

AFGHAN END GAME AND PAKISTAN: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Afghanistan presents a compelling case study in the discipline of international relations as over the past few centuries, the dynamics of major power rivalries, international systemic changes, geopolitics, energy politics, insurgencies and the phenomenon of terrorism have not only affected the Afghan society but also left its lasting imprints on regional and global security. This Research Paper explores the relevance of the structure of International system; identifies the stakes and interests of the key international, regional and local actors in the Afghan End-Game; evaluates the international system and its relationship with the interests and behaviour of these actors, both in the inter-regional and intra-regional contexts. In addition, a way forward is recommended to help achieve a viable Afghan state and a stable society along with defining a stabilizing role, which Pakistan can play in this respect for both itself, this region and towards promoting international security. The paper also identifies the opportunities and emerging challenges for local, regional and global players and compares their convergences and divergences of interests. Lastly, it also suggests ways of contributing towards the security and stability of both the Afghan nation and this volatile region, at a time when major and long-term shifts are underway in the 21st century political and security architecture of the world.

Introduction

Afghanistan has remained significant to some of the major changes, which took place in the international political and security architecture of both 20th and 21st century. 23 years ago, the emergence of unipolarity from bipolarity had its roots in the asymmetrical warfare, which the Western world waged against the Communist block for which Afghanistan proved to be the last frontier.

According to the Structural realism paradigm, in an anarchic international system, it is assumed that state is the dominant actor whose means and ends for the pursuit of its national interests are neither moral nor immoral but amoral and driven by the anarchic structure of the international system. This research study will base its analysis and approach on these assumptions and attempt to study the causes and consequences of policies and strategies, which various states employ in the pursuit of their national interests determined by their capabilities and relative positions within the international system instead of moral considerations. Therefore, in the prevailing unipolar environment, based on the logic of structural realism, the analysis in this research paper assumes that the principal interest of the super power dominating the contemporary international system is to preserve this unipolarity and prevent the emergence or revival of potential challengers.

In this conceptual context, Kenneth Waltz' three levels of analysis provide a useful framework to deconstruct and understand the Afghan imbroglio by identifying and distinguishing between the interests of international, regional and local actors. These interests are determined by a variety of complex factors and considerations, some of which are interlinked.¹ This paper is an academic attempt to identify the interests of local, regional and international actors and ascertain their convergences and divergences and based on this conceptual framework, to recommend a viable way forward, suitable for both Afghanistan and the region.

A security dilemma is posed within the international system by virtue of its dynamic nature and due to the compulsion imposed upon a superpower to preserve its stature as a pre-eminent actor within the international system and the conflicting aspiration of emerging or regional players to exploit the receding influence of a declining superpower. In this context, the political necessities of the US are in conflict with the opportunities which China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan, which view the emerging Post-2014 political and security architecture of Afghanistan as a long-term opportunity. Therefore, Afghanistan provides a contemporary and compelling case study to analyse the relationship between the US's economic, strategic, political, and energy interests and the contemporary structure of the international system. In addition, the US represents the leader of the industrialized world and various scholars and strategists like Colin Gray and Bernard Brodie attribute the emergence of the post-World War-II world order as a direct consequence of the formidable the US industrial capacity. Therefore, securing and sustaining its long-term energy security, represents a goal which is vital to the sustenance of the US ' industrial might, technological prowess, military industry, economic

¹ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, The State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 263.

progress, its way of life and its international image as the leader of the free world.

In the foreseeable future, various the US international relations experts perceive China as the state, which is most likely to a credible challenge to the US's preeminence in the evolving international order. An economically, politically, diplomatically and strategically resurgent Russia represents another concern for Washington as it is reasserting its influence if not waging a direct claim over its periphery. Moreover, Iran presents the last and the foremost irritant towards virtually ensuring a complete control of the Middle Eastern energy resources as well as influence over the regimes, controlling these resources vital to the interests of the industrialized societies, to the policy dictates of Washington. Hence, controlling Afghanistan is key to securing its long-term energy interests, restricting or delaying the emergence of China, containing the resurgence of Russia, neutralizing and isolating Iran besides engaging the extremist forces with Asia.

Moreover, these international developments cannot be divorced from the domestic political and economic realities, which the US is currently facing. The dwindling public support for sustained military presence in Afghanistan, shaky economy, rising unemployment, Republicans' criticism and sagging morale of the US military personnel are important considerations for the Obama administration in his second term. President Obama has already developed a new term of advisors and policy makers, who can help lead the US foreign policy in his second term towards a new direction, aimed at protecting the long-term the US interests in the Asia-Pacific region, by diverting the US strategic orientation, its hard and soft power capabilities, military, diplomatic, intelligence, informational and economic resources accordingly, instead of keeping them entangled within the complex South Asian milieu.

Besides, the lack of proportionate long-term commitment and divergent interests of its allies also constrains the US policy options and pursuit of a cohesive strategy both in Afghanistan and the region. Therefore, blaming allies for lack of military success in Afghan conflict seems to be a political compulsion for the US administration rather than the reflection of strategic reality. In this respect, Pakistan continues to be the principal fall guy of this blame game, despite its unparalleled contribution in the War on Terror, losses of over 42,000 lives of its citizens and soldiers, almost 70 billion dollars worth of damages to its economy, infrastructure and the loss of an entire decade to its national socio-economic, development. In case of Pakistan, the apparent and traditional disconnect between long-term national interests and the relatively short term strategic and economic compulsions of allying itself with the preeminent superpower has significantly constrained Pakistan's ability to pursue a foreign policy based on domestic popular aspirations and also preserve its economic and territorial sovereignty at the same time.

Pakistan's policies regarding Afghanistan, the US, Iran, Russia and terrorism need a detailed critical analysis in the above context. In the age of globalization, public access to information related to policies, a critical and free media, evolving culture of open and candid public debates has made Pakistan's traditional approach of dependence over external powers for meeting its domestic economic, development and security challenges difficult to sustain. Pakistani leadership's ability to perpetually balance the conflicting demands on the popular level makes sustenance of externally influenced foreign policy untenable.

A foreign policy based on defensive realism instead of offensive realism offers both Kabul and Islamabad an unparalleled set of opportunities and challenges, which if prudently and comprehensively dealt with, could contribute towards a peaceful, stable, prosperous and united Afghanistan, beside securing Pakistan's long-term national interests, and ensuring stability of the region. In order to evaluate the role and significance of each major player in the Afghan-end game, their interests and objectives need to be compared with the means available to them, which is discussed in the following parts of this paper.

Role of Key Players

Extra-Regional Players

According to the US Congressional estimates, the US has spent over 1.25 trillion dollars in the global war on terror, which is approximately twice the total cost of 2nd world war borne by the US tax payers². The Second World War allowed the US and its allies to transform the international system from multi-polarity to bipolarity. Whereas, the global war on Terror has accorded the US political legitimacy to preserve international unipolarity and exploit it for the pursuit of its geopolitical, geostrategic and energy interests in Asia. The events of 9/11 provided the US the opportunity to invade Afghanistan whereas the ideological roots and origins of Al-Qaeda, the main perpetrators of 9/11 did not belong to South Asia or for that matter, Afghanistan.

Moreover, the US initial insistence at not distinguishing between Al-Qaeda's transnational agenda and Taliban's local agenda seemed misfit in view of the ground realities of Afghanistan. Moreover, the US resorted to a 'global' War on Terror (GWOT), which from the very beginning should have been based on a Counter Terrorism strategy. In fact, it initially initiated a large-scale conventional war in Afghanistan including strategic bombing by large-scale employment of air power and carrier battle groups a massive deployment of conventional forces including those of its allies. After achieving regime change and physically gaining foothold in

² Syed Muhammad Ali, "The Afghan end-game: Lessons for the US strategy," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3, 2011.

Afghanistan, in the second stage, the US restored to counter insurgency (COIN) strategy, which was pursued for almost 10 years. The US COIN strategy in Afghanistan led to huge military expenditure, significant the US casualties, complex operational and logistical challenges, created a domestic political vacuum, human rights violations and civilian casualties which could have been avoided had they resorted to a Counter Terrorism (CT) strategy right from the very outset.

The incorrect strategy of initially employing conventional warfare and subsequently counter insurgency (COIN) approach led to the largescale destruction of socio economic infrastructure, agricultural resource base and mass exodus of skilled man power. Moreover, it isolated the moderate and educated population within the society, essential for Afghan socio-economic survival and strengthened the black economy, narcotics trade and helped the warlords become the main political actors in domestic politics of Afghanistan. This situation raises serious questions regarding the strategic means employed by the US in Afghanistan during the last 11 years and the actual ends it desires, conducive to its long term national interests in the region. After eliminating its former *Jihadist* allies turned terrorists including Osama bin Laden, the US and NATO continued military presence in Afghanistan rises questions regarding its objective towards the region. The above discussion leads us to the need to identify the US 's actual interest; the pursuit of which resulted in the large-scale invasion, regime change and subsequent political, strategic and economic control of Afghanistan.

The US Objectives: A Brief Critical Evaluation

Based on the logic of Structural realism, as a sole super power in the current international system the US aspires to dominate the policies and politics of various regions, particularly those which it views as significant to its geo-strategic, geopolitical, economic, and energy interests. A long-term stay in Afghanistan and the domination of Central Asia are all corollaries to the multipurpose the US strategies in the region³.

It is widely believed that while anchored in Afghanistan, with a few bases in Central Asia, the United States has multiple objectives. As per the views of various writers and analysts, its long-term agenda includes the containment of China through multi-pronged approaches, planned to be implemented through its allies in Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and South Asia. The US already maintains a significant number of its military forces in all these regions. The US is moving closer towards ASEAN, being part of the

³ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars; the Secret History of CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004)

Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)⁴. It has recently concluded a nuclear deal with Vietnam⁵ and is about to secure military bases in the Philippines⁶. In the context of these measures, countering the rise of China is not restricted to South China Sea and Indian Ocean but also involved bringing Indian strategic, diplomatic and economic influence in Afghanistan and promoting New Delhi as an important player and counter weight to China, in the South Asian region.

In global politics, the US is highly conscious of a resurgent Russia and would take whatever measures it believes necessary to contest this power-balancing quest. Certain Russian actions, such as the attack on Georgia in 2008, the test firing of long-range intercontinental ballistic missile and a consistent and strong opposition of the US missile defence shield in the Eastern European countries, use of veto in Syria, criticism of the US role in Libyan regime change, expansion of military ties in Latin America and restoration of power projection capabilities particularly the revival of Russian long range strategic bomber patrolling over the Pacific Ocean are tangible factors indicative of Russian resurgence, a fact that is of serious concern for the United States⁷. Putin's return to power, growing energy dependence of Western Europe on Russia, revival of its military industry, and recent economic growth have contributed towards a more assertive Russian foreign policy in international affairs. This revival of diplomatic and strategic competition is a matter of concern for Washington.

Both Russia and China desire that the US should leave the region. They have even made use of the SCO's forum more than once to encourage the US into pulling out. Apart from these, due to its long-term strategic, economic and political significance for international power politics, influencing the energy politics of the hydrocarbon-rich Central Asian and Caspian regions has always been an American interest. The US aims to explore, influence and divert these valuable resources towards its strategic allies like India and western European countries, while at the same time limiting the control and influence of Russian and Chinese companies over regional energy politics.

Geography and history makes Iran an important player in the politics of Afghanistan and Central Asia. The US desires reduction of Iranian role in Middle Eastern and Central Asia politics as well as the containment of its ideological influence and its nuclear programme.

⁴ Mark E. Manyin, Michael John Garcia, Wayne M. Morrison, "the US Accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC)", Congressional Research Service, May 5, 2009.

⁵ SauravJha, "Why a the US-Vietnam Nuclear Deal?", Diplomat, September 15, 2010.

⁶ Manuel Mogato, 'the US Military Seeks more Access in Philippines, not Bases', Reuters, February 2012.

⁷ William J. Lahneman, *Military Intervention: Cases in Context in Twenty-First Century* (the USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. 2004).

The US and Eurasian Energy Politics

Geo-political, geo-strategic and energy security consideration constitute important drivers of the US foreign policy. The Eurasian energy politics reflect its aspirations to deny access to energy resources to potential challengers and instead diverting them towards existing or emerging allies. Washington desires that neither Russian nor Iranian soil be used to provide energy corridors from the CARs and the Caspian regions to destined European markets, and elsewhere in the world. The US prefers using the route from the Central Asia to Turkey and then on to Europe, as in the case of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline. This crude oil pipeline is 1768 km long and passes through Azerbaijan (Baku), Georgia (Tbilisi) and the Turkish coast (Ceyhan port) to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea⁸. For the rest of the region, especially India, the US desires a pipeline from Central Asia to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. This the US strategy of bypassing emerging or resurging powers is in clash with long-term economic, energy and political interests of China, Russia and Iran in this region, which could prevent a cooperative environment between regional and extra-regional powers. Moreover, some senior the US military officers warned its political leadership against disproportionate reliance on hard power in its Afghan strategy. The assessment report of General Stanley McChrystal, the former commander of ISAF in Afghanistan in 2009 stated:

“Resources will not win this war, but under-resourcing could lose it. Failure to provide adequate resources also risks a longer conflict, greater casualties, higher overall costs and ultimately, a critical loss of political support. Any of these risks in turn, are likely to result in mission failure.”⁹

Three years ago, Gen McChrystal predicted the failure of the US - led war in Afghanistan if political reconciliation and integration of the Taliban were not ensured.¹⁰ He was perhaps the only military commander who gave a candid and realistic assessment that there existed a total lack of understanding of the Afghan culture and society on part of ISAF officers and soldiers. General McChrystal also declared that the conventional employment of forces under the US, is a the US, part of the problem, rather than a way out.¹¹

Therefore, in the Afghan end-game, the US is expected to ensure security of its interests in the form of retaining military bases and other

⁸ Eric Watkins, “BTC Pipeline Throughput Increasing in 2011”, Oil and Gas Journal, 2010.

⁹ COMISAF’s Initial Assessment, General Stanley Mac Crystal, August 30, 2009.

¹⁰ Eric Schmitt and Tom Shanker, “General Calls for More the US Troops to Avoid Afghan Failure”, New York Times, September 20, 2009.

¹¹ Ibid.

civil and military institutions supporting the US interests in the long run. In addition, the creation of a huge economically dependent security infrastructure in Afghanistan will keep it compliant to the long-term the US interests. From a Realist paradigm, ideological and political differences notwithstanding, Iran and the US seem to have a common interest in preventing the return to power by Taliban after the bulk of the US forces depart from Afghanistan. The ability of the US to preserve, promote and pursue its long term regional interests in Afghanistan will depend upon the survival of the political system, government structures and military organization which the US has helped create during the past 11 years. However, it remains to be seen whether this political system, state structures and democratization process can survive once the bulk of the US forces leave Afghanistan and the US financial assistance for Afghan government and military gradually reduces.

Indian role in Afghanistan

India, though non-contiguous to Afghanistan, is being cultivated up by the US as an unnatural yet major player in Afghan affairs at the cost of the long term national interests of immediate neighbours including Pakistan, China, Iran and Russia. According to the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry's 2007 estimates, India constitutes only 5% of Afghan annual imports and one fifth of Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan¹². In fact, Pakistani exports to Afghanistan are more than the combined total exports of the next 3 biggest trading partners of Afghanistan; the US, Germany and India. According to independent research estimates despite the large-scale military operations on both sides of the Durand Line since 9/11, the Pak-Afghan bilateral trade volume has increased over 14 times during the past decade.¹³

Therefore, based on these facts the US encouragement of New Delhi to be a major player in the economic and political affairs of Afghanistan is both disproportionate and unnatural. In fact, the steady grow pattern of the bilateral trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan highlights the robustness and strength of the deep rooted and historical ties between the Pakistani and Afghan societies, which have not been shaken or deterred by the disastrous episode of the WOT following 9/11.

On the strategic plain, Indian military and intelligence agencies presence in Afghanistan poses a serious threat to security of Pakistan. Their covert and clandestine activities in FATA, KPK and Baluchistan are a part of their overall strategy of making Pakistan's western borders insecure and unstable. This scenario further complicates the security

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Pak-Afghan Trade Discussion Paper," PILDAT, accessed April 5, 2012, <http://www.pildat.org/publications/publication/FP/Pak-AfghanTrade-DiscussionPaperDec2011.pdf>

dilemma of Pakistan by posing a threat scenario on the western borders as well; thus, further accentuating conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan on the eastern border. Consequently, it may affect Pakistani nuclear threshold viz-a-viz India in view of the enhanced post 9/11 asymmetries posing new threats to regional strategic stability. With regards to its enhanced partnership with the US, India is using Afghanistan as a perfect ground for developing suitable strategic partnership based on convergence of interests. With regards to Afghan society, India is enhancing its footprint and vigorously expanding her cultural, political, diplomatic, and military influence, detrimental to Pakistan's regional and traditional interests thereby isolating Islamabad. Besides, the US promotion of Indian military to train Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) portrays insensitivity of the US regarding religious, cultural, ethnic and historical realities of the Afghan society.

Interests of the NATO Allies

NATO's overall response towards WOT spearheaded by the US has been mixed. Whereas, diplomatically and politically they support the US initiative, however, barring U.K no other NATO ally is proactively participating in military operations in Afghanistan. Some coalition members states have been declined to take part in the actual combat operations. Their degree of support for military operations in Afghanistan has lately transformed into encouragement of the US to pursue political dialogue and socio-economic approaches towards Afghan stability.

Increasingly driven by their domestic political compulsions instead of maintaining an alliance with the super power, some of the European countries have pulled out or reduced their forces in Afghanistan. Besides domestic opposition, economic downturn in most Western countries is also a reason for their reluctance to invest their taxpayers' money in a war being waged thousands of miles away from their homelands and for ambiguous the US gains being pursued indefinitely. However, protecting the energy routes and eliminating terrorism could be considered as long-term objectives of the Western Europe for which a prolonged, costly and large-scale military presence and reliance over hard power rather than soft power is not essential.

Regional Powers

Iranian Interests

Iran is Afghanistan's fifth largest trading partner and maintains significance cultural and historical influence over its Non-Pushtun population. The Iranian interests driving its engagement with Afghanistan are aimed at dimensions, preventing other powers from expending their influence and interest in Afghanistan, enhancing its ideological agenda,

and participating and benefiting from Central Asian trade and South Asian energy market. Iran also provides its trade route to Indian trade with Afghanistan. In 2003, Iran and Afghanistan struck a deal under which the Afghan businessmen could use the Iranian port of Chabahar with the 90% discount in custom and port fees and 50% discount on warehouse charges as well as transit rights on the Iranian road network. As per another deal, India obtained similar preferences from Iran and Afghanistan for Indian goods through Chabahar and Afghanistan to CARs. Due to its traditional, historical, ethnic and ideological linkages inside Western Afghanistan, Iran has heavily invested in the Herat region, building transport infrastructure, electronic media, telecom sector and also laid electricity transmission lines, linking Western Afghanistan with the Iranian power grid¹⁴. Although Tehran deported Afghan refugees and immigrant workers, it has never closed the Iran-Afghan border and remains critical to the resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan. In August 2008, the Afghan ring road which connects Delaram to Zeranjan on the Afghan-Iran border was completed. This major project was financed and carried out by India. In addition, Iran is also building a major rail link connecting North Eastern Iran with Herat, which will ultimately connect Iran to Tajikistan.

Moreover, economic growth in Afghanistan could have positive implications for Iranian society as it could encourage many of the almost million strong Afghan refugees to return from Iran to Afghanistan and enhance Iranian influence on the Afghanistan politics, economy and policies in the post-2014 scenario.

Chinese Interests

China's interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan are complex and multi-dimensional, and are primarily driven by internal considerations. Currently, China's leaders are concerned that a significant drop in economic growth – a result of the global economic crisis – will lead to increased levels of unemployment and destabilizing levels of popular unrest. China's need to maintain economic growth and domestic stability significantly influences its approach towards Afghanistan and Pakistan. China certainly does not want to see nuclear-armed Pakistan be overrun by Islamic extremists. Nor does it want to see a degree of instability in either country that could complicate China's access to their resources, markets and transit routes. Additionally, of particular concern to Chinese authorities is the possibility that extremists could migrate from Afghanistan or Pakistan into China, or that their activities could catalyse extremist groups in its western provinces.

Regionally, China sees Afghanistan and Pakistan as components of a broader struggle for dominance over South and Central Asia. China's

¹⁴ Moshen M. Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan", *Middle East Journal* 60, No. 2, 2006, 251.

close relationship with Pakistan is largely a check against India's rise as a dominant power in South Asia. From this point of view, a stable and friendly Afghanistan gives Pakistan an important degree of "strategic depth" against India's nuclear capabilities and conventional military superiority. According to this logic, China benefits from an Afghanistan that is stable and friendly to Pakistan, because it allows Islamabad to focus on India. Thus, India's forays into Afghanistan are seen by some in China as designed to achieve following objectives; contain Pakistan, enhance its own energy security, combat terrorism, and contain China's development particularly of its western region, limit Chinese linkages with Central Asian region and deepening Indo-Afghan state and societies relations politically, economically, culturally and strategically.

Another key dimension of China's approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan is Beijing's perception of the United States. Since 2001, the United States has been profoundly focused on the "Arc of Instability" from the Middle East to South Asia, and the ongoing shift of military resources from Iraq to Afghanistan. In addition to requiring significant amount of policymakers' attention, this focus directly impacts the ability of the US leaders to engage in the Asia-Pacific region. This focus, combined with a difficult economic picture constraining future defence and international aid budgets, has necessarily diverted resources and high-level attention away from China and the Asia-Pacific, forcing the US to essentially operate in the region with one hand tied behind its back. Washington's focus elsewhere, and a relatively stable strategic environment with no military threats, reinforces Chinese perceptions of the current period as a "window of opportunity" allowing China to focus on its own economic growth and development.

To date, China's leaders have not directly criticized the implications of the US involvement in extended occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Beijing continues to view the United States as the world's most powerful nation and China's most important relationship, and does not want to jeopardize the US-Sino relations with unvarnished criticism or harping about the ongoing wars. However, since the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, official Chinese media has not hesitated to emphasize indications of instability, reports of civilian deaths, and questions about the US will to preserve stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan. China highlights problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan for several reasons. First, China perceives itself as the leader of the developing world and is therefore charged with highlighting what they see as instances of the US hegemony. Second, China seeks to cultivate positive relations with Muslim-majority countries for their natural resources, large consumer markets and their votes in various multilateral fora such as UN, CD, WTO, and SCO etc.

Another key driver of China's perspective on Afghanistan and Pakistan is concern about ties between Islamic militants in Afghanistan

and Pakistan and the Uyghur Muslim minority population in Xinjiang province. China is concerned that the militant Islamist ideology in Afghanistan could bleed into China's Uyghur population and feed what many in Beijing see as a terrorist problem. The difficulty for the US policymakers is distinguishing between terrorist groups and opposition of the Chinese Communist Party. China claims that a Uyghur separatist group called the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has had contacts with Al Qaeda, and the US has designated ETIM as a terrorist organization. That being said, ETIM's true size and the accuracy of its reported connections with Al Qaeda remain unclear.

However, Beijing's concerns about its Uyghur population and possible connections with extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan raise questions about China's willingness to tolerate the US military forces in these countries as a tool to keep extremist forces pinned down and focused away from China. Chinese strategists are uncomfortable with a large the US military presence along China's border, and some analysts have expressed concern that the US bases in the region supporting operations in Afghanistan are part of a strategy to perpetuate the US domination of the region. At the same time, however, the US presence in Afghanistan prevents Al Qaeda from focusing on China and helps suppress Islamist groups along China's periphery.

Russian Interests

Russia does not view the long-term presence of extra-regional forces in its backyard as conducive to its national interests besides posing serious threats to its former republics¹⁵. However, based on its previous experience in Afghanistan, Moscow is pursuing a cautious approach not to get entangled in the internal Afghan affairs, which could prove costly to its own regional security. Moscow views the existence of extremist forces in Afghanistan as a threat within its sphere of influence, namely CARs and wants to restrict the extremist forces from expanding their influence in the CARs. Although, Russia views the US and NATO presence in its backyard with concern, however, it does not want them to immediately depart, leaving behind a power vacuum which could be quickly filled with the resurgence of extremist elements.

Senior officials in Moscow publicly support the ongoing reconciliatory efforts with Taliban and are critical of pursuing a military approach towards the Afghan End-Game. They also believe that the regional stakeholders and neighbours can and should play a more positive, meaningful and constructive role in promoting Afghan and regional stability as compared to extra regional forces, except India.

¹⁵ M K Bhadrakumar, "Russia Stops the US on Road to Afghanistan," *Asia Times*, January 27, 2009.

What could be a matter of concern for Islamabad is the potential of Russia forming an alliance with Iran and India to support and sustain a Northern Alliance led power structure in Afghanistan instead of a Pakistan supported Pashtun dominated Afghan political structure after majority of the US forces pull out.

Although Russia is concerned with the growing Indo-US strategic partnership and the gradual loss of its political influence over New Delhi; however, it remains to be seen to what extent Islamabad can translate these Russian concerns into opportunities for itself.

Local Actors (Afghanistan)

Karzai Administration

It can be safely assumed that the success and survival of the Karzai government beyond 2014 will depend upon its ability to be seen as acceptable to major global, regional and local stakeholders at the same time. Due to the complex, diverse and unique nature of Afghan polity, a strong, stable and united Afghanistan is only possible in which the interests and concerns of all Afghan major tribes, ethnicities and ideologies are accepted and accommodated by the multi-ethnic and diverse centre rather than a strong centre expecting all the political stakeholders to submit to its policies and preferences. In essence, Kabul should be seen by all Afghans as accepting their collective will instead of all Afghans accepting the individual will of whoever is in power in Kabul. In addition, the success and the popularity of any government is directly proportional to its ability to provide, ensure and implement socio-economic justice beyond all ethnic, ideological or political divides.

In its own interest, the onus is on the Karzai government to expand its engagement and dialogue with all Afghans and their representatives including the estranged Pashtuns to allow the process of reconciliation and reintegration to move forward and eventually succeed. In the End-Game, any future Afghan government, irrespective of its configuration, will be judged and is likely to govern, deliver justice, effectively cope with the rampant corruption, provide public welfare, create a viable economic environment and generate significant employment and investment opportunities. According to latest United Nations office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, Afghanistan produces 93% of the world's total heroine, which is a major source of revenue for all illegal activities including illegal arms, sustaining war lords and continued instability in the Afghan society.

Taliban

Senior officials of the US administration such as Secretary Clinton and former Secretary Gates admittance of the US diplomatic engagement with the Taliban, opening of Taliban's representative office in Doha, Qatar,

overt dialogue in Chicago and public reiteration by various key international players of the significance of peace and reconciliation effort with the Taliban, review of U.N's wanted terrorist list and release of inmates from Guantanamo Bay prove that a substantive diplomatic effort is afoot with the Taliban. This multi-tracked reconciliation process represents the multilateral effort aimed at bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan through diplomatic means, an approach that Pakistan recommended since 9/11. In the words of a Pakistan former foreign secretary who has served both in Kabul and Moscow, for the peace and reconciliation effort to succeed, "A talk-talk rather than talk-fight approach would be more suitable".¹⁶

The maximalist Taliban position could be to grant them international political recognition; accommodation with future and mainstream political system; cessation of all military operations by foreign forces in Afghanistan; release of all prisoners held at Baghram, Kandahar and other air bases under the US/ ISAF; and Islamic Shari'ah to become the law of the land; and an earlier timeframe for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

Pak-Afghan Correlation: Identifying Opportunities and Challenges

1. Political Dimension

No country has suffered more from the Afghan War than Pakistan. The colossal impact on all spheres and walks of life of this long-drawn warfare, has left a disturbing and deep imprint on not just the economic, social, political but also the cultural and psychological aspects of the Pakistani society.

The manner, in which the US and ISAF forces used massive force to fight terrorism in Afghanistan, not only led to the migration of Afghan people to Pakistan, putting additional pressure on its reeling economy but also created a major wave of anti-American sentiment on the societal level, creating additional challenges for the Pakistani government to maintain a stable alliance with the US against terrorism.

The war against terrorism, as per the US Congressional estimates, became overwhelmingly unpopular among the Pakistani nation, and led to the rise of Religious parties like MMA in the KPK province, which got into power riding this popular anti-American sentiment. This created further difficulties for the government in Islamabad to cooperate with the US as it was seen as an unpopular policy and further isolated the liberal forces within the Pakistani society as they were increasingly seen as pro-US among the conservative segments of society and media.

¹⁶ An Interview with former Foreign Secretary, Ambassador Tanvir Ahmad Khan, conducted in Islamabad on April 1, 2012.

Another new development was the rise of private media after the 9/11 incident, in the form of large number of new TV channels, which helped create a new popular culture of accountability and transparency and open public debates on national and regional security issues, leading to additional pressures on the government regarding the exact details and nature of Pak-US cooperation in the War on Terror.

A major political dilemma was posed by conflicting local aspirations and international expectations to not just the President Musharraf's government but also the current government. Moreover, the effort by the government to build a broad-based national consensus against terrorism was not very successful and limited to media interactions and public statements of the leadership. Had a broad-based political strategy towards national consensus building against terrorism succeeded, the terrorists would have been politically, socially and economically isolated and the political fallout and cost to the state and the society would have been much lower. Such an approach would also have reduced the gulf between the right and left leaning segments of the society, further enhancing the national unity and therefore, the national resolve against Pakistan's enemies, both at state and sub-state levels.

2. Security Dimension

Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan faced the gravest situation ever to its security when its armed forces were deployed simultaneously on both the eastern and western borders. Whilst in 2001-02 the stand-off was underway as a consequence of one of the largest ever Indian armed forces deployments on the Pakistani borders after the 1986-87 Brasstacks crises, Pakistan also had to move large number of its forces on the western borders, in support of its commitment to the war on terror. This accentuated its asymmetry viz-a-viz the Indian forces to an unprecedented level. Pakistan lost over 42, 000 lives of its citizens including 12,000 soldiers and also created an environment, which was not conducive to investment, economic growth and normal business activity. This also aggravated the unemployment and general discontent of the society towards the government. Role of non-state actors and terrorists increased and expanded and led to almost 300 suicide attacks since 2002.

In addition, hundreds of drone attacks as well as air and ground violations carried out by the US and NATO forces over the territory of Pakistan, the attack on OBL compound in Abbottabad, attack on Pakistani military post at Salala, and shooting of Pakistani citizens by a the US national claiming to be a diplomat are but a few events which raise serious security concerns not only at the political and strategic leadership levels but also translate into large scale hostile public sentiment and raise serious questions regarding the real motives of extra-regional forces based in Afghanistan. Although Pakistan has taken extensive measures to ensure the safety and security of its strategic installations and assets, the presence

of extra regional forces in neighbouring Afghanistan and their incursions into the Pakistani territory heighten the threat perception of Pakistan. Based on extensive research, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism discovered that as a direct consequence of the drone attacks on Pakistan up to 2764 civilians including 160 children have been killed¹⁷.

**Estimated Total Deaths from the US Drone Strikes
in Pakistan, 2004 - 2012**

Timeline	Deaths (high)
2012*	84
2011	536
2010	993
2009	725
2008	314
2004-2007	112
Total	2,764

**Through March 13, 2012*

Due to their extensive use, Pakistan's conventional capabilities, weapon systems and helicopters and aircraft's service life were significantly reduced. The only notable addition to Pakistan's conventional weapon system during the last 11 years was the acquisition of 18 F-16 block 52 fighter aircrafts equipped with BVR capability. This aircraft was procured with only partial the US funding and the rest of the cost was met with Pakistan's own resources.

Notwithstanding these disturbing developments, Washington's long-term interest in developing India as a regional counter-weight to China is more significant than its interest in reducing military imbalance between India and Pakistan. This US approach further aggravates the security dilemma for Pakistan as Islamabad has traditionally reliance over the US to provide high-tech military equipment and economic assistant. In this context, Pakistan's traditional reliance over the US and its security concerns viz-a-viz India have been subordinated to the US attempt to prop up India as a major regional power. As a consequence, this US policy poses a long-term strategic threat to Pakistani regional security interests viz-a-viz India in which the sole super power is increasingly encouraging and supporting the Indian quest to emerge as a regional hegemon. Post 9/11 developments such as the 123 Agreement, the US assistance for the Indian ABM Programme, frequent joint military exercises, the recent attempt by the Obama administration to accommodate India into MTCR, Australia

¹⁷ Counter Terrorism Strategy Initiative, "The year of the Drone: An Analysis of the US Drone Strikes in Pakistan, 2004-2012", New America Foundation, March 2012.

Group, Wassenaar Arrangement and Nuclear Suppliers Group further strengthen the above-mentioned concerns in Pakistan.

Insecurity and instability in Pakistani border region (FATA) has aggravated due to the prevailing security situation across the border in Afghanistan. The porous nature of over 2600 kilometres long border, presence of 3 million Afghan refugees inside Pakistan and the ineffective border control system in Afghanistan pose a serious security threat to Pakistan by allowing unrestricted movement of terrorists and their sympathizers inside Pakistani territory. Despite its best efforts, Pakistan could not restrict the cross-border movement of terrorists due to non-reciprocity from the Afghan side, which also cannot ensure an effective control on cross border movement. Pakistan's commitment to check the border crossing can be gauged by measures such as fencing of selected routes, installation of biometric system, and surveillance equipment along the border, and the border defence system of 821 posts as against 112 posts by the ISAF and ANA.

Besides physical damage, the psychological imprint of WOT has also affected all segments of Pakistani society leading to poor attention towards human rights issues, civil liberties, and psychological trauma of thousands of families. In short, a general sense of insecurity has gripped the entire nation which has seriously undermined the general quality of life and character of the nation.

3. Socio-Cultural Dimension

At the societal level, polarization, intolerance and increasing use of violence are a reflection of growing lack of trust between state and society and various schools of thoughts, thus weakening the national cohesion and social fabric. The role of media has also been quite damaging to the national morale and the national image internationally due to the manner in which it portrays the phenomenon of terrorism. The instantaneous weakening of state control over media after 9/11 has allowed the TV channels to focus on more controversial issues than credible and professional reporting of events further contributing to a situation of socio-economic chaos and popular discontent with state's ability to deliver justice, opportunity and create hope.

Negative perceptions created by national as well as international media have severely damaged the image of Pakistani nation internationally. However, this negative perception has been further reinforced by the extremist ideas displayed by certain individuals including some expatriates in different parts of the world.

Unchecked poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and drug trafficking has also affected the Pakistani society in a major manner. According to the figures quoted by the DG Anti-Narcotics Force, currently, Pakistan has almost 4-5 million drug addicts.

The numbers of terrorist attacks, sectarian violence and suicide bombings on business centres and religious gatherings have enormously increased after 9/11 and subsequent investigations have revealed that a large number of suicide bombers were recruited from the Afghan refugee camps or were Afghan Nationals.

4. Economic Dimension

Since 9/11, Pakistan economy has been under tremendous pressure as a direct consequence of WOT as per official estimates the nation has suffered an economic loss of up to 70 billion dollars. Consequently, progress on welfare and development works has been severely affected. Besides, natural calamities like earthquake of 2005 and devastating floods of 2010 added to the miseries and further weakening of the economy. IDPs of Swat and Malakand as well as South Waziristan also added to the financial burden of the national exchequer. Financial cost of security measures undertaken at various tiers both in public and private sectors in terms of security equipment, weapons, vehicles, infrastructure and employment of personnel as guards has not been estimated but appears to be colossal. Following tables evaluates the Annual GDP growth rates, Annual Inflation rates and Foreign Direct Investment rates during Pakistan's association with the Global War on Terror¹⁸:

Timeline	Annual GDP Growth Rate (%)
1991-2000	3.9
2001	2.0
2002	3.2
2003	4.9
2004	7.4
2005	7.7
2006	6.1
2007	5.6
2008	2.0
2009	2.0
2010	3.0
2011	4.0

Table: *Annual Real GDP Growth Rate*

Timeline	Annual Inflation (%)
2000	3.6

¹⁸ Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon. "Pakistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security." Brookings Institute, 2012, 15-18.

2001	4.4
2002	3.5
2003	3.1
2004	4.6
2005	9.3
2006	7.9
2007	7.8
2008	12.0
2009	20.8
2010	11.7
2011	16.0

Table: Annual Inflation¹⁹

Timeline	FDI in Total (\$US)
1995	723
1996	922
1997	716
1998	506
1999	523
2000	308
2001	383
2002	823
2003	534
2004	1,118
2005	2,201
2006	4,273
2007	5,590
2008	5,438
2009	2,382

Table: Foreign Direct Investment Inflows to Pakistan, 2001 through 2011²⁰

The rising inflation rates, lack of investment in industrial and public sectors, translate into dwindling employment opportunities, which further exacerbate crime rate, insecurity and raise the cost of doing business in Pakistan, shying away potential investors.

Despite Pakistan's unparalleled contribution in the GWOT, despite numerous requests by Islamabad, Washington has not increased the export quota for the Pakistani textile goods. Moreover, the 750 million US dollars, which were committed by the US administration for developing Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs) in FATA, as means to encourage the tribal youth to contribute and benefit from mainstream participation

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

in the socio-economic development for both their community and locality, have not been honoured.

In addition, the Coalition Support Funds (CSF) essentially represent the reimbursements of the expenditures undertaken by the defence forces of Pakistan, as part of their contribution towards the war on terror and do not constitute a the US military assistance programme for Pakistan, as wrongly perceived in the mainstream media. This issue also highlights the trust deficit, long delays and bureaucratic problems, which further add to the troubles of this difficult strategic relationship between the US and Pakistan.

Pakistan also continues to suffer as a result of the US strategy to isolate Iran. Its energy needs have been further aggravated by the sustained the US pressure not to allow Pakistan to procure gas supply from Iran. In contrast, the US has repeatedly encouraged Islamabad to procure natural gas from Central Asian republics instead of Iran. According to a research study carried out by the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of the US Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, *“the Central Asian Republics hold reserves of natural gas, oil and potential hydroelectricity which will be sold at prices five times higher to South Asia than to Russia.”*²¹

The much talked about Kerry Luger Bill, instead of building trust and confidence between the two key allies against terrorism, has unfortunately become the symbol of distrust and lack of serious commitment on the part of the US to consider the genuine concerns and problems which Pakistan faces due to its role in the GWOT.

Offering the shortest and most direct route to outside world markets through its ports, Pakistan historically has remained the largest trade partner of Afghanistan, a reality which has not changed after 9/11 the US invasion of Afghanistan.

Of all the regional neighbours, due to various historical, geographical, cultural and other factors, Pakistan enjoys the biggest economic leverage over Afghanistan, not merely in monetary terms but also in terms of being the largest provider of its basic needs, which the land-locked country of Afghanistan and its society survives on. Moreover, Afghanistan also represents Pakistan’s second biggest export market after the US, constituting 11 percent of its export revenues and more than the combined exports of India, China and Iran.

The 8th Session of Pak-Afghan Economic Commission (JEC), which was held on 16-17th January 2012 in Islamabad, provides an institutional mechanism for streamlining the economic ties between the two countries, has resolved to enhance the current US \$ 2.5 billion annual bilateral trade

²¹ “Afghan Policy Paper,” Johns Hopkins University. Accessed on 01 April 2012, <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/academics/regional-studies/southasia/pdf/Pappas%20Afghan%20Policy%20Paper%20v5.1.pdf>

volume between Pakistan and Afghanistan to US \$ 5 billion over the next 3 years.

In fact, Afghanistan imports five times more commodities from Pakistan as compared to India, which further signifies the limited commercial and economic contribution, which India has or can make to the Afghan needs.

According to a Johns Hopkins University research study:

*'After 2001, the new government in Kabul pivoted away from dependence on Pakistan towards closer relations with Iran and India, who had previously sponsored the Northern Alliance. Pakistan began to fear India's expanded diplomatic and development efforts in Afghanistan as cover for Indian intelligence operations directed against Pakistan.'*²²

Despite our continued economic sufferings due to the War on Terror, Pakistan has committed over 330 millions US dollars for development and reconstruction in Afghanistan. This amount is being spent on projects like Torkham-Jalalabad Road, Jinnah Hospital in Kabul, Nishtar Kidney Centre in Jalalabad, Engineering University in Balkh and various faculties in various Afghan universities across the country. Moreover, Pakistan has offered two thousand scholarships to Afghan students for education in Pakistani academic institutions. Currently, more than Six thousand Afghan students are studying in various Pakistani colleges and universities.

The Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), which was signed in Kabul on 28th October, 2010 and came into force from 12th June, 2011 is an important bilateral trade related arrangement between the two countries, which Islamabad aims to extend beyond Afghanistan into Central Asian Republics.²³

Pakistan's Role in Peace and Stability in Afghanistan: The Way Forward

Major Decisions Need Major Analysis: Developing a Comprehensive Policy Mechanism

The current policy review that Pakistan is undertaking viz-a-viz the US, particularly in the context of its cooperation on WOT indicates Islamabad's aim to do a comprehensive cost benefit analysis of this

²² "Afghan Policy Paper," Johns Hopkins University. Accessed on 01 April 2012, <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/academics/regional-studies/southasia/pdf/Pappas%20Afghan%20Policy%20Paper%20v5.1.pdf>

²³ Interview with the Federal Secretary of trade and commerce of Pakistan on March 5, 2012.

partnership. However, this policy review which is underway regarding the 'Afghan End Game' would have been more timely and more appropriate when the Afghan game started after the 9/11 by allowing all existing and potential allies of the US to be consulted in terms of identification of common, realistic strategic objectives within a viable timeframe not to mention a clearly articulated exist-strategy. Such an approach would have also allowed the US and its allies closer collaboration at all levels of political, strategic, operational and tactical levels, minimized casualties and would have allowed a clearly rationalized, coherent and united war effort from the very beginning.

However, instead of building a comprehensive strategy in collaboration with all its allies, Pakistan came under an unprecedented the US pressure after 9/11 to change its policy towards Afghanistan. Some the US experts have even stated that the US approach was less like that of a long-standing ally and seemed more like a case of coercive diplomacy²⁴. Hence, faced with an overt compellence to its security interests from its premier ally, Pakistan's responses were not based on a comprehensive multi-institutional review of its long-term national interests in the changing geo-strategic and geo-political environment and reflect realization of Islamabad's immediate need to secure its survival, traditional security interests and also to sustain a co-operative equation with the only superpower in the existing international system in an environment of unipolarity. Nevertheless, a foreign and security policy based on comprehensive institutional inputs from all institutions relevant to Pakistan's traditional and non-traditional security, sovereignty, economic progress and even human rights considerations and civil liberties should have been taken into consideration before taking an international position, to allow it to be sustainable both internally and externally, in times of economic and political difficulties.

Pakistan's Afghan policy highlights some of the fundamental systemic flaws in the national policy making mechanism. Both Kashmir and Afghanistan policy approaches indicate that major policy decisions are taken by individuals without taking institutions on board, which not only render these decisions unpopular within the institutions and among the general public but also isolates the individuals taking these decisions both from their own institutions and the nation at large. This also creates difficulties in the implementation of these decisions, no matter how sincerely or quickly they are arrived at. Most decisions related to security cooperation between Pakistan and the US have not involved a system of national consensus building through an open and broad based national discourse involving all segments of the society, their representatives, key stakeholders and opinion makers. This issue also contributes towards

²⁴ Liam Collins, "United States Diplomacy with Pakistan Following 9/11: A Case Study in Coercive Diplomacy", (New Jersey: Princeton, 2008), 2.

growing anti-American sentiments at Pakistani societal and individual levels, which makes pursuing these policies more difficult and unpopular for state and its institutions particularly during times of economic and political difficulties. This approach also creates a deficit of trust between the government and the nation due to the lack of transparency in the policy-making mechanism, detrimental to the long-term viability of both the government and the state.

This analysis reveals a fundamental flaw in the strategic culture of Pakistan in which ironically we have no clearly defined or operational institutional policy-making mechanism for our national security policy as such. Over the past 65 years, the policy-making system has perhaps not recovered from its colonial roots, executive-dominated traditions and bureaucratic practices. This creates a fundamental gulf and expectations gap between the executive dominated policy process and the society at large which creates a social division and political instability in an age of globalization. Therefore, evolving a fresh environment of free debate, intellectual input, and academic discourse is essential to mitigate the existing impediments in a comprehensive, broad based egalitarian policy making consistent with 21st century challenges that the Pakistani state and society currently face or are likely to face in future. The need to review and revise the fundamental policy making mechanism and organizational behaviour is far more important than a change in any particular policy like that towards Afghanistan or on War on terror. The absence of national security policy and its necessary comprehensive institutional mechanism, prevents our stance towards national and international security issues to be coherent and well-coordinated or even sustainable when faced with intense internal or external pressures or coercion.

Moreover, our national policy towards GWOT ought to consider the following factors before taking a position and aligning itself with extra-regional forces in Afghanistan: Pakistan's red lines of cooperation in the war in Afghanistan should not have been restricted to territorial sovereignty and foreign troops on its soil but also needed to incorporate identification of a specific timeframe, a comprehensive formula for the sharing of financial and operational costs, and limits on acceptable damage to its socio-economic infrastructure. In addition, the objectives of the military campaign must have been clearly identified, discussed and institutionalized to ensure sustained focus, realistic appreciation, strict compliance by both parties, facilitate cooperation, minimize mutual misperceptions, and reduce and equitably share costs of the joint war effort. Ten years down the line we are complaining about the loss to Pakistan's economy worth approximately 70 billion the US dollars. A realistic assessment of such projected losses should have been factored into our initial decision, negotiations and whatever eventual agreement or understanding which was necessary, before taking the decision to join the war without strong public and domestic support, particularly against an

insurgency within its own borders, would be extremely difficult if not impossible.

A Revised Afghan Policy

An array of opportunities for a successful regional framework await us, provided mutual sincerity, cooperation, and commitment prevail and involves engaging regional and global stakeholders in peaceful efforts to guarantee Afghan security and to foster regional peace and stability. Notwithstanding the prevailing differences amongst Afghanistan's neighbors and regional states, there is a need to capitalize upon shared common interests and develop meaningful economic engagement via regional fora such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Shanghai Corporation Organization (SCO) etc.

Limits of Hard Power: A New Afghan Context

The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan provides persuasive evidence towards the notion that technology is not a substitute for knowledge and military power is not a substitute for understanding a society's culture where large-scale military operations are to be considered. In this context, in order for Pakistan to pursue and promote its regional and national interests viz-a-viz Afghanistan on a long-term basis, a major and comprehensive policy review is long overdue. More importantly, cooperation with international actors should have been based on our long term national interests viz-a-viz Afghanistan and its people whose aspirations, sensitivities and affinity with Pakistani nation should have dictated our Afghan policy in GWOT. A fresh approach based on realization of both the ground realities and the prevailing international environment is mandatory for Islamabad. Pakistan needs to formulate and pursue a soft power-based policy by shifting its strategic orientation from its current short-term state and government centric to a new long-term politico-economic and people centric approach and needs to convince its major allies to also transform their hard-power centric strategy towards Afghanistan into a soft-power based strategy. The entire war on terror has demonstrated the need that terrorism needs to be countered and eliminated on the societal front rather than focusing on a traditional inter-state context of warfare.

Therefore, a major soft power based approach, rooted in a thorough understanding of the diverse sensitivities and appreciation of cultural, ideological and historical differences in various civilizations is a fundamental and primary necessity for the international community, which needs to be coupled with selective and surgical use of hard power, instead of the opposite.

In this context, Pakistan, by virtue of its unique, major and historical relevance to the culture, society, ideology, ethnicity and history of Afghanistan, becomes vital to any soft-power based peace process and a negotiated end-game in Afghanistan.

However, the success of Pakistan's Afghan End Game policy depends on the critical question of Islamabad's political acceptability to all segments of Afghan society beyond ethnicity and ideological divide. Consequently, as the core pillar of its future Afghan Policy, Pakistan should aim to be seen as politically, culturally, ideologically and ethnically tolerant and acceptable to non-Pushtun segments of the Afghan society as well. In this manner, Pakistan will be viewed as a stabilizing force, which could unite the Afghan nation on the basis of peace, stability, economic progress and non-interference in the political affairs of Afghanistan. Another core long-term national interest which must always be considered during policy formulation regarding this entire region is that Pakistan's territory and resources should not be made available or used by any power against any other state.

Instead of a hard power based approach, politico-economic strategies must lead the process. Investments made in hard power based structures such as ANA by the US and ISAF do not reflect realization of the limits of hard power in the conflict resolution process. Afghanistan's stabilization requires a holistic, peaceful approach, involving an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process supported by sustainable economic development in collaboration with immediate neighbours and encouraged and understood by extra-regional powers.

The strategic experience of the last two centuries indicate that the ethnically diverse Afghan society has always been a victim of 'The Great Game' between emerging and declining powers competing for their Geopolitical, Geo-strategic and economic interests in this region. The involvement of additional players culturally, ideologically, and politically alien to the Afghan society could further undermine the future stability of the Afghan state. The encouragement of the US of the Indian involvement in Afghanistan is being viewed with suspicion by the majority of Afghans and both major regional players with major stakes in a peaceful Afghanistan, including Pakistan and China. For any socio-economic and development project to succeed in Afghanistan, it should be sensitive to culture, ideology and diverse ethnic mix of Afghanistan. One of the unique features of the Afghan society is that its population shares its history, religion, language, culture, and lifestyle with all its neighbours. Hence, only a delicate balance between the socio-economic contributions by its politically and culturally acceptable neighbours could create an unprecedented socio-economic and political equilibrium within the Afghan society and stabilize the conflict-prone state.

One of the major reasons behind the lack of success, acceptability and public support for all major powers interfering in Afghanistan over

the last 200 years has been the same. The British, the Soviets, the Americans and presently the Indians are not socially, culturally and ideologically acceptable to the conservative and tribal Afghan society deeply conscious of its Muslim identity and tribal societal structure. Therefore, any political structure created by such a culturally and ideologically alien power has never succeeded and is unlikely to succeed in future as well because it is unacceptable to the majority of Afghan people due to differences in the value systems. If the US and ISAF forces hope to leave an Afghanistan which contributes to the international peace and security rather than harms it, they should engage with and encourage all Afghan neighbours to take the lead in stabilizing Afghanistan by creating a broad based and culturally and ideologically acceptable political structure since they understand the dynamics of Afghan society and polity better than any other state or society and have a more dominant stake in evolving a peaceful Afghan society than extra-regional forces. In addition, the Afghan society also have deep-rooted centuries old relations with its neighbouring societies which the last 33 years old bloody conflict has not changed. Its biggest evidence is the fact that during both the Soviet invasion of 1979 and the US attacks in 2001, majority of the Afghans sought refuge, opportunity and hope in the Pakistani and Iranian societies and not in the western or Indian states nor did these states and societies feel the pain or share the burden of the Afghan people. Both in 1979 and 2001, The Afghans turned to Pakistan or Iran more than any other state or power for food, shelter, security and opportunity, reflecting their long-standing and robust historical bonds of trust between these societies, which perpetual warfare actually deepened rather than weakened.

In a tribal, under-developed but proud society like Afghanistan, no tribe accepts the monopoly over power, violence, resources and opportunities by any other tribe. Therefore, any government or military institution can only be acceptable and efficient if it is built beyond ethnic biases and allows people of all ethnicities and ideologies to tolerate each other, peacefully co-exist and contribute towards the building of a peaceful and progressive Afghanistan. In short, creating a political structure acceptable to the sole super power may serve its short term interests, but by virtue of being unacceptable and unpopular to the large segment of the society, could lead eventually to harming rather than bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan in the longer run.

A New Road Map for Peace: Development and Devolution instead of Destruction and Centralized Control

This new approach should aim to stabilize Afghanistan through development rather than destruction. Therefore, major international powers should devote their attention, policies, and resources towards development of socio-economic infrastructure compatible with the need to

encourage economic development of Afghanistan instead of creating large and unsustainable military structures like ANA with disproportionate ethnic mix, which could further aggravate the long-term Afghan instability. In this case, the major portion of international aid and economic assistance should be allocated towards development projects in a balanced, equitable, transparent, just and proportionate basis throughout all the Afghan provinces instead of being spent on building large military forces, which in any case neither the Afghan state can afford in the medium-term nor reflects an ethnic, cultural and ideological composition acceptable to the majority of Afghan society.

With this view, it would be useful for both Pakistan and the Afghan Pushtun majority if the Pashtun leaders and representatives are encouraged to engage and improve their socio-economic relations with other non-Pashtun ethnic communities. In this context, the non-Pashtun elements resident in Pakistan since the 1979 Afghan War can play a leading role in not only expanding Pakistan's positive and constructive relevance to Afghan developmental process but also help create a broad-based, multi-ethnic yet mutually tolerant and relatively liberal Afghan society, conscious of the opportunities that the international phenomenon of globalization offers. This could lead to a win-win situation by reducing the trust deficit between Pashtun Afghans and non-Pashtun Afghans and enhance the socio-political stability of Afghanistan.

Conclusion: A Safer Transition of the International system towards multi-polarity

An accelerated phenomenon of globalization, growing economic interdependence between the East and the West for markets and finished products and between North and South for labour and natural resources and an unprecedented technology driven global socio-cultural interactions have created an all new environment in the history of the international system. These circumstances create both new challenges and new opportunities for both the rising, resurgent and declining powers within the international system for preserving world peace despite a changing world order. The growing Sino-US, Sino-European and Indo-US economic ties are but a few growing trends which emphasise the increasing need to promote ideological, cultural and ethnic tolerance between different societies. Afghanistan, therefore, provides a compelling case study as an opportunity between Eastern and Western civilizations to mutually help develop a stable and peaceful Afghan society which could allow the US and the Western Europe to pursue their traditional security and non-traditional security interests at the same time when Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran aspire for the same interests in this region. In this context, due to geographical and demographical factors, China has immense potential to contribute to the economic progress of Afghanistan, which

could in return also enhance its own territorial integrity and political stability in Western China. A people-centric Approach between Pakistan and Afghanistan is essential since unlike the two states, the Afghan and Pakistani societies have deep rooted, historical, cultural, geographical, ideological and economic ties, unaffected by the GWOT. Therefore, a society-based approach rather than a state-centric approach is needed to stabilize and harmonize the Afghan society and isolate extremist forces.

Since China has no history of armed conflict with Afghanistan, it is in a unique position to play the role of the key economic driver of a large scale economic Marshall Plan, which will be acceptable to all ethnicities resident in Afghanistan. Moreover, both Pakistan and China, by virtue of geographical contiguity offer unique economic, logistical, historical, geographical and technological advantages, unavailable to extra-regional powers. Western China is Muslim majority area in need of economic opportunities and large-scale investments by China in Afghanistan and provision of Chinese Muslim manpower to man these projects could not only help stabilize Western Chinese Socio-economic circumstances but also allow a peaceful transition to economic growth within Afghanistan through a regional approach sensitive to ideological and historical realities. Since no state and society is more ideologically, culturally, economically and historically integrated with the Afghan society, the international actors and powers willing to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan should capitalize on the unique advantages which the Pakistani people and society potentially offer as the preeminent driver of peace, progress and prosperity in this region.

According to a recent State Bank of Pakistan study, despite the ongoing war on terror related military operations in the Pak-Afghan border regions, Pakistani exports to Afghanistan are far more than Iran and India and second only to China and maintained a higher volume despite a government ban on NATO supplies. However, the same official study highlights the risk to Pakistani economy potentially losing 2 billion dollars in export revenue and one of its major export markets and New Delhi replacing Islamabad, once Pakistan allows India a free-trade corridor to Afghanistan.²⁵ Coping with the socio-economic problems of the Afghan society, China will benefit in a multi-dimensional manner. It could be seen as a stabilizing force in the region, by building economic and cultural bridges with all ethnicities living in Afghanistan, it could be viewed as culturally and politically acceptable to all the Afghan neighbours. This could also allow it access to various Central Asian markets and expand its political influence in the region. In addition, this could eventually lead to building of long-term and sustainable strategic partnerships and alliances.

A proactive Chinese investment plan in Afghanistan could have significant strategic benefits such as allowing it to deepen and enlarge the

²⁵ Shahid Iqbal, "Afghanistan Appears Strong Trade Partner", Dawn, May 1, 2012.

role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a major security block, rooted in both non-traditional and traditional security cooperation between its members, and a potential regional counter-weight to the influence and invasion of extra regional forces. This long-term strategy could rectify the turbulence, which the international order registered during the past 23 year-long episode of unipolarity.

Stabilizing Afghanistan by expanding the role of Pakistan, and building a soft power based coalition of regional partners could contribute meaningfully towards restoring bi-polarity in the international system. The post-World War II bi-polar international order, despite the introduction of various nuclear powers prove to be a more delicate, yet more predictable and coherent international political structure as compared to the turbulent pre-Cold War and violent post-Cold War contemporary international system engulfed by proxy wars, low-intensity conflicts, and terrorism. Stabilizing Afghanistan could be the key to rectifying the destabilizing trends and implications of not just GWOT but could also help restore the essential ingredients of balance of power, strategic stability and reducing the misperceptions between major emerging, declining or resurgent powers and limit the volatility within the complex and interdependent 21st century international politics. Lastly, it needs to be borne in mind, that to rectify the turbulent and volatile unipolarity into a more stable and predictable bi-polarity, the onus is on those states which not only have been the victims of unipolarity rather than the sole super power, whose over-arching interest in international politics has been to prevent or delay this transformation and preserve and optimally benefit from the present uni-polarity. This grand-strategy is neither permanent nor sustainable.

Whilst the Afghan Game is end-Game for some, it is the beginning of yet another new game in this region. But the lessons of British, Soviet and American campaigns in Afghanistan could help guide both new and old major players to define new soft-power-based rules to this game as compared to the traditional hard power based approach, which was not successful for all three superpowers which previously invaded Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was the last frontier of the 20th century great game, which led to the transformation of a bipolar world order into a unipolar international system. Pakistan played a pivotal role during the 1950s, 1970s, 1980s and once again after the 9/11 incident on behalf of the Western block in Afghanistan. In 1950s, it joined the Western alliance, in 1970 by bringing China and the US close to each other, it isolated Soviet Union and during the 1980s it helped win the last battle against Communism on behalf of the Western world. After 9/11 Pakistan is once again the frontline ally of the Western world against the new threat of terrorism and has borne the most cost. However, in the 21st century, the US attention is being drawn away from South Asia towards a new power

equation, which is evolving in Asia-Pacific, as a consequence of the emergence of China and resurgence of Russia.

In this over-arching context, once again, Afghanistan end-game presents new opportunities to emerging and regional players to shape the international system to suit their regional and synchronize their global interests. Based on the logic of unipolarity, the US long term interest is in preventing or delaying the rise of China as a challenger to the US political, economic and strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Therefore, the US aims to develop important strategic partnership in South Asia, led by India, to contain, distract and divert the Chinese emergence by isolating it regionally, economically and strategically. This is why, Washington is encouraging regional integration and improvement of relations between India and Pakistan by expanding political, strategic, technological and economic leverages over both New Delhi and Islamabad and also reducing Chinese leverage over Pakistan.

This makes Islamabad a vital player both in terms of future security calculus of South Asia and also offers it unique opportunities to improve its relations with New Delhi and also contribute towards future Afghan security and regional stability. History has offered Pakistan yet another chance to either remain passive and subservient to the international political status-quo or play a pro-active role in shaping a new security architecture in South Asia, based on the principle of collective security of natural partners with long-term stake in regional security instead of relying on un-natural partners with limited or short-term interests.

Meanwhile, Islamabad can also benefit from the opportunities that the Afghan End-Game is providing it for its own long-term traditional and non-traditional security by balancing its strategic interests with both a rising and an existing power. Like the key role it played during the 1970s in dividing the communism block by bringing China and the US closer, another opportunity awaits Pakistan to make a leading and meaningful contribution towards bringing the US and China together in stabilizing Afghanistan and contributing towards reducing their trust deficit. This will benefit both the US and Chinese regional interests and allow Islamabad to forge not only economic but also develop strategic and geo-political interdependence between an existing and rising power.

This could have far-reaching implications for promoting regional security, enhancing regional economic, trade and energy co-operation, reducing both traditional and non-traditional security by balancing its strategic interests with both a rising and existing power, enhancing regional strategic stability and promoting global peace by mitigating the global rivalry between Washington and Beijing. In an era of transformation of international system, this contribution from Pakistan could also prove to be vital for preserving world peace at a time when it is most needed. It can also have historical significance for a long time to

come, because the core of the world political architecture is shifting towards Pacific after remaining in Atlantic for hundreds of years. What is being described in Washington as a challenge to western supremacy, can be transformed into an opportunity of mutual benefit between both east and west, with Pakistani help, by encouraging an existing and future superpower to co-operate in bringing peace first to Afghanistan and later to rest of the world. Defensive realism instead of offensive realism could hold the key to preserving the world peace in the 21st century between rising and existing world powers.

