterates the factors India needs to take into account while formulating its Afghan strategy, keeping in mind the tradition of Kautilyan *realpolitik*.

2. Roots of India's Strategic Culture: Relevance of Kautilya

Before analysing the current trends and future scenarios of Indo-Afghan relations, it is imperative to understand the roots of India's strategic culture and foreign policy postures from historical perspective as against current discourse that ranges from hegemonic perspectives to reactionary arguments. Different scholars have proposed different conceptual frameworks to get rid of this black and white explanation of Indian foreign policy. For example, Maya Chadda explains that 'relational control' is an Indian strategy that is used to "...maximize freedom of action and to widen available options in foreign policy so that outcomes can be influenced in one's favor".⁵ This strategy encompasses several objectives, major among them include: 'setting rules of the game,' 'exercising a degree of influence over the actions of neighbours' and 'acquiring leverage over the ideology and culture of the region'.⁶ But such benign understanding of India's foreign policy leaves out some contested elements from it. On the surface, India resonates with Asoka's tradition of non-violence, but realist methods of statecraft characterised by power struggle run beneath this peaceful Indian demeanour. A reinterpretation of classical Indian strategic texts might be useful in understanding this duality in Indian strategic thinking.

The influence of classical Indian strategist Kautilya on India's strategic and foreign relations has been discussed widely. Ahmed sees a continuation in India's foreign policy in terms of power projection and alliance formation by tracing antecedents in Kautilyan tradition of diplomacy that projected India as a great power.⁷ Kautilya introduced terms like *mandala* (circle of states), *ari* (enemy) and *mitra* (ally). Although not being credited much by the current Indian policy makers, Kautilya's teachings have had great influence on India's strategic policy postures. The *ari-mitra* relationship espoused by Kautilya is particularly relevant in understanding India's present day Afghan strategy.

To Kautilya, international system composed of *mandalas* (kingdoms), was essentially synonymous to *matsyanaya* (big fish eating the small ones). In the absence of any international body or power configuration that could provide stability and security to kingdoms, it was up to the individual kings to ensure security and prosperity of their respective kingdoms even at the cost of continuous power struggle.⁸

⁵ Maya Chadda, *Ethnicity, Security and Separatism in India*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 11-12.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 12.

⁷ Imtiaz Ahmed, *State and Foreign Policy: India's Role in South Asia*, Dhaka: Academic Publisher, 1993, p. 219.

⁸ R. Shamasastri, *Kautilya's Arthashastra*, Sanskrit eBooks, 1915, p. 13, available at <http://www.hinduonline.co/DigitalLibrary/SmallBooks/ArthashastraofChanakyaEng.pdf>, accessed on 01 August 2013.

Arthashastra explains:

The king, who is being possessed of good character and best-fitted elements of sovereignty, the fountain of policy, is termed the conqueror. The king situated anywhere immediately on the circumference of the conqueror's territory is termed as 'enemy'. The king ...situated close to the enemy, is termed the friend (of the conqueror). ...In front of the conqueror and close to his enemy, there happen to be situated kings such as the conqueror's friend, next to him, the enemy's friend, and next, the enemy's friend's friend.⁹

This brief description succinctly lays out the regional political geometry that has informed India's foreign policy and strategy for centuries. In the words of Kautilya, "The King who occupies a territory close to both the conqueror and his immediate enemy in front and who is capable of helping both the kings, whether united or disunited, or of resisting either of them individually is termed as *madhyama* (mediatory) King..."¹⁰ The importance of a distant but powerful state in keeping the balance of power in any region or altering it in favour of a certain country or group of countries also received wide coverage in *Arthashastra*. Kautilya observed, "He who is situated beyond the territory of any of the above Kings and who is very powerful and capable of helping the enemy, conqueror and the *madhyama* King together or individually, or of resisting any of them individually, is a neutral King (*udasina*)..."¹¹

The concept of *vijigishu* (the king desirous of fresh conquests) introduced by Kautilya also gains significance in the discussion on India's Afghan strategy. One of his strategic perspectives emphasised on turning the *vijigishu* into a universal monarch.¹² To be successful in this endeavour, a *vijigishu* has to be aware of its position in the *mandala*. This creates complexity as "...the *Mandala* system is a very fluid one in which relationships are constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted, thereby creating opportunities for some actors and exposing others to dangers.... For Kautilya, the only way the *vijigishu* can attain success in the *Mandala* system ...is by following the *Sadgunya* (six-fold) policy".¹³ The *sadgunya* includes *sandhi* (peace), *vigraha* (war), *asana* (neutrality), *yana* (march), *samsharaya* (seeking alliance or shelter) and *dvaiddhibhava* (double policy). Although most these policies are self-explanatory, a brief discussion is presented below to help the readers grasp the teachings of Kautilya better.

Sandhi (Peace): The inferior King should always go for peace with the superior one because any other approach would cost the former dearly. *Sandhi*, in this sense,

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² A universal monarch is the one who 'can put to an end to the perpetual struggle of the contending states and lead his army to the farthest horizon unchallenged.' For details, see, Heinrich Zimmer, *Philosophies of India*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967, pp. 128-129; and Roger Boesche, "Kautilya's Arthashastra on War and Diplomacy in Ancient India", *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January 2003, p. 17.

¹³ Rashed Uz Zaman, "Kautilya: The India Strategic Thinker and Indian Strategic Culture", *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2006, p. 337.

is an agreement with vows between two unequal powers. *Vigraha* (War): As much as Kautilya appreciated the merits of peace, he thought it was a temporary arrangement, an effort to buy time and induce self-satisfaction in the enemy before striking him hard. Therefore, Kautilya advised the stronger King to make war while he is at the highest peak of power. *Asana* (Neutrality): Only those Kings who think they are indestructible in the face of any enemy attack and have the capacity to destroy the enemy can afford this approach. They can observe neutrality in their foreign policy. There are three aspects of neutrality. One can peruse *Sthana* (keeping quite), *Asana* (retreating from hostility) and *upekshana* (simply refusing to get involved in any particular situation). *Yana* (March): The Kings who have the necessary means at their disposal should advance against the enemy. But the aim might not be engaging into a violent conflict. This preparation for war can induce fear within the enemy and make him submissive to the wills and interests of the powerful King. This way the latter gets what he wants without actually waging any battle with the enemy. *Samshrya* (seeking alliance or shelter): This is for those Kings who lack the capacity to protect themselves (and their interests) and therefore need protection from others. Sometimes a weak King can seek the help of a powerful one to shield himself against the enemy. *Dvaidhibhava* (double policy): Kautilya showed his true 'realist' colour by suggesting this particular approach. In his own words 'Whoever thinks that help is necessary to work out an end shall make peace with one and wage war with another.'¹⁴ This particular approach is open to interpretation. Some think that it might mean forging an alliance with a neighbour to attack a third party. But it can also be understood as a policy to induce a false sense of confidence and security and act in a hostile manner behind its back.¹⁵ The instruments to achieve/ implement the aforementioned policies can be equally opportunistic. For example *Sama* (reconciliation) with the enemy is an instrument that is preferable only when success in any other way is impossible. In Kautilya's grim worldview, conflict was an inevitable part of political life. So there is no such thing as permanent alliance or cessation of hostility in his scheme of orders. *Dana* (gift) is an instrument that should not be used with altruistic purpose, but to win over the weaker Kings and cultivate compliance in them without waging a war. If this supposedly generous instrument fails to neutralise the threat, the use of *Bheda* (dissention) is suggested. *Bheda* is all about creating division within the enemies so that they no longer constitute a viable singular threat. *Maya-Indrajala* (Deceit or Pretence) can be used to make the enemy believe that King in concern is approaching him with honest intentions of peace. But underneath those peaceful demeanours or the cloaks of righteousness remain the everlasting aggressive intentions. *Danda* (Open Attack or War) was not advised by Kautilya until all other instruments of statecraft had been exhausted. He mentioned two interesting things while considering *Danda*. Before waging war, a King must carefully speculate the strength of enemy's economy and the level of popular support he enjoys at home.

¹⁴ R. Shamasastri, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

¹⁵ Rashed Uz Zaman, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

Based on the above discussion, it could be underlined that both peace and non-violence constituted part of Kautilya's teachings; as a result it could be argued that the strategic policy postures like non-alliance and non-violence initiated after India's independence indeed were not a deviation from Kautilyan tradition, rather a continuation of it.¹⁶

As K M Panikkar noted, although not acknowledged openly, Kautilya's intellectual inheritance is firmly rooted in the strategic subconscious of India.¹⁷ R. Zaman also argues that Kautilya's wisdom is passed on from generation to generation through oral transmission in India.¹⁸ This explains the apparent dearth of mention to Kautilya in India's policy making circles. Through a detailed and systematic case study of India's position on non-aligned movement, its relations with Israel and South Africa, H. Solomon also concludes that Indian foreign policy is the infusion of classical realism rather than a drive for "Southern Solidarity".¹⁹ Although Solomon argues that since independence India has been conflicted between two contradictory philosophical traditions of Kautilya and Asoka, the authors agree with Ahmed's assertion that this apparent contradiction is actually the continuation of Kautilyan tradition in one form or the other.

So how does twenty first century Afghanistan fit into all these discussions of ancient Indian *realpolitik*? To get this answer, it is necessary to look at Afghanistan's position as India's neighbour and its strategic importance to India. Geopolitically Afghanistan holds a very important position for both India and India's arch nemesis Pakistan. Considering India's current circumstances and Kautilyan teachings, the conqueror (India) has an opportunity to collaborate with the 'enemy's enemy' (Afghanistan) in an effort to subdue the original *Ari* or enemy (Pakistan). It would help India create a patron state in strategically important neighbouring countries. Apparently, it is easy to dismiss Afghanistan as a *madhyama* (mediatory King). But the fact is that a non-friendly, Taliban dominated pro-Pakistani, government in Kabul after 2014 can be a cause of concern for India. Similarly, a pro-Indian Afghan administration can deny Pakistan its 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan and offset its strategic advantages *vis-à-vis* India. Further adding to the complexity, China (an *ari*) has potential to become a *mitra* (friend) of India temporarily. Iran - a *mitra* notwithstanding troubled relations with the US (*udasina*) could continue to remain a *mitra* of India in Afghan case. Gaining the blessings of *udasina* is also vital in securing and retaining the regional hegemonic status in South Asia. In the Indo-Pak row over Afghanistan, the role of an *udasina* like the US is very crucial, because the regional powers in South Asia would almost automatically adjust their Afghan policy in accordance with changes in the US

¹⁶ Imtiaz Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

¹⁷ K. M Panikkar, "Indian Doctrines of Politics"; First Annual Lecture at the Harold Laski Institute of Political Science, Publication No. 55, Ahmedabad: Harold Laski Institute, 1955, p. 4, available at <http://iqq.sagepub.com/content/12/3/349.full.pdf+html>, accessed on 20 August 2013.

¹⁸ Rashed Uz Zaman, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

¹⁹ Hussein Solomon, "Reflections on Indian Foreign Policy: Between Kautilya and Ashoka", *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 19, No. 1, April 2012, p. 65.

strategy. At the same time, they will vie for attention of other powerful but undecided countries like China.

India has recently stepped up its activities in Afghanistan. By claiming its stakes in Afghan affairs, India is trying to reach beyond its traditional sphere of influence that has mainly been limited to the South Asian region. By using the concept of 'extended neighbourhood' in recent years, India has stretched its zone of influence from "the Suez Canal to South China Sea and includes within it West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean region".²⁰ D. Scott explains that the "vision of an extended neighborhood has become the conceptual umbrella for India; eastwards, southwards, northwards and westwards. ..."²¹ Moreover, India's former foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee reinforced in 2006 that, "India's foreign policy today looks at India's environment in expanding circles...starting with the immediate neighborhood ...moving on to...the extended neighborhood".²² As it has been discussed earlier, the idea of circles and immediate and extended neighbourhood are not novel inventions in India's foreign policy. Kautilya himself stressed on the need for "Throwing the circumference of the Circle of States beyond his friend's territory, and making the kings of those states as the spoke of that circle, the conqueror shall make himself the nave of that circle".²³

Based on the above discussion of Kautilya's strategic framework, a reinterpretation of his timeless wisdom will be used to explain India's strategic perspectives towards Afghanistan in the following sections. Also, an attempt will be made to discuss alliance building paradigm against the backdrop of evolving strategic contours.

3. India's Afghan Strategy: Winning over a *Madhyama*

Afghanistan had boundary issues with British India;²⁴ however after India's independence and birth of Pakistan, the latter inherited the border dispute with Afghanistan. That made India and Afghanistan natural allies or *mitra* following Kautilyan logic of geo-politics. But as subsequent discussions will reflect, regime change in Kabul has had the potential to ruin this 'natural' alliance between India and Afghanistan. So apart from being an occasional case of 'enemy of my enemy' for India, Afghanistan exhibits all important features of a *madhyama* as identified by Kautilya.

²⁰ David Scott, "India's 'Extended Neighborhood' Concept: Power Projection of a Rising Power", *India Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2009, p. 108.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²³ R. Shamasastri, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

²⁴ Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernisation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969, pp. 91-112.

Recently, Afghanistan has presented itself as a useful gateway to the enormous reserves of natural resources and markets of Central Asia for India, as a result Central Asia features prominently in the extended neighbourhood policy of India. Energy diplomacy and economic development were identified by India in 2002 as the two cornerstones of its foreign policy towards the Central Asia.²⁵ To meet its growing appetite for energy, India acquired exploration rights to three out of four blocks of the Hajigak iron ore deposit.²⁶ This will be instrumental for Afghanistan to generate quick revenue from the US\$ 7.6 billion Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project that is supposed to bring natural gas from Turkmenistan to India by 2017.²⁷ Therefore, an unstable and chaotic Afghanistan would adversely affect India's economic interests.

Economic imperatives alone are not the driving force behind India's strategy in Afghanistan. The motives of India's natural *ari* (enemy) Pakistan's preference to use asymmetric warfare in dealing with superior foes also influences Indian policy towards Afghanistan. Since its birth in 1947, Pakistan has not only faced existential threat from India but also defeat in the 1965 and 1971 wars. As a result, the strategic balance in the region shifted in favour of India mainly because of its role in carving out Bangladesh from the map of Pakistan in the 1971 war and conducting nuclear tests in 1974.²⁸

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 presented a long awaited opportunity to Pakistan to redeem the lost balance with India. Funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and trained by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the anti-Soviet *Mujahideens* proved useful in fighting a proxy war with India in Kashmir. R. Hussain aptly points out that Pakistan was caught between powerful India on its eastern flank and an irredentist Afghanistan with claim on Pakistan's Pashtun dominated territory on the western side of the border and when the opportunity presented itself, Pakistan transmitted the historical animosity between the state of Pakistan and the Pashtun nationalists in both Afghanistan and Pakistan to India.²⁹ Even during the short period of Taliban reign in Afghanistan (1996-2001), Pakistan exerted considerable influence to use Afghanistan as a launching pad to neutralise Indian interests by developing antagonistic behaviour towards Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, instigating the Taliban against repression of Muslims in Kashmir and establishing training camps

²⁵ Cited in David Scott, 2009, *op.cit.*, p.111. Also cited in C. Raja Mohan, "Shakhalin to Sudan: India's Energy Diplomacy", *The Hindu*, Chennai, 24 June 2002, available at <http://hindu.com/2002/06/24/stories/2002062404201100.htm>, accessed on 08 August 2013.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Rupakjyoti Borah, "India's Challenges in Afghanistan Post-2014", *East Asia Forum*, 06 August 2013, available at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/08/06/indias-challenges-in-afghanistan-post-2014/>, accessed on 02 September 2013.

²⁸ Nixon Administration and the Indian Nuclear Program: 1972-1974", *National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 367*, The National Security Archive, The George Washington University, 05 December 2011, available at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb367/>, accessed on 10 October 2013.

²⁹ R. Hussain, "Pakistan's Relations with Afghanistan: Continuity and Change", *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2002, pp. 43-75.

in Afghanistan to train missionaries for *jihad* in the disputed Jammu and Kashmir region.³⁰

After 9/11, Operation Enduring Freedom changed the matrix and offered Pakistan limited choice to either continue its support to a corrupt, fundamentalist Taliban regime which became target of the US or to become a partner in the US-led 'war on terror'. Though President Pervez Musharraf, the then military ruler of Pakistan, publicly denounced Taliban and severed ties with it, his government and military continued to maintain clandestine relations with the 'useful' militant elements around Af-Pak border. Today, it is a well-documented fact that the ISI provided shelter to the Taliban leadership after the US launched its operation in Afghanistan in late 2001.³¹ These militant forces within Afghanistan supported by the Pakistani military continue to orchestrate attacks against Indian interests in and outside India.

Against this backdrop of neighbourly hostility between India and Pakistan, Afghanistan's unique position in the region has made it a strategic pawn for both of these countries at different times. India made a strategic blunder during Soviet occupation of Afghanistan by not publicly denouncing the invasion.³² Not to repeat the mistake of the past, India quickly grabbed opportunity to nurture an ally in Tajik-led faction of the Northern Alliance after the fall of the pro-Soviet regime in 1989. To sustain a strong opposition to Pakistan's ally Taliban in Afghanistan, India continued supplying Ahmed Shah Masoud with high-altitude war equipment, helicopter technicians and services of military strategists.³³

Since re-establishing its diplomatic ties with Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban regime, India has been trying to win over the hearts and minds of the Afghan people by projecting its role as a development partner. Discouraged by the US to be involved militarily, India made a prudent decision by preferring 'soft power' option. *Dana* (gifts)—one of the instruments of the *sadgunya* (six-fold policy) of Kautilya—has been the preferred Indian method for rejuvenating friendly relations with Afghanistan. Over the last decade, India became the fifth largest donor for Afghanistan, pledging over US\$ 2 billion in aid.³⁴ India not only heavily invested in construction of road link from Afghanistan to Iran to woo the Afghans but also strategically reduced dependence on Pakistani ports for international trade. In addition, it also invested in critical infrastructure that includes electric power plants, hospitals and even a

³⁰ William Dalrymple, "A Deadly Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan and India", Brookings Institution, 25 June 2013, p. 3, available at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/essays/2013/deadly-triangle-afghanistan-pakistan-india>, accessed on 09 October 2013.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³² Vikash Yadav and Conrad Barwa, "Relational Control: India's Grand Strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan", *India Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April-June 2011, p. 105.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁴ Shanthie Mariet D'Souza, "Can India Stay the Course in Afghanistan?", *The Asia Times*, Hong Kong, 30 November 2012, available at http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/NK30Df02.html, accessed on 01 August 2013.

Parliament House among others. To build a lasting bond with the younger generation, India offered scholarships to 1000 Afghan students in Indian universities.³⁵

India also contributed in training and equipping Afghan National Security Forces in collaboration with the NATO forces³⁶ which was appreciated by Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta during his visit to New Delhi.³⁷ At the same time, India initiated confidence building measures with Pakistan in political and economic spheres,³⁸ as well as with moderate Taliban by inviting secretly its leader Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef to India³⁹ with an objective to give credence to peace process in Afghanistan and meet its strategic objectives there. This is a reflection of Kautilyan teaching that encourages *sama* (conciliation or negotiation) 'when success in dangerous situation is minimally likely':⁴⁰ In situations like these, where Pakistan clearly holds an advantage over the militant forces, starting talks with the militant leaders and their sponsors to avert future disasters for India and Afghanistan seems a prudent idea.

So far India has been quite successful in implementing the instrument of *dana*, which is to be applied 'to the inferior Kings and discontented people with the avowed purpose of winning them without bloodshed'.⁴¹ The above mentioned Indian initiatives in Afghanistan have generated a constructive and positive image of India among the war-torn Afghans. A 2009 Gallup survey showed that 56 per cent of the Afghans recognised India's role in reconstruction more than any single group.⁴² Just after the Indian embassy attack in Kabul (by the militant groups allegedly supported by Pakistan), India pledged additional financial assistance indicating its long term commitment to Afghanistan.⁴³

But why is India tolerating that much sufferings and casualties in Afghanistan? Why is it not going for *danda* (open attack or war) as retaliatory moves? *Arthashastra* has an answer for this one too. As Kautilya observed, "Whoever thinks that in the course

³⁵ William Dalrymple, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

³⁶ Shashank Joshi, "US-India Relations Hit a Rough Patch", *The Interpreter*, 08 October 2013, available at <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2013/10/08/US-India-relations-hit-a-rough-patch.aspx>, accessed on 12 October 2013.

³⁷ Leon Panetta, "The US and India: Partners in the 21st Century", Speech at the Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, India, 06 June 2012, available at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1682>, accessed on 15 October 2013.

³⁸ "Parties Hope Kashmir Issue to be Raised During PM's J&K Visit", *The Economic Times*, 16 June 2013, available at http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2013-06-16/news/40009065_1_kashmir-issue-jammu-and-kashmir-public-safety-act, accessed on 12 November 2013.

³⁹ Azam Khalil, "Talking to a Lame Duck", *The Nation*, Pakistan, 04 October 2013, available at <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/columns/04-Oct-2013/talking-to-a-lame-duck>, accessed on 17 October 2013.

⁴⁰ Imtiaz Ahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Eltaf Nazafzida, "Suicide Attacks on Indian Consulates in Afghanistan as Ties Deepen", 04 August 2013, Bloomberg News, available at <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2013-08-04/suicide-attack-on-india-consulate-in-afghanistan-as-ties-deepen>, accessed on 09 October 2013.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

of time his loss will be less than his acquisition as contrasted with that of his enemy, may neglect his temporary deterioration".⁴⁴ Present day India also chose to downplay these damages to reap the benefit of sympathy and trust of the Afghan people and the government. Indian resilience to these setbacks caused by Pakistan only strengthens its position as a friend to Afghanistan. Indian commitment to stay in Afghanistan in spite of periodic terrorist attacks has proved to be a worthy investment for the former. Not only the common Afghans in street, but also the policy makers in Washington have realised the potential of India in shaping the future of Afghanistan for better.⁴⁵ Pakistan considers India as an existential threat whereas India accuses Pakistan of sponsoring cross-border terrorism. Both have ongoing conflict over Kashmir that has resulted in fighting four wars in 1948, 1965, 1971 and 1999. Pakistan and Afghanistan have ongoing conflict over the Durand Line and Kabul considers the FATA region in Pakistan as part of Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan's support to the US to wage war in Afghanistan against Taliban turned Pakistan as an enemy state. Both India and Afghanistan consider Pakistan as a destabilising factor, thus constitutes a common enemy. Gradually, India has presented itself as an indispensable solution to the Afghan problem.

India's exercise of patience and resilience against Pakistani influence in Afghanistan can also be traced back to Kautilya's advice on approaching an equal enemy. Kautilya believed that a natural enemy is only allowed to grow and flourish unabated if there is a chance that 'my enemy, possessed as he is of immense power, will yet in near future, hurt the elements of his own sovereignty;.... he will... fall into my hands, as he has neither a friend nor a fort to help him; that a distant king is desirous to put down his own enemy, and also inclined to help me to put down my own assailable enemy when my resources are poor; or that I may be invited as a *Madhyama King*'.⁴⁶

India might as well watch and wait for Pakistan to get weaker from its internal strife rather than going for some kind of physical confrontation over Afghanistan, which will be costly in economic and human terms. Another important reason India is tolerating Pakistan's arrogance of power in Afghanistan is because in the current context the *udasina* is deeply tied to India's natural *ari* (Pakistan), which is the closest match to Indian military might in the region. As a power broker in South Asia, the US has no immediate interest in appeasing Indian demands regarding Afghanistan over Pakistani ones. The mild American scolding after Pakistani supported attacks against Indian interests in the last couple of years and slow but steady improvement of US-Pakistan relations after the disaster in Abbottabad exposed this strategic calculation of the US. So India realises that it has to wait till the US strategic interests get diffused or mutated in the region and Pakistan becomes considerably weak from its own internal problems to activate a more assertive Indian mode in Afghanistan.

⁴⁴ R. Shamasastri, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

⁴⁵ US Secretary of Defense, Leon E. Panetta, "The U.S. and India: Partners in the 21st Century", 06 June, 2012, available at <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1682>, accessed on 10 July 2014.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 368-369.

4. Kautilyan Geo-politics: Role of Alliances in Securing Regional Interests

In this section an attempt is made to critically analyse the evolving regional power dynamics and focus on India's strategic equations with Pakistan, China, Iran and the US from Kautilyan perspectives and Afghanistan's position in these power calculations.

4.1 *Pakistan: A Natural Ari (enemy)*

Harsh V. Pant observes that the Indo-Pak row over Afghanistan is a classic case of security dilemma where improved Af-Pak relations generate increased insecurity for India and cordiality in Afghan-India relationship shifts the balance of power against Islamabad.⁴⁷ When Musharraf decided to go with the US in 2001, Pakistan was not only expected to help neutralise Al-Qaeda and Taliban elements but also contribute to stabilise post-Taliban Afghanistan and strengthen Karzai government. However, in this regard Islamabad's credentials remained mostly questionable because Musharraf and his successors failed to dismantle the establishments which provided Taliban logistic support and training. Rather Pakistan military perceived Taliban as a tool to control Afghanistan and undermine Indian influence there.⁴⁸

Even with India's moderate presence in Afghanistan (around 500 security personnel) Pakistan feels challenged.⁴⁹ Islamabad suspected that Indian consulates in Afghanistan are aimed at collecting intelligence on Pakistan, stir rebellion in Baluchistan and North West Frontier Provinces, and provide funding and weapons to Baluchistan Liberation Army.⁵⁰ The visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Kabul in 2011, which resulted in signing a strategic partnership agreement between the two countries, caused further panic in Islamabad.⁵¹ The agreement included among other aspects, closer cooperation on security, and provision of light weapons as well as training in counter-insurgency.⁵² Although Karzai clarified that the agreement was not "aimed at any country"⁵³, Pakistan had its own inhibitions.

⁴⁷ Harsh V. Pant, "India in Afghanistan: A Test Case for a Rising Power", *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 2010, p. 139.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed discussion, see, H. Haqqani, *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, pp. 238-260.

⁴⁹ William Dalrymple, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁵¹ Shazad Ali, "India: Jostling for Geopolitical Control in Afghanistan", *Open Security: Conflict and Peacebuilding*, 27 March 2014, available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/shazad-ali/india-jostling-for-geopolitical-control-in-afghanistan>, accessed on 10 April 2014.

⁵² "Afghanistan and India Sign Strategic Partnership", *BBC News South Asia*, 04 October 2011, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-15161776>, accessed on 25 August 2013.

⁵³ Cited in Sumera Khan, "Engaging the Taliban: Afghanistan Counts on Pakistan's Mediation", *The Express Tribune*, Karachi, 27 August 2013, available at <http://tribune.com.pk/story/595708/engaging-the-taliban-karzai-counts-on-pakistans-mediation/>, accessed on 30 August 2013.

In recent months, Islamabad's relations with New Delhi have improved at the margins, but sparks between Pakistan and India could be reignited all too easily. The recent border skirmishes along the disputed Line of Control⁵⁴ reflect just another illustration of fragile relationship between the two neighbours. India's insistence on bilateral discussions as per the Simla Accord and Pakistan's stance on multilateral solution⁵⁵ further exacerbate the Kashmir issue. The fate of Afghanistan largely hinges on mutual understanding between India and Pakistan over Afghan matters.

4.2 *China: An Ari (Enemy) with the Potential to be An Occasional Mitra (Friend)*

China with its big appetite for natural resources has played a low key but important role in the economic growth of Afghanistan.⁵⁶ Though it has not put any military foot-print in Afghanistan, it envisages playing a constructive role in the post-US withdrawal phase. This was visible in early 2013 when the US and China launched a joint programme to train Afghan diplomats.⁵⁷ China's initiative to incorporate Afghanistan as part of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation further aims to promote its economic interests as well as facilitate dialogue among different political actors in Afghanistan.⁵⁸ By far, China has become the biggest investor in Afghanistan with the award of a licence to China National Petroleum Corporation to explore oil fields in northern Afghanistan's Amu Darya basin with potential reserves of over 80 million barrels of crude oil.⁵⁹ In addition, China acquired mining rights to the tune of US\$ 80 billion in Aynak copper deposit in 2007.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ "Kashmir Tension Rise as India, Pakistan Exchange Gunfire", *Aljazeera America*, 25 October 2013, available at <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/25/Kashmirtensionsriseasindiapakistanexchange gunfireoverbor er.html>, accessed on 26 October 2013.

⁵⁵ "US on Kashmir Issue", *The Dawn*, Islamabad, 24 October 2013, available at <http://dawn.com/news/1051414/us-on-kashmir-issue>, accessed on 30 October 2010.

⁵⁶ Christian Le Miere, "Kabul's New Patron? The Growing Afghan-Chinese Relationship", *Foreign Affairs*, 13 April 2010, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66194/christian-le-miere/kabuls-new-patron>, accessed on 01 October 2013.

⁵⁷ "US-China Launch Joint Training Program for Afghan Diplomats", *Xinhua*, Beijing, 10 September 2013, available at http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-09/10/content_29977355.htm, accessed on 25 September 2013.

⁵⁸ Brendan P O'Reilly, "SCO Glimpses a New Eurasia in Bishkek", *Asia Times*, 16 September 2013, available at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/CHIN-01-160913.html>, accessed on 25 October 2013; and Christina Lin, "China's Silk Road Strategy in Af-Pak: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization", *IPSW Publications*, Berlin, Germany, 2011, p. 5, available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital Library/Publications/Detail/?id=130169>, accessed on 29 October 2013.

⁵⁹ Hamid Shalizi, "China's CNPC Begins Oil Production in Afghanistan", *Reuters*, 21 October 2012, available at <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/10/21/uk-afghanistan-oil-idUKBRE89K07Y20121021>, accessed on 10 October 2013.

⁶⁰ "Aynak Copper Field: Case Study of Sino-Afghan Dreams, Interrupted", *Registan*, 07 August 2011, available at <http://registan.net/2013/07/08/aynak-copper-mine-case-study-of-sino-afghan-dreams-interrupted/>, accessed on 01 October 2013.

The Chinese investment projects in Afghanistan have come under militant attacks recently;⁶¹this in turn has forced Beijing to seriously consider the ramifications of instability emanating from Afghanistan to its largely Muslim dominated Xinjiang province and Taliban's association with Uighur separatist movement. It is important to note that China did not recognise the Taliban government in the 1990s; but after the fall of the Taliban, Beijing not only resumed diplomatic relations with Kabul but also signed a Treaty of Good Neighbourly Friendship in 2006.⁶²

Sino-Indian bilateral relations suffer from mutual trust deficit mainly since the 1962 Chinese incursion. Further, both have been vying long for their influence in the energy rich CARs including Afghanistan. As Zhang Guihong explains "an emerging India does mean a strong competitor for China from South, East, Southeast Asia and Central Asia to Indian and Pacific Oceans where their interests and influences will clash".⁶³ India, on the other hand, feels stifled by Chinese encirclement in South Asia through a 'string of pearls' that includes construction of seaports in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka that could prove as strategic assets for China.⁶⁴ In addition, evolving Sino-Pak 'all weather friendship' does not bode well in Indian strategic circles. The situation gets even more complicated with both India and China competing to project their power in the Indian Ocean.⁶⁵

Although rivalry over influence in each other's extended neighbourhood has strained Sino-Indian bilateral relations for so many years, India realises that working closely with China could help achieve common goals in Afghanistan. India seems to be in the mood for *sandhi* (accommodation or co-existence which was one of Kautilya's six-fold policies) with China on Afghan issue. In this regard, India and China held consultations in April 2013 regarding counter-terrorism with emphasis on post-withdrawal Afghan situation.⁶⁶ China would still like to have a Pakistan card under the sleeve to curb Indian influence in what it views as its 'extended zone of influence'. Nevertheless, considering the expanding Sino-Indian economic relations, it appears China would discourage Pakistan to create instability for India or any other

⁶¹ Roger Brennan, "Allied Withdrawal from Afghanistan: How the Key Asia-Pacific States Will React", 07 September 2013, available at <http://hip5ter.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Allied-withdrawal-from-Afghanistan.pdf>, accessed on 10 November 2013.

⁶² Zhao Huasheng, "China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances and Perspectives", Russia and Eurasia Program, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, March 2012, p. 2, available at http://csis.org/files/publication/120322_Zhao_ChinaAfghan_web.pdf, accessed on 01 November 2013.

⁶³ Zhang Guihong, "US-India Strategic Partnership: Implications for China", *International Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3-4, 2005, p. 289.

⁶⁴ Nitin Gokhale, "India's Great Game in Afghanistan", 24 April 2007, available at <http://www.ndtv.com/topic/india-afghanistan-strategic-partnership>, accessed on 09 October 2013; David Scott, "South Asia in China's Strategic Calculus", p. 217, available at <http://www.d-scott.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/china-southasia.pdf>, accessed on 17 February 2014.

⁶⁵ David Scott, 2009, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁶⁶ "With an Eye on 2014 NATO Pullout, India, China Hold Dialogue on Afghanistan", *The Hindu*, Chennai, 19 April 2013, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/with-eye-on-2014-nato-pullout-india-china-hold-dialogue-on-afghanistan/article4631039.ece>, accessed on 12 September 2013.

neighbour, mainly to minimise the US interest in the region and establish a conducive environment for its own influence in the region.⁶⁷ Recent developments in Sino-Indian diplomacy indicate that both recognise importance of each other in the changing regional strategic context. This was perceptible during Manmohan Singh's visit to Beijing in October 2013 where the two countries reached an agreement on border defense. Signing of this agreement culminated in diffusing trust deficit that had built over alleged Chinese incursion into Indian Territory in April 2013.⁶⁸

India intends to team up with China to deter Afghanistan from plunging into a state of chaos and violence. This could be a classic Kautilyan move where temporary alliances are built between countries to achieve some short-to-medium term strategic objectives in a *mandala*. This momentary friendship between two natural enemies with disputed borders does not make them friends forever; rather utilises the room for mutual collaboration for some common purpose. According to Kautilya: "One shall make an alliance with a king who is stronger than one's neighboring enemy;... for there can be no greater evil to kings than alliance with a king of considerable power, unless one is actually attacked by one's enemy".⁶⁹ In this case, Pakistan being the greater threat to Indian interests, India might as well rethink its China strategy *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan.

4.3 *Iran: A Potential Mitra (Ally) with a Troubled Relationship with the Udasina*

Iran's role in Afghan situation has received mixed reviews⁷⁰, that ranges from a marginal player⁷¹ to having some influence over western Afghanistan that was once part of the Persian empire⁷² and its support to Shia and other Persian speaking minorities in that region.⁷³ Iran's interest in keeping its eastern flank clear by curbing the narcotics trafficking route might be a good incentive for it to be more positively engaged in Afghanistan.

Although not Washington's first or may be even the last preference, Iran holds an influential position in Central Asia and can help the US and other regional stakeholders to achieve their goals in Afghanistan. As M. Olcott observes, "While the future of US-Iranian relations is unclear, any improvement in the relationship would

⁶⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, "Transition in the Afghanistan-Pakistan War: How Does this War End?" *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 11 January 2012, p. 12, available at http://csis.org/files/publication/120111_Afghanistan_Aspen_Paper.pdf, accessed on 27 April 2013.

⁶⁸ "India and China in Border Defence Agreement", *BBC News India*, 23 October 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-24633991>, accessed on 23 October 2013.

⁶⁹ R. Shamasastri, *op. cit.*, p. 375.

⁷⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and US Policy", *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, Washington, D.C, 04 April 2012, p. 52, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>, accessed on 01 May 2013.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

facilitate the success of US-supported initiatives in Afghanistan.”⁷⁴ This may include the ‘New Silk Road’ strategy, that has a bearing on improving Afghanistan’s economic ties with the Central and South Asia, and the confidence-building process, which fosters high-level dialogue on security, political, and economic cooperation among Afghanistan and its neighbours.

Geo-strategists believe that improved Indo-Iranian bilateral relations owe their genesis to India’s goals and aspirations in Central Asia as a rising great power.⁷⁵ The Zarinj-Delaram road project exhibits how closely India needs to work with Iran to counter rising Chinese influence in Central Asia.⁷⁶ India would like to continue its collaboration with Iran, notwithstanding being trapped in the diplomatic rivalry between Iran and the USA. With warming of its relations with the USA, India finds it difficult to strike the right balance between its approaches to Washington and Tehran. Without a green signal from the powerful *udasina* (the US), there is only so much India could do to realise the potential of Indo-Iranian partnership in Afghanistan.

4.4 United States: The Powerful Udasina

English interpretation of Sanskrit term *udasina* has given rise to much speculation and left room for subjective interpretation. Exchanging *udasina* for neutrality makes the category highly problematic in explaining international relations through a realist prism. Hence, further explanation of the specific English synonyms used to analyse this category of state by different scholars at different times is imperative. P. Banarjee contends that the term ‘*udasina*’ was probably applied by Kautilya to describe a King who remained passive in regard to both the contending parties.⁷⁷ P. K. Gautam has used the term ‘neutrality’ and ‘indifference’ synonymously in explaining Kautilya’s *udasina*.⁷⁸ R. Zaman also chose the word indifferent in clarifying the meaning of *udasina* in *Arthashastra*.⁷⁹ The paper explains Kautilya’s *udasina* (neutral power) as not being a disinterested or objective great power because the US has the capacity and capability to influence the balance of power in the region. In international relations, neutrality rarely ever amounts to ‘impartiality’. Even the most powerful state never bases its external policy on objective calculations. Rather it is based on well calibrated understanding of its own national interests. If any great power seems ‘indifferent’ in any given situation, it is because ‘indifference’ works in its

⁷⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, “Iran’s unavoidable influence on Afghanistan’s future”, *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 15 August 2013, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/08/15/iran-s-unavoidable-influence-over-afghanistan-s-future/gii0?reloadFlag=1>, accessed on 20 August 2013.

⁷⁵ C. Christian Fair, “India and Iran: New Delhi’s Balancing Act”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2007, p. 145.

⁷⁶ Melissa Levaillant, “The Indian Dilemma: New Delhi’s Foreign Policy towards Tehran”, *Network of Researchers in International Affairs*, 30 October 2012, available at <http://www.noria-research.com/2012/10/30/indias-foreign-policy-towards-iran-dilemmas-of-an-emerging-power/>, accessed on 30 October 2013.

⁷⁷ Pramathanath Banarjee, *Public Administration in Ancient India*, London: McMillan and Co Limited, 1916, p. 188, available at <https://archive.org/details/publicadministra00banerich>, accessed on 12 October 2013.

⁷⁸ P. K. Gautam, “Relevance of Kautilya’s Arthashastra”, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2013, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Rashed Uz Zaman, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

favour at that particular time. Therefore, the paper describes *udasina* as a powerful country that does not have any genuine concern for the interests of other countries in a certain region while achieving its (*udasina's*) foreign policy objectives and long term strategic goals in that region. But the very activities of such an *udasina* can tilt the regional balance of power in favour of one country or the other. As such, securing the support of an *udasina* is vital for any regional power politics situation.

The major objective of US in Afghanistan is to root out Al-Qaeda sponsored international terrorism. To meet this objective, instead of aligning with one *mandala* or the other, the powerful *udasina*, issued blanket calls, such as on 20 September 2001, President George Bush issued a statement that "Either you are with us, or you are with the enemy".⁸⁰ In this scenario, the neutrality of the US could be mapped based on pursuing its own stated objectives, in the process it sought help from the major regional powers (kings or conquerors in Kautilya's *mandala*). In this case it is imperative that: a) the US does not want to stay in Afghanistan indefinitely, b) it established one-on-one relationship with India and Pakistan, instead of aligning with one or the other, c) it promoted sort of neutrality in its relations with regional countries as the major objective was to meet the challenge of international terrorism, d) when the US identified Pakistan's role in Mumbai attack, it pressurised Islamabad to maintain regional harmony to fight for the bigger cause of international terrorism. In sum, the US holds the key to successful engagement of regional players in Afghan situation and maintaining regional stability. The *udasina's* decision to prioritise one neighbour of Afghanistan over the other alone can change the strategic calculations in South Asia.

Considering that both India and Pakistan are trying to present themselves as the only suitable candidate for US blessings in Afghanistan, experts believe that any prudent post-withdrawal US strategy would include India in it.⁸¹ According to Chalk and Hanavar, "Not only is India a more reliable partner than Pakistan, but it has far more to contribute to stability and security in Afghanistan and in the wider regions of South and Central Asia".⁸² The most credible argument in favour of selecting India as a post-2014 ally appears to be the evolving bilateral relations between India and the US, aimed at bigger strategic calculations, that is counter-balancing a rising China. But buttressing India for a stable Afghanistan might upset a nuclear armed Pakistan. To avoid escalation of regional tension, experts suggest a 'concert of powers' (forum of *mandalas*) involving other regional states that could prove instrumental in reconstruction and stabilisation programmes in Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier,

⁸⁰ Cited in Michael Hirsh, "Bush and the World", *Foreign Affairs*, New York, Vol. 81, No. 5, September-October 2002, p. 19.

⁸¹ Abhimanyu Chandra, "Prospects for Future Peace in Afghanistan: India as a US Partner", *The Yale Review of International Studies*, February 2012, available at <http://yris.yira.org/comments/267>, accessed on 12 October 2013.

⁸² Larry Hanavar and Peter Chalk, "America and India: Growing partners in Afghanistan", *The Diplomat*, Tokyo, 10 August 2012, available at <http://thediplomat.com/indian-decade/2012/08/10/america-and-india-growing-partners-in-afghanistan/>, accessed on 14 October 2013.

some of these regional powers have complicated bilateral relations with the US. In that case, India might extend hand for mutual collaboration with countries like Iran, Russia and Turkey by throwing the 'circumference of the Circle of States' beyond its friend's territory.⁸³

Although the US promises visibility and presence in a different capacity in Afghanistan even after withdrawal of the troops, it will have lesser influence on the events then. That is why it should initiate dialogue and confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan. Pakistani support is required to tame the Taliban and other militant groups in the region. At the same time, uninterrupted Indian support is needed to build the ground for economic and social progress in Afghanistan. Till now, the US has dealt with these two vital allies one-on-one basis, giving scope for suspicion in both countries. The current format of trilateral negotiations between the US-Afghanistan-Pakistan and the US-Afghanistan-India should give way to a quadrilateral forum including all four stakeholders.

5. Conclusion

Afghanistan is a test case for Indian strategists. Becoming a *vijigishu* is not an easy task. India, being economically, politically and militarily the strongest country in the South Asian region, needs to deal with its neighbours with prudence and regional sensitivities, while embarking on its great power ambition. The particular interpretation of geo-political reality as espoused by Kautilya centuries back is still implicit in Indian strategic thinking even if the country has failed to put a 'grand strategy' on paper. The apparent inconsistency in Indian approach towards its neighbours (both *ari* and *mitra* in the South Asian *mandala*) is thus not whimsical or impulsive; rather it is based on an understanding of international politics that is characterised by 'fluidity' of inter-state relations. A methodical categorisation of enemies (*ari*) and allies (*mitra*) and a clever manipulation of context in building alliance to counter any anti-hegemonic force within the region give Indian strategy a certain level of stability and clarity of purpose.

Based on this observation, the paper tries to highlight how Afghanistan's geo-strategic location has put it in the priority list of India in terms of ensuring access to energy rich CARs and resisting Pakistani asymmetric warfare stratagem. India's improved relations with the *udasina* (the US) and its defrosted nature of engagement with another natural *ari* (China) have been explained following this conceptual framework. Iran has also come to play an important role in securing Indian interests in Afghanistan despite American reservations on the role Iran could play. All in all, India has been playing its Afghanistan cards cautiously and creatively. India still needs to come to terms with certain issues to gain further clout in Afghanistan through the

⁸³ Abhimanyu Chandra, 2012, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

inclusion of major stakeholders (expanding *mandalas*), added appreciation of its works by the '*udasina*' and support of other neutral and 'not-so-indifferent' powers.

It appears that India would not like to fill the vacuum created by the US forces in Afghanistan, but would continue to provide development aid (*dana*) to support developmental projects even by encouraging private investment and taking necessary measures to integrate Afghanistan with the SAARC economy. The scepticism of the South Asian countries about the US motives and objectives in the post-troop withdrawal Afghanistan, brings back the crude form of power politics in the region (*matsyanaya*), forcing each state to maximise its strategic resources and political clout around Afghanistan at the expense of the other.

So it would not be wise for India to try and shun the questionable elements of Afghan politics in fear of increased militancy in Kashmir. If anything, co-opting with the elements carefully chosen by the US for accommodation (*sandhi*) in Afghan politics might make India's role in post-2014 Afghanistan more relevant. It is not easy to do away with the Taliban in only 12 years, especially when much of the US effort has been directed against Al-Qaeda and Osama bin-Laden.

In response to the Afghan situation and evolving strategic clamour, India needs to adjust the 'circumference of its circle' as espoused by Kautilya, considering the 'fluidity' of the situation. For this, attention needs to be paid to the new regional dynamics created by natural *ari* Pakistan's democratically elected Sharif government's limitations in reining radical and fundamentalist groups and shift in Pakistan's perception of existential threat coming from 'inside' rather than from India. At the same time, the opportunity to forge alliance (*sandhi*) temporarily with another natural *ari* China through conciliation (*sama*) on anti-militant and terrorism issues should be utilised properly. In this regard, Chinese perceptions of India's place in the Asian strategic game plan and China's support for Pakistan coupled with its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean should be taken into consideration. The policy posture of US (*udasina*) towards India to counter rising China is also of paramount importance. India should respond to these changing situations as per Kautilya's *Sadgunya* (six-fold) policy. As an aspiring and capable great power, India's strategic objectives and goals need to consider these country specific situations as well as regional dynamics while implementing its Afghan strategy. In this case, careful and timely use of the different combination of instruments suggested by Kautilya to execute the *Sadgunya* would keep alive the broader framework of Kautilyan tradition of diplomacy.