



AN AGENDA FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT **POLICY OPTIONS FOR INDIA IN AFGHANISTAN**



Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy

Research Officer, IPCS

This brief explore the potential future policy options for the Indian government and does not touch upon the initiatives already undertaken by New Delhi in Afghanistan. New Delhi must try to optimise its potential by drawing from its own strengths and experiences of dealing with several issues of a similar nature in India.

India's 'no-boots-on-the-ground' policy and no or negligible interference in the internal issues of the country, and a development-led presence, have been fruitful. However, there is more to be done, and efforts can be classified in four sections: Development Cooperation (Education, Agriculture, Health, Public Transport,

Technology, Social); Political Liaising (Inter-Ministerial and Inter-State/Province Dialogue); Trade and Investment; and Security Relationship

I DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Indian investment in infrastructure-development in Afghanistan is, as mentioned, vast. What New Delhi must do now, is, expand/intensify its services/efforts in more areas. India is constructing the Afghan parliament building, schools, refurbishing hospitals, and so on, but must now expand/offer to further expand developmental activities. They can be clubbed in the following focus areas:

EDUCATION

India would do well to invest more in education in the country. For Afghanistan, especially with a population where the median age is 18 years, there is a pressing need for an educated and skilled workforce – one that is central to drive a hobbling economy to acceptable levels and eventually, towards prosperity.

While New Delhi aided the establishment of the

Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy is a Research Officer at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. Previously, she worked in Kabul, assisting in capacity-building for an Afghan-led NGO. This policy brief is part of an IPCS series on foreign policy titled 'An Agenda for the New Government'

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Afghan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University (ANSTU) in Kandahar – symbolic, given its location on Tarnak farms, once the base of former al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden – and provides several scholarships for Afghan students to study in India, there is a need to make this initiative more sustainable and one that benefits as many Afghans as possible.

New Delhi could:

Bring education to Afghanistan, while simultaneously providing scholarships to Afghan students for education in India. Most Afghans do not have access to even elementary education, let alone access to university-level education. The few thousand scholarships and fellowships that India provides, while greatly useful, are insufficient to successfully address the educational needs of the several thousand Afghan youth – who constitute a large chunk of the country's population.

Establish more primary schools and colleges in the country. Provide incentives for Indian universities to collaborate with Afghan universities, and/or set up centres of higher education in the country. It would be more affordable and thus viable for several more Afghans to attend universities in their own country than to spend huge sums to cover fees and living costs in India – for not all Afghans make the cut for the scholarships.

Establish branches/centres of Indian universities in various provinces of Afghanistan. The rural areas of the country are still rather conservative

with regard to the issue of women's education. While the mind-set is gradually changing and more and more girls are attending school (although a lesser number go on to attend university), many in the interiors of Afghanistan are still averse to sending their girl children to universities in other provinces, let alone sending them abroad for studies. Campuses of learning in their own country, more so in their own provinces would encourage more families to send their girl children to pursue higher education, and eventually, help bridge the gap in literacy among Afghan women.

Partner with the Afghan Ministry of Education to set up teacher training schools. Teacher training schools will help more Afghans learn the ropes of the teaching trade, and can be channelled to staff the various educational institutions that will spring up in the country. Qualified personnel from India can train the prospective teachers and professors, as well as prospective teaching trainers.

Collaborate with Afghan universities on subjects such as agriculture (which is of immediate priority), medicine, gemmology, mining, media, fine arts, and all forms of engineering. The country needs as many skilled and semi-skilled people in its workforce as possible, to make it viable to establish industries, and get the economy efficiently running. Offer courses in medicinal disciplines, especially cosmetic surgery and orthopaedic studies, given the high rate of violence in the country that renders several with mangled faces and bodies. Often they cannot afford to access medical services outside their country.

Assist in establishing publishing houses across the nation – a host of several small-scale units scattered across the provinces that could produce books; and given that eventually literature will become a viable career, publishing houses will be needed to support the same. Establishing small-scale publishing centres in universities themselves would be a start.

Team Indian universities with partner universities in Afghanistan to set up public libraries in all provinces. They could start with strengthening the capacity (quantity and quality

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-wise) of existing libraries (in universities or otherwise), and move on to establishing new ones gradually. Assist the Afghan Ministry of Education in conceptualising an institution like India's IGNOU.

Expand 'Sports Diplomacy' where India could support cricket coaching in major towns. It can eventually move on to establishing centres for various other sports in collaboration with the Afghan authorities.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Post teachers and professors in Afghanistan, and eventually aid in establishing teaching centres.

Encourage institutions such as Nirmala Niketan in Mumbai that cater only to women to set up similar centres in their universities.

Deploy Indian doctors to the country, followed by Indian medical professors in their medical colleges, and then eventually move on to aiding with establishing medical universities in collaboration with Indian institutions such as AIIMS.

Establish collaboration between Afghan universities and the Gemmological Institute of India, and eventually, if viable, establish a centre for the study of the discipline in the country.

Engage the film and media industries of both nations vis-à-vis training and mentoring. The entertainment industry played a huge role in bolstering India's soft power in Afghanistan, and must not be taken for granted. Today, India is slowly but steadily losing its turf to Turkish shows that are seeping into the country. The government of India must encourage the Indian film industry to collaborate more with Afghan performers and artistes. One cannot just depend on the goodwill of *Khuda Gawah* and on whatever goodwill new movies are generating, taking them for granted.

Encourage more Indian universities (especially private-run) to collaborate with Afghan universities. Provide monetary and

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infrastructural incentives for the same.

Indian universities are willing to collaborate, but without sound government backing and support, they will not muster courage to embark on such a venture.

Establish centres similar to India's Industrial Training Institutes to train unskilled workers to help them secure employment in various sectors.

Exchanges between sportspersons between the two countries. Start with cricket, which is already a rage among citizens.

Conduct sports camps once/twice a year where coaches from India and Afghanistan together train young students, especially girls, from schools in various districts. It can help expand the scope to various disciplines. Given the burgeoning participation in sports, we could rope-in established Indian sports personalities such as Bhaichung Bhutia and Mary Kom, among others, to conduct annual bilateral sports activities.

HEALTH

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New Delhi could:

Establish branches of enterprises that manufacture prosthetic limbs. In a country where there are more landmines than livestock, prosthetic limbs are greatly in demand.

Initiate more training campaigns for nursing and midwifery. Afghanistan is among the few countries whose maternal mortality ratio is 400 and above (per 100,000 live births). Also, the high infant mortality rate too calls for better post-natal services. Hence, setting up training centres for post-natal care, especially immunization centres (in collaboration with the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health) would be useful. India could share its experiences in the process leading up to its recent success in its Polio eradication program, to be adopted in Afghanistan.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Sending Indian doctors, midwives and nurses to train Afghans in Afghan hospitals, and eventually set up training centres in collaboration with the Afghan government.

Collaborate with the Afghan government to initiate infrastructure projects such as India's Swajaldhara program and the National Rural Drinking Water Program to improve water availability, sanitation and public hygiene.

AGRICULTURE

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Any developmental cooperation in Afghanistan must not overlook the agriculture sector. In fact, it must lay more emphasis on cooperation in the agriculture sector.

However, several regions with cultivable land suffer from low yield given the lack of irrigation facilities. For instance, even Balkh, the Afghan province with the most cultivable land, suffers from irrigation issues. New Delhi could aid Kabul in overcoming this obstacle.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Provide more and varied seeds and initiating irrigation projects all across the country. Establish seed banks, and agricultural research centres in the country

Initiate more frequent and regular contact between the Indian Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries (Tamil Nadu) and the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture.

Set up granaries in various provinces.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Public transport and logistics management are some of the most neglected sectors in Afghanistan. Although security concerns obstruct the construction of strong and extensive road, rail and riverine public transport networks, one cannot neglect it.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Assisting with a comprehensive traffic regulation plan for the metros. For example, there aren't any automated traffic signals in Kabul. While this could be a result of the constant insurgent attacks, and because it is more convenient to man traffic by people in these circumstances, one should not put off

such initiatives for better days. Preparations must begin now.

Conduct an assessment of the viability of expanding riverine transport in the country. If possible, we could use our expertise in the area to provide support to the expansion of services, starting with the existing barges in the Amu Darya River.

India and Afghanistan could further collaborate with Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to construct more connectivity services along the borders.

Construction of the Badghis Ring Road must ideally be completed as soon as possible for better connectivity to other parts of the country. What India can do is aid in the rehabilitation efforts that come along with the construction of the road.

TECHNOLOGY

Afghanistan will soon need effective technological resources to administer the country. While there has been some progress in this area, a lot still needs to be done. For instance, under the 'Elimination of Violence Against Women' law, women can file complaints at the Provincial Prosecution Units, from where the cases will be transferred to criminal courts, family courts and so on accordingly. However, once transferred, there is no mechanism to track the status of the case except telephonically or by sending paperwork over courier – and more often than not, the case reaches a dead end, and is closed. The absence of digital record-keeping, and a lack of personnel trained in the use of computers is a stumbling block for the effective functioning of this important law. Here exists a great potential for the Indian software industry to play a role.

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Train Afghan personnel in using digital means to discharge their duties.

Make computers available in all government departments (and their corresponding branches) in the country.

The Indian tech industry could be tasked with engaging with Afghan students in developing apps for common purpose in the universities.

SOCIAL

Among the several issues Afghanistan faces today are the problems of gender disparity and child health. If these issues are to be tackled, there is a need for women to be economically independent, and healthy. However, for women in the country to take up jobs in a country that is extremely patriarchal, there needs to be a system where the children can be looked after when the mothers are away. A viable plan would to assist the Afghan government to set up a system similar to India's Anganwadi centres. Such a centre that provides integrated services such as child nutrition, pre-schooling, health counselling for mothers and families, community sanitisation and much more would be extremely useful in community resource building and administration. Like in India, women could be posted to run these centres, thus providing livelihood, as well as social and health benefits.

New Delhi and Kabul must work together and pave way for increasing liaisons between Indian and Afghan civil societies, and make the process easier, hassle-free and more robust.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Set up a joint fund that provides grants for independent analysts aiming to conduct research on the region. Subjects of immediate interest could be: gender equality, domestic policy-making, social issues, interfaith dialogues

Encouraging think tanks from both countries to work jointly on specific projects of mutual interest. Involve the educational sectors of both nations in this effort.

II POLITICAL LIAISING

India has so far made good progress in terms of maintaining and furthering political relationships with Afghanistan. Given that the country is somewhat like India, where federalism will come into play eventually, the Indian political class must engage more with its Afghan counterparts – both at the central as well as on state/provincial levels.

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engagement between various ministries of both nations, such as mining, education, public health, energy, micro small and medium enterprises, textile, human resource development, communication information and broadcasting, woman and child development, panchayati raj, and environmental issues, among others.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Initiate an annual interaction mechanism between ministries and their counterparts in either country on official levels, and then move on to high-level meetings.

The Indian Ministry of Women and Child Development must especially take efforts to engage with its Afghan counterpart, and work towards achieving optimal levels of health statistics, as well as empowerment.

The ministries of tribal affairs of both countries could share each other's experiences in their dealings with the subject.

Interact and eventually collaborate on renewable energy projects. Aid in introducing, if not completely funding, renewable energy infrastructure in the country. The Indian Ministry of New and Renewable Energy and Indian private-sector companies could come together to tie-up with Afghan organisations working on renewable energy and set up solar panning in government offices, schools, hospitals, and street lights to begin with.

III TRADE AND INVESTMENT

Although it will take a few years before the Afghan economy grows to healthy levels, the coming three to four years will be extremely crucial in laying the groundwork for the same.

India must liaise with the Afghan government in

creating economic processes that are viable, sustainable, inclusive, and most importantly, bottom-up models. Once the ring-roads are constructed, Afghan exports, mostly agricultural, will get a boost. Until the security situation is somewhat stable, the Afghan natural resources cannot be optimally explored and traded. Until then, the economy will have to depend on agrarian exports and goods transit revenues. India must hence work with the Afghan government towards ensuring food security in the country.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Collaborate in setting up cottage industries in all the provinces. The Central Cottage Industries Corporation of India could assist in the assessment and establishment of small scale manufacturing units, as well as setting up stores in the country as well as abroad.

The Indian government could provide a boost to institutions such as the Ahmedabad-based Self Employed Women Association (SEWA) that has, in collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs, already been working with Afghan women in training them in skills such as handicraft and food-processing.

Focus on providing potent seeds and infrastructural backing to the agricultural sector. Assist in assessing the type of crops that can be grown in various parts of the country, and support the cultivation of the same. Encourage and support collaborations between Amul, India's dairy cooperative that revolutionised milk and dairy product manufacturing, and set up similar Afghan cooperatives. Indian and Afghan ministries of agriculture could work together along with civil societies of both countries to chart a way to and ensure provincial food security.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Employ as many Afghans as possible in India's

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ventures in the country.

Collaborate with the Afghan government in strengthening institutions, and building strong drug-enforcement agencies – especially because better connectivity to neighbouring countries such as Tajikistan would otherwise only mean smoother access for drug trade.

Indian and Afghan companies could collaborate to establish manufacturing units, where India will provide technology and Afghanistan will manage the processes.

Aid in setting up basic infrastructure around places of tourist interest. Tourism in Afghanistan will take some time to start generating decent revenues, but the existence of infrastructure could speed up the process.

As a supplement to the usual food supply networks, India could propose and support the development of community orchards near major towns, where landless farmers could cultivate vegetables and fruits.

Finally, India must come together with Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to construct land connectivities to promote transit of greater volumes of goods, making Afghanistan a functional gateway to the greater Central Asian region from the Indian Ocean.

IV SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

Security and stability in the post-2014 Afghanistan are the immediate and primary concern of Kabul as well as the international community – especially the regional players. Without some guarantee or preparedness of the Afghan security forces to tackle the Taliban offensive that will begin following the withdrawal, the region faces the threat of amplified instability and insecurity.

Today, Afghanistan has an army that is more capable and equipped than it historically did. To maintain and build on it, it needs consistent support from the international community. While India must continue its no-boots-on-the-ground policy, there are a few initiatives it must undertake to ensure security-related support to the country.

New Delhi could undertake the following initiatives in this regard:

Train more officers in Indian military academies.

Start training batches of Afghan women soldiers in India as well.

Encourage attachments of Afghan military officers to Indian think tanks for specified periods of time.

If India is reluctant to sell weapons to Afghanistan, it can compromise by granting ammunition alone – and to a limited extent only. And even in that case, ensure that the ammunition is manufactured in India. This will boost India's own arms and ammunition manufacturing industry, which is gathering dust due to severe bureaucratic roadblocks. Limit the amount of ammunition transferrable to Afghanistan to ensure that there is no set of players who would benefit from continuing war for business profits. Historical, cultural, and ideological reasons would support a projection that it is unlikely that this ammunition will end up in Kashmir

in case of an adverse situation.

Develop security apparatus such as mobile applications that keep the Indians in Afghanistan up to date with relevant information – especially such as security advisories and/or emergency evacuation plans. Given that there are several Indians who work with international agencies in Afghanistan, there needs to be a comprehensive evacuation strategy in case of an emergency evacuation. Make a list of who will avail of the Indian evacuation action and who will avail a plan of the organisations they work for, to avoid confusion.

V CONCLUSION

India's involvement in Afghanistan will have to increase in the coming months, and the key to success is a light-footed strategy, one that has specific targets, and a combination of both short and long term goals.

Instead of simply pouring money into the country as aid, supplementing it with a plan to maximise the potential of the amount given would be more useful. Whether or not to go ahead with the plans can be the Afghan government's call. The key lies in engaging with the country to generate substantial and sustainable assistance, and thereby creating a bottom-up model for development.

In many ways, Afghanistan and India are similar in structure – both have the task of creating and maintaining a civil bond between their culturally and ethnically diverse populations, and moving towards modernization while keeping their cultures and sensibilities in mind. Both have lessons to teach each other.

The clock is ticking, but there is still time for genuine neighbourly courtesy to expand its scope. That's what will give us leverage, when needed, in the coming months.

