Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

South Asia faces regional political and strategic rivalries that persistently aggravate the security of the region. Since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the geopolitics of South Asia has been shaped by a dynamic triangular relationship among Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. Strategic positioning and concerns and claims for political space have shaped their relationship to such an extent that any one particular state becomes an influencing factor in the relationship of the other two. These countries constitute a triangle on which depend the prospects of peace, governance, and stability in the South Asian region. The evolution and the nature of the triangular engagement lie in the overlapping policies of these three countries and, hence, we identify their interactions as constituting a dynamic triangle. The nature, dimensions, and character of this triangle may be underscored through an analytical study of its geopolitical aspects, which is the objective of this work.

This research project has made an attempt to study how and why this triangle emerged and how it affects the three countries. It examines the impact of the triangle on the politics of the South Asian region. It also analyses what their major aspirations and interests in the northwestern sub-region are and how they are addressing those aspirations and interests and trying to gain a sturdy grip over the region. An attempt is made to analyse the major motivations driving the three states using the triangular approach.

Northwestern South Asia comprises a group of states with asymmetric political and economic profiles. Its history is very complicated. The countries are facing some complex internal challenges as well. B. Buzan and O. Waever (2004) argue that the South Asian region remains mired in a conflict formation. The region is also rested within a larger domain of competing interests and geopolitics. It serves the cause of power competition among regional and international actors. These regional states share borders, ethnicities and histories in common. They have been tied together. Simultaneously, they
have overlapped in different aspects and their relations are marked by cooperation, conflict, and differences. All these states have a different vision for one another and for themselves. They have a range of political, economic, and security interests with one another.

The September 2001 terror incidents have had an enormous impact on the geopolitical restructuring of South Asia. The regional dynamics were distorted by the United States’ invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. It changed the triangular dynamics among India-Afghanistan-Pakistan. The project also studies how and why major strategic and political shifts have occurred in their relations after the fall of the Taliban rule. The key aspect of this study is geopolitical. This aspect would facilitate us to understand the dynamic nature among the states and their perceived interests in the triangle.

1.1.1 Geopolitics

Geopolitics was originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolph Kjellén in 1899, who sought to elaborate Friedrich Ratzel’s (1844-1904) idea that signify a general concern with geography and politics (geo-politics).

Geopolitics is an approach to foreign policy study that comprehends the activities, interactions, and the importance of nations in terms of geographical features, such as environment, location, terrain types, populace, and natural resources. In essence, it is “the influence of geography on the political character of states, their history, institutions, and especially relations with other states” (Faringdon 1989: 14).

Geopolitics is the influence of geography on the political character of states. It consistently assigns priority to the “objective factor” of human masses and space over the “subjective factor” of technical and cultural development. The key features of geopolitics are: First, the belief that nations have centres, consciousness, boundaries, communication wires, and diverse cultures. Second, area and resources could determine country’s power and strength. Third, countries are in persistent competition and the powerful countries could seek to enlarge to consolidate and fortify their influence (Chapman 2011). This study examines how political differences and
competing strategic priorities persistently undermine the possibilities of a triangular cooperation.

1.1.2 The Emergence of the Triangle

In South Asia, there is a great deal that its three important countries – Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan – share. Since the inception of India and Pakistan as sovereign states in 1947, they have had ties with a range of Afghan regimes. Therefore, the triangle exists among the three states. It is a product of two bilateral conflicts, India-Pakistan and Afghanistan-Pakistan, that involve diplomatic rivalry, conflicting views and wars that have threaten regional security and cooperation many times in the past. Their relationship shows that their destinies are tied jointly by a pattern of divergence that affects each country’s territorial security, its diplomatic and political identity and international position. Siegfried D. Wolf has argued that “the triangle is gaining impetus because of the nature and complexity of the multidimensional configuration of conflicts interweaving international and domestic determinants” (2012: 25).

Following the September 2001 terror attacks, the geopolitical condition was changed considerably in the triangular relationship. India and Afghanistan have renewed diplomatic ties and established a strong and friendly relationship based on their historical and cultural relations. Since the demise of the Taliban rule, India has increased its presence in Afghanistan, re-opened its embassy in Kabul, established four consulates across Afghanistan, and made extensive efforts in the reconstruction of this war-torn state. It has been argued that India’s economic and diplomatic engagement in Afghanistan has complicated the mutual relations of the three countries. At the same time, scholars have argued that Afghanistan is a peculiar knot in the intense relations between India and Pakistan. Thus, one part of the study also examines how does India’s presence in Afghanistan counterbalance the Pakistan factor in Afghanistan’s politics.

If the above discussion offers a brief understanding of the nature of the Indo-Afghan relationship since 2001, the question arises about the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan since the collapse of the Taliban rule in late 2001. Geo-strategically, Pakistan is situated between India and Afghanistan and shares long borders
with both. A natural convergence of interests was very likely between Afghanistan and India as both countries realised that they have a common problem in border relations with Pakistan: India over Kashmir and Afghanistan over Pashtunistan (Yadav and Barwa 2011). Although Afghanistan and Pakistan share common cultural, historical and religious traditions, they have had a troubled political relationship since the inception of Pakistan as a sovereign state in 1947. Their relations have remained highly complex. There have been conflicts along the border between the two countries. Apart from the historical disputes regarding the demarcation of the Durand Line and the issue of independent Pashtunistan, new issues cropped up after the United States military action in Afghanistan. It has been argued that deep-seated enmity and distrust has generally characterised the two states’ political relationship. The dynamics of the border dispute, Taliban insurgency, and the Pashtunistan issue are an outgrowth of enduring historical disputes between these two countries.

However, the post-September 2001 scenario offered an opportunity for Pakistan to reconsider its policy with the new regime in Afghanistan and to renew its diplomatic and political ties. The downfall of the Taliban regime prompted Pakistan to revisit its strategy regarding Afghanistan. In the contemporary context, Pakistan has grown apprehensive of the growing relations between Afghanistan and India and sees substantial challenges ahead. It suspects that India’s growing influence in Afghanistan would damage their interests and, thus, the Indian engagement with and in Afghanistan determines Pakistan’s revised Afghan policy. Of late, Pakistan has begun negotiating with Afghanistan over almost all the long-pending issues and shows an interest in developing a partnership with Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was the centre of the “Great Game” in the 19th century, when imperial Britain and Russia tried to exert influence on Afghanistan and in the whole region. It was a contest for political supremacy, protection, security and control, conducted by two imperial powers over population, resources, and landmass. The country has acted as the meeting place of four ecological and cultural regions – South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and Far East – that makes Afghanistan as an extremely important geostrategic asset (Saikal 2014: 141). It has been argued that Afghanistan
occupies a distinctive geostrategic position in the South Asian region, which is an imperative factor that shapes its economy, history and political situation in the region.

Following the September 2001 terror attacks, dynamics of the new competition for hegemony, power, and profits of the South Asian region has been evolving. Many scholars, authors, practitioners and analysts view this as a “New Great Game”. South Asia has yet again become a battlefield for this “New Great Game” though the players of the game have not remained the same. The players involved in the “New Grate Game” include the United States, Russia, Iran, China, India, and Pakistan. It has been argued that India-Pakistan’s involvement in Afghanistan is an extension of the “New Great Game”. A part of this study explores how and why these two South Asian countries are involved in this game.

It has been argued that Afghanistan has become an arena for India-Pakistan rivalry and zero-sum dynamics in which one side’s gain is a loss for the other. As Ahmed Rashid, a leading scholar on this subject, argues in his book *Descent into Chaos*, as Pakistan gained influence in Afghanistan, “Kabul had suddenly become the new Kashmir – the new battleground for the India-Pakistan rivalry” (2008: 110). The country has major strategic and political significance for Pakistan and India as a gateway to Central Asia where both countries hope to expand their influence. Both India and Pakistan accuse each other of using Afghanistan to the detriment of each other.

Afghanistan is playing an important role in regional politics, having its own agendas. It is playing a game for its own benefit and for its own reasons and some major interests. For example, it uses India for its own interests while also playing up ties with Pakistan to prevent antagonism of its neighbour. An example is a speech given by former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in Delhi in which he declared, “Pakistan is a twin brother, India is a great friend. The agreement that we signed yesterday with our friend will not affect our brother” (Bhattacharya 2011). The agreement he referred to was the Indian-Afghan Strategic Partnership. At the same time, Afghanistan provides a ground on which India and Pakistan compete politically and economically.
The country is posing problems among the tribal people of Pakistan while, in addition, its instability could produce persistently turmoil in the internal security of India and Pakistan. The country’s main national objectives include maintaining and prolonging friendly relations with neighbouring and regional countries, achieving internal stability and acting as a transit and trade hub linking Central Asia states and beyond (Mir 2010).

The dynamics of the triangular relationship among these countries are complex and overlap other geopolitical rivalries and tensions. These countries are blaming each other of interference in their respective internal affairs. They seek to advance highly disparate interests through their respective engagements with one another. Geopolitically, it is a struggle for control over South and Central Asia landmass.

Following the downfall of Taliban rule, these countries have witnessed the new patterns and trends of geopolitics. They are employing different strategies to achieve their objectives in this region. The study examines the dynamic nature of the triangular relationship since the fall of the Taliban regime. It also studies imperatives of geopolitics in this triangular relationship. One part of the study focusses on how this triangular relationship is crucial to long-term strategic stability in the South Asian region.

1.2 Review of Literature

This review of literature assesses the current state of debates and research on issues of the relationship among Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. Alongside a review of the existing literature on the dynamic nature and character of this triangle since c. 2001, it simultaneously explores the major research questions.

The South Asian region faces inter-state, intra-regional and regional conflicts. The region also faces economic turmoil, political instability, nuclear proliferation and the War against Terror. The major states of South Asia including Afghanistan, India and Pakistan have shared some serious issues with one another. However, their relations have been transforming over the years, marked by essentially political and geostrategic concerns. The key question is – why Afghanistan is important to strategic and political stability in North West South Asia.
Afghanistan has long been a country in disarray. The country is land locked - with porous borders and has an intricate history of relationship with its neighbours, particularly, in South and Central Asia. Its disastrous history of external dominance, exploitation and disorder calls for extensively regional support for reconstruction. The country has acted as the meeting place of four ecological and cultural regions – South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Far East – endows Afghanistan as an extremely important geostrategic asset (Saikal 2014: 141). The country’s geographical position has given it a geopolitical importance. The geostrategic position of the country between the regions led the practitioners and scholars to describe Afghanistan “a region at the cross roads of history” (Rubin 1995: 138-139). The “father” of geostrategy, Halford Mackinder, described the area as “the heartland of Eurasia” and the “geographical pivot of history” (cited in Saikal 2014: 141). Its geostrategic position holds significance for intra-regional, interregional and extra-regional countries for trade, transit and energy supplies. The region is blessed with enormous reserves of natural resources. As a result, following the post-Cold War era, the region has become a stage of global competition known as the “New Great Game” (Kurecic 2010; Khan 2006).

Mondira Dutta has argued the geocentric location of Afghanistan at the crossroads of Asia denotes that “a measure of control over Afghanistan will automatically lead to a measure of control over South Asia, Iran and the resource-rich regions of Central Asia” (2008: 412). The fall of the Taliban regime activated various powers to seek and endorse their political and economic advantages in Afghanistan.

1.2.1 Literature and Debate on Afghanistan-India-Pakistan Triangle: Post-Taliban Era

The discourse on the Afghanistan-India-Pakistan triangle has usually centered on the strategic and political shift. The post-Taliban period created new opportunities and interests for this triangular relationship. Although they have a history of uneasy, unstable and hostile relationship with one another that threatened regional security and cooperation many a times in the past.
1.2.1.1 *Indo-Afghan Relationship*

India has deep historical and cultural ties with Afghanistan. India’s relations with successive of the Afghan governments have remained cordial except the Taliban regime. India became a key player in the post-war reconstruction in Afghanistan and has played an important role in the development and stability of Afghanistan. India has also intensified the efforts to re-establish its influence in Afghanistan. They have moved from the historical and cultural ties to developmental partnership.

Since the end of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Government of India has been providing medical care, constructing infrastructure and assisting with educational programmes in an endeavor to enlarge and improve long-term Afghan capabilities (Pant 2012). India has not only been re-establishing its past influence, it has also been building inroads, geostrategically, economically and politically. As argued by C. Christine Fair (2011), since late 2001, India has focused its attempts upon many diverse projects and humanitarian aid. In October 2011, both countries signed Strategic Partnership Agreement to enhance their cordial relationship. Beyond their bilateral engagement, India has also been rather active in a range of regional meetings and summits during which the evolving situation in Afghanistan has been discussed.

India has significantly contributed in the sectors identified as priority areas for development by the government of Afghanistan. These include agriculture, power transmission lines, industry, hydroelectricity, broadcasting, construction of roads, education and health programmes. The country remains at the forefront with its efforts to assist the government and people of this war-torn nation to build a stable, democratic, inclusive and pluralistic society (Chakraborti 2010). The Indian government has considered extremist ideologies to be very dangerous and a national security threat. It would be important to study how each of these activities has furthered India’s interest in the triangle.

The edited volume by Salman Haider, *The Afghan War and its Geopolitical Implications for India*, analyses the nature of the Afghan troubles and the struggle for building the nation. One part of the study observed that Afghanistan’s immediate
neighbours have been more affected by the US-led war than India. The author highlights the common concerns of India and the United States that led them to enhance their relations and presents a major account of the interests of India in Afghanistan as well as in the whole region.

However, India’s relationship with Afghanistan has been uneven due to external factors. Pakistan has been considered India’s primary rival in South Asia and the main challenge for its Afghan policy. Smruti S. Pattanaik (2012) has tried to study the factors that have shaped India’s Afghan strategy and the nature of its engagement. India’s Afghan policy is determined by, and is dependent on, many extra aspects such as New Delhi’s strained relations with Islamabad as well as its seek for a land route to the Central Asian Republics (CARs) through Iran and Afghanistan. India’s anxiety is also that Pakistan uses the Afghan territory to damage its interests.

The new Indian consulates in Afghanistan also became a serious issue between India and Pakistan. Peter Wonacott (2009) has argued that Islamabad frequently opines about the “mushrooming Indian consulates” in Afghanistan. Indeed, New Delhi has only consulates in Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, Herat, and Kandahar, in addition, to its embassy in Kabul. However, their mutual distrusts over each other’s activities in Afghanistan aggravated bilateral relationship. The government of Pakistan has been assisting the Taliban and its allies because it wants to balance its power and influence with New Delhi which has very cordial relations with Afghanistan by providing huge financial support to them (Rafiquea and Anwar 2014).

It has been argued by some think tanks and scholars that India’s policy and approach towards Kabul has primarily been a purpose of the aspiration to avoid Islamabad from dictating and dominating that state, something Pakistan perceives as an imperative counterbalance to New Delhi’s dominance in the region (Weinbaum 1991, Hussain 2002, Pant 2011). However, some scholars perceive the sustainability of New Delhi’s engagement in Afghanistan as a “test case” for the growing power (Pant 2010: 133-153, Fair 2011: 189). Jagmohan Meher (2008) in his book Afghanistan: Dynamics of Survival provides an important account of the stakes of India in Afghanistan and in the
whole region. The study also focuses upon the diverse aspects of Afghanistan’s problems and highlights the various forces that are at work in this war-torn country.

However, India pursues several geostrategic interests in Central Asia. First, as highlighted by C. Raja Mohan, one of the leading scholars on the subject, New Delhi desires to be, and “to be seen by others as, the dominant power” in the South Asian region (2006: 17-34). It has been argued that Afghanistan is a central corridor through which New Delhi can project its influence well beyond Afghanistan. The country is also essential to contain the non-traditional security threats within the region. Second, Meena Sing Roy argues that New Delhi wants to be “the preeminent power within the Indian Ocean basin” and have an important role in determining regional stability and security all over the region, which New Delhi perceives as its “extending security environment” (2001: 2273-2289). It has been observed that India’s main interest in maintaining and securing its relationship with Afghanistan is to monitor Pakistan’s activities as well.

1.2.1.2 Afghanistan-Pakistan Relationship

Geostrategically, Pakistan is situated between India and Afghanistan and shares long borders with both countries. Afghanistan and Pakistan have long historical and cultural relations that go back for beyond the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. However, their relations have never been easy. Some concerns remain at the core of their relationship. The Durand Line and the issue of Pashtunistan remain a major source of hostility between the two countries. In fact, in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country which voted against Pakistan’s inclusion to the United Nations Organisation (UNO) because of its claims over the famed Durand Line (Ahmed and Bhatnagar 2007: 159). They are blaming each other of interference in their respective internal matters. Before the September 2001 terror attacks, Pakistan had close ties with the Taliban regime and supported them against the Northern Alliance. However, after the incident of September

1 The Northern Alliance was formed in 1992 by Ahmad Shah Massoud and Abdul Rashid Dostum. It fought the Taliban during the civil war and was backed by India, Iran, Russia, Turkey and four of the five Central Asian Republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – with money and weapons to attempt and stop the Taliban’s progress and advance to the other parts of the country (Ahmad 2002).
2001, Pakistan government joined the US-led alliance’s “War on Terror”. Some analysts have argued that the U-turn in its foreign policy has created more problems for Pakistan.

It has been argued that Pakistan has played an important role in shaping contemporary Afghanistan. Since 1947, Islamabad has looked Afghanistan as a vital element of its sphere of influence, shaping its “intrusive foreign policy” towards Afghanistan (Akhter and Sarkar 2015). Moeed Yusuf, one of the most prominent experts on the Pakistani policy making processes, sets out clearly and realistically the thinking that has guided Pakistan’s policy on Afghanistan. He has pointed out three considerations in his major work Decoding Pakistan’s Strategic Shift in Afghanistan that are guiding the changing nature of Pakistan’s policy toward Afghanistan. These are: “(a) The rise of domestic instability and terrorism, which is now its top priority; (b) its longstanding rivalry with, and suspicion of India; and (c) its desire to avoid a surge in Pashtun nationalism among its own large Pashtun population” (2013: 4). The Pakistani policymakers have found themselves bound by two neighbours India and Afghanistan with whom they have been involved in territorial disputes since the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 (Barnett and Siddique 2006).

The major objectives of Pakistan in the CARs are determined by its security and political imperatives; its commercial and economic gains; opposing New Delhi’s influence and its aspiration to be an energy transit-corridor in this region and the Asia-Pacific region (Roy 2006; Subramanian 2006). Also, Pakistan has always wanted to enlarge its power and influence in Afghanistan and CARs (Haqqani 2005: 159-197). As Christopher Budihas (2011) claims, there are four main objectives that drive Islamabad’s aspirations and interests in Afghanistan: first, dynamics of its domestic politics; Second, external security complexities; Third, the search for economic resources, and the complexities of internal security. Shayeq Qassem Ahmed (2007) has observed that the major reason for the persistent instability in Afghanistan is that the international attempt has failed to address enduring disagreements on issues including the Pashtunistan issue and the Durand Line border between these two countries. Pakistan has been concerned with New Delhi’s ties with Afghanistan and has attempted to build an “Af-Pak” alliance to protect its sovereignty.
1.2.1.3 Indo-Pak Relationship

The issues in Indo-Pak relationship are deep-rooted in colonial legacy and historical animosity. The South Asian region has been often recognised as a “high-risk conflict zone” because of a history of uneasy relationship between them. This enmity has led to four wars, in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999 (in Kargil), decades of skirmishes and low-intensity conflicts. They have shared some serious issues with each other including the Kashmir dispute, the Siachen glacier conflict, etc. Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2003) has argued that these two South Asian states now have to live under the shadow of nuclear arms, and both suffer from being described as the most dangerous flashpoints on earth. Their enmity is active in Central Asia as well. Both are competing for their influence in Afghanistan. They advance their defence, economic and geopolitical interests to prevent the other from gaining any advantage.

They have very different vision for Afghanistan, and they seek to advance highly diverse interests and concerns through their respective engagements in this war-torn country. Shahram Akbarzadeh (2003) has argued that India and Pakistan try to outpace each other along three lines of competition in Central Asia. These are: First, access to gaining “geostrategic advantage point” in relation to Russia and China; Second, hydrocarbon reserves; and, Third, enlisting the support of Muslim Central Asia to their respective positions in Kashmir. William Dalrymple argued that “hostility between India and Pakistan lies at the heart of the current war in Afghanistan” (2013: 2). This claim is the major reason for this triangular dynamic.

Stephen P. Cohen et al. argue in their book, The Future of Pakistan (2011) that Pakistan has become a state in crisis, while its actions have created crises for other states as well. It is caught by internal differences and external worries. The country is facing security threats including religious extremism, Indian threat and threat from Afghanistan. Carlos Setas (2013) argues that Pakistan lives in a dangerous neighbourhood, though it could be said that the most problematic neighbour is Pakistan itself. The security policies in Pakistan are continuously dominated by the military. In addition, its political stability and economic production are in deep crisis (Staniland 2001: 133-148). However,
Pakistan’s geostrategic position makes it very complex for regional and extra-regional countries to ignore it (Roy 2003).

It has been argued that India’s rage went up when Pakistan became a frontline state in the “War against Terror”. After the fall of the Taliban regime, New Delhi’s return to Afghanistan was bound to fear Islamabad (Grare 2006). The growing partnership between India and Afghanistan has caused apprehension within Pakistan. Marving G. Weinbaum and Jonathan B. Harder have examined how Pakistan has pursued a “two-track foreign policy” toward Afghanistan that repeatedly bound incompatible and diverse objectives. They argue that “India is viewed as engaging in activities in Afghanistan intended to destabilise Pakistan domestically and threaten it militarily” (2008: 26). India and Pakistan are very interested in maintaining their economic, security and political presence in Afghanistan. They are the biggest rivals in this region, and Afghanistan has also suffered from this antagonism (Hameed 2012).

It has been argued that a democratic and stable Afghanistan would lessen the threats of extremist violence and destabilise terrorism in the South Asia region. Ahmed Rashid, in his book Descent into Chaos: The US and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia (2009), emphasises the importance of Central and South Asia and the interests of world nations in this region, mainly after the demise of the Cold War. The author observes the region as the most unstable because of its wealth and strategic position. He also significantly focuses on the recent state of the nature of relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Sadika Hameed (2012) discusses the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan as well as trilateral cooperation among India-Afghanistan-Pakistan. She claims the cooperation between these three countries has the potential to increase trade, have access to natural resources and regional security. She discusses the joint benefits for the three nations at a trilateral forum and also diverge interests of India and Pakistan in Afghanistan. She also argues that the path to trilateral collaboration in Afghanistan lies through Indo-Pak cooperation, greater trust and active engagement in conflict resolution. However, India perceives a stable, democratic Afghanistan as pivotal to its interests, while an unstable Afghanistan would better serve Pakistan’s interests. The rivalry of
Pakistan with India compels it to play a manipulative role in Afghanistan that generates worldwide criticism (Wasi and Khandekar 2012). Pakistan wants to eliminate India’s influence and position in Afghanistan by assisting and encouraging the Afghan Taliban, the Haqqani network, and even factions such as Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) which have been increasingly active in Afghanistan since 2004. Islamabad is trying to prevent the involvement of Afghan refugees in the Pakistani politics and to promote a friendly government in Kabul to diminish India’s influence (Fair 2011).

The edited volume by Rifaat Hussain et al. Afghanistan and 9/11: The Anatomy of a Conflict (2002), discusses the role of the international community to address the

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2 The name “Taliban” means “religious students”. It was formed by the traditional Islamic practitioners and scholars from the southern Pashtun tribes and students studying in the Sunni madrasas of Pakistan. Mohammad Omar was the supreme commander and religious leader of Taliban from Qandahar. Under him, the Taliban implemented a harsh version of Islamic law to rule in Afghanistan. The Taliban came into power in Afghanistan in 1995. Four years later, the Taliban had successfully extended their control throughout 95 percent of the country until being overthrown by the Northern Alliance fighters and US-led alliance’s “War on Terror”. The period between 1996 and 2001 has been regarded as gloomy era in Afghanistan’s history. Only three countries recognised their government: Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. During its rule, a series of edicts was issued in an attempt to control all aspects of people’s lives. First, they banned women from working outside the home (except in health care). Second, girls’ schools and colleges were closed. Third, men were ordered to grow full beards and pray five times a day. Fourth, they banned all forms of entertainment including kite-flying, cards, music, TV, videos, and most games and other sports (Rashid 2002; Johnson 2004; Runion 2007; Crews and Tarzi 2008). The Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), famously known as Pakistan Taliban, are two different organisations in terms of history, objectives, ideology and operational targets. The TTP came into force in 2007, under the leadership of Baitullah Mehsud, as an opposition against the Pakistani military affairs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

3 The Haqqani Network was formed by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a former anti-Soviet resistance commander, in the 1980s in Afghanistan. It has been argued that he had close ties with Pakistan. He has received significant support from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and from Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) to build this group. The group has been active mainly in the east of Afghanistan in Paktika, Paktia, Ghazni, Khost, Wardak and even Kabul areas. The Haqqani group pledged alliance to the Taliban and supported it when it captured Kabul in 1996. In the present era, it is one of the most experienced insurgent organisations in Afghanistan. They are working to eliminate Western influence and restructure the administration into a strictly Sharia-following country. This group has been considered a threat to the security and stability in South Asia and abroad.

4 Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) literally means “Army of the Pure”. This organisation was formed in the 1980s by Abdullah Azam, Zaffar Iqbal and Hafez Saeed. It is one of the oldest and most powerful Jihadi groups in South Asia. The main objectives of this organisation are: first, to achieve the supremacy of Islam as a way of life throughout the world; second, to force nonbelievers to pay Jizya (a tax on non-Muslims); third, to defend Muslim states anywhere in the world; fourth, to punish enemies for violating their agreements; fifth, to “liberate” Muslims residing in Kashmir. In the nutshell, the organisation embraces a pan-Islamist rationale for military action.
problems in Afghanistan. Rifaat Husain’s chapter entitled, “Pakistan’s Afghan Policy,” examines India as the main motivating force behind Pakistan’s policy towards Afghanistan. The author also points out the intention of Pakistan to engage Afghanistan against India’s interests. J. N. Dixit’s interesting chapter in this book entitled, “The Political and Economic Reconstruction of Afghanistan,” has explored the role of external factors, including India in rebuilding Afghanistan.

1.3 Definition, Rationale and Scope of the Study

This study is an examination of the dynamics of Afghanistan-India-Pakistan triangle since c. 2001. The September 2001 terror attacks caused a dynamic change in the triangular relationship. Since then, the geopolitical landscape of South Asia has been considerably altered. Both India and Pakistan have had relations with a range of different Afghan regimes. However, they have injected their conflict into the affairs of Afghanistan. Both the countries perceive Afghanistan as a zero-sum game where gains by one side are interpreted as a loss by the other. The study initially attempts to identify the fundamental issues in this triangular relationship. Its primary concern is to examine the dimensions of this complex triangle and how one dimension influences the other two.

This study is important for two reasons. First, the dynamics of this triangle have considerable bearing on the prospects of regionalism in South Asia. An influential section of South Asians is working towards regional processes that can enhance cooperation and connectivity. But if the situation in northwestern South Asia, involving these three countries, remains geopolitically charged and influenced by competing national interests, then regional cooperation is unlikely to progress. This study justifies itself in being concerned with this question. Second, the study is important also because it will contribute to the academic literature on the international relations of South Asia as well as the international politics of the three countries.

Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan have distinct visions for one another and for themselves. They have a range of economic, political and security interests with one another. However, their relations have been transforming since c. 2001. There are significant differences in the way these countries have projected their strategies and
political interests since the downfall of the Taliban regime. The study examines the diverse interests of the parties in the triangle and the overlap of their vested interests and policies with one another.

The study assumes a lot of scope in considering the fact that the triangle remains a debatable issue. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the triangular relationship is in a dynamic process. They have moved from cultural and historical ties to the development of partnerships covering all sectors. It has been argued that India and Pakistan are competing for strategic gains in Afghanistan that now acts as a battle ground between the two. India’s engagements in Afghanistan have raised concerns in Pakistan. Pakistan is apprehensive about the growing Indo-Afghan relations. The study also discusses the growing influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan’s politics.

The rise of the Pakistan factor in the Indo-Afghan relations and the resurgence of the Taliban have drawn wider attention in recent years. These two developments have led some scholars, policy makers and think-tanks to draw different interpretations. The study would outline the mechanisms that are suitable for Indo-Afghan policies to deal with the re-emergence of the Taliban and other extremist ideologies.

1.4 Research Questions

The following are the major questions of this study:

1. What is the triangle? How did it come into existence?
2. What are the key strategic features of this triangle?
3. What are the key political features of this triangle?
4. How does the triangle look from Afghanistan’s point of view?
5. How does the triangle look from Pakistan’s point of view?
6. How does the triangle look from India’s point of view?
7. What is the impact of the triangle on the international politics of South Asia?
8. How does this study of the triangle contribute to academic literature on the South Asian region?
1.5 Research Methods

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach in seeking to combine the fields of history and international politics. The major reason for choosing this approach is that historical description provides itself to a qualitative enquiry. This study involves qualitative research that is empirically grounded. The study examines the geopolitical aspects of this triangle following the end of the Taliban rule. It studies the dynamics of the triangle i.e., interests, opportunities and challenges through an empirical analysis.

The present understanding of the triangular relationship is primarily derived from the realist perspective. While relying on realism, this work describes how these countries continue to conceive their policies and strategies towards one another in the dynamic triangle. Realism is the most important approach for understanding general patterns of state behaviour in an anarchic international political system. The conceptual lens borrows from practical international relations that provide the means to explain and understand the phenomenon of their triangular relationship since the end of the Taliban rule in 2001.

The work is based both on primary as well as secondary sources. The work is fundamentally a qualitative analysis of the primary and secondary sources relating to the central research questions. In the primary data, official documents, speeches, and interviews of the officials constitute the main source. The official statements and speeches of the officials of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan and different reports are critically examined. The study analyses the agreements which have been concluded by these states since the post-Taliban era. The secondary sources include books, journals, articles, newspapers and various other means of information available.

1.6 Summary of Chapters

Chapter 2: The Geopolitics of Northwestern South Asia: The Emergence of the Triangle

This chapter discusses the historical background of the triangular relationship. It examines the historical evolution of triangular relations among India-Afghanistan-Pakistan, in general, and since the fall of the Taliban regime, in particular. It also
attempts to develop a framework which gives a plausible way to understand the nature and dimensions of the triangular relationship. There is a need to think through the complex grid of political and strategic relationships among the three states. The chapter provides a possible way for such an understanding.

**Chapter 3: Afghanistan-India Relations: the Post-Taliban Period**

The chapter studies the Afghanistan-India relationship since the fall of the Taliban regime. It studies how they look at each other in the triangular relationship. It also studies how and why these two countries are considered very important to achieve peace in South Asia.

**Chapter 4: Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations: the Post-Taliban Period**

The chapter studies the changing dynamics of Afghan-Pakistan relationship and underlines the historical complexities in their relationships despite certain commonalities like religion. The study also analyses how Pakistan has shifted its Afghan policy after the September 2001 incidents, and how India has emerged as a concern and a factor in this ‘new’ policy.

**Chapter 5: The India-Pakistan Rivalry: Afghanistan – A New Battlefield?**

Afghanistan is becoming common strategic leverage point for India and Pakistan. The relationship and intimacy with Afghanistan is taken as a strategic advantage, and the chapter delineates on the extension of “New Great Game” of India and Pakistan over Afghanistan.

**Chapter 6: The Dynamics of the Triangle: A Critical Analysis**

This chapter critically analyses different and competing interests within the Afghanistan-India-Pakistan triangle. It also scrutinises how their dynamic interests create an atmosphere of competition in which all sides of the triangle seek any possible edge over one another.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter sums up the main conclusion of the proposed study and also identifies the further areas of research.
1.7 Major Arguments

The major arguments of this thesis are mentioned below:

The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 was a turning point in South Asian history. The new dynamics have occurred in northwestern South Asia after the inception of India and Pakistan in the post-colonial phase, with exclusive ideas of nationality, ethnic community, identity, and citizenship within a fixed territory. This unique region remains the most volatile region in the world, which contains two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, and a fragmented state, Afghanistan. It is, however, very influential with regard to international politics. Its unique geographical position adds its salience in the global politics.

The triangular relationship among Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan began to take shape with the departure of the British Raj from the Indian subcontinent. Since then, it has acquired a structure and dynamics of its own because of the domestic and external compulsions of each state. Subsequently, the geopolitics of South Asia has been shaped by a dynamic triangular relationship among these countries. They share histories and common culture, ethnic, religious and linguistic bonds.

The evolution and the nature of the triangular engagement lie in the overlapping policies and, hence, the dynamic triangle. These countries have overlapped in different aspects and their relations are marked by cooperation, conflicts, and differences. And, relations between each of the three states have been formed by their divergent defence and security perceptions and suspicions. Their enmities are based on conflicting territorial claims, conflicting regional aspirations, asymmetrical distribution of economic and military power among the three states. They have a range of political, economic and security interests with one another.

The salient features of the triangle being studied here are: First, the adoption of geo-politics as a basis of foreign policy; Second, existence of incompatible or irreconcilable imperatives of the countries interests; Third, the build-up of military and economic strength; Fourth, intimate attention to the actions of opponents; Fifth, a reliance on policies to build pressure on one another rather than to settle fundamental issues by
negotiations; Sixth, to borrow the external compatible power to balance the adversaries even as the countries build vitality.

These states follow diverse policies and approaches at different times depending on the geopolitical conditions. The major features that constitute the geopolitical importance of the triangle are: First, the geographical position of this sub-region on the global atlas; Second, the valuable natural resources and productivity of this specific area; Third, technological advancement; Fourth, massive manpower; and, Fifth, the accessibility of this specific area from the exterior.

In addition, India and Pakistan have been largely looming in Afghanistan’s foreign policy. Their involvement in Afghanistan is an extension of the “New Great Game”. Both have become involved in a competition by proxy there. This is apparent in the military-security, commercial dealings, and political-diplomatic arena. Both countries regard the region as offering a big opportunity to achieve regional dominance and deal with the other from a position of strength. Their mutual concerns and distrust have had an aggravating impact on the triangular relationship. It has been argued that the rivalry between India and Pakistan impinges on the relations and interests of all the three countries and also restricts opportunities in the region.

The alliance politics, capability, and strategy are the three major variables that have been largely disturbing factors for regional equilibrium. These factors have remained barriers to a permanent solution in their conflicts and concerns. The presence of extra-regional powers has exacerbated conflicts and concerns in South Asia as well. India and Pakistan have used the extra-regional powers for advancing their strategic goals and major interests. They have a long record of interference in Afghanistan. For objectives and ambitions to be secured certain geopolitical perspectives have to be taken into consideration.

The new geopolitical situation emerged in this region in the aftermath of the September 2001 terror attacks in the USA. Since then, the focus of their relationship is on connectivity, constructing new trade routes, increasing maritime trade and commerce, and building strong contours of inter-dependability for progress, economic
growth, and prosperity. The game is to move along these lines. The agreements and policies adopted by any two states among the triangular relationship have an immediate impact on and response from the other one. The diverse interests of sub-regional stakeholders have contributed to the regional instability, disorder, and insecurity. In addition, the instability in “Af-Pak” region has also hindered the constructive peace process and positive developments among these countries.

The acrimonious nature of their relations has played a significant role in undermining stability, cooperation, peace, and security not only in this sub-region but in the entire region. It has changed the politics of South Asia. The disputes between India and Pakistan and Afghanistan and Pakistan regarding the borders have been simmering for the last seven decades. Border issues remain to be a central question between India and Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Pakistan to be resolved. So, their conflicts have not only adversely affected regional peace and security, but have also hindered economic developments which require peaceful management and resolution of conflicts.