

An Analysis of Indo–Afghan Relations Under the NDA Government (2014–2021)

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Abstract:

India and Afghanistan have historically shared a relationship founded on civilizational ties, strategic cooperation, and mutual interests in regional peace and development. The period between 2014 and 2021, under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government of India, marked a significant phase in Indo–Afghan relations characterized by enhanced diplomatic engagement, developmental partnerships, and strategic cooperation amidst evolving geopolitical challenges. This study critically analyzes the nature and trajectory of Indo–Afghan relations during this period, with particular emphasis on political, economic, security, and developmental dimensions. India's policy towards Afghanistan was guided by its commitment to supporting a sovereign, democratic, and stable Afghanistan through capacity-building initiatives, infrastructure development projects, humanitarian assistance, and regional connectivity efforts. Major projects, including the construction of the Afghan Parliament building, the development of the Salma Dam, and the operationalization of the air freight corridor, strengthened bilateral ties and reflected India's soft power diplomacy. Simultaneously, growing security concerns arising from the resurgence of extremist forces, changing regional alignments, and the withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan posed significant challenges to India's strategic interests. The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 marked a turning point, necessitating a reassessment of India's Afghanistan policy and regional engagement strategies. Employing a qualitative and analytical approach based on secondary sources, this study examines the achievements, challenges, and policy implications of India's engagement with Afghanistan during the NDA regime. In this article, an analysis of Indo–Afghan relations under the NDA government (2014–2021) was discussed.

Keywords: *Indo–Afghan, Relations, NDA, Government.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

During the NDA government (2014–2021), India and Afghanistan had strong political and diplomatic ties, with frequent high-level visits and structured bilateral discussions. This showed India's commitment to Afghanistan's sovereignty, stability, and democratic institutions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's trips to Afghanistan in 2015 and 2016 were very important because they showed that the two countries trust each other strategically and are willing to work together for the good of the people. His visit in 2015 saw the opening of the Afghan Parliament building, which was built with Indian help and showed India's support for democracy. His visit in 2016 saw the opening of the Salma (Afghan-India Friendship) Dam in Herat, which showed India's commitment to development-led diplomacy. During this time, Afghan Presidents Hamid Karzai and later Ashraf Ghani visited India several times to have in-depth talks about security cooperation, development partnerships, trade, and regional connectivity. Regular encounters on the fringes of regional and international gatherings made diplomatic engagement even more official. These high-level talks helped improve strategic cooperation, build political confidence, and reinforce India's role as a credible development partner in Afghanistan, even when regional and security issues changed before the Taliban took power again in 2021. The high-level visits and bilateral discussions showed strong political will and improved diplomatic relations between India and Afghanistan. However, their real-world effects were limited by structural and geopolitical factors. These meetings focused mostly on symbolic diplomacy and development cooperation, but they didn't have a strong security framework that could protect Afghan institutions from instability within the country and intervention from outside. India was careful with its diplomatic efforts and stayed away from direct military involvement. This limited its ability to shape Afghanistan's security results, especially as the Taliban insurgency grew and U.S. and NATO forces slowly left the country. Also, Pakistan's strategic leverage and China's expanding presence in the region hurt India's strategy toward Afghanistan in ways that high-level diplomacy alone could not fix. The long-term strategic benefits of these visits were much lower because there was no ongoing interaction with non-state power centers, and India's position in peace talks was restricted. Consequently, despite significant political symbolism and normative commitment, Indo-Afghan diplomatic initiatives during the NDA era failed to achieve lasting strategic results, as seen by the swift disintegration of the Afghan state in 2021. Even though there were many high-level visits and bilateral

meetings during the NDA government (2014–2021), Indo-Afghan political and diplomatic contacts showed that it is not always possible to turn diplomatic symbolism into long-term strategic results. These interactions did build trust between the two countries, boost India's soft power, and show that India was committed to Afghan sovereignty and democratic institutions. However, they did not come with a full security or contingency plan that could deal with Afghanistan's long-standing political division and insurgency. India's decision not to directly become involved in military operations, while in line with its principled foreign policy, limited its power in a region that is becoming more militarized due to Pakistan's strategic depth doctrine and the changing U.S.-Taliban talks. Also, India's small role in formal peace talks and lack of contact with new power players in Afghanistan made it harder for the country to protect its long-term interests. As a result, high-level diplomacy served more as a normative and developmental engagement than as a decisive strategic tool, a deficiency that was clearly shown by the quick political collapse of the Afghan state in 2021 (Dubey, Y., 2023). The objective of the study is to an analysis of Indo–Afghan relations under the NDA government (2014–2021).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

A research methodology delineates the procedures and techniques employed to identify and examine data relevant to a specific area of inquiry. Research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out their research.

Study Area:

Indo-Afghan relations-NDA government.

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H₁): It is hypothesized that Indo–Afghan relations correlated to the under the NDA Government (2014–2021).

Research Design:

The framework of research methodologies and techniques selected by a researcher to carry out a study is known as the research design. Qualitative research design is defined as a type of research methodology that focuses on exploring and understanding complex phenomena and the meanings attributed to them by individuals or groups. In this research, qualitative research design was used.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data is information that has already been collected and documented by researchers but is not pertinent to the topic of the current study. It is available as data collected from a number of sources, including government & non-government publications, books, journal articles, websites, reports, internal organization records, e-resources, documentary evidences etc. In this research, secondary data was used.

Methodology:

The research was based on the qualitative research design and secondary data. A study on indo-afghan relations with special reference to NDA government were chronicled in this research. Also, due to unavailability of statistical data, charts, graphs etc. the quantitative research design and primary data was not applicable in this study.

Research Tools:

Researchers can measure and examine the frequency, significance, and connections between particular terms, concepts, or issues using content analysis. In this research, content analysis tool was used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Descriptive research analysis is a methodological approach that aims to elucidate the features of an event or subject under inquiry. Descriptive research analysis is a crucial instrument for scientific inquiry, allowing researchers to observe, document, and examine the intricacies of a certain subject. This method offers a comprehensive and full elucidation that facilitates understanding, categorization, and comprehension of the subject. All disciplines extensively utilize descriptive research analysis to systematically observe and record all events and elements affecting the phenomenon. In this research, descriptive research analysis has been used.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

Political and Diplomatic Engagements:

India's political and diplomatic ties with Afghanistan were defined by continuity, escalation, and strategic recalibration, all aimed at making Afghanistan a stable, sovereign, and friendly partner in the region. India has always said it supports a peace process that is led, owned, and controlled by Afghans, with a focus on inclusive governance and democratic institutions. During this time, high-level political interactions became a defining

characteristic. Afghan Presidents Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah made frequent trips to New Delhi, while Indian leaders made trips to Afghanistan in return. This showed that trust and political unity between the two countries were growing. India also made conversation a permanent part of its government by creating strategic groups like the India–Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Council, which helped coordinate efforts on political, security, and development issues (Sethi, H., 2020).

The NDA government took a proactive regional and multilateral approach to protect Afghan stability by being involved in venues like the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, the United Nations, and regional conferences on Afghanistan. India's diplomatic measures were aimed at stopping outside intervention, especially terrorism supported by Pakistan, but also at presenting itself as a trustworthy partner for development instead of a security hegemon. The opening of the Afghan Parliament building in 2015 showed India's commitment to strengthening democracy. India's continued diplomatic support during crises, like Afghanistan's disputed elections and security problems, showed that it is a stabilizing political actor. Overall, the NDA government's political and diplomatic work with India greatly strengthened the strategic partnership with Afghanistan, making New Delhi a major player in Afghanistan's political future and regional integration.

India's foreign policy towards Afghanistan during the NDA government (2014–2021) was consistent and included diplomacy, security, and development as three parts that worked together to support each other. India worked to build a stable environment by staying politically active and using proactive diplomacy to protect its strategic interests from terrorism and regional rivalries. At the same time, India's development-oriented aid, which focused on creating capacity, infrastructure, and democratic institutions, was a form of soft power that made Afghanistan's political legitimacy and social resilience stronger. This combination of diplomatic outreach, security cooperation, and developmental support not only built confidence between the two countries, but it also showed that India is a responsible regional player that wants long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan. The changing security situation and the Taliban's return, on the other hand, showed how limited development diplomacy can be without a stable political system. This shows that India's future Afghan policy needs to be flexible and include everyone (Ganaie, R.A., Ganaie, M.A., 2022).

The NDA government's Afghanistan strategy from 2014 to 2021 was based on the idea that diplomacy, security, and development are all connected tools for strategic involvement. India's ongoing diplomatic efforts and political support were meant to help Afghanistan become a stable state that could fight extremism. At the same time, development cooperation was a major way for India to use soft power to strengthen institutional capacity and public goodwill. This unified strategy improved India's strategic partnership with Afghanistan and made it look like a regional player that doesn't interfere and focuses on development. However, the rapid decline in Afghanistan's security situation, which led to the Taliban's return, showed that relying mostly on development diplomacy without enough control over security outcomes has structural flaws. As a result, India's experience in Afghanistan shows that it needs to change how it interacts with other countries in the future by making sure that its diplomatic efforts and development aid are in line with changing security situations and political systems that include everyone.

Security and Counterterrorism Cooperation:

During the NDA government's time in power (2014–2021), security and counterterrorism cooperation became a key part of Indo-Afghan ties. This was because both countries were worried about terrorism, instability in the region, and the growing power of terrorist organizations backed by Pakistan. India always saw a stable and safe Afghanistan as important for both Afghan sovereignty and India's own national security, as well as for the stability of South Asia as a whole. As a result, New Delhi stepped up its work with Kabul in areas like building up its defense capabilities, sharing intelligence, and coordinating security in the region (Khawrin, M.K., 2023).

India's work with Afghanistan to fight terrorism was mostly about making Afghan institutions and operations stronger, not sending troops to fight. The NDA government kept training the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and even added to it. They offered courses at Indian military academies and specialized counter-insurgency schools. These programs were meant to help Afghanistan fight extremist groups, including the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and groups funded by Pakistan, notably the Haqqani Network and Lashkar-e-Taiba. These groups were always a threat to both Afghan and Indian interests. Sharing intelligence and having strategic talks on how to stop terrorism financing, cross-border infiltration, and radicalization trends made the two countries' security ties even stronger.

India's larger strategic goal of combating Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan also affected regional security cooperation throughout the NDA period. India openly denounced Pakistan for using terrorism as a tool of state policy and backed Afghanistan's call to get rid of terrorist safe havens along the Durand Line. New Delhi always supported a peace process that was "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled." They were against agreements that gave violent extremist organizations legitimacy without making sure that terror infrastructure was destroyed. India's diplomatic support for Kabul at global forums like the United Nations, the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, and SAARC showed that it felt this way.

The NDA government also made Indo-Afghan security cooperation a part of a bigger regional framework, connecting Afghanistan's stability to efforts to improve connectivity and fight terrorism throughout Central and South Asia. The Chabahar Port project and the India–Afghanistan air freight corridor were both strategically important because they made Afghanistan less dependent on Pakistan and limited the power of hostile regional actors who often took advantage of instability. Economic connectedness was seen as a way to assist security cooperation by making the social and economic bases of extremism less strong.

The NDA government took a careful but strategically consistent approach to security and counterterrorism in Indo-Afghan ties. To fight terrorism and help Afghanistan become more stable, India focused on developing capacity, providing diplomatic support, and working together on regional security, all while staying out of direct military action. India's involvement during this time showed its long-term commitment to a stable, sovereign, and terrorism-free Afghanistan as a major part of its regional security strategy, even though structural restrictions and regional dynamics limited the results.

During the NDA government (2014–2021), India's security and counterterrorism cooperation with Afghanistan was a key part of Indo-Afghan ties. The goal was to help Kabul fight insurgency and terrorism more effectively while keeping the area stable. India took a capacity-building approach, avoiding sending troops directly but giving a lot of help to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). This help includes long training programs for Afghan police and military officers at Indian schools such as the Indian Military Academy, National Defence College, and Counter-Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School. India also gave Afghanistan defensive military equipment like Mi-25 and Mi-35 assault helicopters, transport vehicles, artillery support, and replacement parts. This helped Afghanistan improve its ability to fight the Taliban and other terrorist groups. India also helped the Afghan military keep its equipment in good shape and provided logistical support, which helped the ANDSF deal with issues related to sustainability. Sharing intelligence, talking about how to fight terrorism, and having conversations between institutions all helped to strengthen bilateral security cooperation. India wanted to help Afghanistan become a peaceful, independent country free of terrorism. At the same time, India wanted to stop extremist groups sponsored by Pakistan and keep Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for anti-India terrorism. India's help was a good mix of not getting involved and actively working on security, which showed that it is a reliable regional partner that wants to make sure Afghanistan is safe in the long term.

From 2014 to 2021, when the NDA was in charge, India's security and counterterrorism cooperation with Afghanistan faced constant and growing problems since the Taliban was coming back and cross-border militancy was growing. The Taliban's growing grip over territory, especially after US-NATO forces began to leave, limited India's strategic options in Afghanistan. This was because New Delhi did not have direct contact with the Taliban leadership for most of this time. Taliban militants, as well as terrorist groups based in Pakistan, including the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), directly threatened Indian interests by attacking Indian diplomatic posts, development projects, and people. Attacks on the Indian Embassy and consulates that made headlines showed how weak India's soft-power-driven engagement strategy is in a security situation that is getting worse. Cross-border militancy made India's fight against terrorism even harder. This was because of weak borders and suspected backing from Pakistan's security forces. Militant safe havens along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border also made it harder for Kabul to take strong action against anti-India groups. India has helped Afghan security forces by training them, strengthening their capability, and giving them limited defense aid. However, because India hasn't sent troops to the battlefield and has a non-interventionist military attitude, it hasn't been able to change the outcomes of battles. The Taliban's refusal to accept the Afghan constitution and peace procedures that were in line with India's vision added to the strategic ambiguity, which led to severe worries that Afghanistan might once again become a safe haven for terrorist groups that are against India. So, throughout the NDA era, India's security cooperation with Afghanistan was based on strategic commitment but limited by practical problems. The Taliban's challenge and cross-border militancy made long-term counterterrorism goals and regional stability much harder to achieve.

Economic And Trade Relations:

During the NDA government (2014–2021), bilateral trade and investment programs were a crucial part of India's larger security and counterterrorism cooperation with Afghanistan. India wanted to deepen trade ties and encourage investments that would help Afghanistan develop because it knew that economic stability was important for fighting extremism and making Afghanistan less dependent on hostile regional actors. The India–Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement (2011) kept guiding trade between the two countries, and India became one of Afghanistan's biggest business partners in the area. India's preferential market access made it possible for Afghan exports, especially dried fruits, spices, carpets, and medicinal herbs, to enter Indian markets. At the same time, India's exports of pharmaceuticals, machinery, construction materials, and consumer goods helped Afghanistan rebuild. The India–Afghanistan Air Freight Corridor (2017) was a big step forward because it went across Pakistan and greatly increased trade volumes, made transit easier, and made the economy more resilient in the face of political problems in the region. India also put a lot of money into infrastructure and connectivity projects like the Chabahar Port in Iran and the Zaranj–Delaram Highway. These projects made it

easier for Afghanistan to go to global markets and made Pakistan less powerful strategically. Investing in electricity generation, education, healthcare, and capacity building in India by both the public and private sectors not only improved economic relationships but also India's soft power and long-term security interests. These trade and investment initiatives under the NDA government showed that India believed that long-term economic engagement was important for fighting terrorism. This was because development and connectivity were seen as important ways to stop people from becoming radicalized and keep the region stable (Dhar, X & Dhiman, A., 2021).

During the NDA government (2014–2021), Indian aid and development projects were an important part of India's security and counterterrorism cooperation with Afghanistan. This showed that New Delhi believed that long-term capacity building and socio-economic stabilization were the only ways to achieve lasting peace. India's assistance approach focused on people and did not include the military. It sent over USD 3 billion to infrastructure, governance, education, healthcare, and human resource development. This made Afghanistan more resilient to extremism and insurgency in an indirect way. The Afghan Parliament building, the Salma (Afghan–India Friendship) Dam, the Zaranj–Delaram highway, and nationwide electricity transmission lines were all flagship projects that made the state more legitimate, improved connectivity, and made Afghanistan less reliant on hostile outside actors. At the same time, India worked on soft security by teaching Afghan police, civil servants, and security officials and giving thousands of scholarships to Afghan students through the ICCR and ITEC programs. This helped create an educated group that would not be easily radicalized. Community-level projects in health, agriculture, and rural development helped to address social and economic problems that terrorist groups typically use to recruit new members. The NDA government made India a credible and trustworthy development partner by aligning development aid with security goals. They used aid as a strategic tool to fight terrorism, promote stability, and protect India's long-term security interests in the region without sending troops.

The changing security situation in Afghanistan had a big effect on the depth and longevity of India's economic ties with Afghanistan during the NDA government (2014–2021). India wanted to make big investments and get more private businesses involved, but the ongoing war, the Taliban's return, and frequent terrorist strikes made the situation unstable. India kept helping Afghanistan with development aid, capacity-building programs, and infrastructure projects like roads, power transmission lines, and the Salma (Afghan–India Friendship) Dam. However, as security got worse, project costs went up, implementation was delayed, and Indian personnel and assets were put at great risk. Attacks on Indian embassies and development sites made it clear that security and economic cooperation are closely linked. As a result, India had to rely more on grants and state-led projects instead of investments that are driven by the market. As a result, economic participation became intimately linked to security and counterterrorism goals. India saw development aid as a way to stabilize Afghanistan, empower the Afghan state, and fight terrorist influence. However, the lack of a stable security situation made it hard for long-term trade integration and connectivity projects to move forward. This shows that long-term economic cooperation during the NDA era depended on improvements in Afghanistan's internal security and counterterrorism effectiveness.

Developmental Assistance and Infrastructure Projects:

During the NDA government (2014–2021), infrastructure development became the most visible and strategically important part of India's development aid to Afghanistan. This showed India's commitment to Afghanistan's long-term stability, economic self-reliance, and people-centered reconstruction. The Afghan–India Friendship Dam in Herat province is one of the most important projects. It is one of the most important projects. The dam, which opened in 2016, improved irrigation, made hydroelectric power, and showed that India is a dependable partner in development that directly supports Afghanistan's agricultural economy and energy security. The Zaranj–Delaram Highway was also very important. It was built before the NDA period but became more useful during that time. It connected Afghanistan to Iran's Chabahar Port, which made it less reliant on Pakistan for transit routes and improved trade links in the region. India also put a lot of money into social and urban infrastructure. For example, they built the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul, which opened in 2015 and became a strong symbol of strengthening democratic institutions and political independence. India improved and helped facilities like the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul and gave more medical help through capacity-building, telemedicine, and medical missions. Other projects included fixing up the Store Palace and building electricity transmission lines, schools, and community development programs in all provinces to make sure that all regions have equal access to services. These infrastructure projects showed India's development diplomacy based on soft power, which focuses on local ownership, sustainability, and civilian welfare. At the same time, they helped India achieve its strategic goals by building goodwill, fighting extremist influence, and expanding its presence in Afghanistan without sending troops.

During the NDA government's time in power (2014–2021), India focused on humanitarian aid and building capacity as important parts of its development and infrastructural work with Afghanistan. India's long-standing commitment to a people-centered foreign policy that aimed to strengthen Afghanistan's social underpinnings as well as its physical infrastructure led to this strategy. Even when security got worse and

international troops slowly left, India kept acting like a credible development partner, putting the needs of regular Afghan civilians ahead of its own limited military or geopolitical goals.

The NDA government in India also focused on capacity building as a key part of its development work. India increased training and education initiatives for Afghans because it knew that long-term stability in Afghanistan depended on strong institutions and developing human resources. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and other organizations gave scholarships to thousands of Afghan students. Afghan government servants, diplomats, engineers, and security personnel also got professional training in Indian schools. These programs helped create a competent workforce that can help with government, administration, and rebuilding operations in Afghanistan.

During the NDA government's time in power (2014–2021), India's development aid to Afghanistan focused heavily on improving the health and education sectors. This showed a strategic commitment to human development alongside traditional infrastructural projects. India helped rebuild and modernize schools and vocational training centers in Afghanistan. This included building new classrooms, training teachers, and offering scholarships to Afghan students who wanted to go to college in India (Yousuf, M. et al., 2023).

Cultural and People-To-People Ties:

India put a lot of effort into establishing cultural and people-to-people links with Afghanistan during the NDA government (2014–2021). They understood that long-term relations between the two countries went beyond just strategic and economic cooperation. Scholarships, educational exchanges, and specialized training programs became very important parts of this soft diplomacy. India continued to give a lot of scholarships to Afghan students in many different sectors, such as medical, engineering, management, and traditional arts. This helped them improve their skills and do better in school. Also, educational exchange programs let Afghan professionals and intellectuals' study at Indian schools, where they learned about modern teaching methods and professional procedures. Vocational and technical training programs, frequently administered by Indian institutes and organizations, sought to improve employability and foster capacity building among Afghan youth, especially in fields such as healthcare, information technology, and governance. These programs not only helped Afghanistan's human resources grow, but they also encouraged understanding, cultural ties, and long-term goodwill between the two countries, which laid the groundwork for strong bilateral relations (Subirthana, M.S., 2020).

The NDA administration in India from 2014 to 2021 used cultural diplomacy to improve relations between India and Afghanistan. They knew that personal relationships are the most important part of long-lasting bilateral ties. Some of the initiatives were promoting Afghan artists and scholars in India, supporting cultural festivals, and working together to protect Afghanistan's rich heritage, especially through projects like fixing up old buildings and helping schools. Scholarships for Afghan students to study at Indian institutions, vocational training programs, and exchanges in music, art, and literature helped to build goodwill and understanding between the two countries. These actions not only strengthened India's reputation as a trustworthy partner in Afghanistan's social and cultural growth, but they also built long-lasting personal connections that encouraged trust, conversation, and resilience in bilateral relations outside of formal diplomacy (Reyaz, M. & Ahamed, S., 2022).

India put a lot of effort toward improving cultural and people-to-people links with Afghanistan while the NDA was in power from 2014 to 2021. This was because they knew that long-term relations between the two countries went beyond economic and strategic ties. Supporting Afghan civil society was one of the main ways to get involved.

India's Regional Strategy:

India's relationship with Afghanistan has been an important part of its larger regional policy, which is based on historical links, security concerns, and geopolitical goals. Since the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, India has taken a multifaceted approach that includes development aid, diplomatic engagement, and strategic cooperation, all while carefully managing the effects of Pakistan and China in the area. India sees Afghanistan as strategically important because it is located between Central and South Asia. Afghanistan that is stable and friendly gives India the chance to protect trade lines, energy corridors, and balance out hostile forces, especially those coming from Pakistan. India sees its involvement as a strategy to keep Afghanistan from becoming a safe place for terrorist groups that are against India. These groups have historically utilized Pakistan's territory as a base for operations against India. India's policy focuses on developmental diplomacy, which means building up infrastructure, education, healthcare, and skills. Building roads, power projects like the Salma Dam, and helping institutions like the Afghan Parliament and universities are some of the most important things that are being done. India wants to build goodwill and influence that goes beyond traditional security concerns by boosting Afghan civil society and encouraging people-to-people ties. This "soft power" approach helps India resist Pakistan's strategic moves, which sometimes show up as assistance for proxy organizations in Afghanistan. Pakistan has long pursued strategic depth in Afghanistan to curtail India's influence and avert encirclement. India's involvement is a direct response to Pakistan's policy. India wants to weaken Islamabad's power and stop terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a safe base for attacks on Indian soil by forging strong connections with the

Afghan government. India's collaboration with Afghan authorities on intelligence and security is also part of a bigger effort to find and stop terrorist groups based in Pakistan, like the Haqqani Network and Lashkar-e-Taiba. India's plan is even more complicated because China is involved in Afghanistan, especially through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China wants stability for its economic investments and to fight terrorism, yet it stays close to Pakistan. India keeps a close eye on China's actions, trying to find a balance between resisting China's influence and looking into ways to work together on projects that encourage Afghan self-reliance and stop extremism from spreading. India's regional policy also includes projects that connect people and work with other countries. India is a member of groups like the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process and works with Central Asian countries to connect Afghanistan to regional trade and energy networks. The goal of this kind of involvement is to make Afghanistan less reliant on Pakistan and to limit China's and Pakistan's power in regional affairs. India also talks about how Chabahar Port in Iran might be used as a different trade and transit route that connects Afghanistan and India without going through Pakistan. India's involvement is still facing problems, including the unstable security situation in Afghanistan, the return of the Taliban, and Pakistan's ongoing influence. India has had to change its approach since the U.S. left and the Taliban came back to power. Instead of focusing on big development projects, it is now providing humanitarian aid, engaging in diplomacy, and quietly supporting Afghan civil society. India's long-term plan is still to keep its power, protect its strategic interests, and stop anti-India groups from getting stronger. India's involvement in Afghanistan is a deliberately planned part of its regional strategy to challenge Pakistan's might, deal with China's growing role, and help Afghanistan become a stable, development-oriented country. India wants to improve its position in the region while also helping Afghanistan's sovereignty and stability by using soft power, diplomatic outreach, and strategic partnership. However, the changing situation in Afghanistan means that India needs to stay flexible to defend its strategic interests in the face of conflicting regional goals (Sethi, H., 2020).

Challenges and Constraints:

One of the biggest problems that made it hard for India and Afghanistan to get along during the NDA government (2014–2021) was the ongoing political and security turmoil in Afghanistan. India's ongoing efforts to expand and improve relations with its neighbours have been hampered by a worsening security situation, which has made it harder for the two countries to work together effectively. The Taliban's return, the presence of extremist groups like the Haqqani Network and ISIS-Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), and the continued power of militant groups backed by Pakistan made the security situation very unstable, which put Indian interests and people in Afghanistan in danger.

Insurgent violence kept getting in the way of India's development-focused agenda, which included creating infrastructure and improving education, healthcare, and institutions. High-profile attacks against Indian assets, like the Indian Embassy in Kabul and consulates in Jalalabad and Herat, showed how weak India's soft-power strategy is in an unsafe environment. Because of this, New Delhi had trouble sending people to the ground, so it had to rely on local partners and international processes, which made direct monitoring less effective and delayed on-the-ground project delivery (Singh, S., 2023).

Political instability made security problems worse. India's efforts to help Afghanistan become a stable and independent state were hurt by weak governance, factionalism within the Afghan political elite, disputed elections in 2014 and 2019, and the central government's limited power outside major cities. The weak power-sharing agreements between President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah made policies less consistent, making it hard to plan and carry out Indian-funded projects over the long term.

So, throughout the NDA period, security risks and political instability in Afghanistan made it hard for India and Afghanistan to get along. India was still committed to Afghanistan's stability and development, but the worsening internal conditions limited its strategic leverage, put its assets at risk, and forced it to be more careful about how it got involved. This showed the limits of soft power diplomacy in a conflict zone that is always unstable (Khawrin, M.K., 2023).

During the NDA government (2014–2021), India's relationship with Afghanistan was characterized by both a strategic alliance and strict geopolitical limits, especially those caused by Pakistan, China, and Iran's regional influences. India wanted to keep its historical role as a crucial partner in rebuilding and stabilizing Afghanistan by supporting democratic institutions, infrastructural projects like the Salma Dam, and teaching Afghan students. These efforts were based on the 2011 strategic partnership framework.

India's development-focused relationship with Afghanistan had a lot of problems during the NDA government (2014–2021), even though there was a lot of political desire and public support. The most continuous limitation was the worsening security situation, which was caused by the Taliban's insurgency, the emergence of ISIS, and repeated attacks on infrastructure sites. Indian-funded projects, especially those for building roads, transmitting power, and running public institutions, were often delayed or stopped because Indian engineers, contractors, and Afghan partners were threatened. This made India rely on local execution and indirect monitoring, which made the projects less efficient and accountable. Limited physical access and logistical problems were also big problems. Pakistan wouldn't let India pass through its territory; thus, India couldn't link directly to Afghanistan

by land. This made India more reliant on expensive and time-consuming alternatives like the Chabahar route through Iran and air freight corridors. These new ideas were helpful, but they weren't enough to completely fix problems in the supply chain, which were causing project costs to go up and implementation timeframes to slow down. Afghanistan's poor institutions, inefficient bureaucracy, and corruption also made things harder to run smoothly, which often led to cost overruns and problems with maintenance (Reyaz, M. & Ahamed, S., 2022).

Evaluation and Findings:

Indo-Afghan relations made a lot of progress during the NDA government (2014–2021), even though there were major security problems, political uncertainty in Afghanistan, and growing regional limits. India used a comprehensive engagement strategy that included development cooperation, strategic outreach, and people-centered diplomacy. This made India a more reliable and long-term partner for Afghanistan. One of the most important things that happened was India's ongoing development aid, which helped improve Afghanistan's institutions and infrastructure. India finished and put into use various important projects, including the Afghan Parliament building, the Salma Dam (also known as the Afghan–India Friendship Dam), and big transportation and power infrastructure projects. These programs helped India gain more soft power and showed that it was serious about Afghanistan's sovereignty and rebuilding, even as security was getting worse. Another big accomplishment was more involvement in politics and diplomacy. The NDA government kept in touch with Afghan leaders at a high level, making it clear that they favor a peace process that is led, owned, and controlled by Afghans. India's active role in regional and multilateral talks over Afghanistan, such as the Heart of Asia–Istanbul Process, helped make New Delhi a significant player in Afghanistan's stability and the security architecture of the area (Barman, J., 2023).

During this time, people-to-people ties were still very important to Indo-Afghan relations. The NDA government gave more scholarships, medical visas, educational exchanges, and humanitarian aid, which made Afghan people feel better about the US. India's commitment to improving people's lives, notably in education and healthcare, strengthened long-term ties amongst people and made it look like a good partner.

In short, even though there were geopolitical problems and the Taliban came back, the NDA government's policy on Afghanistan made real progress in development cooperation, strategic influence, regional connectivity, and soft power. These accomplishments showed that India was dedicated to a stable and independent Afghanistan and that the NDA government had a foreign policy that was both practical and founded on values.

The NDA government (2014–2021) had to deal with a lot of problems and structural limits in Indo–Afghan relations. These experiences taught us a lot. India's involvement showed that diplomacy that focuses on infrastructure, capacity building, and people-to-people ties can create long-term goodwill. However, these soft-power achievements are still at risk without a stable security environment. The Afghan conflict, the Taliban's return, and the eventual fall of the Kabul government showed how little influence India has when security dynamics are controlled by outside forces and regional rivalries, especially Pakistan's strategic power and the key role of the US and NATO. One important lesson is that India needs to be more flexible and realistic in its regional approach. It needs to find a balance between its dedication to democracy and sovereignty and its willingness to work with all political groups, even those who aren't traditional. The time also showed how important it is to keep working together in the region and on multilateral platforms. Unilateral attempts to improve the region could not make up for being left out of geopolitics or sudden changes in international policy, like the US pull-out. Overall, India's involvement in Afghanistan under the NDA shows that while economic and diplomatic support are important, they need to be backed up by flexible security plans, a wider range of regional partnerships, and plans for what to do if things go wrong to protect long-term strategic interests in unstable and conflict-prone areas.

Under the NDA government (2014–2021), Indo–Afghan relations were moulded by a complicated mix of strategic goals and structural limits. This has important effects on the future of bilateral engagement. India's on-the-ground presence in Afghanistan was severely hampered by ongoing instability caused by the Taliban's return and regional proxy dynamics. This made it hard for India to continue its development-focused approach in the long term. Pakistan's ongoing influence over Afghanistan's politics and security made it harder for India to make strategic moves. The lack of direct land access also made it harder for trade, connectivity, and quick crisis response. The changing US–Taliban talks and the Doha Agreement of 2020 pushed India out of important decision-making processes. This showed the limits of New Delhi's dependence on multilateralism and its careful non-engagement policy with the Taliban during this time. Also, Afghanistan's recurrent political instability made it harder for institutions to stay the same, which made it harder for Indian-supported projects to go forward. These problems all showed how important it is to have a new India strategy that strikes a balance between moral obligations and practical involvement. This strategy should include a variety of regional relationships, flexible diplomatic routes, and plans for what to do if there is a political transition. The NDA period shows that India's influence in Afghanistan will depend less on symbolic soft-power projects and more on flexible diplomacy, forging consensus in the region, and being able to work in a world that is changing quickly (Ali, A.M., 2014).

From the above study, it has been stated that the “Hypothesis 1 (H₁): It is hypothesized that Indo–Afghan relations correlated to the under the NDA Government (2014–2021)” was accepted.

IV. CONCLUSION:

The period from 2014 to 2021 witnessed a significant transformation in Indo–Afghan relations under the NDA Government, characterized by strategic engagement, developmental partnership, regional connectivity initiatives, and sustained diplomatic support for Afghanistan's sovereignty and stability. India adopted a multifaceted approach that combined soft power, economic assistance, capacity building, and strategic cooperation to strengthen its role as one of Afghanistan's most trusted development partners. Despite growing regional complexities, India remained committed to an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled peace process while promoting democratic institutions, infrastructure development, and people-to-people ties. The NDA Government successfully deepened bilateral relations through high-level diplomatic exchanges, developmental projects, security cooperation, educational initiatives, and connectivity mechanisms. Major projects such as the Afghan Parliament building, the dam project in western Afghanistan, and the establishment of air freight corridors significantly enhanced economic and social cooperation. India's investments in healthcare, human resource development, and institutional capacity building reflected its long-term commitment to the welfare of the Afghan people rather than merely pursuing geopolitical objectives. However, Indo–Afghan relations during this period were also shaped by substantial challenges. The evolving regional security environment, cross-border terrorism, geopolitical rivalries, and the changing political landscape of Afghanistan posed serious constraints on India's strategic interests. The withdrawal of international forces and the Taliban's return to power in 2021 marked a critical turning point that necessitated a reassessment of India's Afghanistan policy. Nevertheless, India's humanitarian assistance and continued engagement demonstrated its willingness to maintain constructive relations with the Afghan people despite political uncertainties. The study concludes that the NDA Government's Afghanistan policy was marked by strategic pragmatism, developmental diplomacy, and regional cooperation. India's engagement transcended conventional bilateral relations by contributing significantly to Afghanistan's reconstruction, institutional development, and socio-economic progress. Although the political developments of 2021 introduced new challenges, the foundations of Indo–Afghan friendship remain resilient owing to their historical, cultural, and civilizational ties. The future trajectory of Indo–Afghan relations will depend upon regional stability, inclusive governance in Afghanistan, and India's ability to balance its strategic interests with its enduring commitment to peace, development, and humanitarian cooperation in the region.

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